



# *the* spyglass



fall issue  
twenty twenty-two





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# RHHS STUCO: IN AND OF ITSELF

// ELAINE WANG  
PHOTO // SHASHANK SINGH  
DESIGN // JILLIAN FENG



High school is an instantaneous mirage that fades in and away in mere moments. For some, it was the best time of their lives. For others, it was a stepping stone towards what would be the best time of their lives. What will it be for us? Regardless, there is a glowing essence in the adolescent period spent in secondary education. Since two years ago, nobody could experience the proper high school fever dream. Even last year, it was something in between normal and not so much. But after all, it was a year risen from the ashes of the pandemic. This year, RHHS StuCo is writing a different story. Its new image? The center of a puzzle made complete only by its surrounding pieces: the students and clubs of RHHS.

For many of us students, the term “normal” doesn’t quite mean what it did before. Online classes, tests, clubs, rehearsals, the list goes on. In the midst of the pandemic, the thought of attending a schoolwide event was absurd.

But with everything back in swing, StuCo is eager to shape a year like no other.

Rin Ozaki, one of StuCo’s Social Convenors, is determined to make his last year at RHHS an extraordinary one.

“Going back to normal, we’re rebuilding basically from the ground up,” he said. “We’re bringing experiences to students who have missed out on it... There’s passion [in StuCo], there’s a FIRE there, this year.”

The core of each student’s ideal high school experience is participating in interesting clubs and attending grandiose events. As Hallo-week and the long-awaited Semi-formal returns, StuCo is making extensive efforts to tailor each school-wide event to the enjoyment of students. StuCo is consistently engaging students through their Instagram platform and through Google Forms—for example, surveying students’ preferred semi-formal theme. Albeit council confidential at this point in time, it is safe to encourage all students to attend school events for seemingly trivial but unforgettable experiences.

Rin is also involved in other school activities, such as MusCo, DECA, and YouthAlive. “In a time of uncertainty, having no communication between StuCo and clubs caused more uncertainty, but this year we’re gonna improve that 100%”.

If the rushing stream of reposted club posts on Instagram hasn’t caught your attention, it is apparent that club activities are fully underway. StuCo has held a meeting with all club presidents to ensure communication is smooth sailing throughout the year. And, if you visited Club Fair, you would know that our school is thriving with a comprehensive range of lively and welcoming clubs to choose from. From the arts, to public speaking, to business, athletics, and infinitely more, there will assuredly be an RHHS club you can call home.

For all RHHS newcomers and veterans, immerse yourself into this school year’s potentials, qualms, and everything in between. Attend events, join clubs, meet all the people you’re meant to meet. Dive headfirst into the water. Whatever high school means to you, embrace it. Whatever experiences this year brings to you, treasure it.

The school is your oyster, Raiders, because in the words of StuCo:



*“We’re goated this year.”*

# trust issues.

Maybe your periods look like commas, your cursive like chaotic loops. But that doesn't matter, right? You're armed with an eraser. Your second chance conveniently placed at the base of your pencil. Your light at the end of a spelling error tunnel. Your ride or die in the middle of a geometry test. That is, until you realize it's one of those hard plastic erasers that do nothing more than smudge graphite marks: an eraser whose futility is masked by the overpowering glitter and grandeur of the meretricious pencil design. We've forgotten about the traditional notetakers of the world in our race for constant innovation, hastily throwing aside any effort to produce

erasers that actually serve their purpose.

Much like the common cold, the supply of deplorable pencil erasers is nearly impossible to plug due to its monumental number of different sources. Since I can remember, there has always been a collection of useless pencils shut away in the closet that's home to my childhood trinkets. But there's always more circulating, waiting to pounce on some inopportune moment to desecrate your carefully drawn Bohr-Rutherford diagram on a chemistry test. The typical defective pencil comes, ironically, as a prize from middle school teachers. It is a



trophy of your victory against the rest of the class. "I built the highest spaghetti-marshmallow tower and I have something to show for it," you tell yourself. So you keep it.

What is it, then? Are pencil manufacturers succumbing to market pressure? Do they think that an unusable nub is better than having nothing at all? Or do they just want us to suffer? The answer to this takes us back to the 18th century. Until 1770, moist bread was used to erase pencil marks. It was English optician Edward Nairne who proposed rubber as the successor to bread. Fast forward a few centuries and you've got a steady stream of good quality erasers. For a golden era, the eraser industry was honest. It all came crashing down in the early 1930s, though, when thermoplastics were introduced to the commercial market. And thus began the inescapable age of substituting high-caliber rubbers with thermoplastics. The low-grade pencil erasers that are produced today can't hold a candle to Nairne's relic of an eraser. Sure, it crumbled upon use, was sensitive to weather conditions, and smelled awful, but really, it was the only one with an excuse to fall short of Ticonderoga standard.

The modern day pencil eraser is not the eraser it purports to be. It is a crime that a pencil with a nugatory eraser costs twice as much as its serviceability. So, to the traditional notetakers of the world: I recognize your struggle and understand your frustrations. I, too, implore adequacy of the pencil eraser, for all we ask is that it fulfills the very reason behind its existence.

Stories, whether they be fictional or not, have lives of their own. A story may not ever exist in this universe, but they can be worlds all the same. They have people, places, events, times, cultures — everything that matters, you can create with your mind, if not with your own two hands.

