



# PHOENICIA

To the readers, teaching this course has been a dream come true. Really. In my twenty years of teaching, I have always wanted to teach a whole course whose focus is imaginative, digging-deep-into-the-mind-and-soul writing. And getting to teach this course, learn this course, alongside this talented, hardworking, thoughtful, funny, collaborative group of students has been such a joyful process. I often interrupt my family members in their reading, their laundry-folding, their homework, or their path to the refrigerator, to read a piece of writing from this class out loud to them. I feel like an editor at a publishing company because this class's writing is so close to what professional writers do on their way to print.

I hope you will enjoy reading the selections they have chosen for this anthology as much as I have. And I hope you will recognize the amazing people these students are. They each have their own unique family stories, passions, memories, humor, and responses to the pandemic. They have walked their own paths of discovery, smashed into their own creative blockades, and reached out their hands to help and get help from each other. If their joy in the process has been a fraction of what mine has been, then this course has been a success.

To Ms. Kinney and Mr. O'Donnell, thank you for supporting the course and the anthology.

To the students, thank you for being who you are. You mean so much to me.

Lauren Jackson, Teacher

Creative writing has always been an outlet for us. Throughout COVID, creative writing—whether it be poetry, fiction, or screenplays—was at times the only reliable aspect of our lives. There is something special about writing down your thoughts on paper and having people read it. Where some people didn't have a voice, they now do.

While reading this anthology, we implore you to think about the deeper meaning of each piece. There is no such thing as a one-dimensional writing piece. Throughout the year, we learned not to treat writing as a task to be done. No, to us, it is art. Every writer painstakingly went over each word and each sentence.

Just as writing is a way to explore emotions, reading is a way to explore other's cultures and thoughts. Sometimes, when writing, we are unable to directly tell the reader the truth. Our greatest hope is that all our writers and readers realize that their truth is worthy of being heard, whatever it is. We won't judge you so please don't judge yourself.

Anthology Editing Team



# Phoenicia

International Community School  
Creative Writing Course  
2020-2021 Class Anthology



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## New Friends and Old Ones

Andrey Piterkin

With the sun shining, waves rolling, and boats gently rocking, you go for a dive as always. You and two old friends, mates from your college years who would do anything for you, excitedly embrace the chilling water around you. The black, rubber wet suits and gleaming oxygen tanks, because you trust the water, but not too much. Your boat, a small yacht with Alcantara-lined chairs and a painted pristine white, rests above your head, reminding you that your dry belongings are in good hands. You dive only a few meters below the water, just far enough to feel the weight on your shoulders. You twirl in the water, celebrating the water and the sunny day, but your friends disappear. Like the keys you misplaced this morning and hunted for between the couch cushions, the friends vanish.

In an instant, your back arches, becoming a crash-test dummy flung around in a foreign circumstance. *Have I been hit by a submarine?* You ask yourself. At train speed, it fires itself into your fleshy body, your muscles doing little to impede this new, unstoppable force. And then the view slows. A beady, silky, navy-blue iris stares ahead at your face, a calm greeting as it slices open your thigh as if it were trimming silk.

Your composure melts like butter; beneath the diving mask, the skin is oily and uncontrollably sweaty. Swimming for dear life is your first instinct. The gun strapped to your left leg, silvery and long, protrudes enough to create an uncomfortable bite for your new friend. It couldn't stomach it. You wouldn't like eating a speargun either. The white teeth tearing at your flesh exit your

now hampered appendage, taking rubber and your gun with them. Finally, your freedom of motion returns. You sink agonizingly slowly, and finally, curl up into a ball at a reef on the ocean floor. Reds, yellows, and rainbow colors create a façade of protection. The small fish dart from side to side all around you, going about their business and pretending to ignore your struggle. But the sand, ever soft and sparkly, greets you like a friend, consoling your limbs in a trying time.

It hits again. This new pal lay in wait 20 meters away from you, observing your futile struggle. Even it knows you will not live. It bolts towards you like a friend rushing towards one last embrace. Teeth submerge themselves in your epidermis, tickling your interior and crumpling the flesh like paper. Saltwater stings at you, its pressure forcing your wound further apart as the smiling shark welcomes its brunch. Blood spills. Shimmery and red, it decorates the ocean floor, a painting begging for admiration. Vision blurs. Mind woozy. Thoughts absent. Fading.

Silver strikes through the water faster than your closing eyes can comprehend. Your new friend leaves. As quickly as it came, it zips away. As the jittery little red arrow on your oxygen tank spins ever lower, you see your old friends swimming up to you. How good it is that your mates didn't forget you. You wouldn't have made it without them.

## Cooking

Maxwell Voss

Cooking food is a delicate art  
With one small mistake the food will break apart  
To make good food requires the correct motions  
Learning to Cooking requires a lot of devotion  
Sadly, Critics review my food and call it bland  
And yet, the customers say the food tastes grand  
Despite all the mixed reviews I come to the job everyday  
Not because I enjoy cooking, but because of the pay.

## Suns

Alex Schuessler

Incarcerated in dark rooms and halls,  
while smoke and sickness occupy the surrounding air.  
Blocking out the sun and stars.  
Every day, the only suns we see,  
Are the lights in our rooms,  
reflecting on our walls,  
And back to us again.  
Because outside we see no suns,  
we view no stars,  
we see only one moon,  
only in dark clear skies

# City Life

*Vivian Lee*

1. Waking up, surrounded by concrete blocks in a tall, multi-story tower. Where you can see everything, from the dark clouds to the small trees. As the fog takes over the sky and the light blue sky turns a dark gray with sprinkles of rain hitting the large window in your bedroom.
2. You get out of your warm bed, ready to start the day. You walk a few feet and you're in the living room. But that's what it takes to live in the city.
3. Few steps later you're in the kitchen. Deciding to have a simple breakfast, you pop a bagel into the toaster. As you're waiting for it to toast, you continue to watch the rain fall. The window which was once clear is now filled with water. You hear a ding, meaning the bagel is ready. You take it out of the toaster, now a nice golden brown on both sides, adding some cream cheese.
4. You take a few steps back to the living room to eat it, sitting on the couch watching out the window, as if it were a tv screen, like watching a calm movie.
5. It's now later in the day, you have been working since breakfast and it's time for lunch. As the fridge is small, you have to get takeout. Ordering a sandwich from a local sandwich shop down the street, you bundle up, with a nice warm coat and a hat. You head out of your apartment, into the elevator and down the street.
6. You're close to the restaurant and you can smell the aromatic scent of freshly baked bread next to the sandwich shop. You walk in, get your sandwich, and walk out, as you're leaving you wave to the cashier, whom you know well as you always go there.
7. Back in the small apartment, you eat, and the whole place smells like the sandwich that you ate. You continue working until it starts to get dark. Somebody rings the doorbell, it's your friends that has come for dinner.
8. Together you make pasta, the rain finally stopping. Going back to the living room to eat dinner, you watch the gray skies to black and all the lights in the building turn yellow. You guys look out the window and see the pretty skyline with bright lit lights.
9. Hours of just talking your friends leaves. You clean up and get ready for bed. Going back into bed, taking a final look out the window, at the pretty scene around you, admiring the place you live. All you can hear are beeps from cars and a siren, then silence.
10. You go to bed. That's the life of living in the city.

## H2 Podcast

*Harry Fung*



<https://git.io/Jsrw1>

Navigate to page 44 for QR code instructions!

# Flour of Reckoning

*Pranav Gopalkrishnan and Julia Lee*

## EXT. ABANDONED-ISH TOWN - DAY

Camera pans to abandoned Western town. We assume it has people, but we see no people. A tumbleweed rolls past.

We SEE BAD GUY riding horse into town. He gets off his horse and ties it to a post. Bad Guy slinks into a general store. He is wearing a poncho, a cowboy hat, a bandit mask, and cowboy boots.

JUMP CUT

## INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

As he enters the store, we HEAR the old wooden floor creak under his boots. He wanders up and down aisles and finds a bag of flour, a can of noodles, and a rope. He puts these in his satchel.

BAD GUY

Wow. I can commit so much crime using this bag of flour and this can of noodles and this rope.

He stares at bag of flour for three seconds.

BAD GUY

Oh no. Whole wheat? Ew.

He throws the whole wheat flour over his shoulder.

The door of the store behind Bad Guy opens to reveal SHERIFF. Sheriff is wearing sheriff boots and a sheriff hat. He is wearing a white button-up with a black sheriff vest. A polished, gold sheriff badge is pinned to the left side of his vest.

The bag of flour flies in a beautiful arch to Sheriff's face. The bag explodes. Sheriff's face is now covered in whole wheat flour.

SHERIFF

(insulted and disgusted, making flour particles fly as he talks)

How dare you say "Ew" to this whole wheat flour. Whole wheat is the best wheat.

BAD GUY

(judgmentally)

Who are you?

SHERIFF

(proudly and hero-like)

I am this town's defender of

whole wheat. I am the destroyer of all-purpose flour heretics. I am the one who will destroy your sacrilegious ways. Your people's era of terror finally comes to an end, with me.

Look upon this wheat--

Camera close-up of a pristine bag of whole wheat flour that Sheriff holds up.

SHERIFF

--90% of all nutrients in bread is contained in this processed whole wheat flour. Those who enjoy the factory-refined grade of all-purpose flour do not know the splendor of this flour in its natural form.

Sheriff closes his eyes and imagines taking a big bite of his whole grain bread made with his whole wheat flour. He opens his eyes again.

SHERIFF

Now heretic, are you ready to perish amongst your uncultured brethren?

Sheriff snaps back to reality and realizes Bad Guy is no longer in front of him. He turns around to see Bad Guy outside of the store looking right back at him.

BAD GUY

You fool. I have outsmarted you. I have no time for your filthy monologues.

Bad Guy gets on his horse and runs away into the sunset.

SHERIFF

(waving his fist angrily)  
Mark my words, I will get my revenge!

Bad Guy has already ridden a mile away and cannot hear nor see Sheriff.

FADE OUT

## EXT. WILD WEST DESERT, TWO WEEKS LATER - DAY

We SEE a montage of Sheriff riding his horse across a desert.



SHERIFF (V.O.)  
It's been two weeks since I  
last saw that bandit. I have  
been tracking him nonstop  
and I have ridden miles and  
miles in search of him. My  
morale is low, and I'm slowly  
running out of supplies.  
He looks into his satchel and counts a whopping  
seven whole bags of whole wheat flour.

SHERIFF (V.O.)  
But I will not rest until  
justice prevails and that  
bandit is behind bars, for  
he has insulted both me and my  
fellow whole wheat brethren.

A small vaguely familiar town appears in the  
distance. However, Sheriff does not find this  
town familiar.

SHERIFF (V.O.)  
Ok you know what, maybe I'll  
have just a small break.

SWIPE CUT

#### EXT. ABANDONED-ISH TOWN - DAY

Sheriff rides into town on his horse. He parks  
his horse next to a suspiciously familiar horse.  
We showcase the town with the exact same shot we  
opened with, tumbleweed and all. It's the same  
town.

As Sheriff turns around the door of a nearby shop  
opens. The bandit walks out.

BAD GUY  
(oblivious)  
Woohoo, time to steal more  
stuff!

Sheriff and Bad guy both spot each other at the  
same time. They jump into a Mexican standoff  
position.

Western cliché Mexican standoff music plays.  
Camera switches back and forth between the two  
characters. Close ups on their fingers twitching.  
Bad guy suddenly stands up straight and points at  
something behind Sheriff.

BAD GUY  
Hey! Look over there! It's  
a truck filled with flour!  
And there's a sign on it that  
says "Free for everyone" on it!

SHERIFF  
Ha! You think I'm so dumb I

would fall for the same  
thing twice? I know you lie.

BAD GUY  
(gasping dramatically)  
Wait, its not just flour,  
it's all whole wheat flour!  
Sheriff immediately turns around.

SHERIFF  
(excitedly)  
Where?!?

BAD GUY  
HA! You fell for it fool!  
That's the oldest trick in  
the book.  
Bad Guy pulls a modern bomb out from behind his  
back and throws it at the ground.

BAD GUY  
If you want to save this town,  
you better diffuse this bomb!  
You only have 5 minutes!  
Bad Guy throws a smoke grenade down on the  
ground.

Camera pans to Bad Guy running away into the  
distance behind the small cloud of smoke.

SHERIFF  
Argh! I can't believe he  
tricked me like that. I  
promised myself that that  
would never happen again  
after the incident of last  
summer.  
Sheriff snaps neck towards bomb and runs to it.

SHERIFF  
But this is a more pressing  
matter. I've got to figure  
this out!  
Sheriff rummages through his bag, sifting through  
all the loose flour in it.

SHERIFF  
(frustrated and urgently)  
Come on, come on, where is  
it?  
He rummages more, finally finding Diffusing Bombs  
for Dummies.

SHERIFF  
Aha!

\*\* To continue reading this work, visit page 44 for the QR code  
and link to the full online version!

## Cuckoo

*Ella Yuen*

The bluebird chirps  
Her merry song bright,  
As she flits quickly  
Spring air  
Tucked gently under her wings.  
Food lines her stomach  
Ready to gift  
to the young  
waiting back at the nest  
Branches decorated  
In the pink petals floating down from the sky.

The watcher observes a pastoral scene,  
Soft colors  
Filling binoculars to the rims,  
As if milk  
flooded over the sides.  
They observe in wonder  
As the bluebird alights  
Her woven nest perfectly situated,  
A mossy, lined bundle  
Twigs crossed neatly as if it were  
A watercolour illustration  
Printed  
In a picture book.

She lowers her head into the nest,  
A loving glance  
At the fat, brown mass  
barely squeezing itself in the tiny nest  
feathers oozing out the sides  
As idealizations crack  
Revealing the snapped necks of the young bluebirds  
Lining the ground below  
Rotting away slowly  
As she feeds  
Oblivious  
Lovingly  
Into the snapping, demanding mouth

Gaping like a cavern,  
Lined with jagged edges,  
Its insatiable beak screaming  
For more than she could ever give.

## Hi, Grandpa?

*Madeleine Goertz*

Do dark thoughts tremble through your head?  
Does the sunlight ever bathe your face?  
Do you still curl up the corners of your lips?  
Does your heart still thump steady?  
We haven't forgotten you.

I mail 69-cent cards from Trader Joes,  
scrawled with sweet memories in  
LARGE-PRINT HANDWRITING  
To the gates of the compound.  
Do they nurse you there?  
*Please read aloud loudly and show to Grandpa.*  
*He cannot hear you.*

Do the names of your girls still roll  
around like greased pebbles  
under your tongue?

We're still here, Grandpa. I'm  
still here.

One day, I hope I can embrace you again  
Arms wrapped tighter than binds,  
*Grandpa, you haven't aged a day!*  
Sighs escaping through grateful streams of tears  
Staining your ruddy cheeks.

