

Alternative United Voices – Volume 6

A compilation of short stories and poems from the students of
Montreal's outreach high schools

Cover art by Marco Benoit
Cover design by Heather Hardie

An Alternative United publication
Organized by Colin Throness



Find out more about Alternative United and read the publication
online at alternativeunited.ca

Acknowledgements

We shook it up a bit for our sixth volume, throwing the theme of magic into the mix. We conjured an expert on the theme — an illusionist, a magic scholar, a real-life wizard of sorts — Dr. Joseph Culpepper. Not only did he take on the impossible task of picking the winners, he's also giving a magic performance at the launch. A big shout out to Joe for his help this year!

Many thanks also go out to the Outreach Network's staff, in particular Caitlin O'Brien, Andrea Williams, Tara Rutledge, Kelley Torchin, Annie Ogle, Jennifer Barrow, Ruwani Payoe and Heather Morrison, for supporting and encouraging those who submitted.

Big respect goes out to Heather Hardie for organizing the visual art submissions and designing the cover. Over the last three years, she's transformed the look of this publication, making it shine.

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This anthology wouldn't be possible without the generosity of John Commins and Christine Lachance. Much love!

Most importantly, immense respect goes out to all the students who participated this year. We're always astounded and inspired by your creativity. Make it your superpower!

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Foreword

“We need, all of us, whatever our background, to constantly examine the stories inside which and with which we live. We all live in stories, so called grand narratives. Nation is a story. Family is a story. Religion is a story. Community is a story. We all live within and with these narratives. And it seems to me that a definition of any living, vibrant society is that you constantly question those stories.”

— Salman Rushdie

The authors in this compilation have each performed a special kind of magic to share new poems and short stories with their Montreal communities and the world at large. They began with a blank page. They conjured words from their imaginations to appear on that page. Finally, they transformed those words into a compelling narrative through the power of editing.

The result is a collection of stories that will surprise you. I’ve just called them stories, but we could just as easily call them spells. Read them silently or out loud or both. Some of them contain elves, jinn, knights, guinea pigs, and dragons that readers who are fantasy fans will enjoy. Others present criminals, heroes, monsters, victims and liberators that will appeal to fans of crime, horror and life-writing. All of these stories capture the unique voices and the humanity of their authors.

Finding one’s voice and telling one’s story are lifelong learning experiences for all of us. The self-doubt, the loneliness, the fear of deadlines, the desire to create something perfect, and the imperfections are obstacles that never vanish entirely. These difficulties diminish with each written page though. Falling in love with the constant cycle of practice, failure, further practice and achievement is one of the secrets.

So, thank you for following through, working your magic and bringing these stories into existence.

Thank you for questioning other stories by telling your own.

— Dr. Joseph Culpepper

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Dear Student
By Andrea Williams, Proud CCW

You don't say good morning,
It's okay, today may be a bad day.

You rage,
It's okay, I'll support you.

You sit in still silence in front of me,
It's okay, I patiently wait.

You say you can't,
It's okay, I believe you can.

You think you are about to fall,
It's okay, I am right there behind you.

You hit roadblocks,
It's okay, I'll keep you on the road.

It's okay, dear Student
For you are like an elastic band,
No matter how far it is stretched it comes back
And when you come back,
Please know,
It's okay and I am there for you!!

Judging May Hurt
Anonymous

Judging can come and go,
It will always be lurking no matter where you go,
What gives you the right to call someone a ho,
For the littlest things,
That you see come and go,
What gives you the right to say that they don't have a home,
Just because they wear baggy sweatpants
and a loose t-shirt and
they buy food everyday before walking home,
all alone,
Why do you say cross the street when it does not cross your mind
that just because they are black you think they'll do something,
Right there, at that moment, at that time.
Not everything you see is the truth that lives in your head,
Stop you've misread,
Listen to the things that I have said,
Now stop, take a deep breath,
And remember what I have said.

True Love
By Kasem Bayram

Love
Is not easy
But in the end
It is worthy
Once you make it through the hardship
True happiness accumulates
To spend the rest of your life
With
Them
It all begins to be worth it
It's love
True
Love

She Is a Victim
By Kasem Bayram

A woman is no one's property
A woman is not the enemy
A woman is not lesser than
A woman refuses to be controlled
She is NOT a victim
A man is no one's slave
A man is not the enemy
A man is not more than
A man refuses to be taken advantage of
He is NOT a victim
I am no one's punching bag
I am not the enemy
I am not being put in your ideal box
I refuse to be lied to
I am NOT a victim

I Am Not
By Kasem Bayram

I am not my sexuality
I am not a punching bag
I am not losing this battle
I am not my father
I am not letting it slide
I am not going to take it
I am not going to be used
I am not going to be lied to
I am worthy
I am special
I am strong

Jouska
By Gavin Wollrad

It plays and plays like a broken record
It goes on for days and days and
Time passes by and it flies.