A story is a part of yourself, one that comes from a single thought. It evolves until it becomes something that can function all on its own. The characters are no longer just characters—they are people living a life as real as ours. They walk their own paths. You—the authors—might feel as though you, too, are mere bystanders. You watch your characters just as the readers do, wondering what the story may become because they themselves no longer know.

Settings unfold themselves as the story expands. Layers upon layers of details surface and resurface, weaving an intricate world no less substantial than our own. The timeline slots into place, miscellaneous events and stray thoughts coming together to form a tale that may as well be real. A story can be a world. A universe. Perhaps there are endless possibilities, or perhaps there is only one way you can ever imagine it ending.

"But it isn't real," they claim. "It's just a story," they say. "Stop deluding yourself."

'Just' a story? No. The word 'just' has no place here. There is nothing trivial about a story. Though it may never have happened within this plane of existence, who is to say that stories do not have their own place in the grand scheme of being? Possibilities are real. Thoughts are real. Dreams are real.

## **Stories are real.**

It matters not whether you have half a concept or a fully transcribed manuscript. From the moment it springs into being, it gains the potential to become a story. Length, style, content—there are no absolute qualifications when it comes to stories.

It matters not whether others believe. You write a story for yourself. You write because you want to. Whether you consider your work to be a world in the making is up to you alone.

I will give to you words spoken by a nine year old child, long before they realized the true meaning of what they had said.

*"Stories are as real as you want them to be."*

I'd turned around and was just about to jump  
out through the open window. I just  
sat down at home and never thought of you and just sat there.  
I got a dinner ready and had prepared it. I wrote the note to you.  
How very sorry and sorry to have sent out such a  
terrible thing that could bring back feelings like this.  
I'd intended to have this out of there. I brought my family  
down to dinner meeting there. When I got the note he'd written  
back with us, that was it was planned for the next day,  
that he had to go off to the other two or three weeks. So he  
had to suffer the consequences of my infatuation.

*-A story lover's view on stories*

// ANNA PAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY // JOLLY YAN  
DESIGN // ELINA LAI





WAX

// YASMIN HADIZAD  
PHOTOGRAPHY // RACHEL LIU  
DESIGN // ELLIE LIANG

## TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK, THAT IS THE QUESTION.

We come to school as vibrant, beautiful and shining candles ready to bear the flame of learning. Well, some of us are. But as we go to each class, as work piles on, as minutes turn to hours of restless studying, the fire grows too hot for the wax. We are whittled down to the wick, barely carrying ourselves through the halls. Just as we rebuild some of our structure, the fire bursts and blooms, all while we're told that we shouldn't have to rebuild our wax, that we shouldn't be melted anyways, that it's our fault for not being the flawless candles we once were.

And over time, as we're told again and again to pursue what burns us down the most, to never do what keeps our wax firm and shining, we begin to neglect ourselves. Suddenly, the joy dripping from our bodies no longer matters, the days spent crying over lost flesh are embarrassing, not concerning, and all we have left is the hope that, one day, in the far future, the proud smiles of our superiors will rebuild us into what we once were.

Maybe, we will be whole again. But not now. Now, we must work.

### OR MUST WE? HOW TIRED WE ARE...

...Until we're finally given the choice to work without wasting our lives. Our friends lift us up from the pool of melted motivation that lies under our feet and give us their strength. Maybe, there is room for joy.

The flame starts to shrink.  
And once we learn to split the hours up with rest, we  
feel it all becomes easier.  
The fire hisses as it grows smaller.

We start to work for what we wish in silence, taking gray expectations and adding to them our own pops of colour, slowly, but surely, making our lives our own. The flame has become reasonable, manageable.

Maybe we don't have to be tired all the time.  
Maybe we'll never be as beautiful as we were, but maybe  
we can build ourselves back up to something similar.  
Maybe we can do this, we can make it.

TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK, THAT IS THE QUESTION. THE ANSWER IS IN BETWEEN.

# UNI APPS

## & ME

//SOPHIE DRUTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY//ELINA LAI  
DESIGN//ELINA LAI



**Whether you're an incoming freshman or a resident senior, chances are you've thought about post-secondary education at least fifty times.**

What university do I want to attend? What do I want to study? What am I gonna do for the rest of my life? We've all been there. The anxieties associated with planning our futures are stressful, to say the least. As someone who is currently going through the application process, I know the feeling. I have some quick misconceptions I wish to clear up before any of you stress out and start seriously looking into your academic futures.

You need to pick the right subject. This is a difficult one. A huge source of anxiety for many teenagers is selecting the "right" topic of study. The truth is there is no such thing. We live in the twenty-first century; the opportunities for subjects to study are unending. Although the countless options might just cause additional stress, look at it this way: you are of the age where you can make mistakes without grave consequences. Say you chose to study life sciences. You show up to your first class, and it's a complete snooze-fest. You realize that the only reason why you liked biology in high school was because your teacher was super chill. Fear not! Your life is not over. Post-secondary institutions are designed to be flexible and provide you with opportunities to change your major. So get out there! Make sure to give your topic of study some considerable thought before you choose it, and do not worry if you end up hating it. You will find your match; I guarantee it. And even if you don't find your match, you have the rest of your life ahead of you. Keep trying new things and don't shy away from new opportunities; after all, you miss 100% of the shots you don't take.



What are you waiting for?