Will I find you in your wise watery eyes?  
Will I still see your grateful glances?  
Will you see your face in mine?  
Will you face me?  
Will I face it?  
Will you recognize me?

# Fuxiao

*Benjamin Yu*

Warning! The following page contains spoilers.  
For those who have not completed (GAME TITLE PENDING),  
please stop right here!

Fuxiao (foō-shē-ou) is one of the nine factions in the city Diastas, situated in the southeast portion of the city. It is directly connected to the Jizoku faction via River Bridge 8 and to the Jouis faction via River Bridge 6. Like all other factions, the Intergov Highway connects Fuxiao to the City Core. It is home to much of the Chinese population of Diastas.

## Layout/Appearance

Fuxiao consists of two main areas: the business district and the residential district. A combination of older architecture is mixed in with the more urban buildings of the business district, while the residential district is a little more traditional. Being next to a large saltwater lake, Fuxiao's Sundown Port often attracts many anglers from other factions.



(Concept art of Sundown Port and Leyan's House)

The layout of the Fuxiao faction is flat, with winding alleys/streets and hole-in-the-wall restaurants.

## Story

Fuxiao is the home to Leyan, who lives at the edge of the residential district, near Sundown Port. Throughout the story, certain buildings can be used as hideouts/safe areas to talk with and raise your bonds with your friends. Leyan also traverses the sewer system by using unlocked manholes near the port, his

house, and in Sen Alley.

As the story progresses, security in Fuxiao becomes much tighter with the government becoming more and more aware of Leyan's investigations. However, due to the secretive nature of the government and Leyan's knowledge of each corner of Fuxiao, he can easily defend himself from spies or secret investigative forces. The faction is also the backdrop for several showdowns with enemies that Leyan and the party make. During the final boss fight, an empty version of the faction is used as a flashback battle.

## Locations/Landmarks

- Leyan's House
- Restaurant Surf
- Industrial Lane
- Sundown Port
- The Angling Dock
- Residential Boundary
- Sen Alley (Hidden Landmark)
- Pharmacy

## Restaurants

- Daybreak Tofu
- Tian Mein
- Burger n' Joy (Branch 4)
- Mango Confectionaries
- Extreme Tofu
- Wonder Rice
- Street Stalls in Restaurant Surf
- Leyan's Homemade Meals (Unlocked in Food Takeover Sidestory)

## Trivia

- Since the lake attracts many angling folk, people in Fuxiao are generally more open to people from other factions.
- Leyan's house was heavily sought after, but his ancestor's wills explicitly stated no amount of money would take this property away from their family.

- A large fountain marks the boundary between the business and the residential district. Some say you can make a wish come true if you discover its secret.
- The shiny surface of the Diastas barriers can be seen a little off the coastline.
- Robust food business; many family recipes and competition

#### Gallery:



(Sketch of Fuxiao Layout)

### Prisoner Zone

*Ritika Managuli*

I've seen darkness before,  
 The kind that fills the night  
 as you roast marshmallows with the family,  
 Everything a shade of warmth.  
 This isn't like that.  
 This is the darkness that holds you, prisoner,  
 The darkness that robs you of your senses  
 Replacing it with paralyzing fear,  
 The darkness that freezes your breath every time you feel it.  
 Standing on the edge of the dock I knew that jumping  
 Into the lake would allow darkness to present itself again,  
 But with friends cheering me on to jump,  
 I let myself soar through the air,  
 And when I fell into the depths,  
 I was a prisoner to the darkness.

### a poem based on “See You At The Top (Long Hike)” by Mark Sparling

*Benjamin Yu*

This is pretty nice  
 This sense of adventure  
 Without exerting myself  
 Too much.  
 A beautiful, yet compact view  
 Of the scenery,  
 All right here,  
 In this golden moment  
 A little while longer.  
 ...  
 ...  
 Ah, we should leave,  
 soon.  
 After this,  
 Let's hike,  
 Upwards,  
 To where it gets snowy.  
 It's a little tiring,  
 A little melancholy,  
 But it's all good  
 Here at the peak.  
 Oh, we're not there yet? Well,  
 We can always keep going forward  
 Tomorrow.  
 No need to rush.  
 Let's take a break.  
 Someone calls me and  
 I turn around.  
 They hand me a stick,  
 And a beach ball.  
 I stand up, smiling  
 One, two, three  
 Each hit rings success.  
 Nobody loses here,  
 Everyone's a winner.  
 Everyone together here  
 On this relaxing,  
 Short, hike.

# Untimely Ignorance of End Impacts

Karthik Shaji

Ranvir's head floods with nose cones, fin designs, and laser-integrated targeting. Puzzle pieces swivel around in his brain as he thinks of new ways to maximize the destructive potential of the latest missile he has been designing. He and his team enter spreadsheets of numbers through their MATLAB simulation, designing new and novel techniques that a guided explosive rocket can take to slam itself into a known ground position, obstacle avoidance on display at its finest. A missile shell is brought to him, with a serial number of 30003-704ASB7492, and he enters multiple datapoints pinpointing aerodynamic curvatures of the shell into his computer, creating a 3-dimensional Computer Aided Design (CAD) of it. Several perspiring, ceaseless banging on keyboards and endless calculator presses, head-spinning days later, his team possesses a raw blueprint of an advanced landing obstacle-avoidance algorithm emphasizing these unique aerodynamic quirks of the missile shell, an almost-novel approach never seen before. Within a week, he submits his research and investigations with a 50-page report to the higher echelons of Raytheon, anticipating the opportunity to present and ask questions to his bosses like a Golden Retriever waiting for its owner to throw a tennis ball. *A chance for promotion cannot be taken lightly, after all.*

A devout Hindu, he abhors the suffering of mankind. In his place of sanctity, a den lined with double bookshelves in the back with a fresh teak desk equipped with a double-monitor setup, a silver-steel idol of Brahma (Hindu God of Creation) adorns its center. Additional symbols such as those of Baby Krishna playing a flute near a cow line the wall behind him, and most prominently positioned: a banner in fine satin with the Hindu proverb of *a peaceful heart sees a celebration in any village* in Sanskrit. A crisp golden-brown certificate declaring the successful achievement of a PhD in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin lies on the far right of his wall, showing no insignificance of academic achievement.

Each day, he drives one hour to his office in Waltham, Massachusetts, the headquarters of Raytheon, scribbling endless variations of the Navier Stokes Equation (a fundamental set of equations in Fluid Mechanics) and clacking them into computer simulations, yet occasionally obtaining the fresh reward from his

boss to journey to the on-campus wind tunnel to hands-on experiment with aeroshells. A true "professor-warrior" in his eyes: a blend between his Kshathriya (warrior-caste in Hinduism) and Austinite upbringing. His friends question him on his seemingly conflicting-internal ideologies, but he consoles themselves (and himself) with fervent lectures about how even though he may be aiding in the creation of a weapon of war, the noble bosses of Raytheon will ensure that his brainchildren only serve to aid regimes that uplift the poor and assist in the overthrow of ruthless leaders like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gadhafi, a parallel to the great Kshathriya kings of the old who ridded lands of oppressive rulers. *After all, if swordsmiths had not given their armies swords, how would they have done their deeds?*

\*\*\*

A Saudi missile hits Mach 1 as it shreds through the air, its laser-guided precision system pinpointing its nose cone towards the target: an unsuspecting school bus teaming with happy, innocent Yemeni children returning home from a day of elementary school. Within seconds, the missile strikes. Happy chattering turns into terror-fueled screams and within seconds small, limp, bloody, ripped-apart bodies lined the streets.

Climbing out of his bed in his family's one-floor, four-room house in Dahyan, Hussein thought his day selling food at his stall would be no different than normal. Hours spent in the boiling heat of Yemeni sun in his faux-leather-strapped sandals with sweat glistening down his chin, hawking in Arabic to nearby passerby to buy fresh figs. Nothing could've prepared him for what happened.

A screech tore through the air as the missile initiated its nosedive into the heart of the school bus on that busy road. A pale white vortex spiraling in its wake too close for comfort. The heat overwhelmed him, as much as the shockwave that sent him rolling, sprawling into the sand. When he came to, he winced, feeling a fresh cut in his foot. Looking up, he saw the exoskeleton of a blackened school-bus and the teary, crying voices of children heaving their death-throes. Instinctively, he looked up, seeing the retreating golden-green haze of a Saudi fighter jet, shaking and clenching his fist in the air as his eyes turned red. *How dare*

*they? They've bombed our cities to dust, and now they bomb our children?*

\*\*\*

At home in his den, Ranvir peruses through the *New York Times* and comes across the article, thinking to himself about the unfortunate nature of the bombing and the terrible effects it would have on the children's families. According to the author, the Saudi F-15 pilot mistook the school bus for an armored transport filled with Houthi rebels. *Thoughts and condolences to all of those who died.* Flicking through other news pages and absorbing headlines, he stumbles into another article striking his attention: the London International Airshow. Upon reading the news pages, replete with graphics showing the panoply of aerospace devices on display, he jumped outside of his seat with excitement. A fervent company-loyalty-fueled dreaminess came over him. Raytheon had managed to secure billions in dollars of sales for its newest precision-guided missile system. A key product sold had been one of his aeroshells; exhilaration flooded him as he felt the endorphins trickle in: validation for those endless hours he spent in research and design, grinding and dreaming.

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One day later, outside inspectors and human rights advocates in Yemen had identified the missile that struck the school bus: a Raytheon Maverick missile with the serial no. 30003-704ASB7492.

30003-704ASB7492.

Returning to work with a skip in his step, Ranvir eagerly immediately went to his lab to check on the latest missile in need of a laser-guided precision landing system. This time, a fun, novel, multi-stage surface-to-ground missile aimed to help submarines obliterate coastal targets. At lunch, Ranvir's bosses greeted him with good news: he didn't need to present his work. The higher-ups merely read the report, understood the fundamentals behind it, and decided to give him a massive promotion. After all, a true missile connoisseur ought to be paid more, especially with such fine quality. He would receive a \$100,000 annual salary increase and a \$300,000 bonus. The laser-guided missiles he designed had sold beyond expectation. Many countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey had lined up in droves to purchase them.

Elated, Ranvir returned home happy and celebrated by taking his wife and two young toddlers out to Middle East, a

famous Yemeni restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Upon reaching the entrance to the restaurant, he noticed a makeshift memorial for the children who died in the bus bombing. Ranvir passed by without second thought and proceeded to order a sumptuous meal of lamb shawarma and hummus. Feeling blissful, he thought to himself, *I am making the world a better place by helping build weapons to fight against terrorism.*

## Virtual

*Sonia Sheth*

Don't unfriend me on Instagram,  
the only way I can see you.  
Unless  
you want to Zoom? Facetime?  
But  
you never turn your camera on.

Battery died.  
Ugh.  
Fine.  
Whatever.  
I'm not mad.

I'll just binge  
watch Criminal  
Minds. Pop-  
corn  
and all.

We social distance,  
while flash mobs protest.  
Let's stop the spread  
of COVID-19.

I need to see you.  
We need to talk.

Don't unfriend me on Tik Tok.  
Let's dance together.

# Biography of Philo Dareios

*Harry Fung*

## Beginnings

Born of a Noble Family of the North, Philo Dareios was trained to be the heir of his family estate. Eloquent and well-cultured, Philo spent his youth training to be a leader of his clan and managing his family's lands. Unfortunately, this ended when his father came under accusation of sedition, his clan dissolved, and lands seized by Kyros. Thanks to his eloquence, Philo negotiated his life for service as a Fatebinder of the Archon of Justice, Tunon.

## Conquest of the Tiers

After several years of training, Philo was sent to oversee the invasion of Kyros' latest target, the Tiers. In the first year of the invasion, Philo, along with a group of Disfavoured scouts, infiltrated the gates of the Bastard City, opening the gates for the rest of the invasion force, and beginning the invasion of the Tiers.

In the second year of the conquest, Philo lead an attack on the City of Apex. Hatching a clever plan to poison the well, Philo successfully convinced the defenders of the city to negotiate at a parley. During the negotiations, Philo goads the Queen of Apex into a duel, which he easily wins. Without a leader to guide them, the Nobles of the City of Apex surrenders.

In the final year of the conquest, the combat became fiercer, and Philo was often pushed to a leadership role, one he accepted nonetheless, despite originally participating in the conquest as an ambassador of Tunon only. As the armies of Kyros approached the last resistance on the peninsula, Philo proclaim the Edict of Fire, a powerful spell which will burn the stronghold to the ground. After many days, the flames continue to burn, as Kyros' magic marks the end of the conquest of the tiers. While this was his first interaction with the magic of Kyros, it would not be his last.

## Rebellion of the Tiers

Three years after the Kyros conquest of the Tiers, infighting amount the Disfavoured and Scarlet Chorus have allowed the conquered kingdoms to rise up in an attempt to rebel against the rule of Kyros. As the Fatebinder who lead the armies of Kyros to victory in the last conquest, Philo was chosen once again to assist

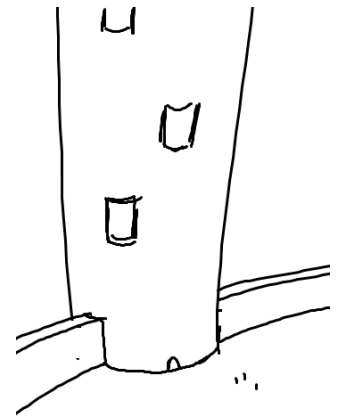
in the defeat of the Tiers. However, as Philo rendezvous with the rest of Kyros' forces on the peninsula, he realizes tension between the Disfavoured and Scarlet Chorus has risen to new heights, and the uneasy alliance soon fractures into a full out civil war between the two factions. Philo is then tasked with ending the rebellion of the Tiers and ending the war between the Disfavoured and the Chorus by the Court of Tunon.

As Philo's journey progresses, he gains access to ancient landmarks laid out by the Old Gods, which has never been done in the history of Terratus before. Eventually, Philo, using the power of the Spire, crushes the rebellion and learns to cast his own Edicts, without the need for the magic of Kyros. Allying with the Disfavoured and the assassin Bleden Mark, Philo accuses the Chorus of betraying Kyros and aiding the enemy in their rebellion. He successfully persuades Tunon to have the leader of the Scarlet Chorus, the Voices of Nerat, assassinated. With their leader dead, the Chorus crumbles, as Philo declares his independence from Kyros, not before casting an Edict of Darkness on the Imperial Throne, sparking a war between Kyros and Philo's new empire.

## Art Gallery



Philo reading the Edict of Fire



Philo and his companions approach the Sunset Spire

## Red Dust

*Eric Shi and Harry Fung*

### EXT. Marshan Desert

Open with a panning shot of ADJUDICATOR as he walks toward a Marshan bar, starting from his boots and moving up to his dirty, calloused face. The sun is setting, but the town is just starting to wake alive as miners return from a long day of work. Our lone hero is clad in a hood, a mask covering his face, marking him as an Adjudicator of the Empire. Taking his time, he takes notes of his surroundings before entering one of the drinking holes. Adjudicator approaches the bar. (Ambient sound of a town. Take ~10 seconds of this then add sfx of children playing)  
A group of CHILDREN are playing in front of the bar, carrying toy guns.