I try to put it in the past but it's stuck with my future.
Tired of hearing the lectures that I get from the people that I left.
These lectures fill me with regret.

I would rewind to the fun days that I had with my football team.
But now it's separated and split.

If I could pause those times I would stay with the time I had my
team by my side holding a small trophy with a camera in front of
us.

The smiling faces, the helmets thrown into the sky
The shoulder pads getting rolled into the side lines.
The smile on our faces lining up to congratulate the other team
Shaking their hand.

The face I had when I went in my mom's car; the smile that my
mom had.

I asked my mom, "Why are you smiling so much?"

My mom replies, "Because when you are happy that's the one
thing that makes me happy."

Amor como ninguno
(Love Like No Other)
By Naomi Cavero

Things I love about myself is the way I care
Love looks like fruits with condensed milk on top
I am beautiful because I respect my self
Things I love about myself is my nose
Love looks like different shades of melanin
I am beautiful because I am my mother's daughter
Things I love about myself is that I am connected with my
grandmothers
Love looks like my abuela's hands
I am beautiful because I uplift my friends
Things I love about myself is how I view my mistakes as a lesson
Love looks like my dad screaming at me to get up in the morning
I am beautiful because my mom never gave up
Things I love about myself is myself
Love looks like me.
I am beautiful because I simply am.

The Devil Talking
By Kris Katsoulotos

I try to do what I can
But I can't with these voices in my head
I've been told these voices are who I am
But these voices want me dead
Cuz if this voice is who I am
Shouldn't I be dead?
God, if you hear me, why did the gun jam?
It was pointed straight at my head
God, if you want to do me a favour
When you watch me when I'm sleeping
Do your magic
And just stop my breathing
And it's hard to get help
When everyone else starts leaving
I feel the sweat drip from my head
And I don't think it's the heating

Magic within You
By Caitlin Kontos

I can talk about this magic because they tell me
It's already inside you
Racing against the writing on the wall
That's in my blind view
Why be worried with flying
When my potion's the wings to guide through
Spotting my differences
Doesn't make me against who I'm to be
When I'm loving every step
That I'm finding
Through in my beat
My song was never made for them to write
For them to dance to
In their cleats
They can try to poke the rabbit
But can't touch what's in my hat
Deck and my sleeves

Untitled
By Caitlin Kontos

On this day I felt the pain in my heart and the disturbing feeling
my stomach carried
I feel as if this is my life now and the pain and loneliness will have
my feelings buried.
The truth is while the scars deepen in my heart, well I start to see
blurry.
I know another day will come.
I walk with my head down and my thoughts heavy.
When I feel the weight in my chest and the thoughts heavier,
I know another day will come

Untold stories
By Jahmaal Roach

A story is like something you keep,
It's something you enjoy and love.
A story can be a way you communicate.

It is so important to communicate
'cause how else would you tell a story,
but I'm wrong, there are so many ways to tell a story: a book, a
letter, an article. Speaking isn't the only communication.

The words that come out of your mouth will hurt other people.
People need help.
People need someone to hear them speak.
People will not learn how to handle your problems.
People will think everything is a joke.
People think you don't have problems to fix.

The way that I am thinking sometimes, people wouldn't
understand the pain or people would forget what you are made of.

A pain in someone's heart needs to be refilled with more positive
love.

Pain is like an element of blankness. It can't recollect when it
began or if there were a day when it was not there.

My life begins with happiness. I am now successful.
Before the end of my life I wanna be known as a legend.
The way that people know me now is the same people that will
know me in a couple of years.

The Paths
By Karlo

One
Is a human being
Just like all of us.

One must venture down on many unlimited paths of life,
Not knowing what it may lead to.

Before choosing, one worries about which path will give joy in life
or not,
Without knowing what will happen.

On any chosen paths,
There will be always something to dread
And always something to love.

On which path will determine future experiences,
It is all up to you.