You need to pick the right University Canada is a big place (duh); which means that the options for where you might want to study are practically unlimited, not to mention the overwhelming number of post-secondary institutions around the planet that are open and willing to receive your application today. One has to consider many factors when deciding where to go after RHHS. I highly recommend doing extensive research into the institutions that are of interest to you, as well as where they are situated. Look for schools that have alluring programs that align with your interests (for example, don't go to a nursing school if you're interested in marketing). Also, don't forget to look into the actual location of your chosen college or university. If you love the big city, maybe consider studying in one of this country's many urban locations; Toronto, Montreal, or even Vancouver, for example. If the concrete jungle is not your style and you much prefer an environment filled with other students like yourself, consider looking into a college/university town. Regardless of where you choose to study, it's not absolute; you can always change institutions if you feel like you need a change. So stop worrying! Do a little research, and go with your gut.

Perhaps, dear reader, you've realized a common theme within this article: your absolute right to make mistakes. There is a common misconception among high schoolers that you only get one shot at university, but that couldn't be further from the case. You're young; it's the perfect time to make errors and not regret them. You don't like your chosen major? Change it! You hate your uni? Get the hell outta there!

**Mistakes are the stepping stones to success, so step on those stones already!**



# PAINTED WINDOWS

//KAREN ZHOU  
PHOTOGRAPHY//UNS  
PLASH//CANVAS  
DESIGN// LYNN HE

I  
dealistically,  
imagine a world  
where the average  
person had the  
knowledge and  
ability to shape

their surroundings in a meaningful way; a world where one could do so in public spaces, creating tangible changes in their community. The world could be a canvas and everyone an artist.



As of 2011, Graffiti Alley in Toronto is one of the few places you can create graffiti legally. One of the arguments for its legalization was that the area had been “culturally significant”, in large part due to its features in famous television personality Rick Mercer’s weekly rants. But is “cultural significance” the main difference between ugly, unsightly graffiti tags and acceptable street art and murals?

## What does it mean to be culturally significant?

Murals are a form of street art usually commissioned by a property owner or business. Most murals are tasteful, or what a company would consider to be tasteful. But who considers these art pieces to be culturally significant? The process through which murals are created is isolated from most of a community, just as the creation of a building or street is. Murals are nothing more than framed

office paintings dressed up as edgy counterculture... is an argument that could be made.

All art is worth making,  
and I am not  
endorsing vandalism.

Broken windows theory states that people are more likely to commit crimes in areas that already have signs of neglect; if a building has one broken window, this could signal to criminals that it is an easy target; if there is graffiti on a wall, criminals may feel welcome. This theory is used to propound increased policing of petty crime, and uphold an idea that any crime, no matter what the circumstances it is committed under, should be punished the same.

Figure 1  
*Woman with a striped headscarf in the desert*





There  
are  
many  
**criticisms**  
**of broken windows**  
**theory.**

When the average person thinks of a livable city, they think public transportation, walkability, and bike lanes; the ability to accessibly connect with others physically is an integral to a healthy city. Moreover, emotional connection to one's community is also essential to the livability of a city. Communities could be made more

accessibly interactive to the average resident; more legal graffiti zones, community gardens, tiny free libraries, and communal gathering spaces with no pressure to spend money.

Imagine a world where graffiti is legal - where artists have time to perfect their work. Imagine a group of children coming together to create something beautiful - or not so beautiful - but still worth creating. The idea that every creation must have value to society, that every piece of art must have a utilitarian purpose, and that only a few people can call themselves artists, is boring. Humanity can be ugly, but we also create beauty. Life is beautiful, and I believe that our environments should allow for greater freedom of beauty.