CHILD

Hold it stranger. Show me  
your hands.

The child points his gun at Adjudicator and blocks the entrance.

ADJUDICATOR

Scram, kid. I don't have  
time for this.

Adjudicator pushes the child back, but the children again rush to block his path.

CHILD

(pointing toy gun at Adjudicator)  
Strangers get shot! We  
don't appreciate strangers  
'round here. Ma says when  
I grow up, I'll be the one  
protectin' these lands.

Medium close-up shot shows the Adjudicator squint and give a death glare to the child.

ADJUDICATOR

Is that so...

Sound of a person getting hit, hard. Sound of a person hitting the ground and child crying. Adjudicator now walks forward intentionally into the Child. When the Child doesn't move, Adjudicator delivers him a swift kick to the chest, breaking a couple bones in the Child as he flies back in a cloud of dust. The other Children scatter.

## Chill Zone

*Rory McNerney*

I'm sitting in my chill-zone,  
Not looking for a thrill-zone.  
The focus-on-myself-zone,  
Don't-need-nobody-else-zone.  
The rhythm of the breeze  
Puts my fluttered heart at ease.  
No-relationships-to-mend-zone...

save them for another day  
this is not the end-zone

## A Sunny Side Up

*Ritika Managuli*

Every morning I wake up,  
And drink milk in a cup.  
Then I grab a pan  
To butter it up and plan.  
Plan what? You may ask,  
To which I name the regular task.  
Butter the pan, and put in an egg  
Then hear it sizzle as my dog runs over to beg.  
Every day since quarantine occurred,  
I've been cooking my eggs the way I preferred.  
In case I heard a heartbreaking story,  
At least my sunny side up won't have to worry.



# The Betrothed Baby

Lucy Zhang

1922

A gush of wind loosened the union between a viridescent, young leaf and a plump node. Four branches down, a blue-throated bee-eater chirped eagerly at the sight of a buzzing wasp flying roughly 3 feet under. The intermittent threats of the bee-eater were briefly discontinued as the young leaf sauntered downwards; the bird's pupils hypnotically visiting the two vertices of the elliptic eyes, tracking the zig-zag motion of the dancing leaf. A few moments later, the first rays of sunlight pierce through the tips of the W-shaped space formed by the intersection of three notable (despite the most unoriginal names) mountains: 小山 (Little Mountain), 中山 (Middle Mountain), and 大山 (Big Mountain). As the sun slowly peeks through the space, like the grand entrance of a royal figure, the coveted "alarm clocks" squawked, each vocalized its unique rendition of "*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*".

Inside the smallest mud hut of the sparsely populated village, lived a young couple. Both man and woman dressed plainly, tattered cloth hung loosely from their frame. Crammed into the corner of the hut stood a makeshift bamboo bed, providing a stiff place to rest at night and a generous space for meals. That day, red paper lanterns hung stiffly from the straw roof, red ribbons were tied to the slender green shafts of bamboo and bundles of red cloth laid strewn on the bed. A plate of chicken dumplings was left to cool on the lone stool that lived by the door. Woman and man's eyes were magnetically drawn to the plate of chicken dumplings, it was a wondrous sight: three beautiful chicken dumplings, four pleats each, sat drooping in the center of the plate. An invisible force seemed to be dragging the edges of the dumplings down, now generously spread to twice the area as before. Woman and man's dreamy thoughts of tasting chicken were suddenly interrupted by the cacophonous cries of their newborn baby joined by the flamboyant bee-eater. "听到她哭, 我的心已经碎了。今天下午, 那位女人来的时后, 我无法在屋子里。" (*When I hear her cry, my heart shatters. Later this afternoon, when that lady comes, I will not be able to stay in the house.*) sputters woman as her thin frame shakes uncontrollably. Her short hair, recently chopped, lies flat against the nape of her neck. Occasionally, her chest expanded and

subsequently deflated with sharp exhales, accompanied by a singular drop of water pulled towards the ground by the same invisible force. "有没有搞错! 那位女人来后, 我们会变成有钱的人!" (*What is wrong with you!? After that lady visits, we will finally have money!*) man whispered tremulously. Woman's eyes drifted back to her baby. A head full of sesame-colored hair, asymmetrical yet captivating eyebrows, a pair of alert and deep-set eyes, and a wide, flat nose. As woman spoke, baby's wails simmered down, her penetrating eyes softened, slowly. The vertices of her elliptic eyes curled upwards, revealing double-fold eyelids and a deep dimple on her left cheek. Momentarily, her attention was captivated by a green leaf dancing just outside the window. Woman noticed the young viridescent leaf; carefully observing her daughter, she gently retrieved it. "你要给她树叶? 你疯了吗? 她会把他吃了! 如果她吃了, 有可能那位女人会不要她了!" (*You're giving her the leaf? Are you crazy? She's just going to eat it! If she ate it, it's possible that the woman will not want her anymore!*). Woman turned around; a ray of sunshine illuminated the left side of her face. Her eyebrows were tightly knit, eyes staring intently, cheekbone accentuated and lips firmly pursed. She locked eyes with man, seemingly inviting him to an intense round of a staring contest. Despite her thin frame, she now shook vigorously, her eyes stood electrified, and her gaze could cut rocks. "你要是在说一句, 你就看着啊。自私的男子汉" (*If you talk once more, you just watch and see. Selfish man.*)

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A woman dressed in a bright red top approached the shabby front door of man and woman's hut. She lightly tapped thrice, for had she knocked with too much force, she feared she would strike the door down. Standing at roughly the same height as the hut, the woman awkwardly stood with her eyes level to the roof. She stood for quite some time—observing a couple of wasps perched on straw roof. *Perhaps it was a family of wasps, no, it didn't seem so because all were fighting with each other. Maybe it was though; or they could be siblings. I fought with my siblings over food when we were younger... Maybe it's a group of* "您好, 请进。抱歉我刚才没听见你敲门。" (*Hello, please come in. Sorry, I didn't hear you knock earlier.*)

Man answered the door with a pretentious smile lingering around for an unnatural period of time. He stood unusually tall, shoulders proudly pushed back, chest puffed out like an emperor penguin. His hands were hidden behind his back; white were his knuckles, tightly gripping his left thumb. The remaining nine fingers hung; they hung whilst shaking—shaking similar to that of someone during an epileptic seizure. “今天我的太太得去田里工作，所以无法见你。但是，她给你写了一封信。她也给女儿写了一封，请你今天走时，带上。” (*Today, my wife has to go to work in the fields, so she won't be able to meet you. However, she wrote you a letter. She also wrote one to her daughter, please bring it with you when you depart.*) “好的。宝贝在哪儿？” (*Ok. Where's the baby?*) Her eyes glanced over to the bamboo bed, actively scanning for any sign of life inside the dark, tiny hut. Walking over, the woman saw the baby nestled inside a thick cotton blanket, clutching the young leaf her mother gave her. Commonly a nice way to respond to others when lacking sufficient or meaningful discussion or to express happiness, a smile is rarely representative of pure bliss and love felt from the heart. The smile of the woman was like none the man had observed before; her face was lifted up towards the heavens with joy, her hands trembling with exuberance, her toes curled inside her shoe, resisting the urge to tap her foot and lift dust up to the nose of her new baby. Awakened by the presence of another person, the baby lifted her eyes open, only to see a giant that seemed to touch the infinite space the heavens reached, staring straight back at her. Such a sight must've been frightening for the baby for she almost immediately began to cry, and no, they certainly weren't tears of joy. “看外面想快要黑了。我现在因该走了。” (*Looking outside, it seems to be darkening. I must leave soon.*) said the woman as she carefully rubbed her new baby's hair.

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The woman trudged over 中山 (Middle Mountain) as she raced against the darkening sky. With her was the new baby and gone was the 5,000 元 (yuan) that she and her husband had saved for ten years. As she combatted the parallel component of her weight tugging her down while hiking up the mountain, she dreamed of the future date when her new baby would be dressed from head to toe in red, surrounded by the entire village. She dreamed of the imminent response of her son and husband when they met the new baby. She dreamed of the day when she'd be joined by her daughter in the family business, she dreamed of

watching her daughter and her son working side by side—learning the responsibilities of men and women. The woman's smile seemed to have treated her sadness (her first baby, a girl, became sick and passed) that loomed over her presence for the past 5 years. She looked once more like a 28-year-old woman, joyfully skipping down the mountain.

## Entomophobia

Sharon Oh





## A Kind of Treasure

*Julia Lee*

A comfortable silence fills the atmosphere, but to my friend and I, the lack of verbal exchange only assails our minds with deafening boredom. On a warm summer day, there are better ways to spend your time besides dragging over-worn yet comfortable sneakers across dry soil until your ears start ringing. I think my friend makes a defeated and soulless complaint about how I'm kicking up dust and how she's allergic, but I only listen to half of it. We have positioned ourselves in the generous shade

of a tall pine tree, and my friend watches my not-so-meticulous throwing of dirt particles while leaning on the tree's trunk, its cracked crevices of bark catching and caressing her hair. A field of dehydrated grass surrounds us, and we try our best to ignore their prickly glares.

Tired of foot-dragging, I squat down, planning to aimlessly investigate the earth I had eroded. Waving my friend over, I point to my discovery, and she, too, squats to greet our

new playmates. Lips pursed with fascination, she asks whether I know what type of plant this may be. I reply with a prompt “nope”, popping the ‘p’ and subtly shaking my head. After staring at the largest sprout, only the size of an adult female’s thumb, my friend suggests that we dig it up. Neither we nor the plant will benefit from such an endeavor. Yet, somewhere deep within myself, where my thoughts float without leashes, my friend’s spontaneous suggestion triggers a switch. My eyes evolve into 50mm Canon camera lenses like the one Mum bought Dad for his birthday this year – focusing on the sprout, its surroundings blur into intermingling blotches of color. Unconsciously, my fingers open, pointing desperately at their green little sister. Suddenly, I feel as though the culmination of my existence lies just under this hardened layer of topsoil. Any hesitation evaporated, I start to remove the earth surrounding the sprout, and my friend eagerly joins. Using one, two, three fingers, then my entire hand, I strain to pull away chunks of dried ground as anticipation threatens to seep through my skull. As I get closer to the prize, the internal switch buzzes and jolts, sending chills through my awakened nervous system. Finally, grasping the base of the sprout – which had grown an inch in the process of our excavating – I yank the entire plant from the ground. Below the green stem, a round yet slightly misshapen, bulky white root with an orange layer of nearly transparent covering dangles in the light. An onion.

For hours, my friend and I dug, and our pile of treasured roots grew. Though our fingers numbed and our nails became a concentrated brown, we hummed contently as the switch hummed alive within me. I pictured Mum frozen five feet from the front door, wearing her ripped yellow-red apron, eyes and mouth wide with shock, and Dad’s pleased crescent-moon-eyed side-smile that would fill my pride to the rim when I marched home with the bottom of my shirt bulging with dozens of fresh onions. I felt as though I could already smell the wafts of traditional chicken stew with extra onions filling my welcoming nasal passageways. If I smiled any wider, the plump of my cheeks would threaten to engulf my eyes.

Unfortunately, I didn’t see my dad’s pleased side-smile that day. When he pulled into the driveway, he found his eight-year-old daughter and her friend wearing Gymboree jeggings embellished with dried fertilizer from the knees down, ecstatically digging up the tulip bulbs he had bought in bulk from Costco and spent hours planting the past spring. I rose proudly to

greet him but froze upon taking the first step. To my horror, the shock I had imagined witnessing from my mother materialized in my father’s tired yet terrifying stare. The buzzing within me halted abruptly as the switch swiftly clicked out of my senses, leaving my naïve body shaking. As I desperately darted my eyes around the front yard to avoid my dad’s eyes, a dull ache sprouted at my fingertips as I noticed a rock’s imprint on my left ankle begin to bruise. For the rest of the week, I watched silently from the window as my father replanted the thirty-some displaced bulbs into the mangled ground.

Now, nine years later, as a teen approaching adulthood, I can (somewhat) confidently distinguish between a tulip bulb and an onion. I chuckle as I recall the decisions of my younger self and vow to never mistake the two plants again. However, some days, I swim deep within myself – sinking further and further, struggling to hold my breath – in search of that dark, hidden crevice where the rusted, nearly-forgotten switch resides. For though I would prefer not to relive the dread and immense disappointment of realization, I would give so much to experience that explosion of curiosity and imagination just one more time.

## Time in a Bottle

*Andrey Piterkin*

Curved milky white lip  
Of the flask I bore into with my eyes.  
Dreaming of the fondness I felt  
While I was still young and hapless  
And in love. How I wish that glassy-cold neck  
And perched shoulders  
Of the Erlenmeyer  
Could bottle up the days and months  
Whisk away my past and future for me  
To hold another hand and smile another smile;  
To ransom eternity for another brief embrace  
While I thought of her and she thought of me-  
-n she had met elsewhere.  
How I wish those glossy-warm lips  
And perched shoulders  
She wore  
Could be mine once more.

# Treasure

Benjamin Yu

Resistance. It felt almost alien after the sluggishly slow hours of repeatedly jerking my tool of promised riches, in hopes of obtaining the thing, no, the treasure, I set out for that night. It came as a shock following my fruitless, toiling labor, but fruitless it was no more. In that moment, I lifted that rod with the power of one thousand tigers, the power of five hundred dinosaurs, and perhaps even the power of Garfield's anger on a Monday.

As my left hand tirelessly heaved, fueled by the adrenaline and excitement of the moment, my right hand, at immeasurable speeds, flew to the reel of the contraption, ready to rotate my way to salvation. As I began this crucial procedure, a realization dawned upon me.

I had forgotten this feeling, this sentiment of unrealized hope. The battle was not yet over.

My sentient treasure, trapped along the brim of the circle of needles, struggled to protect its own life. It fought against my conviction, my drive to pull upwards.

But I would not give up so easily. After all, I would not tolerate for these seemingly never-ending hours of labor to end in vain.

*A worthy contender for my haul*, I thought as I relentlessly rotated the reel, that key to my success.

But...

*What if... what if this ends up a failure?* As I yanked and yanked, this thought intruded upon my very sense of wellbeing. *What if I'm not ready? What if I'm not powerful enough to handle these riches?* It started to feel more and more hopeless. My drive was beginning to falter.

But then, I remembered. I remembered what I was there for. I remembered those painful hours of fruitless work. I remembered...my hope, my very reason for being there.