Salvation
By Elijah Vatcher

Many people did you wrong
But I know I could do better,
Through the rain into the storm
I'll walk you through it any weather,
Secure here all along
I put my love in this letter,
Fighting battles makes you strong
Salvation brings us close together,
People switch up then they're gone
And I will always remember,
Time here's taking way too long
I might just pray and surrender,
Make Jesus your king
Elect Him like its November,
You can do anything
God can use you whenever,

And I know you're out here searching for the meaning,
That's why I give you revelation when you're dreaming,
Feel like I'm drowning in the ocean every season,
But I gotta keep my head up keep on breathing,
They say things happen for a reason,
And I don't doubt it just be tweaking,
And all these problems keep on leaching,
But I ain't worried just be sleeping,

I was doing drugs
I was f*cking up
I just felt so lonely couldn't keep my own head up,

Started giving up and started acting tough
Influenced by gang life started showing you wassup,
I did robberies
I caught cases
In two places but got caught in one location,
Locked me up two years started praying
Then I found God and I found my own salvation.

Life
By Jahnei-Nesta Been

Life can be beautiful
Life can be annoying
Life can be joyful
Life can be frustrating
Life can be playful
Life can be irritating
Life can be impactful
Life can be challenging
Life can be powerful
Life can be disturbing
Life can be grateful
Life can be confusing
Life can be peaceful
Life can be embarrassing
Life can be faithful
Life can be depressing
Life can be soulful
Life can be exhausting
Life can be useful
Life can be frightening
Life can be voiceful
Everyone will die
But that's Life

Ballet of Dragons

By Christian Dimitrov

An old, frail, hunched man looks up from his point of interest, a scroll, lit faintly by candlelight. He moves his hand and wipes the sweat from his forehead with an already damp, soaked sleeve.

“The dragons,” he croaks. “They’re back.”

Jonathan woke up to the clanging of steel. He groggily stumbled out of bed and walked to the nearby bowl next to the windowsill to wash his face. He felt humorously revolted by his reflection as he splashed the water, chilled by the night’s air on his closed eyes. He stomped out what little embers remained in the hearth and pat-dried his face, pondering why there was fighting in the courtyard.

He left his room, and as he heard the door close with a familiar creak, his questions were answered. He saw Lorian, the knight he squires for in a duel against Garios, a knight, captain of the Kingsguard, and slayer of the last dragons.

Lorian switched to a high guard as Jon saw him tighten the grip on his sword. Garios swung low.

Lorian was prepared, he took a quick step back and maneuvered his steel beneath his enemies, pushing up his sword and exposing Garios’s stomach.

With his hands now up in the air, Lorian used the weight of his sword and nimble frame to plunge his shoulder into Garios.

He tried taking the fall gracefully but couldn’t. Lorian was on top of Garios, and in what looked like a blur to Jon, unsheathed his dagger and pushed up Garios’s visor.

Garios however, was waiting for Lorian to unhand him, and used the brief moment of control he had to the fullest.

He reached a mailed hand up to Lorian's wrist and held it there. With his other hand he grabbed for his longsword and gave Lorian a hefty smash with the pommel of his weapon.

A muffled grunt came from the skull of Lorian's helmet as Garios pulled his wrist across his body, bringing Lorian to a fall.

The tables had turned. Garios was now the one in control. He left no room to fight back as he placed his knees on Lorian's pauldrons and wrangled free his dagger.

He was digging his fingers through Lorian's visor to get a grip; enough to pull it up, exposing the young knight's face.

"I yield!" he heard Lorian cry, his usually soft-spoken voice now coarse and rough from battle.

Garios rolled over, enervated as he tucked his dagger back in its sheath.

The two knights just lied there, breastplates moving ever so slightly in a racing rhythm.

He heard Garios giving Lorian praises as he made his way down the steps.

"Your sword!" Garios bellowed out of breath.

"So quick! For years I teach you day in, day out, and you're always getting faster! Lorian!" He said as he let out a hearty laugh.

He fixed his eyes on Lorian, and with a finger wag, said "You may be quick! But experience—"

"Experience triumphs everything, yes," replied Lorian, defeated.

"That's right." said Garios with a smile

Lorian only now noticed his squire was standing above him.

"Oh, Jon. I hope it wasn't the sound of us fighting that woke you." said Lorian with a tight smile.

"It quite was," replied Jon. "Why are you out here in the courtyard practicing with, well, the entirety of the Kingsguard? Especially this early in the morning. Your training shouldn't start

for a couple more hours at least. Hell, the sun's hardly rising and you're already fighting.

What, is there a surprise tournament being held later today? Our oh-so-lovely liege *does* love his surprise tournaments," said Jon in a mocking tone.

"Shall I ready your horse?"