people are  
cherries  
sweet or sour  
a lasting aftertaste

or a momentary afterthought

but  
every one of them is  
a lesson

a challenge  
a blessing

i was led to meet you, my friend  
amidst the darkness

you drove away the fog  
and guided me back to the light

i know i was made  
with

hope in my smile  
stars in my eyes  
and exuberance for life

but  
my heart is weak  
and my mind frail

so when comes a sour cherry  
I

shudder  
at its taste

i wash it down but what remains  
is

a bitter aftertaste

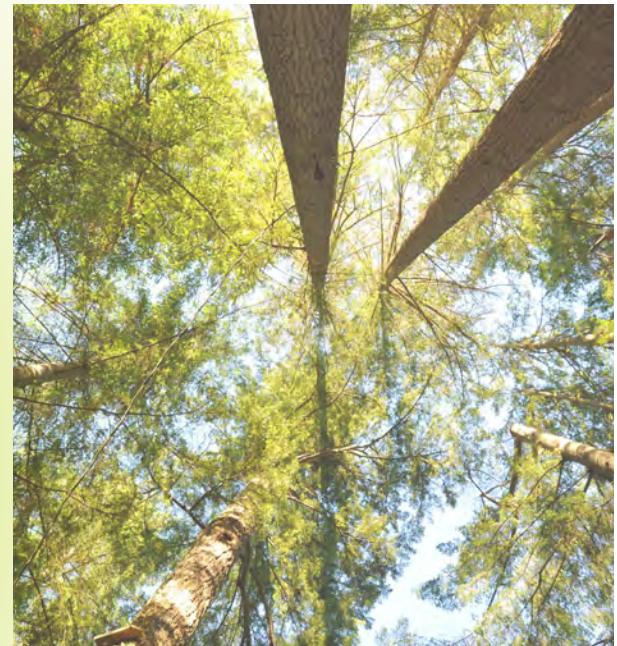
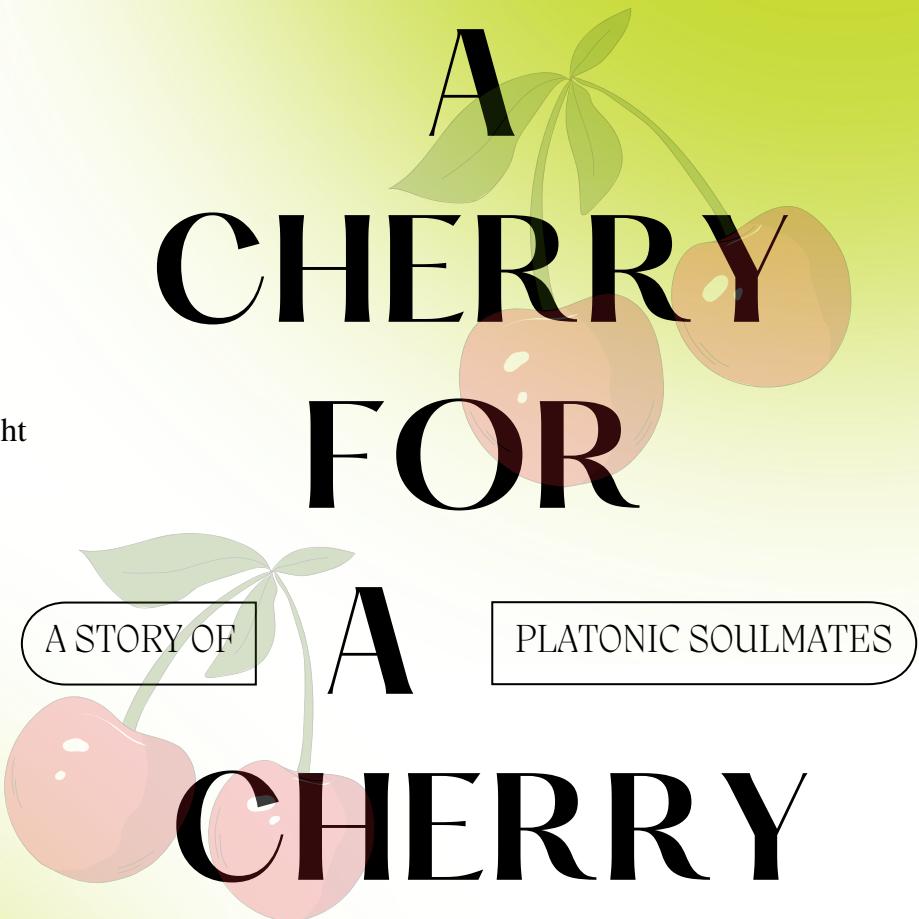
but then  
a cherry falls from the tree

and lands  
at my feet  
(that was you)

it was as if  
the sour cherry came only so you would come too

we are meant to eat all the cherries we eat,  
and  
we are meant to meet all the people we meet.

// ELAINE WANG  
PHOTOGRAPHY // ANSON LAI  
DESIGN // FIONA XU



// KATE SHAHIDI

PHOTOGRAPHY // ANNIE CHEN

DESIGN // HANNAH TRUONG

# Kids Should Be Kids

*“Kids these days grow up too fast.”*

We've all seen and heard this statement before, whether it be on the internet or from our own parents, but have you ever thought about its validity?

Just a couple of months ago, I used to roll my eyes at people criticizing the lifestyles of Gen Z tweens and teens, until I finally came to the realization that kids these days really do grow up too fast.

From social media platforms dictating lives to first graders feeling the stress of academic pressure, the joys that used to come with going to the park or getting McDonald's on a weekday are long gone. Social networking websites, such as TikTok and YouTube, encourage adult-like behaviour, with videos titled “Pretending to be 21 for a Day!” racking up millions of views;

**At the same time, they look down upon actions that are considered “immature.”**

In fact, my very own seven-year-old sister refuses to watch cartoons and insists on watching live-action television shows because her favourite YouTuber says that cartoons are “for babies.”

Social media isolates youth as well, leaving them to rely on the number of likes and comments they receive as a measure of their self worth. There's no doubt that social media is a constructive and useful tool; in fact, we saw it in action during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social networking platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet, helped us connect virtually since it wasn't possible to meet face-to-face.

At the same time, it's true that children do not interact with one another face-to-face as much anymore, allowing them to get caught up in actions that are mostly targeted toward adults.

**The wondrous world of the internet that we all love is also the one that has deemed childhood to be unnecessary,**

forcing kids to jump right from being a toddler to being a mini teenager or adult. These missed opportunities can result in yearning for the feeling of childhood in adolescence and adulthood.

The cyberspace is not the only factor causing this behaviour in children though; academic pressure is also to blame. In the 21st century, it's widely accepted that you need to be the “best of the best” to succeed. Due to the increasingly competitive job market, a bachelor's degree from an average university is often thought of as insufficient for many careers.

That's why children as young as four are put into various extracurriculars like violin lessons or debate – to be molded into exceptional citizens. If the child enjoys the activity, they should surely participate in it.

**The problem occurs when children are stripped of all their free time and passions for different activities, so that they can succeed at the ones that are seemingly important, such as studying.**

This idea can also be applied to teenagers, who are often unable to truly experience the exciting and thrilling years of adolescence because of a demanding workload.