My eyes opened. As I lifted, my drive reignited, my face lit by the last spark of life in me, and in my eyes carried the resolve to end this, once and for all. My treasure realized this and began to pull the hardest it ever had. But I had already decided, decided to defy my fate, the very thing hell-bent on inciting my failure. If one were to look at me in that moment, they would see a blinding light, one that could pierce the heavens. My resolve burned brighter than the sun itself.

And at last, it happened. My riches, my treasure, suddenly burst from the surface, spewing its ink as a last resort. It was futile. I had successfully defied fate, changed my future. I triumphantly brought the prize over the railing.

"Hey, that's a pretty big squid. Nice job," my brother said.

"Thanks, man," I responded.

I dropped the squid in the bucket and brought my rod over the railing to continue squidging.

# Cold Hands

Andrey Piterkin

Together, meet at the heavy, frigid glass door  
Grasping hands, a unity of her warmth and my cold together.  
A brush of warm air greets two friends into  
a shared drink, perhaps, to spread coziness to the tips of our fingers

Grasping hands, a unity of her warmth and my cold together;  
There and gone, her head turned away, searching for  
something in the night,

A shared drink, perhaps, to spread coziness to the tips of her fingers

Without me and my cold hands.

There and gone, head turned away, searching for something in the night

Her eyes and lips wave goodbye, feigning sweetness but secretly happy

Without me and my cold hands.

Her scarf, warm and bright red, fallen on the ground behind her.

Her eyes and lips wave goodbye, feigning sweetness but secretly happy,

As I try to catch up with her and return

Her scarf, warm and red, fallen on the ground behind her

But she is lost to me, among the endless black sea of cars and people.

# Chaos and Corpses

Meena Kuduva

A sharp scream tore through the night air. Ahana sprinted through the dark forest, twigs snapping and leaves crunching beneath her sneaker-clad feet. She had no idea who the scream belonged to, but at this point, she couldn't care less. A hoard of decaying corpses stumbled after her, tripping over each other in their mindless chase for human flesh.

Ahana paid no mind to her burning lungs and legs as she pushed through the forest, trying to shake off the corpses chasing her. The trees began to thin, and the ground shifted from soft dirt and moss to hard rocks as she approached a river cutting through the massive forest.

*Perfect!* Ahana thought as she quickly waded through the river, the rapids pushing insistently at her legs, trying to carry her away. *The corpses aren't strong enough to get past this.* She reached the opposite bank, jeans soaked, cold, and sticking to her skin, and looked back. A throng of undead corpses wandered around on the other side, clouded eyes trained on Ahana, but most refused to come closer, repelled by the river separating them. Other mangled corpses stumbled into the river, unrelenting rapids sweeping them away, groans drowned out by the sound of the rushing river rapids.

Huffing out a laugh, Ahana jogged back into the forest. Now that the hoard of undead was taken care of, she could finally begin focusing on her other problems: finding shelter and food. Winter was beginning to creep in, and her two fleece jackets won't be able to protect her from the harsh cold much longer. She trudged through the forest, silent except for the crunch of dried leaves beneath her boots. Ahana had no idea where she was or which direction she was heading, but she continued her trek anyway, her need for shelter deemed more important. After what felt like hours of walking, Ahana reached a clearing with a small wooden cabin. She walked toward the door, gently turned the knob (it was unlocked!) and tentatively stepped inside, looking around for any signs of people, alive or undead. The cabin was small – the door opened straight into a living space with a kitchen to the right. A short hallway with two doors split from the living room. *Probably a bathroom and bedroom.* Finding no signs of life, she let down her guard and closed the door behind her.

Ahana dropped her backpack with her supplies by the door and rushed into the kitchen, frantically looking through the cupboards in the hopes of finding food. After a good five minutes of searching, she found a few cans of peaches. *Better than nothing.* She slinked toward one of the dusty couches in the living room and sat down with a sigh. Opening the can of peaches, she began eating.

Just a few weeks ago, everything was normal. Ahana was surrounded by her family and her friends, not an undead in sight. What had happened? She remembered the jarring discovery of a novel brain-rotting virus all over the news just days before everything went to hell. The virus had spread quickly. In just a few days, big cities had been bloodied by the undead, and half of her small town had been infected. Ahana had been able to stock a backpack full of food, water, and clothes before anything had happened to her or her family. They had taken off in their van, hoping to find a place more isolated to get away from the virus and the infected. Their plan took a turn for the worse – their van broke down and Ahana had ended up separated from her family after a hoard of corpses found them and chased them. She had been alone since.

Ahana put down the empty can of peaches on the dusty coffee table in front of her. Grabbing her backpack, she pulled out a flimsy piece of cloth and draped it over herself to conserve body heat. Her eyelids drooped as she laid down on the couch. It was going to be a long night.

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There's a girl in Titus' hideout. She stole his peaches.

He's not sure how she ended up in his cabin. After a long day of searching for supplies and other survivors, Titus had stumbled upon this run-down cabin in the middle of the woods, and after finding it completely empty, he staked his claim. It was a perfect place to stay and store his stuff – he didn't have much, but he had found a few cans of peaches when searching through a pair of abandoned backpacks he found in the woods (they were his most valuable items!). He was sure that he had locked the door when he came inside of his newly acquired cabin, but it turns out he *hadn't*, because now there's a girl sprawled across

his couch. Titus would've been okay with it – hell, he'd been searching for other survivors ever since he managed to escape into the woods after the virus spread – but this girl crossed the line. She robbed him of his peaches!

Clearing his throat, Titus walked over to the couch and stood above the sleeping girl, glaring down at her.

"Ahem." Titus started. The girl rustled in her sleep, black hair tangling as she cuddled deeper into the couch. "Excuse me. Wake up!"

Blairily, girl opened her eyes. *Finally, took her long enough.* Titus stood over her, taking up her entire field of vision. He wanted to seem intimidating.

"Who are you?" The girl sat up and blinked at him, her thin blanket falling into her lap.

"Who am I? I'm the one who should be asking *you* that! Who are you and why did you eat my peaches?!" Face full of disbelief, Titus gestured wildly to the empty can of peaches perched on the small coffee table behind him.

"Oh. Were those yours? Sorry." The girl stood up, not looking very apologetic. "I'm Ahana." Ahana walked toward the kitchen and rifled through the cabinets. Picking up another can of peaches, she looked over at Titus. "I'm gonna steal another one."

Titus stared at her, incredulous. He advanced toward her and snatched the can of peaches out of her hand. "Wait. Please. These are mine. If you want some you should *ask* me."

"Dude just let me have them. We're literally in the middle of an apocalypse and I don't have anything else to eat." Ahana let out a heavy sigh. "I'm sorry I ate your peaches, okay? I thought this place was empty and the previous owners had left the canned peaches behind." She looked up at him. "I guess not though. Who are you, anyway?"

With a heavy sigh, Titus introduced himself. "I'm Titus. We can share these. I only have like three more cans, so if we're going to be stuck here together, we need to ration our food." Grabbing a small pocketknife from his pocket, Titus opened the can and speared one of the peaches. "I was just a bit upset because peaches are my favorite."

Ahana gave him a small smile and grabbed a few peaches from the can. They ate by the kitchen counter, discussing their unfortunate experiences with the virus and the infected, until the can was empty and thrown aside. Titus watched Ahana walk over to her backpack and pull out some baby wipes to clean up her hands and face. *Useful.*

Titus settled down on the couch and stared at her. "So. What next?"

## Four Homographs

*Madeleine Goertz*

*Row, Row, Row & Row*

Firmly planted, the lines of rubber ducks  
Squabbled over who prevailed in a  
Sculling regatta on the  
Row River in Lane County.

*Broach, Broach, Broach & Broach*

Raising this uncomfortable truth prompted  
A man to pierce the row of boxed wines  
After the ducks' boats hazardously veered left  
Due to the broaching whale.

*Chine, Chine, Chine & Chine*

Later splitting the sheep carcass along its backbone  
At the top of a mountain ridge, he willed the blood  
To flow down the narrow ravine,  
Splashing the broaching boats at their chines.

*Plant, Plant, Plant & Plant*

The man, a CIA informant, later infiltrated the  
Manufacturing facility engaged in  
Positioning rubber ducks in the shadow of the chine  
Amongst the riverside plants.

## Mail

*Sonia Sheth*

At the window I impatiently wait  
For the little white van bringing treasures.  
On the chilled glass my breath condensates,  
But I still watch the box filled with pleasures.  
Tall it stands around lively green bushes,  
Jet black with shiny letters that I eyed.  
And only when one inserts and pushes  
The key, will it reveal its gold inside.  
My time has not yet come to open it  
For the red flag still remains flying high.  
Yawns soon attack me but I will not quit,  
I need to see the mail lady drive by.  
Sigh, the mail never arrives on Sunday,  
I must wait until tomorrow, Monday.

## The Path Towards Madness

*Kaylee Allen*

The path towards madness runs bare:  
A circular Labyrinth spiraling round and round—  
As you tiptoe through the perplexity,  
Hearing the voices going rounds in your head,  
You question whether Theseus overcame it:  
He swindled the Minotaur but lost his father,  
Swindled the girl too, along with his kingdom  
When he conveniently forgot to put up the white flag.  
Instead he became a bystander, a perpetrator to his father's fall  
A prophesy of his own path  
Of him crawling deeper into the Earth,  
Looking back only to see  
The shadowed indents' steadfast reminder of his original maze  
Still haunting him decades later, rendering him mad,  
Before he willingly fell to the Underworld,  
Fossilized alive for swindling yet another girl.  
In all the myths and legends,  
We still believe him the hero, paying no attention to his victims  
You wonder, which part of this story you play.  
Could be years before you realize  
The path towards madness takes its time.

## Student

*Vivian Lee*

He wakes up at 6:30 am, rolling out of bed exhausted from the  
late-night studying  
Washing up and eating a quick bar, realizing he's late  
Going from class to class, absorbing knowledge  
Watching the clock turn from hours to minutes to  
seconds  
Finally, the bell rings, running to his car to get his duffle bag  
full of his clothes for practice  
Sweating and panting, practice is over, it's now 6:00  
pm  
Going home, eating a quick dinner with his family  
Running up the stairs with his backpack ready to get  
started on work  
Studying for his early morning test and doing all his homework  
It's 12:30 am and he's going to bed, with a sigh because  
he has to do it all over again.

## Your Bed after Rain by Kazim Ali

*Samantha Pollard*

Silently watching, I am your ghost, If  
You were aware of my spectral presence, you and I  
Would never be able to look each other in the eye, so Open  
And accessible to me, I have carried your weight, felt your  
every breath My  
Body had provided you comfort on the loneliest of nights, my  
voiceless Mouth  
Cannot console you, but Now  
At your darkest, I  
Ache, wishing I Could  
Tell you, and that person-shaped void beside you, it is  
impossible to Drown  
Your sorrows In  
That amber bottle, so tightly clutched in your hand, I feel The  
Tremors in your body, tears fall upon me, warm and salty like  
summer Rain



## Looking Into Aaina

*Sonia Sheth, Ritika Managuli, and Sravya Ganti*

### INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE COURTROOM - DAY

AAINA and ELIJAH stand facing each other, doors of courtroom visible in background. Aaina is wearing a blazer-skirt set with red details and red heels. Elijah is wearing a dress shirt tucked into pants. OMINOUS MUSIC plays in the background.

ELIJAH  
(concerned)

Hey. Look at me. You're gonna be ok. You don't have anything to worry about.

AAINA  
(nervously joking)

What? Is a murder charge not enough for you?

Elijah holds her hand with both of his hands.

AAINA  
(under her breath)

I mean I'm literally a freshman, what the hell am I gonna do if this goes wrong.

Elijah tilts up Aaina's head by holding her chin. Aaina gives him a small smile.

ELIJAH  
(whispering)

It won't. Just keep your head up.

AAINA  
(lightheartedly)

Easy for you to say.

ELIJAH  
(looking down)

You'll be fine. If I've learned anything from Mock Trial, it's to smile at the jury. Be yourself.

AAINA  
(eyes dart from hands to Elijah, tearing up)  
How can I even be myself if I don't even remember what I've done?

Aaina removes her hands from Elijah's grip. We FOLLOW BEHIND HER as she opens courtroom doors.

### INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Aaina walks with confidence to left side of courtroom and takes a seat next to her attorney.

As she walks PEOPLE IN COURTROOM are all staring at her. We SWIVEL 180 DEGREES FACING AAINA and ZOOM OUT until we are behind the judge. We see Elijah and AAINA'S FAMILY seated behind her. JUDGE BANGS GAVEL and we CUT to facing the JUDGE who is seated.

JUDGE

Does the prosecution have an opening statement?

We PAN from Judge to PROS ATTORNEY who stands up.

PROS ATTORNEY

Yes, Your Honor.

We FOLLOW PROS ATTORNEY from the front at a LOW ANGLE as she walks towards JURY.

PROS ATTORNEY

Remember high school? When friends felt like family. When relationships felt unbreakable? But what if a bond is severed? At this vulnerable age, on the cusp between high school and college, you have to look at yourself in the mirror and be willing to move on. To start fresh. Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, today's case is about a girl who could not move on. A girl who carried those severed bonds into college with her. Aaina Gelani murdered her ex-best friend Lily Pham, in a fit of rage on February 16, 2021.

CUT TO

### EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL STADIUM (2020 GRADUATION) - DAY

SHOT OF GRADUATION STAGE, CLOSED FRAME.

PRINCIPAL (V.O.)

Aaina Gelani.

Aaina walks across the stage, gets her diploma and shakes PRINCIPAL's hand. Aaina poses for a picture. We PAN TO her DAD holding a camera. CLICK.

CUT TO

AAINA'S PARENTS take pictures of Aaina and her BAA. Baa is wearing a sari. We PAN to a MEDIUM SHOT of Baa and Aaina.

BAA  
 (squeezes Aaina's cheek)  
 We're so proud of you betu.  
 Wishing you lots of good luck in college.  
 Aaina rolls her eyes and smiles.  
 AAINA  
 (drawing out her words sarcastically)  
 Thanks Baa.  
 LILY enters from behind Aaina and Baa.  
 LILY  
 Can Lily get in on this Gelani family photo?  
 AAINA  
 I think we're done taking photos for today. Love you Baa.  
 LILY  
 (to BAA)  
 Love you too!  
 We SEE THE FRONT of Aaina and Lily as they WALK.  
 LONG SHOT.  
 LILY  
 Don't be a bitch. It's our last high school party. Are you coming or what?  
 AAINA  
 (jokingly)  
 Babe it literally wouldn't be a party without me.  
 LILY  
 (annoyed)  
 Mmm yeah for sure.  
 AAINA  
 (chuckling)  
 You know I'm just kidding! But for real like who would you talk to if I wasn't there?  
 LILY  
 (stops walking)  
 What do you mean by that?  
 Aaina and Lily stop walking and face each other.  
 AAINA  
 No! I just mean that like-  
 Aaina pauses to think and Lily interrupts her.  
 LILY  
 Like what.  
 AAINA  
 Well if you weren't there I'd get super bored too. It's not that big of a deal. Stop over- analyzing

things like you always do.  
 Aaina and Lily start walking again.  
 LILY  
 Yeah ok. Um, how is everything with you and Neil?  
 AAINA  
 It's fine. We're just chilling.  
 LILY  
 (raises eyebrows)  
 Chilling?  
 AAINA  
 Ok shut up. I'm gonna miss him so much next year.  
 LILY  
 Yeah it's literally been three years. Honestly, I don't understand how you guys haven't broken up yet. Everyone was expecting it to happen.  
 AAINA  
 NO WAY! Did they really?! I mean nice to prove everyone wrong, I guess.  
 LILY  
 So are you guys going together? Tonight?  
 AAINA  
 Yeah he's giving me a ride.