"You shall ready my horse, but not for tournament," replied Lorian, only now finding the strength to prop himself on his elbows.

"We're to report to the Capital at once. Head magister Dustinian needs us there to study dragon anatomy."

"Dragon anatomy?" asked Jon, confused. "Why does the magister always insist on filling your head with such useless drivel. First it was defence against a magic art that's been dead for the past three centuries, which, now that I'm saying it, seems typical as we haven't even *seen* them for what, five decades now? And how to fend against lake rats, as if that's important," he scoffed. "Of course *now* he wants to teach you dragon anatomy."

"I won't speak ill of the magister," replied Lorian as he stood up. "And today's lesson won't be useless... According to the magister," he paused.

"The dragons are returning. And it's my duty, as a knight, to be a loyal servant to our king and protector of our realm," he continued. "Saddle Llamrei, we leave in two hours."

He turned and left the courtyard, leaving Jon standing there, feeling small.

The coming hours flowed like molasses, Jon usually loved handling the horses, but the anxiety of this newfound weight left him feeling sick. Llamrei, Lorian's horse, was no easy beast to saddle. She was a strong, fierce mare given to him as a show of friendship from the Kamarian Sultanate. She wore her barding, saddle, and rider

spectacularly upon her high tail and shoulders. So spectacularly, in fact, that Jon almost felt ashamed seeing her and his old plow-pulling workhorse next to each other.

Lorian walked into the stable after what felt like days. A simple nod was all he could produce as they mounted up and set off to the capital.

It took Jon an unusual amount of time to work up the courage to ask about Lorian's new quest.

"So, dragons..." said Jon awkwardly. "They're coming back. After an absence and apparent extermination." He squinted.

"Correct," replied Lorian quickly.

"So you *really* believe they're back?" asked Jon, his tone making his lack of faith in the magister apparent.

"I've no reason to disbelieve Dustinian," said Lorian back.

"Cause he's like a father to you?" replied Jon.

Lorian seemed to give some time to let the question simmer in his mind before responding.

"Perhaps... that's a part of the reason..." he said thoughtfully. "But it's not like him to make jokes about such matters. Especially after the suffering dragons have caused us."

"What about Garios? Did he not slay the last of the dragons himself?" asked Jon, almost as if he wasn't sure of who he was trying to convince.

"Jon..." said Lorian, sighing. "You're bright. You know the magister well. He's rarely wrong about these things, anyways; you know how such beasts are. They're like *roaches*. When you think they're gone they always come back. You might get rid of them from that *area*, or for a *while*, but they'll find their way," he said disappointedly, exchanging glances between him and the road.

"Hell, we haven't even seen them in decades. God knows how many actually exist," he said, now growing upset.

“The TENGHRIT Khanate might be getting ravaged by them, or even amassing an army of them as we speak, we haven’t heard from across the steppe in years, before the dragons even,” he continued angrily.

“Calm down *Sir*, I was just asking,” he said playfully. A look of smugness grew across his face. “You *are* scared, aren’t you?” he said with a smirk only he could pull.

“Of course I am!” exclaimed Lorian quickly, causing his horse to bray.

“N-not to say I’m not thankful for where I am,” he continued.

“Not like you had a choice,” finished Jon. “Your father, being regent and all.” He tried to find Lorian’s eyes.

He did. And exchanged a sorry look with him.

“To think the fate of the realm hangs on the shoulders of so few... But—”

“The weight of it all.” Finished Jon once again.

Lorian paused to think.

“Yes. Th— Thank you Jon, I know it’s hard for you too... it’s just...” he said, getting flustered.

“Thank you,” he finished, giving Jon a warm, loving smile, as his armor shone in the dawning sun.

Jon, not knowing quite how to respond, returned an embarrassed look, and spent the rest of the ride in silence. The only sounds that would grace him and his knight’s ears were the rhythmic trotting of horse hooves on dry ground, and the occasional neigh.

The capital’s looming towers felt like a sight for sore eyes to Jon. While the ride had not been particularly long, the varying terrain, and lack of sleep left both of them feeling exhausted.

Even though it was still very early for them, the common folk were awake and rowdy, flocking as soon as they saw who had entered the gates. “Lorian, Sir! Bless you, Lorian! It’s an honor!” he heard them scream as they rode on by. They all stood there, some wearing rags, others wearing what could be excused as garbs, cheering him and his knight on, pointing at his otherworldly armor in amazement and awe.

“Even *one* of the gemstones found on Llamrei’s plate barding or Lorian’s armor could probably buy one of these families food for months,” thought Jon.