**Childhood is often something that we take for granted;**

it is a period in life that we ignore and only think about when it's over, which is why kids should just simply be allowed to be kids when they have the chance to be.

# Peel Share Mom Friend



My mom loves oranges. Sometimes, when I really think about it, I feel like that's the only thing I actually know about her. I watch my mom peel her orange of the day with a unique fluency – her movements are smooth, the orange peel coming off in a few pieces with little to no effort. It's almost as if she does this everyday. And that's because she does.

I'm rather clumsy in my attempts to peel oranges for her. I try to copy the way she does it – first using a knife to cut the top off, then creating a small slit before peeling. But the juice spills over my fingers, and it's like my nails are digging into the orange as I forcefully (and morbidly) separate the fruit from its skin. I'm left with what seems like a hundred remnants of orange "rind" (that's the name for the skin of an orange, apparently) in the sink, which I scoop up little by little to place in the green bin. I'll be the first to admit it's not pretty. And still, she eats the slightly traumatized and suspiciously scuffed orange graciously. After all, my mom loves oranges.

Everyday, my best friend brings a mandarin or clementine or tangerine to school. She peels it smoothly, leaving one long trail of skin on the cafeteria table. She separates it into quarters to share with me and our other friend – half for her and quarters for us. Although there are seeds, I chew happily at the silent, automatic gesture. Sometimes, she'll complain about how her fingers will smell like oranges for the rest of the day. I don't think it's an entirely bad thing though. To carry the scent of oranges on your fingers means you've been eating oranges. And to me, that means you carry the fruit of love everywhere you go. Everything you touch and everyone you embrace will be enveloped in that familiar, comforting aroma.

I wear this scent like a scarf; I snuggle in when I seek warmth, as I take a piece cleanly from my

seek warmth, as I take a piece cleanly from my orange decorated in delicate white webs. And I think of my mom, who seems like a distant stranger at times. Sometimes, I wonder if I were an orange, would she peel me layer by layer with love and care? Perhaps I won't be the biggest nor sweetest orange. Although seemingly mundane or trivial, I hope to be an orange that contributes just a bit of happiness every day.

Some days, I'm in my own world – music blasting through my old samsung headphones, and my eyes glued to my computer screen usually served with an extraordinarily hollow expression plastered across my face – frantically trying to get that essay done or that assignment just right. And sometimes my door will open ever so slightly, letting her peek through the crack. My mom will bring up an orange in her hands wrapped in a damp paper towel, peeling one in a perfect eighth and putting it near my mouth as if to say, "You can do this." I eat it slowly as she peels one for herself. Citrusy juices fill my mouth, giving me a small boost in energy with each bite. There's just something so special about sharing the same fruit – savouring the sweet taste at the same time and chewing and swallowing without a single word spoken. No fruit can evoke such an experience.

No fruit but the orange.

And one day, I hope to return the favour to her, speaking the language of peel, share, chew, and swallow.

// SAMANTHA LEE

PHOTOGRAPHY // SAM ABDI

DESIGN // GRACE FAN

Kitsch: The reduction of aesthetic objects or ideas into easily marketable forms

To peel an orange is to unpeel it.  
After all, no one would add a useless layer.

So why are we so kitsch?  
Objects we consume with layers on layers  
on layers  
each obscuring the last,  
barely translucent.

Each a neon colour filter  
bold bright and brash  
layered,  
they muddy into brown.

# Kitsch

# ch

Look anywhere to see  
bloated bulging layers  
bursting at their poorly-made seams  
bursting into plastic confetti.

What does it mean to consume?  
Purchasing symbols of experience to  
remember

Let's remember something archaic  
when layers are what we know to be real

Float with me  
down a calm curving creek  
Float and wait  
for the current to wash your layers away.

I'll peel a simple orange  
though transformed from its origins,  
it is juicy and sweet.

// KAREN ZHOU  
PHOTOGRAPHY // SAM ABDI  
DESIGN // GRACE FAN

# HOLLOW KNIGHT:

## Building a World Through Music

The evolution of storytelling has been nothing short of **incredible**. As civilizations prospered and crumbled, the art of storytelling has matured from legends and folklore, passed down through speech, to epics and poems tens of thousands of lines long, to most recently, online articles such as the one you are reading now. However, I believe that an often overlooked medium of storytelling, video games, are able to create compelling narratives, competing with even the most refined and polished of books, plays, or poetry. Games like Nier: Automata, God of War 2018 and The Last of Us, just to name a few, introduce the player to a cast of unique characters and captivating plots, which are only reinforced by their phenomenal graphics, sound design, and gameplay. However, these are “triple-A” games, produced by game developer giants with budgets upward of \$100 million and crazy high expectations. Hollow Knight, published in 2017 by a small indie developer duo under the name of Team Cherry, shocked me with the quality of its phenomenal sound design, intricate world building and cryptic approach to storytelling, remaining as one of my favourite games to this day.

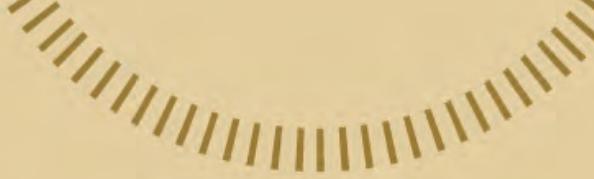
// ANDREW YANG  
GRAPHICS // TEAM CHERRY  
DESIGN // SAMANTHA LEE

Scan for an immersive experience!