CUT TO

# **INT. MATTE BLACK TESLA - NIGHT**

CLOSE UP. NEIL and Aaina making out.

AAINA  
 (flirty tone)  
 What time is it? We should get to the party. Aaina rolls off of Neil. Neil pulls Aaina's collar towards him.  
 NEIL  
 (whiney)  
 Oh, come on... five more minutes?  
 AAINA  
 It's already 11:27, we want to be late... but not THAT late.

**\*\* To continue reading this work, visit page 44 for the QR code and link to the full online version!**

# Asher's Research Assistant

*Dev Patel*

## ENTRY 1 – A Frightening Task

Asher just tasked me with recovering a set of skulls from the Sanctum of Bones. He knows I hate that place, especially since the Taken have found housing there.

Every time I go, it feels like I'm in a Mission

Impossible movie trying to avoid the Taken (but taking them out if needed) while actively stealing stuff from their newly inhabited cave.

On the bright side, the Sanctum is only in The Rupture, which is right across our base of operations. Other than that, not much to look forward to...

But I guess this is the type of stuff I have to deal with if I want to be Asher's research assistant.

## ENTRY 2 – A Grave Warning

There I stood, in front of the Sanctum of Bones. The actual Sanctum was inside the cave, but we normally just call the whole thing the Sanctum of Bones because the darkness of the cave is really just the start to what's inside the cave.

*I heard a faint screech, like an old walkie-talkie making noise.*

"Assistant?"

"Yes, Asher?"

"I've got reports of increased Taken activity in that cave. Make sure to come back in one piece. We have much more research to do on the Taken."

Great...I already had to go into this cave but now there's more Taken in there. As if my day couldn't get worse...

## ENTRY 3 – The Descent

The only light in the cave before the actual sanctum was from dimly lit lamps that were on the ground.

The cave itself was very tight and cramped, any noise I made was echoed throughout the entire cave – and any noise the enemy made, I could hear as well.

My heart was beating faster than normal, probably because of Asher's warning. But surprisingly, I didn't see any Taken on my way down.

I hoped that they would all be busy investigating the Sanctum, so I could simply pass by them, get the skull, and leave with no conflict, but I had a feeling that things would not work out

this way...

## ENTRY 4 – The Taken

At the feet of the sanctum, I saw the first group of Taken.

Luckily, they were only Taken Psions, which were weaker than most Taken enemies. I decided to take them out instead of walking by since they were isolated from the rest and because I didn't want them to cause trouble later on.

As I climbed to the top of the Sanctum, where I presumed the prized skull Asher wanted was located at, all I saw were waves after waves of Taken.

At first, I thought I could get by using some smoke grenades that I found lying around at the base, but my supply quickly ran low. As I reached for another smoke grenade, a Taken Hobgoblin spotted me from afar and landed a perfect shot on my bag. It left a massive hole, and the rest of my grenades fell out and rolled out of my reach.

It was at this time that dark thoughts of my end came to me.

## ENTRY 5 – My Salvation

Soon, Taken Knights surrounded me and cut off any possible escape routes.

They broke my legs, so I couldn't run.

They dragged me to the top of the sanctum in victory.

There was no skull at the top, only a mutated Taken Knight.

I learned his name was Pandrok, Pillar of Nothing. He was a freak of nature. Though exhibiting traits of a Taken Knight, he had the size of an ogre and the frightening aura of a wizard.

I tried to bargain, but they didn't listen.

They only know how to blindly follow orders.

Pandrok reached for his sword, and I realized it was time to move on.

I counted down my last seconds, "3...2...1..."

...

I was alive.

I looked up and saw a large flash of fire pass me and strike Pandrok down.

It was Asher.

His first words, "I told you to come back in one piece!"

## Mother Earth

*Samantha Pollard*

I don't come from a religious family, or at least not in the traditional sense. My mother, having grown up in the sweltering heat of the south, has regaled me with her battle stories. Driving, what felt like ages, only to sit in a packed church, sweating through her nicest clothes, and singing hymns that she didn't understand. By the time I was born, both my parents had done their fair share of rebellion against the teachings thrust upon them by their parents. But it was my mother who had formed a newer, greener philosophy.

Plants have always grown in my home. Strategically placed by windows, stretching towards the sun, and meticulously watered. When I was younger, I would watch as my mother tended to them, teaching me her love for nature. She taught me the inherent value and potential of every living thing, that every life has worth, and I should treat it as such.

My mother knew only how to show her plants care. Each morning, when she would water them, I would marvel at how their leaves would perk up, as if they recognized her. During my younger years, filled with skinned knees, bubble-gum pink tutus, and syrupy chocolate milk, I didn't understand my mother's hobby. Why show so much love and care towards something that could never love you back?

My own mother condemns the way most people treat mother earth. Raping her for all she can give us, and once she has nothing left to offer, leaving her. She becomes barren and cold, no man or animal dares to make their home with her. The earth gives and gives, and all we do is take. My mother showed me that how we treat the earth is a metaphor for how we will treat others in our lifetimes. If someone could not appreciate the lush, green beauty of a healthy forest, how could they ever appreciate the subtle allure of a child's laugh or the tenderness of a first kiss?

I now know that by keeping her plants pristine, my mother was reckoning all the wrong doings that she had experienced in her own life. Growing up in a household that took all they could before leaving only wreckage in their path; my mother knew that unconditional love was rare. So, she had rejected the false faith that her own people had expected her to conform to and built her own. Her faith taught me the value of loyalty, that beauty comes from within, and that for all the taking we do, we must do some

giving.

Now, I watch my mother standing over the stove, her hands moving unhurriedly while she prepares fluffy scrambled eggs. The white scars dappling her arms stand starkly against her smooth skin, my mother is a survivor. One of these arms reaches out, plucking a single leaf off her tallest basil plant, my mother is fluid in her movements, poetry in motion. That single leaf is dropped into the frying pan, my mother lets the flavors mingle. The butter-yellow eggs sizzle, contrasting beautifully with the emerald green herb. She glances up, I am noticed, I inhale and take in the aromatic sent of fresh basil, still clinging to her as she runs her fingers through my hair.

While my family may not be religious in the traditional sense, we do believe in higher powers. Those of dedication, gratitude, and compassion. My mother has taught me to love nature, to care for those pieces of her that she loans us, and when walking through her lush valleys, forests, and crevices to be thankful for all that she has given us. But more than that through our love of nature.

## The Clock Shop

*Rory McNerney*

6:30 AM. Both thin obsidian black hands aligned southwards as Mr. Choi's rattling Sharp alarm clock broke the old man's slumber. Wiping away the dreams of last night, Mr. Choi focused his mind on the present. First breakfast, then a wash, and finally lunch for his sleeping son. Sweeping away the leaves outside, the quiet shop keeper listened to the ticks of his watch's racing second hand. Inside the clock shop, Mr. Choi cleared the glass countertop, revealing sparkling silver watches glittering in the rising sun. Mr. Choi popped the lock of the shops glass door, briefly allowing the cold crisp January air to penetrate the warm varnished wood-paneled room. my mother has taught me how to treat people.

9 AM. Mr. Choi smiled as he saw his son taking a quick glance over the old man's head before picking up to a nervous sprint. Slumping in his chair, Mr. Choi watched as the last of the

students ran by, the metronomes of time marking each second of loneliness. Fortunately for Mr. Choi, it wasn't long until cold and weary customers bustled through the door, forcing the shopkeeper to grind his rusted gears into action. Mr. Choi explained batteries, checked warranties, turned gears, twisted hands, adjusted screws, and straightened rods, to the rhythm of the ticking clocks.

12 PM. Popping out from his little world, Mr. Choi stumbled to his kitchen, unsurprisingly disappointed to see his son's lunch, standing alone on the kitchen table. After returning to the counter of his shop with lunch in hand, a friendly neighbor scurried forward with a bowl of sweet potatoes. Treating her to warming tea, the two overpowered the droning ticks with talk of the neighborhood. An hour of amity would pass before his friend finally slipped back into the nipping cold.

3 PM. The clocks and watches ticked on in sleepy symphony. With no customers to call for him, Mr. Choi seeped back into his chair, watching the leaves roll back reversing time to the morning. No life moved but metal hands. No heads turn but only gears. No faces smiled except at 1:50. No hearts beat, spare that of time.

6 PM. Mr. Choi, staring down his son's lunch, sprang from the chair like a clock unwound. He picked up his coat, turned off the lights, and opened the shop's door. For the first time in weeks did Mr. Choi move any faster than a walk. Though the gears of his knees protested, Mr. Choi struggled to a jog. Glancing at his watch he realized school would be ending soon. Cutting through alleyways Mr. Choi passed the restaurant he and his starving son would visit soon. For now, he had to run, Mr. Choi had to catch his son before time caught him.

## Pokémon Z: An X and Y Parody

Matthew Lin

Serena's eyelids flew open to find herself not in the midst of an intense Pokémon battle, but in a garishly pink room with a Wii-U in the corner. Her detective uniform (a pink Lolita dress) was gone, and instead replaced with a generic set of pajamas. *Crap*, she thought. *I must've lost that battle and fainted. It always happens for some reason.* Deciding that pink only looks good on clothes, she changed into a black shirt and red dress she found in

the closet and headed down the stairs to check in on her colleagues with her Holocaster. *This will do for the time being.* After all, her work was supposed to begin today.

"Hey sis, please hurry to Aquacorde town! Our assignment begins shortly. Also, once you pick up your Pokémon, I wanna battle you! There's a quota we need to fill for rival battles, after all." Serena's air-headed colleague Shauna popped up on the holographic display. Her hair also looked like a pair of wings, so Serena liked to imagine that she didn't need a Pokémon that can fly, as she herself was capable of that already. "Wait, what quota? Why rival battles of all things -" the call was disconnected before Serena could get an explanation.

Moving those pertinent questions to the back of her head, she passed through the stone gate into a central plaza with a fountain. After being briefly heckled by a local business owner who offered her drugs, she sat down at a table with her coworkers and tuned into their conversation. She would've arrested the guy, but she was in a rush and they had bigger Magikarp to fry. "Alright detectives, Looker isn't here today so I, Professor Sycamore, am filling in." A Frenchman in a lab coat appeared on screen. "Recently, there have been a string of terrorist attacks involving redheaded people in suits that according to witnesses, look like they came out of a movie franchise that rhymes with 'Flingsman.' Though we don't know who their leader is, we're pretty sure it's not the tall redheaded guy with an orange tie who keeps muttering about creating a better world where gingers aren't bullied for having no souls. Let's bring 'em to justice so the Kalos region can be safe once again! Also, here's a handheld device that can register every Pokémon in existence. If you want, try to fill it out in the name of important scientific advancement, but nobody I ever give this to does so it's okay." The transmission ended and the detectives' attention turned to the box in the middle of the table. There were three of the devices that nobody used, and three Pokémon in balls to choose from. Serena chose the one that looked like a huge nut. *I guess I'm covered if I get hungry*, she thought. "Oh, yeah! Here's a letter for your mom. It's from Professor Sycamore and for her eyes only." A tall and rather chubby colleague handed her a letter that smelled faintly of perfume. Serena, understandably disliking the implication, hurried back to the town gate. "You're going to be my opponent in my Pokémon-battling debut!" It was Shauna. *1400 Pokedollars an hour doesn't cover this*, Serena muttered under her breath...

# Speedrunning

Thomas Welch

Have you ever heard the term speedrun? Do you know what it really means? To put it simple, it's the act of doing something as fast as you can. Technically, it can literally be anything, like speedrunning eating a pizza, speedrunning math homework, or speedrunning a walk around a park. But there are other words people use instead of 'speedrun' in that context, since its main definition is most widely used for video games.

When people play video games, regardless of what it is, anyone will get bored of a game, and stop playing, never come back. That's disappointing. But why not play from a different approach? Try speedrunning. Many people find more enjoyment in video games by doing speedruns, since it brings a vastly different approach than what developers intend players to do. To put it simply, speedrunning in a video game is accomplishing something within the game, whether that is getting a certain item, completing a level, getting everything possible in the game, or, in most cases, beating the game as fast as possible. How you do this? Well, it's completely up to you, the player. It's the player's job to figure out. You can make your own rules, as it doesn't matter what you do, if you reach your goal that is, but you'll probably also want to figure out what the fastest way is to get to your goal.

In general speedrunning terms, what you may hear as 'beating the game' in speedrunning is usually called any%. That basically means you need to complete the game, which in most cases is rolling the credits (in some way), with any percent of the game complete. Now, not every game is going to have a goal of beating the game, or you may not want to do that, so you can try different categories. The categories vary per game, but can be pretty much anything you want, but don't make the categories too obscure, or else there won't be any competition. Competing? Did you think that this was a small thing? No, of course not. There are many, many players for so many games new and old, and each of those games have their own communities, numerous specifically for speedrunning. A lot of these competitors do it for the fun of it, just to have gotten a decent time, but are also trying to get the number one spot, and yes, they are world records. It can get ridiculous what highly optimized speedruns can become, especially for popular games. Imagine being at the end of an

hour-long run, on pace for world record, but you still have one more trick that you have to go for to ensure the world record. The trick is extremely precise, and only saves a few seconds, but it's your only shot at getting the world record. Would you take that chance? Risk it all, all or nothing, after hundreds of hours of practice? Or do you guarantee second place on the leaderboard? Every second counts in the final timing.

Now, if you, yes you, wanted to speedrun a game, and see yourself on official leaderboards with real people, it's pretty simple. Most games/categories require video proof of the entire run, and for your convenience, an external timer. You can really go as simple as a phone timer if you wanted. Make sure your recording your gameplay, start the timer when run starts (which can depend on the game), and end it when you have reached the goal of the category. After some practice and finally getting a decent run, and you want to finally submit the run, there may be a few more specific rules (which are always a good idea to check beforehand), but for the most part as long as you did everything correctly, you're ready to start speedrunning. There are many games to try, including some of the most popular like Super Mario 64, Super Mario Odyssey, Celeste, Portal, Minecraft and so much more. But it's up to you to see what you like, and realize that speedrunning is quite a fun way to play video games in a completely different perspective. Who knows, you may become a world record holder....