“It’s sad, isn’t it?” said Lorian abruptly, shocking Jon, as he was smiling and waving.

“What? What is?” asked back Jon, feeling lost in the moment.

“How these people live, the state they’re in,” he replied.

“They *live* here, ragged, starving, lowborn. What do they do? What *can* they do? Strong enough to be levies I wager... Our king has them right where he wants,” he said, sounding upset again.

“They *are* in the capital, Lorian,” said Jon mockingly.

“They’re in *slums*, Jon. Yes, the capital’s slums, but slums nonetheless.”

“It’s not that bad,” said Jon in reply.

He was interrupted by a little girl, no older than ten, breaking through the crowd, running to Lorian’s massive metal-clad destrier, barefoot and fearlessly, to give the knight of her dreams a common dandelion. He plucked it from her hands graciously and placed it in his gorget, giving her a big, bright smile, and continuing his trot.

He took a momentary break from smiling, to shoot Jon a melancholic, blank look, before returning to his mask.

“*Okay, okay,*” started Jon. “I agree with you, but now’s no time to get upset. We’re nearly at the court, and have appearances to uphold. *Especially* you.”

Lorian's face flashed with frustration, but within seconds shifted back to that of a noble knight, the realm's pride, and said with a face that betrayed his tone, "You're right, Jon. Once again, you are right."

As they moved towards the Capital's court, the crowd gradually dissipated. The buildings were better maintained and architecture; more sophisticated.

The beauty of the gates leading to the court always impressed Jonathan. The building stood tall, and wide, supported by grand, luxuriously decorated fluted quartz columns, topped with ornate sculptures; the emblems of the houses that formed their realm.

As they approached, half a dozen royal guards led them in as familiar horns blared a welcoming fanfare. While leading their horses to a stableboy, a guard met them with an expressionless, face and began, "Head magister Dustinian has summoned you to—"

"Oh? Has he? We just came 'cause we missed you," exploded Jon angrily, cutting him off.

The guard finally showed some emotion; hurt, as he spun on his heels and embarrassedly marched away.

To Jon, the ride had felt long, and the court; while beautiful, was filled with the very things Jon detested. Held by snotty politicians who looked down on people like him. Men-at-arms, lowborns, no matter your parents, (unless wealthy) treated and looked upon you as if you were just another digit in one of their tax collection reports.

As they walked to the entrance, the two giant-sized mahogany doors; keeping the court in and the world out, opened without their effort.

When they entered, Jon's senses were assaulted from all sides. Between the smell of ink, ever present scratching of quills, and

grand tapestries, Jon's only restraint from making a hasty retreat was Lorian's hand on his collar.

They treaded carefully through the great hall, and with a bit of searching and showing of papers, found the head magisters office, marked by a sprawled owl found above the entrance.

Jon had entered this room many times, and by now had learned that the room's large doors were deceptively, almost magically, easy to open.

He pushed gently, and after Lorian had entered he once again stepped inside one of the most secretive rooms in the entire realm.

Immediately, both he and Lorian noticed that the place was an absolute mess. Around the room, scrolls, books, and papers sat on chairs and desks, in some places stacked to the ceiling.

The sight was confusing to both of them, and would remain so as the magister's distinctive voice cried out, "Who's there?!"

Lorian apparently was prepared for this, and quickly responded.

"It's Lorian! And I brought my squire, Jon! Just as you asked!"

"Ah! Just in time!" he shouted back.

"Come out here old man! This screaming is ridiculous!" yelled Jon.

He heard what he assumed could only be a very large book closing, and from the source of the noise came the magister.

"So! The two of you came as I had asked," said the magister with a smile.

"Of course, magister," said Lorian with a shallow bow.

"And Jonathan..." said the magister, eying him up and down. "It's always a pleasure to see a curious young man such as yourself. Are you still keen on learning Assyrian? I've made a wonderful discovery about the language—"

“I am, yes,” Jon said, cutting him off, “But I believe we’ve more important matters to discuss. Lorian seems to believe you about these dragons, but I have my doubts.”

Whether Jon’s thoughts stemmed from denial or disbelief, he now couldn’t tell.

“Lorian, I appreciate your trust,” said the magister, bowing deeply. “Jonathan, I came to my conclusion after studying our land's history. They seem to plague us intermittently. Replenishing their numbers every few centuries to ravage our lands.”

“Then why are they returning now?” Jon shot back. “They were here just fifty years ago.”