As soon as I launched the game, I was presented with a poem, “Elegy For Hallownest”, accompanied by a melody called “King’s Theme”. It didn’t make much sense at face value, much like much of the information given to me. I was thrown into the desolate kingdom of Hallownest, unsure of my purpose or the history of the world. It’s only after exploring the world and gathering clues that I was able to piece together the meaning behind what the game presents to them – kind of like a puzzle. Dodging dead eyed bugs and exploring the forlorn world submerged in a mood that would take hours to explain but only seconds of playing to understand.

Each region of the kingdom feels unique from the last, bursting with personality and life. “City of Tears” is the best song in the soundtrack, mostly because of how it was presented in tandem with gameplay. The introductory regions are composed of the outskirts of Hallownest. It’s hard to believe that a great, prosperous kingdom once stood there. The background music is rather quiet, but still gives the area a mystifying atmosphere. After a couple hours, I came across a giant bridge and unlocked a massive steel gate. As I walked through to the next screen, the gate slammed shut, the music stopped abruptly, and I was trapped within a dark corridor. With only one way to go, I kept moving, and the music gradually returned, but it’s not the simple, gloomy ambiance that I was used to. Eventually, I left the corridor and emerged in the City of Tears. The constant downpour gives the backdrop a dark, moody blue and a piano and harp introduces a sombre yet light hearted melody. Only now did I discover the true scope of the ruins I’ve explored thus far and realise that the history behind the Kingdom of Hallownest is so much more than I possibly could’ve imagined. Without the score “City of Tears” accompanying the gameplay, the grandness in scale could not be conveyed as impressively as it was. As I travelled further into the City of Tears, the music swells with a full string section and choir overtop the original melody, filling me to the brim with a sense of longing and nostalgia.



# Eyesight

If I ever stumbled across the fountain of youth, I would portion it into thirds:

Deciding who receives the first 2 portions is easy; I would give a third to my mom and dad each, literal reimbursement for the years they've spent loving and raising such a funny, witty, funny child.

The last third, not everyone will understand, but let me try to explain:

A couple months ago, I visited Joseph Ellerby Park; this park near my first home. Nothing looked the same. I moved out in third grade, so it was the first time in nearly 10 years since I sat on the benches. My first friends are 10 years older now, and their eyesight is probably just as blurry as mine. Many of them had moved out years prior, and the houses that I laboriously took time to memorize had become unoccupied. And knowing where the first house down the street with the red roof was, or the second house along the sidewalk felt useless because there was no one there anymore. Nevertheless, I wasn't totally in despair. I'm sure that, like myself, they've made new lives in these last 10 years. Times have changed, and the fact my childhood is no longer distinguishable is both a hopeful and tragic reminder of that.

Something in our mind promises us that it'll stay the same, that the physical time apart is nothing compared to the emotional attachment...

I think our memory of youth is like Shroedinger's cat;  
it promises that everything will stay the same  
as long as we don't check.

Our eyes appreciate more when we're younger. Everything is so curious and ineffable. We yearn to see the fantastical, lovely beauty, like rainbows or shooting stars flowing down the river in the sky. That changes, of course. People develop specific tastes, usually a little more bitter than sweet, and the love and beauty warps into something more disgusting and jaded.

//JASON WU  
PHOTOGRAPHY // VIKTOR OSTAPCHUK  
DESIGN // ELLIE LIANG

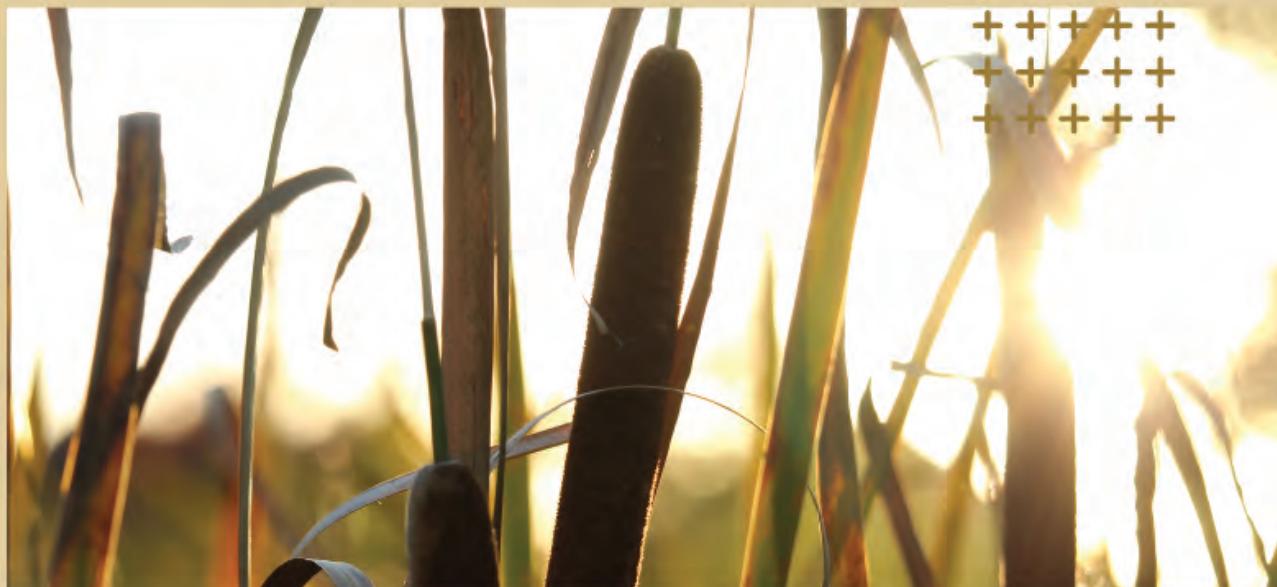
For example, I have a dog; her name is Izzy. I want to say that our love is the purest kind;