## Village of Dust

Maxwell Voss

James woke up with a shudder and looked around. *Seems like I'm not the only one who felt the earth shake*, he thought, looking at the startled birds. \*BOOM\* even the dirt jumped beneath James. He was supposed to guard his village from any incoming threats, but now, he was starting to question if maybe he should leave. He stood his ground. The lives of his people depended on his ability to warn and possibly defeat an incoming threat, and he was not going to forsake his post because the ground moved. If only James knew what was approaching, if

only he didn't have a god complex, if only he could understand that he didn't have anywhere as much power as he thought he did. The earth jumped again, and the ground shattered open. James tried to run, tried to warn his people, he really did, but it meant nothing, NOTHING. The Village? GONE. His wife? REDUCED TO ASH. Nothing left behind, nobody to tell the story of these people. For all we know they randomly died to a volcano or a forest fire. Only one piece of information remains, next time you hear the ground shake, fear something far worse than an earthquake.

## Learning Telugu

*Sravya Ganti*

Despite the jet lag, my grandma and grandpa always woke up at the crack of dawn. They shuffled around downstairs, sipping chai, staring out the window, completely oblivious of each other, until the rest of us woke up 4 hours later. It's like they were teleported from their breezy coconut grove house in India, to a suburb in Redmond, Washington, and everyone knew besides them.

On those summer mornings, the sun would peek through my window, bathing my room in soft yellow light, smooth like the inside of a mango peel. I unwrap myself from the blanket, skip downstairs for breakfast and spend every day at the park laughing with the other girls in the neighborhood. My freedom from school tasted sweeter than a cardamom-spiced, frothy cup of mango lassi. Every day I would dip my mouth into that cup, and take a greedy sip, coating my upper lip in the thick yogurt-mango mixture. But a cup of mango lassi isn't bottomless.

One day as I jumped off the fourth step of our staircase onto the downstairs hardwood with a triumphant thud, my grandma shuffled up to me with a little steel cup of chai. I followed the tendrils of smoke extending delicately from the surface of the chai, all the way up to eye level with my grandma. Her green eyes, which brilliantly contrasted her coffee-colored skin, offered all the kindness that her stoic face and tone were missing. They crinkled in at the corners as she said, "Here Sravya, sit with me."

"Oh-ok sure Nama, I have to go to the park in 10 minutes, I don't think I have time to drink this." As I lifted the chai to my mouth my lips pursed in aversion. I didn't want to lose the

intoxicating sweetness left on my lips from a summer of no responsibilities, no studying. But when I let a hot drop of chai hit my mouth, searing my lip along the way, I realized it was sweet too. Just in a different way. It didn't leave me in a happy, mellow trance, but kept me alert.

My grandma rolled her eyes. "You see those girls every day. Today you can take a break and spend time with your Nanama. Thathegaru and I want to try something with you."

She pulled out a colorful distressed paperback booklet with peeling corners. When I realized it was a Telugu lettering book made for first graders in India, I knew my cup of lassi had run empty. I guessed the chai would have to do.

We began learning the basic vowel sounds, "ah, ahhhh, ee, eeeee, u, uuuu." They had the same basic sounds as English, but the structure was very different. I didn't know languages could work in so many ways. Telugu is built on syllables, not letters like English. Each character is a base consonant sound. And then, like accessorizing a Polly Pocket doll, you attach emphasis and/or vowel endings. After a month of studying letters with my grandparents every day, I'd gotten the hang of it.

My next challenge was to read a Telugu children's book. The memory of the name is fuzzy, but the feeling as I tried to read the first sentence is burned into my mind forever. I was able to decipher every syllable of the first word. But when I put it all together and spoke it out loud to my grandma, I didn't have the slightest clue what it meant. That was the first moment I realized I knew probably two percent of the Telugu language. I knew all the words that are necessary to compose sentences like "Why does it keep raining?" "What are we eating for dinner?" "Can I watch TV for another hour?" But beyond the activities of my green-brown house in Redmond, WA, I didn't know a single word of significance. I suddenly felt very small. I was glad my cup of lassi had run out and my grandma had coerced me into learning Telugu. It might take me a year to get through this book made for a 5-year-old in India.

It amazed me that my parents, who are now also limited to the same two percent of Telugu as I am, read and wrote in this language for 20 years of their lives. I wondered if they were still able to do so as proficiently as my grandparents. I couldn't picture my dad writing an essay in Telugu, like I'm writing this essay in English right now.

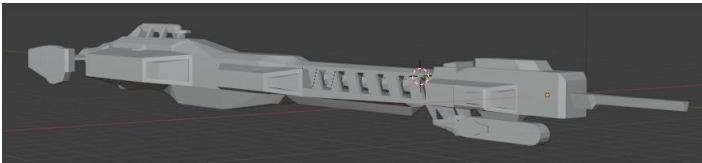
It's been five years since my grandparents visited. Every

time I pass our spice cabinet, I try to read the labels scrawled out in my grandma's Telugu handwriting, stuck haphazardly onto stacks of metal tins. I daydream about spending the next 30 years of my life in Kakinada with the rest of my family. I could wake up every day at the crack of dawn, enveloped in a sweaty coconut breeze, turn off the ceiling fan and sip chai with my grandparents with the staticky sound of radio and mosquito flies buzzing in the background. Maybe, I'd eventually forget how to read and write in English.

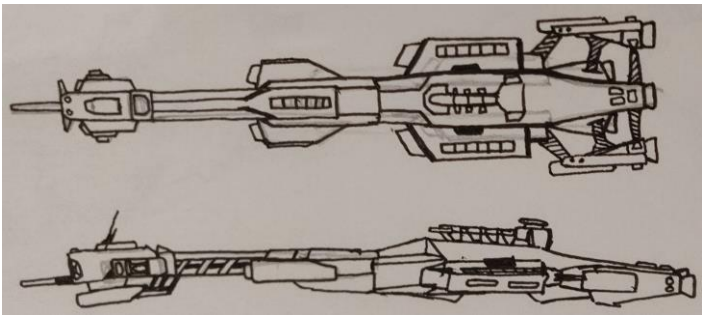
## Vakan-class frigate

Maxwell Robertson

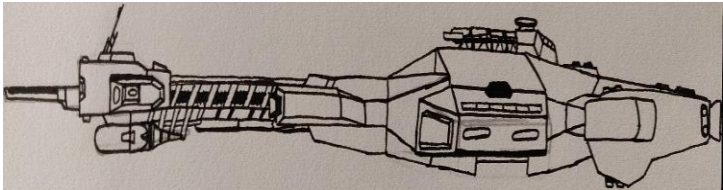
The *Vakan* class of frigates, officially the SOR FG-88 class<sup>[1][13]</sup>, were built to serve as the primary power-projection for the Selenn Orbitory Republic. The ships of the *Vakan*-class were the 3rd largest vessels to enter service in the SOR navy prior to the Silent Escalation<sup>[2]</sup> in 2609, weighing in at 423,000 metric tons<sup>[1][13]</sup>. As next-generation High-Mobility Combat Vehicles, the *Vakan*-class integrated advanced protection and stealth mechanisms including Larnz-type 2-phase reactive plating<sup>[13]</sup> and a next-generation self-guiding Magnetic Accelerator Cannon round<sup>[1][12][13]</sup>.



(Render courtesy of Ship Historical Preservation Society (SHiPS))<sup>[7]</sup>



(above and side view)<sup>[1]</sup>



(more detailed side view)<sup>[1]</sup>

### General Information:

- Name: *Vakan*-class frigate
- Builders: Aphons Shipbuilding<sup>[1]</sup>, Fazon Stellar-Yards<sup>[1]</sup>, Brakom & Lann Stellar-Yards<sup>[10]</sup>
- Operators: Selenn Orbitory Republic Navy
- Preceded by: *Krast* class<sup>[1]</sup> and *Alesby* class<sup>[1]</sup>
- Cost: Program cost: equivalent of 79 million ZDK (Zekk Denominational Currency (currency)) in materials and work time<sup>[8]</sup>  
Unit cost: 4.8-6.1 million ZDK in materials and worktime<sup>[8]</sup>
- In service: 2583-2672<sup>[10]</sup>
- Planned: 18<sup>[1][3]</sup>
- Completed: 14<sup>[1]</sup>
- Cancelled: 4<sup>[1]</sup>
- Lost: 1212
- Retired: 2<sup>[7][13]</sup>
- Preserved: SOR *Moltobar* (FG-94)<sup>[7]</sup>

### Characteristics:

- Type: Frigate (Force Amplification and Transmission Craft (FAMTRAC))<sup>[3][13]</sup>
- Mass: Operating: 423,000 metric tons<sup>[13]</sup>  
Space-Tunneling: 972,000 metric tons<sup>[13]</sup>  
Operating (FAMTRAC-2 modification): 431,000 metric tons<sup>[13]</sup>
- Space-Tunneling (FAMTRAC-2 modification): 1.03 million metric tons<sup>[13]</sup>
- Length: 393 m<sup>[1][13]</sup>
- Beam: 81 m<sup>[1][13]</sup>
- Height: 39 m<sup>[1][13]</sup>
- Installed: Up to 4.74 TW with FAMTRAC<sup>[13]</sup>, up to 7.92 TW with FAMTRAC-2

\*\* To continue reading this work, visit page 44 for the QR code and link to the full online version!



## Network

*Alex Schuessler*

The online world has grown increasingly more dangerous the longer it has stayed around. Malicious network manipulators now have more control than ever with the power of online gaming platforms such as Xbox, PS4, and various voice chats. There are multiple tools some free and others that cost money based on their abilities to track someone VIA their home routers IP address. Exposing them to many things the IP grabber might want.

An IP (internet protocol) address is something all routers and devices have, it's technically public information so "pulling" IPs is not illegal. However, many things people can do with an IP once they have it is. Many websites store and log IPs based on online gamertags for platforms such as Xbox allowing anyone to find someone's IP. With an IP you can track where someone lives, who their internet provider is and many other things depending on what software you use to pull someone's IP.

A router IP works a lot like a phone number, whenever you interact with any website or anyone online your router IPs are exchanged with each other so as to allow both parties to communicate and interact. By communicating, these IPs will send each other "data packets" which essentially is code of what they are communicating. However, these, of course, can be manipulated in many ways and become "DDoSing". A DDoS (Distributed denial of service) DDoSing is when someone floods another person routers with packets which overloads it and stops it from working, because the malicious packets are like a virus code, the router can't decipher which are real packets and which are purposeless ones being used to flood the router. There are multiple different types of Ddos attacks, but they all lead to the same purpose. The router then cannot work properly, and the victim has no internet. It's also extremely difficult to find an attacker because many attacks are done using private company servers and they IPs that overload your router are traced back to them rather than a single person.

There are many ways to carry out a DDoS attack. There are websites that use "Stressors" which send packets to any host IP which "stress" the router and slow the internet or down it completely. There are also things called "Botnets" which is essentially a large group of infected devices (usually the owner of

such device has no idea its infected) which are used to carry out DDoS attacks or send spam or even spy on people. When being attacked by a personal botnet, they can hold you offline for virtually as long as you want. Days, weeks or months.

So how can you protect yourself? Many routers these days have "Dynamic" settings meaning, when you had reset the router, your IP changes and you can no longer be attacked unless the attacker pulls your IP again. Another way is to get a VPN. VPNs work by either masking your IP and instead showing a location or something else, so the attacker can't find it. Or they allow an attacker to see an IP but they can't overflow your router because your VPNs server can either mitigate data traffic or absorb the packets entirely, because of the fact that the data runs through a cloud server rather than just your home router.

The online world may seem dangerous but there are ways to protect yourself. These should be taken seriously and used. The solution is not to avoid the online world because many of these issues are relatively rare and don't come often.

## A Mission to Palmas-3

*Maxwell Robertson*

Ops. Prep. Room, Medical Sector 3, Block D, Deck 3,  
Kassad-class Star-Strider Restful. 22:32 dark cycle; 42 hours to  
mission commencement.

---

"It will only hurt a little, *relax*."

The sound-proofed walls of the Operation Preparation Room cut short the echoes of shrill agony as filament-thin needles tore a series of six sequential holes down the length of his arm. Viscous fluid, black like tar, bubbled and spread, engulfing Isaac Adelann's outstretched arm as it spasmed in its restraint.

"Almost finished, I just need to patch you up a bit. You'll be field-ready in no time."

"Thanks as always, Doc."

Linear motors cried as the 20-millimeter reinforced door formed an airtight seal between Isaac and Medical Sector 3. He

held his hand before his eyes. Grip, un-grip. . It felt the same as usual, like the 2-micrometers of synthetic polymer weren't even there.

A mission-specific implant, almost certainly a data-recorder; there wasn't much else that could be of use on a reconnaissance mission. Standard protocol: enter, gather intel, leave. Quick and easy. According to *The Standard Encyclopedia of Species*, beaten into every young Tormassian before they even knew how to read it, the natives of Palmas-3, the Palmos, were a remarkably peaceful species. Neither Isaac nor Command expected any resistance to his presence, as such he was equipped minimally.

Isaac tapped three times on the sensor lock, each tap a calculated 1.21 seconds, any more or any less and his identity would not be recognized. The door computer, content that the individual before it was who they said they were, unlatched the security lock and allowed Isaac into the 4<sup>th</sup> most secure part of the ship, the armory. Isaac was notorious, especially within his own Ops. Team, for paying particular attention to his gear. Maintenance wasn't always easy, especially when he found himself assigned to long missions on sand worlds such as Katrain. Six months there had turned his teammates' gear to dust, but his remained pristine day after day.

Slot 240, as always. Electromagnets released and the metal cover flipped away to reveal his personal equipment: a 24M carbine, 2 weeks off the assembly line; its predecessor, the 22M occupied the slot adjacent; 6G General-Environment gear filled the hanger-space; a pair of 48H sidearms sat on the bottom of the locker; and a multi-purpose knife lay next to them. Each was retrieved one at a time. Isaac unscrewed or removed every piece he could. He wiped and polished surfaces, cleaned down crevices, and carefully re-painted insignia before putting the gear back together again.

Isaac examined his mental checklist, affirming each matter of the day to be complete. With all his duties done, nothing remained but sleep. He returned to his assigned Cryo-Block, hopped in tube number 240, secured all 5 safety harnesses, typed the duration of his rest into a keypad, and finally depressed the "SEAL" button.

His eyes had already begun to close, the sleeping agent kicking in, when the tube computer began to recite its sleep message. "Good night Isaac Adelann, ID 240006832."

---

Cryo-Block, Deck 3, Kassad-class Star-Strider  
Restful. 15:00 light cycle; 2 hours to mission commencement.

---

"Wake up Adelann, your briefing is starting soon."

Major Lufthaul rapped on the glass of Isaac's Prolonged Inactivity Tube. Vibration sensors in the pod awakened subroutines, in turn bringing the pod's main response systems to life.