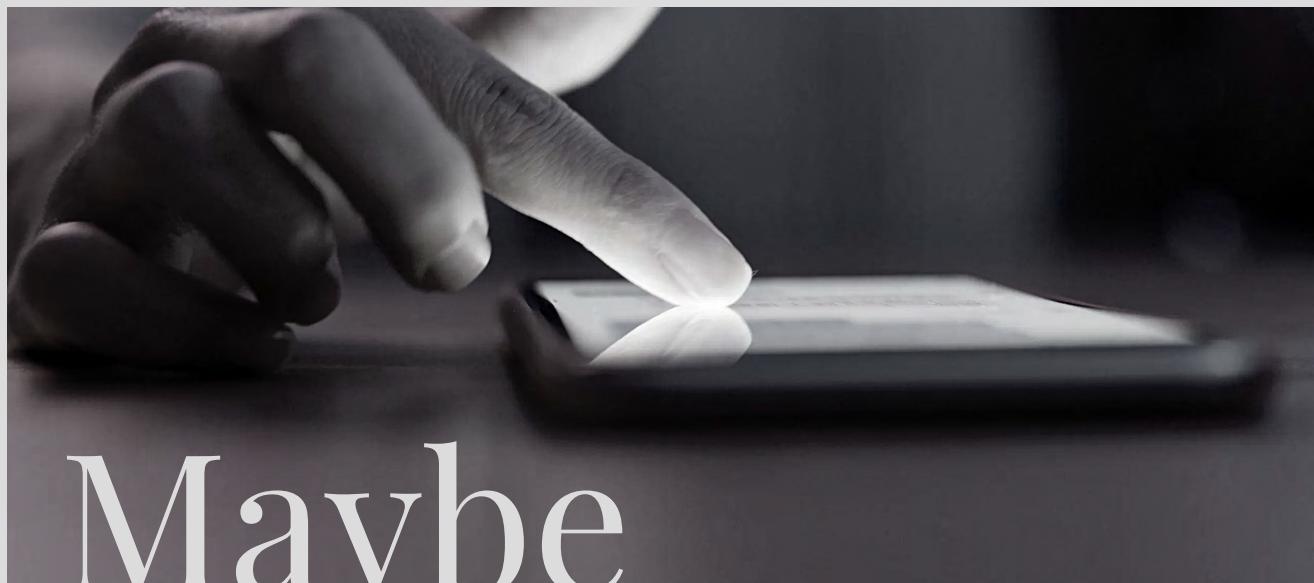
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kind of love, but as I've grown older and my eyesight worsens, I realize she's been bought, trained and generationally domesticated. Like most pets, Izzy didn't have a choice of who to love.

Therefore, with my final portion of water, I would pour some out into Izzy's water bowl and set her free. Even if she's been so domesticated to the point where she'd return home every night, she still deserves the extra years because she's been extraordinarily good these last few years.

I have to assume the water would fix my eyesight. My mom once told me that after her laser eye surgery, she couldn't believe how blurred her vision used to be. As if the world itself pushed against you, like it did when everything was surreal. I don't think I'll ever get eye surgery because I know the moment I see my vacated home with youthful eyes, that's the moment I'd feel hopeless.

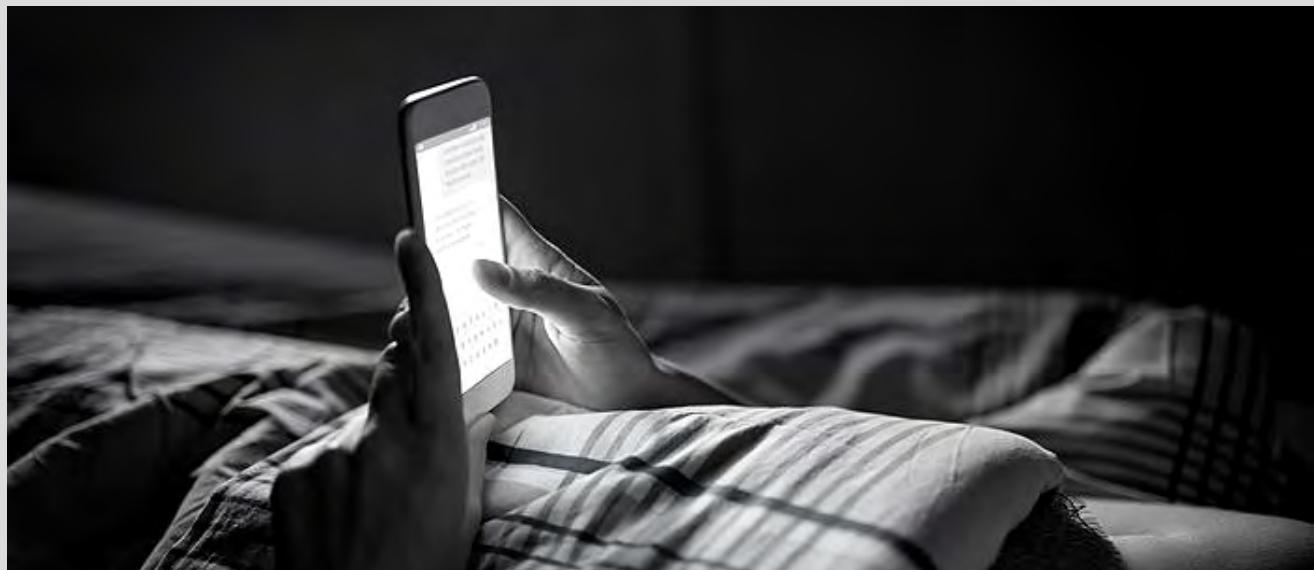




Maybe

it IS

that Phone...



The stress of being a teenager in today's climate—repeated topic amongst many writers, but it sure is difficult being a teenager in today's society—from social media in general to making comparisons with celebrities. When confronted with these problems, our elders always tell us the same thing: "It's that damn phone!" Most of us would protest; I would've as well. But what if they were right? I mean think about it, phones are so popular because of how accessible they are. It's so easy to get sucked into it.

One example I want to mention is TikTok, where you can infinitely scroll through your ForYou page and expose everything all at once to your brain. One second you could be watching a video on how to channel your inner Rory Gilmore for the school season, and the next is a graphic video depicting a humanitarian crisis across the world. I'm not saying that we should ignore what is going on around the world, but when we can access everything about anything at our fingertips, it's mentally exhausting to any person. In some cases, people will be so invested in a protest going on in a small town in Poland that they'll forget that their final exam is tomorrow. So many people are involved in other people's lives that they forget about their own. They forget about their own identity and instead become attached to a little bit of everything that they see everyone else on social media having. There have been so many new, made-up insecurities that I never even knew existed; like what even classifies as a wide ribcage? I think everyone can relate when I say that our younger selves felt more secure with our appearances than now.

With more technology comes more information, and with more information, requires more maturity in response. Teenagers don't even have fully developed brains yet but we're already haggling the stress and burdens that toxic beauty standards enforce because we're exposed to them

would see the occasional celebrity photo on the paper, not an endless void of videos showing them what they'll never have or never could be.

All of this is merely a collection of my personal observations, but it's just a minuscule issue in just a sea of so many more ways life as a teenager in the 21st century is for a lack of a better term, brutal.

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# Mindless Drive



For English class, I once analyzed a character whose motivations were centered around avoiding criticisms rather than contributing a net societal good.

## *“Hates on evil, doesn’t actually help with anything,”*

I wrote. But as I was brutally roasting her in essay format, I backtracked. Wait a second. Don’t I do exactly what she does? I’ve been thinking so hard about how I can fake my way into having a deep personal connection, but it’s been right in front of me this entire time.

I started high school with the sole goal of one-upping my older sister. See, a few years ago, I was dreading the eighth grade because I would have the same homeroom teacher as my sister. My sister, the long tone record holder. My sister, who’d constantly defied the arrogant guy in her class with flair. My sister, who’d effortlessly gotten full marks in every subject while procrastinating. I couldn’t stop wondering when my teacher would be disappointed that I’m nothing like her. Yet I fought. With every ounce of my being, I fought just to be an inch better than her – to pass the break-even point created by the two slopes of our collective accolades. I fought using sheer will to override the incessant pleas given by my body to stop. It paid off halfway through the year, when I’d beaten her long tone record by double her original time.

## *Once I’d finally gotten a taste of superiority, I wanted more.*

It was my holy grail. I lived off the high of being slightly better than her at anything. I was the walking personification of the childish spats that involved who got the purple toothbrush from the dentist’s bag or whose name was first on the Christmas cards. But knowing that my sister was naturally blessed with reservoirs of intelligence, academics was the field I dedicated most of my efforts to. (Oh, she got a 98 in French? Fantastic, I have full marks.) That became my fuel for most of freshman year.

The problem is, as good as doing everything your sister did but slightly better sounds, it severely limits your own free thought, to a point where you can’t remember if you’re doing something out of love or out of mindless drive. I thought I loved basketball, but that “love” didn’t get me up for 7:00 AM practices or motivate me to shoot 200 foul shots a day. Alternatively, I breezed through music class, thinking I’d never take it again because my sister never did.

Ok then. Am I capable of doing things for myself? Does it even matter? I tell myself I want to be the best. But do I really want to be the best or have I just let my desire to not be the worst run too far?

The past year, things have stopped being about my sister and more about just me. I’ve stopped using her achievements as benchmarks for my own successes and learned to be proud of the things I do for the sake of it. I’ve gotten more room to breathe: to slow down and explore my own interests. Turns out, I was more of Klay Thompson’s forgotten brother when it came to basketball. But I liked music a whole lot more than my sister did. In fact, my band nerdiness reaches the extent of voluntarily surrounding myself with other avid band nerds for a whole week of band camp this November.

So, back to my English homework: I knew exactly what that character felt. There was a time when I, too, chased away negativity instead of actively pursuing positivity.

In the words of Hans Selye,

## *“As much as we thirst for approval, we dread condemnation.”*

But at the end of the day, I’m my own person. And if I just so happen to be better than my sister at a few things, then so be it.



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