"Please cease your disruptions Lambard Lufthaul, ID 239960727. The occupant is in rest cycle for a further 28 seconds," declared the PIT's AI, synthesizing speech through its outward-facing speakers.

"Yeah, yeah. Tell him he has a briefing."

"Affirmative, I have set an awakening notification."

When Isaac awoke, the pod presented its message, short and sweet.

"Good waking Isaac Adelann, ID 240006832. You have a briefing in 1772 seconds."

---

Aboard landing craft K4-011, launched from Kassad-class Star-Strider Restful. 17:01 light cycle; 6 seconds after mission commencement.

---

Isaac's hand was beginning to ache, having been locked in ready position for more than an hour. The transfer to orbital station Lauhaad had been uneventful, but fuel line issues set the mission behind by 10 minutes. Unacceptable.

"Alright Adelann, I'm venting to the outside, so no more external air for you. Make sure you switch your suit over."

The pilot's warning was almost pointless for a veteran like Adelann; he had, after all, switched over the moment K4-011 had detached from the station, compliant with mission protocol.

Isaac reached up to the chin of his helmet, pressing one of the many buttons to enable voice relay. He asked the pilot simply, "what's the expected landing time?"

"30 seconds, or there about. We were a bit behind but lucky for you, I'm your pilot."

The light craft shook as the outstretched airbrakes crashed against the outer atmosphere of Palmas-3.

\*\* To continue reading this work, visit page 44 for the QR code and link to the full online version!

# Florida Man Claims Magic is Real and Commits Uxoricide

*Matthew Lin, Meena Kuduva, and Disha Prasad*

## DOWNTOWN MIAMI, FLORIDA

A redheaded wizard sits at her booth, located far inside an alleyway behind a popular bar. The booth itself is presentable, at least compared to a 9-year old's lemonade stand. The WIZARD sits, slumped over in her chair, and is peeling and deseeding a pomegranate, the red juices staining her fingers. Above the booth hangs wine-colored lights, adding a whimsical feel to her shop. SEAN, adorned in an unbuttoned and lightly wrinkled grey suit with a loose tie, stumbles into the alley and walks to the stand. He smells lightly of alcohol and appears visibly upset.

SEAN

(slurred)

Is this a palm reading booth?

The Wizard looks up and points at the sign on booth, annoyed. The sign reads, "Palm Reading."

WIZARD

Is it?

SEAN

Well, can you read my fortune?

WIZARD

Well, it's five minutes from closing, so it'll cost you extra.

The Wizard shows her pomegranate-stained hands to Sean.

Sean gently places his hands in the Wizard's. They're cold and kind of gross, but the Wizard doesn't mind. Sean interlaces his fingers with the wizard's. He smirks.

SEAN

You can hold a lot more than these hands 😊.

The Wizard is visibly repulsed, especially seeing the ring on his left ring finger.

WIZARD

(disgusted)

That comment right there will cost ya another 20. Alright, let's take a look.

The Wizard closely inspects the man's hands.

WIZARD

Alright. Your whole family is gonna die. Soon.

SEAN

(shocked and confused)

What?

WIZARD

That'll be 50.

SEAN

(shocked and confused)

What?!

WIZARD

I normally charge 25 but it's 5 extra for coming so close to closing, and 20 extra for the shitty flirting—aren't you married?

The Wizard nods towards the ring.

SEAN

What do you mean my whole family is going to die?!

WIZARD

You heard me. The lines say it. Take it up with your hands if it bothers you that much. Now pay. This is a respectable business.

Sean pays the Wizard. Distraught, he wobbles back down the alleyway to the front of the bar. He notices pomegranate juice staining his palms. Drunk, he ignores it.

## SUBURBS OF MIAMI, FLORIDA

Sean stumbles into his home around 11 P.M. to find AMAIA doing work on the dining table. He carries his jacket in one hand, and briefcase in the other. His kids are upstairs. Amaia quickly glances up at Sean, taking her eyes off her computer for a mere 2 seconds.

AMAIA

I didn't realize you were working late today. But then again, I didn't realize I'd pay for your drinking habits either.

Sean puts down his jacket and briefcase with a THUD.

SEAN

Is Carmen asleep?

CARMEN enters from the shadows.

CARMEN

What do you think? Asleep  
before the useless man who  
married my wonderful daughter  
comes home? Sounds like a  
missed opportunity.

Sean takes a seat at the dining table.

SEAN

Well, I'd prefer you berate me  
when I'm not sober, so have at  
it.

Amaia continues to work, never looking away from  
her computer.

AMAIA

Have you eaten yet? There's  
dinner in the fridge.

SEAN

I'm good.

CARMEN

Good at what? You're still a  
breathing nuisance aren't you.

Sean dismisses the comment and turns his  
attention to Amaia.

SEAN

The other guy had connections.  
I would too...

AMAIA

I'm not gonna get you a  
promotion. Is your job not  
enough of a handout?

CARMEN

Are you not ashamed of taking  
everything from my daughter?  
You need her to get you a  
decent job too?

SEAN

That's not what I meant.  
Everyone has connections, it's  
just business.

AMAIA

I thought you said you were  
tired. Say goodnight to the  
kids before you sleep,  
please.

Amaia waves a hand at him, eyes still glued to  
her computer screen. She dismisses Sean.

SEAN

I know.

Head down, Sean leaves.

### MIAMI SUBERBS, SEAN'S HOUSE

Sean wakes up the next morning on a large couch  
in the living room. No one else is awake. He  
heads upstairs to his bedroom, where Amaia is  
sleeping. He brushes his teeth, showers, and puts  
on the same suit he had on last night.

SEAN

(quietly)

It's not that wrinkled, I can  
wear it another day.

Sean notices a small red stain on the arm of his  
suit jacket. It smells strongly of alcohol and a  
bit like pomegranate.

SEAN

OH crap. The palm reader! My  
whole family is gonna die!

Sean pauses.

SEAN

Man, I should really stop  
drinking, I can't just believe  
anyone who works behind a bar.

Sean pauses again.

SEAN

Man, I can sure go for a pina  
collada.

Sean runs out the front door and gets into his  
car. He drives to the Hidden Palm Bar. Upon  
exiting the car, he sees the Wizard passed out on  
the curb, with a bottle of alcohol in her hand.  
Sean parks his car (halfway on the curb), runs  
over to the curb, and shakes the Wizard awake.  
She smells of alcohol.

WIZARD

(slurred and loud)

I'm sorry I made your ears grow  
instead of your brain!!!

The Wizard wakes up, and accidentally smacks  
Sean. She looks at him for a second, realizing  
where she is.

WIZARD

Oh, it's you. The shitty flirt.

SEAN

About last night, do you remember  
the fortune you gave me?

**\*\* To continue reading this work, visit page 44 for the QR code  
and link to the full online version!**

## Sestina

*Ella Yuen*

A familiar smell drifted through the damp summer air,  
Carrying boisterous chatter of old aunts through the hallways.  
The draft, tinged with childhood and the slightest pinch  
Of flour, tickled my nose, faded memories flooding  
Back as the chipped mahjong pieces crash  
Into the worn table, barely saved by a single piece of thin green felt.

Once as thick as the shawl my grandmother bore each day, the felt  
Was now a sad whisper of its former self—when held to the air,  
Cheeky light showed itself through. Another booming crash,  
Another round later, another loud laugh bounced around the hallways.  
Each gathering bringing more noise, more memories flooding  
Throughout the halls, another hug, another cheek pulled with a pinch.

Shrimp chips, buns and cakes lined the low table, masterfully  
pinched  
Away by the careful handywork of snickering children, who felt  
Great satisfaction in their small heist. Snacks piled on the ground,  
flooding  
The “secret” room under the stairs as laughter pierced the air.  
Crumbs lined the aisle, with bits of flour trailing the hallways  
More and more snacks pilfered, tucked into the room with a  
muffled crash.

Memories tucked into thin dough, bowls clanging together with  
a crash,  
My fingers carefully folded them together before sealing with a  
delicate pinch.  
Family spread across the tables, squishing into the narrow  
hallways.  
Flour and spices fill the cracks, fractures in the once smooth  
wood the felt  
failed to protect from. Dumplings plopped into baskets, steam  
filling thick air  
as grandparents scurried around the kitchen, chatter flooding.

Food came pouring out of the kitchens, flooding  
Every open surface of the house. The children’s bowls, with a  
crash  
And a clatter, lined the small side table, an air  
Of pride filling the territory, an area pinched  
Away from the rest of the crowd. Cheerful chatter shook the  
tables, tremors felt  
Throughout the entire house, as people reached for dishes lining  
the stuffed hallways.

Meals wrapped up, people clamor through the hallways  
Sweeping and wiping surfaces, bits of food flooding  
The trash bags deposited at the ends of tables. The mahjong felt,  
folded and put to the side as children piled dishes into the sink  
with a loud, metallic crash,  
parents plucking soiled napkins and tablecloths with a practiced,  
careful pinch.

The lingering smell of dinner drifts through the air, final  
goodbyes flooding  
the hallways, a final pinch on the cheek as the door closes with  
crash  
left with piles of dishes and the same worn, tired felt.

## The Humble Klein Bottle

*Madeleine Goertz*

A small armada of Klein Bottles lines the top of my  
headboard. Two knitted, two fuzzy, two large, two small, one  
hat, one pendant. Allow me to introduce you.

According to Wikipedia, an ever-exacting source of  
information, a Klein Bottle is “a two-dimensional manifold  
against which a system for determining a normal vector cannot  
be consistently defined.” That’s not terribly romantic. Let’s try  
again. Imagine you’re an ant. Your name is Alfred (just go with  
it). Spindly legs resting on a cold glass surface, quivers of terror

reverberate through your body. *Where the hell am I?* Like any normal creature, you begin to walk forward, at first with trepidation. Then you accelerate, your legs slipping on the shiny surface. *Hours pass. Everything looks the same.* Desperation drops to the bottom of your stomach.

Relax, you're just on an infinite surface. You can walk as far as you like without ever reaching an edge. You can make it back to the point where you began, but you'll be upside down. Strange, right?

Oh, I forgot to mention something. This entire ant nightmare plays out in a universe with four spatial dimensions. If you'd rather think in the pedestrian three dimensions, you'll have the ability to walk through the glass wall if you happen upon a vertical one. (Klein bottles self-intersect in three dimensions.) Imagine passing through glass! I'm sure crows would love such a skill.

Now that you're intimately aware of your predicament, allow me to introduce you to the man who created this wonderful nightmare: Mr. Cliff Stoll. A delightful astronomer made mildly famous by his capture of an infamous computer hacker, he sells glass Klein bottles from the warehouse located under his crawl space, maintained entirely by his robot built of junk. The man cannot bottle up his excitement about math; it escapes through his Einstein-like hair and constant need to bounce like a pogo stick whenever he speaks (I promise I am not indulging in hyperbole). A true treasure, Cliff and I are now friends, trading lively emails filled with mathematical irreverence, and we delight in sharing our Klein-bottle creations, such as my new knitted Klein bottle hat.

But back to you, Alfred. How could a man so joyous create a world so vast and frightening?

After hours of trotting along and passing through self-intersections and dismaying at the vast infinity of sameness, you spot another ant friend. A quick chat reveals her name to be Bethesda, and she introduces you to her friend Caroline. Companions! How lovely! *I'm not alone.* Some small talk about the weather, sports, and your glass world, and you discover how utterly befuddled B & C are as well. Oh well, not much any of you can do. Caroline's son Damien steps out from behind her and lays out the picnic he schlepped along. *Mmmmmmm, raspberry jam on buttered English muffins.* Your tummy full, a sense of calm lays you to sleep.

You can't ever fall off this glass world. There is no edge,

after all.

## March 11th, 2020

*Sonia Sheth*

Behind my mask I hide  
A deep pool of tears  
Where the evil continues  
To snatch and drown my life.

Gone are the days  
Snoozing through bio,  
Goofing off in math class,  
Cheering at Kang Football games,  
Smashing homers on the softball field,  
Walking with fresh fries from Met. Market,  
Chanting "Senior Power!" on the top bleachers,  
Eating lunch through the cacophony of chatter in the lyceum...

Gone forever?  
Please, no!  
Come back!  
Just  
One  
Last  
Time!

Behind my mask I hide  
My lifeless heart aching  
To see friends'  
Pearly white teeth  
And erupt in laughter,  
Together.

Strained, bloodshot eyes  
Are my only view  
Now.

## Juno

*Sree Challa*

### JUNO'S HOUSE

CHRIS goes over to JUNO's house for another training session.

CHRIS

Sensei! I have something to tell you, and I don't know what you'll think of this.

JUNO

What is it? You know you can trust me.

CHRIS

The Pacific NW Karate tournament is a couple weeks away and Jack says if I beat him in the tournament, he'll never pick on me again. Do you think I should fight?

JUNO

You want my honest opinion?

CHRIS

Of course.

JUNO

I think you should. When you beat him, he'll be humiliated that someone half his size kicked his ass in front of thousands of people. And if he still doesn't decide to honor his end of the deal, it'll make him look petty to everyone else. Not to mention, if he tries to pick a fight with you, you have the capability now to beat him. Also when he loses, the memory of you fucking him up will stick with him, and he'll never see you the same again.

CHRIS

How can you be so confident I can win? His dad is a double black belt in Karate, and a X MMA fighter, and he is also literally twice my size. He is way stronger than me, how the hell am I supposed to win??!

JUNO

Stop doubting yourself!! You

came such a long way from when I first started training you. You are more than capable of beating him! Fighting is mostly mental, if you don't have the confidence or mentality of winning and preserving through adversity, might as well not even fight at all. I've seen you do things I couldn't have even imagined you doing when I had first met you. You came such a long way! Now there's still some things I want you to master before the tournament but stay confident in your damn self! This applies not only to fighting, but to life...

CHRIS

You're 110% right, I can't do this unless I believe I can. Ima fuck him up and not only will I win, but I will also stand up for every person he's ruthlessly picked on!

Juno keeps training Chris for the next couple of weeks. He mainly focuses on getting Chris's defensive movements and counters natural due to Jack being much bigger in size. Jack surprisingly leaves Chris alone in this interval in order to let him train. Although Jack was a dick 99% of the time, this is one of the very few times he is actually decent as a human being. Time passes, and the tournament day is finally here. The showdown begins.

Jack and Chris win all their matches with no real competition at all, and they match up in the finals.

Juno has to say something to Chris before the match starts.

JUNO

Remember everything I taught you. All the hard work, the blood, the sweat, all your time and effort, you pride, your

honor! EVERYTHING LEADS UP TO  
THIS! You worked so hard and now  
is your moment. Now go kick this  
motherfucker's ass and go show  
him he can't mess with anyone  
anymore, especially you!

The ref calls up both fighters to the mat, and  
both signal that they are ready to fight by  
nodding their heads.

However, unlike any of the previous matches, the  
final match is sudden death. This means whoever  
scores the knockdown wins the fight.

Jack comes rushing in throwing a right body kick,  
but Chris blocks it. Chris moves well on his  
feet, dodging most of Jack's attacks as he throws  
mostly body kicks and some hand strike  
combinations. Jack faints a body kick and throws  
a head kick which makes Chris stumble almost out  
of bounds.

JUNO  
(screaming)  
Chris! Remember what I  
taught you! Use the Jackal  
technique!

The Jackal technique is a Juno special move,  
where if someone only throws kicks, you set up a  
spinning body kick using multiple hand strikes,  
then evade out of the way and maintain distance  
by throwing a body kick. If all this goes  
according to plan, you have a split second before  
the opponent reacts, and then you throw the  
spinning body kick with all your momentum! This  
is the finishing move.

Chris does exactly that, and Jack falls down and  
holds his rib cage, screaming in agonizing pain.  
THOMP! The crowd goes wild! Chris had just pulled  
off the biggest upset in tournament history!  
Juno runs to Chris and hugs him.

JUNO  
You did it!!! You remembered  
everything I taught you! I told  
you the Jackal technique would  
come in handy! I am so proud of  
you!

CHRIS  
Thank you so much Sensei, I  
couldn't have done any of this  
without you. Let's say we  
celebrate tonight by going to  
your favorite pizza place huh?

JUNO

I would love that. Food is on  
me Champ!

The crowd chants Chris, Chris, Chris, as the ref  
hands him his trophy.

Jack comes up to Chris.

JACK

Hey... you beat me. Absolutely  
great match, not only did you  
win, but you earned my respect  
tonight! I'm fuckin shocked,  
trust me. Not in a million years  
did I think I would lose, but  
you held your own in there.

CHRIS

Yeah man, great fight. So we  
good now?

JACK

Yeah, we're good.

Jack and Chris exchange a hug and handshake as a  
formality of respect for the fight. Juno and  
Chris go to eat pizza to celebrate the victory,  
while Jack ends up going to the hospital as he  
had cracked two ribs due to the Jackal technique.  
As for school, everyone respected Chris like a  
god, due to standing up for everyone who Jack  
bullied. He took on an impossible task and came  
out victorious. As for Jack, he spent months  
recovering from his injury, and after that Jack  
no longer bullied others. As time went on, Chris  
and Jack started to grow a bond that  
progressively grew. They eventually became best  
friends, and that was the end of the "war".

END

## cuckoo's nest

*Kaylee Allen*

i think i may be sleeping in the cuckoo's nest  
if i could actually sleep  
u may leave me in the nest  
if you don't like me when i speak  
because maybe i disrupted your sleep  
when i gave u what i didn't think was my speech.



## Saturn

*Sharon Oh*

Its unfamiliarity hitches my breath  
The silence is so thick, my mouth is dry  
as I dangle my legs beneath its ring  
and dip my toes into the endless  
black ocean

From afar, it's unreal  
untouchable  
and its pale yellow soft to the eye  
It has never seen the day  
yet has no imperfections

Its ring suddenly feels like a balcony  
One where I'll fall  
any second  
back first  
and break the concrete

The reality sits still,  
burning up like a star  
with its opaque gray settled,  
with its blue browned up,  
with its green dissipated  
Its people wanted too much

## The Effects of Pollen

*Vivian Lee*

We can't see it, but we can for sure feel them;  
The strange tickling sensation, in the back of your throat  
The feeling of having to sneeze.  
In the spring, flying through the air  
Creating a monstrosity  
A unique looking shape, too small  
To see or realize, with small touches of red;  
Almost as small as a speck of dust.  
Floating until it finds a person to bug,  
Causing them to sneeze, Achoo!

## Fallen Pieces

*Kaylee Allen*

You cut me.  
Shattered my ghost  
Into infinite scraps.  
I used to dream  
About piecing them all together—  
But I know my cracks would seep  
Through my guise.  
You cant just glue my scraps back together  
And expect the glue to hold.  
There arent any words for what you did to me.  
I am a wistful, pitiful ghost  
Because of you.  
And I cant help but think  
I cut myself too.

## Work From Home

*Disha Prasad*

Tranquil pitter patter,  
Consumes my mind.  
Too much,  
Consumes my mind.  
    Spilled tea  
    Wets the table.  
        Curry powder fills  
        My lungs.  
            My computer screen is still  
            Blank.  
                The sky is darkening.  
                Deadlines approach.  
            Frustration consumes my mind.  
Too much,  
Consumes my mind.

## A Hope for Success

Zain Abbas Merchant

On a quiet Friday night in December on the third floor of an apartment building, Rahim sat in the darkened room, illuminated only by the screen of the black computer he was in front of and the dimmed light of his lamp, exposing his acne covered face and unshaven upper lip. Rahim glanced at the time on his computer. It read 10:30 PM. Rahim shifted uncomfortably in his wooden chair, he only had ninety more minutes until the scholarship deadline. Taking a deep breath and a long gulp from his metal water bottle next to his computer, Rahim reviewed the scholarship prompt for the eighth time.

“Are you an aspiring game developer that has created a game like no other?

This program is for you!

Sponsored by Young Coders Foundation, this program is open to any high-school student. The top three most unique student submitted games will receive a full scholarship to the prestigious university Silicon Tech.”

Rahim exited the website and stared at his lines of code, many of them containing two green backslashes to the right to provide an explanation of his code to the judges. He clicked the green arrow to run his program. An image loaded up on a screen to the side of his code resembling a sprite riding on a grey rock with wings heading toward various brightly colored spheres. The objective of the game was to destroy as many planets as you could in a minute by typing in the square root of the current number of the planet you were on. Rahim leaned back in his chair, giving off a slight grin, satisfied with his finishing touches. He checked the time on his laptop. It was 11:57 PM. He only had two minutes before the deadline. Panicked, Rahim sat upright in his chair, his eyebrows knitted together in pure concentration as he frantically uploaded his program to the scholarship website, his eyes fixated on the progress of the uploaded file. 97 percent uploaded, 98 percent uploaded... come on upload! Rahim felt like screaming. After what felt like a decade, the file was finally uploaded. Rahim exhaled in relief, rubbing his eyes inside his glasses. It was one minute 20 seconds to midnight; he had successfully submitted his program. He clicked on the past winners and observed their smiling faces. He desperately imagined one of those faces being his and his parents' elated

reactions after telling them his results. His wishful thinking was interrupted by a loud tap on the door followed by his mother's voice,

“Rahim it's basically midnight, can you please go to bed? I am sure that your game is already amazing. You have been working on it for the past eight hours.”

“Yes, I'll go to bed,” Rahim replied, although he solemnly contemplated in his head whether he would get in at all. His mom often worried about how much time he spent in his room studying and suggested that he work on involving himself in more social activities. He understood his mom's concern and tried to make more friends, but his nervousness when approaching new people and his crippling shyness made it impossible to sustain a conversation for more than five minutes before he and the other person stared at each other in silence. Then, he would often exclaim that he was really late for class, despite it starting in another 3 minutes. Rahim picked out a pair of shorts from his drawer and his favorite t-shirt, a *Legend of Zelda* one with the triangular symbol of the Triforce imprinted in the middle. Rahim took off his black, thick rim glasses, placing them neatly in his glasses case on his night table. Lying on his bed, Rahim stared at the pitch-black ceiling. *Would he really win this competition? He had won many academic competitions in the past, why couldn't he win this one?* His heart beating rapidly, Rahim took deep breaths, forcing his eyelids shut and hoping for sleep to distract him from his current worries. Before long, Rahim could feel his body relax and his mind slowly losing focus on his present thoughts before losing consciousness.

The sound of his 9:30 alarm jolted Rahim awake, a few months later. A notification appeared on his phone reminding him that the competition results were finalized that day. Rahim jolted in an upright position on his bed. He had to check his results. Throwing the covers off his bed, he bolted to his computer and flung the screen open, re-entering his password multiple times due to his haste. Rahim clicked on his inbox, closing his eyes, too afraid to look at the results. After what seemed like an eternity, he reluctantly opened one of his eyes to see the message. Rahim's heart sank, his eyes becoming hot and itchy as he forced himself to read the rest of the letter.

It started out with the standard phrase “dear applicant, we appreciate your submission and our judges have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing your work.” It continued with the result, our judges have awarded you with a fourth Rahim was unable to finish the letter due to the tears welling up in his eyes, forcing him to take off his glasses to dry his eyes. He knew something like this would happen but did not want to believe one of his greatest fears would become a reality. Rahim looked back at the e-mail, his sadness turning into frustration. How could they do this to him? -place finish...”

Rahim jolted in an upright position on his bed. He had to check his results. Throwing the covers off his bed, he bolted to his computer and flung the screen open, re-entering his password multiple times due to his haste. Rahim clicked on his inbox, closing his eyes, too afraid to look at the results. After what seemed like an eternity, he reluctantly opened one of his eyes to see the message. Rahim’s heart sank, his eyes becoming hot and itchy as he forced himself to read the rest of the letter. It started out with the standard phrase “dear applicant, we appreciate your submission and our judges have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing your work.” It continued with the result, our judges have awarded you with a fourth-place finish...” Rahim was unable to finish the letter due to the tears welling up in his eyes, forcing him to take off his glasses to dry his eyes. He knew something like this would happen but did not want to believe one of his greatest fears would become a reality. Rahim looked back at the e-mail, his sadness turning into frustration. How could they do this to him? Didn’t they know how badly he wanted this? How many times he has looked up that college campus on the web and imagined himself being one of those lucky kids walking down those halls? Rahim slumped back in his chair, his hands on his face. The loud knock on the door followed by his mother’s voice alerted him, making him stand upright in his chair.

“Rahim, don’t you want to come and have breakfast?” By the way, did your submission go okay?”

“The submission went great.” Rahim said, gritting his teeth. His mom opened the door and saw his saddened face when she looked in Rahim’s teary eyes.

“Don’t worry there will be other opportunities, we’ll find another way.”

“I did everything I could, I thought maybe I would be picked, but I guess my submission was not good enough.” Rahim

said, feeling his eyes grow hot again.

His mother put down the cereal she was holding on the table and walked over to the chair Rahim was sitting on, putting a hand on his shoulder, “Don’t be so hard on yourself, I want to tell you how much of a hard worker you are. I know that we are not in the best financial situation, but I know you will find a way to make your goal come true, you always do.”

Rahim let out a slight smile. “Thanks mom, I guess I feel a little better.”

“You know what? I’m going to get you some eggs from Billy’s egg factory on 4th avenue. I will be back in about twenty minutes.”

After seeing his mom leave, Rahim walked over to his desk and reopened his laptop, watching as his fourth-place project appeared on the screen. He stared at the many lines of code he had written and read over the judges’ comments, each subsequent comment causing his hand to tighten around his thigh until his grip became so tight he let go of his thigh in pain. He still could not believe he had lost. His only chance of going to his dream college seemed just like that, only a dream, not a realistic goal he could achieve. He sat in silence for about a minute until he heard a knock at the front door, only it sounded more like someone was repeatedly punching the door with enough force to break down the wall. Rahim reluctantly got out of his chair and headed toward the front door as the sound of banging increased in speed and sound. Rahim looked through the peephole on the door and saw a bearded man wearing an overcoat with his hands in his coat pocket. It was the landlord, Dennis.

## Silent Sunset - Ghazal

*Andrey Piterkin*

Sun heaving a trembling sigh, freeing a breeze to carry snores,  
Clouds close their heavy eyelids and the dusk drifts off to sleep.

Mountains recline into relaxation, loosening before a dream.  
Ravines deep and peaks tall sag as gravity pulls them into sleep.

Fresh pine trees, who's wooden, sappy scent lofts on lulling breeze,  
Cuddle in prickled blankets, the blooming warmth of deep sleep.

Once violent, busy shores battered by the tireless waves quiet,  
Surfs hush, soundly embracing smooth rock, yielding to sleep.

Soft, alabaster moon drowsily beaming, a fragile, waxing gibbous,  
Surveying its white touch across the horizon in advance of its sleep.

Seattle, a packed maze of one-way streets and little automobiles  
Invigorated by callous breath of night and driving people from sleep  
A rusted, rickety AC unit lying in expectancy after a day's silence  
Replaces a window, grumbling to secure its master's deep sleep  
The light bulb flickering, a sun child beaming a round, golden smile  
Forced to toil throughout the night, far from reach from desired sleep

Man, wearied by travels, embraces an acquaintance, his woolen pillow.  
The wayfarer, having eaten the fruit, closes eyes at last, a final sleep.

## The Electoral College

*Madeleine Goertz*

America's old College, scam to all.  
These villains of democracy provoke  
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The swing state voters matter most, they drawl.  
Firm partisans view it as a big joke,  
America's old College, scam to all.

The gerrymandering serves to forestall  
Any solutions attempting to stoke  
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The NPVIC1 could end this brawl;  
Then finally our country could revoke  
America's old College, scam to all.

The Bayh-Celler Amendment, you'll recall  
Was filibustered by the South, which broke  
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The founding white men had no wherewithal;  
They disenfranchised people with their yoke.  
America's old College, scam to all  
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

## Drown There

*Kaylee Allen*

i dreamt u're alive...pretended u had more  
we playacted in my dream that somehow  
u had come up for air and not that  
u're laying there. and not that I left u there.  
with your friend drowning there...why i never  
wept is beyond me. it's not like i had a spare  
when i left u there. believe me, its not like i meant  
for u to be deprived, denied, unrevived.  
i dreamt u're alive, but u're attempt crept  
up on me, clawed its way through your prayer  
all I know is I'm not exempt  
from your grave. we reap what we sow. so  
if u're not there, i may be the one drowning there.

a bang

*Kaylee Allen and Vivian Lee*

how does it feel to know you will watch the world end?  
will your eyes comprehend the way  
our crows fall

to the ground?  
we thought it would end with the “a bang.”  
no.  
nothing ever ends that way.  
it always ends with a crow’s call  
does that sound like “a bang” to you?

no.  
that signals the coming of  
the  
vultures.  
does that end your world?  
when they claw our corpses  
no—we do.

## Judgement Zone

Disha Prasad

Marigold bled into my hands.  
The earthiness that warmed me,  
I gratefully accepted on my tongue.  
Gingery aromas embraced,  
My cold shoulders.

Summer coursed into my eyes.  
The grey of winter, mundane,  
I dismissed in a single blink.  
Satisfying crunches chanted,  
A cozy prayer.

Stares ran over through my palms.  
The earthiness that warmed me,  
I scraped off my hands.  
Cold judgement fueled,  
Ignorance.

Fear glossed over my eyes.  
The summer became grey winter again.  
My own submissiveness consumed my mind,  
As I picked up a fork and a knife.

To read extended works, visit the online anthology by scanning the QR code or following the link below:



<https://git.io/JsoIb>

Use the camera app on your phone to point your camera at the code. A pop-up should take you to the link.





Harry