“Well...” he said, as he rather impressively lifted a large book with a leather cover onto the table and opened it. “According to my estimates, based on our historical examinations of course,” he said, flipping through the thin pages, “and the scale of the last dragon Garios had slain... I believe this so-called ‘Last dragon’ must have been, at the very least, a century and a half old,” said the magister, pointing with a grim expression.

Jon started smiling stupidly at the thought of an old dragon, and having his interest finally piqued, asked sardonically, “So, would you say this dragon was weak, perhaps? Even frail?”

The magister examined his face and returned the expression. “Maybe I would,” he said, his smile turning to a grin. As he moved his eyes to Lorian it faded immediately. When Jon glanced at the knight he knew why.

Lorian stood there in paralysis, as his mind filled with images of men, women, children; all crying, pleading, and screaming helplessly into a sea of flame engulfing all.

He placed his hand over the dandelion on his gorget uncomfortably as he thought he heard his name being called.

He couldn't think about that right now. All he could do was wallow in his powerlessness.

"LORIAN!" yelled Jon in his face, shaking his shoulder.

Some sort of noise came out of his now open mouth as he returned.

"Sorry, s—sorry I just I—I," he stammered as he drank in what was around him.

"How do we kill these things," he said breathlessly. "The dragons, yes. How do we kill the dragons?"

"That's what you're here for," said the magister, giving him a warm, reassuring pat on the shoulder. He left his hand there for a moment before turning back to the table.

"When Garios arrives, his practical knowledge will make the task particularly easy. You two were always quick learners," finished the magister.

Lorian felt relieved that Garios was to arrive. Ever since his youth, Garios made him feel reassured.

After what must have been hours of pouring over schematics and tactics, a young boy wearing a well tailored uniform burst into the room.

"Finally! Something to break the monotony!" said Jonathan excitedly.

"Magister, sir," he said, out of breath.

"Speak, child," replied the magister simply.

"It's about Garios, Sir. The guards reported that his—," said the boy panting. "His host was attacked on the road here. Near—"

"My helmet," was all Lorian said commandingly, as he stood up and rushed to the door.

Jon was quick on his heels, and within minutes they had saddled up and armed themselves, making haste down the very road they had just traveled.

Minutes of galloping had passed, and Jon looked back to notice that a few dozen knights and mounted men-at-arms had mobilized after them.

“His host was attacked...” said Lorian, confused. “It just doesn’t make sense.”

“We’ve such robust patrols. Perhaps one of the realms’ enemies bribed one,” said Jon.

“If it was the patrol guards, I doubt Garios’s host had much trouble dispatching them,” said Lorian assuredly.

He took a deep breath and spoke again. “Regardless, we need to keep our minds on what’s ahead,” he said. “If we’re lucky, we’ll be in time to act as reinforcements.”

First came the horses, they caught the scent of blood, and when Jon’s beast reared it took everything he had to keep from falling.

They crested a small hill and bore witness to the battlefield before them.

Countless bodies lay in the now blood-soaked forest road. Jon passed a knight whose upper torso had been cleaved almost clean from his waist, his innards leaving a trail to his legs, which still sat in his steed’s stirrups. He saw the cart they used to haul their supplies sitting in the middle of the road ablaze, as the rank odour of death from the battlefield mixed with the smell of burning wood.

Upon closer inspection, Jon recognized some of the corpses. He saw Edward, a valiant knight, no more than a couple years older than Lorian, on the ground. His now lifeless hands sat at his throat, in what must have been a futile, naïve effort to keep his blood in, as there lay a gaping hole in his neck.

Jon didn’t want to look, but he couldn’t close his eyes.

He noticed Harold. A knight, if you could even call him that; who had more a thirst for ale than he did honour or chivalry. He

lay dead with his leg trapped underneath his notoriously hot-tempered stallion, which had died to a single blow that had nearly taken its head off. His face was caked in mud, and his tongue hung loosely out of his gaping mouth.

Jon couldn't decide if the blow that took his brain from his skull came before or after.

Passing the horribly mutilated and brutalized bodies of knights, men-at-arms, and levies alike, he continued to the back of the convoy.

He saw Lorian catch sight of Garios's uniquely ornate Kingsguard's armor as he raced his mount to it.

He was next to his dead warhorse, one hand wrapped around the hilt of his longsword, which was planted firmly enough to support his weight, and the other clutching his blood soaked gambeson, just under his breastplate.

Lorian hastily steered his destrier over to him and dismounted clumsily.

"Garios?!" Lorian exclaimed with a shaky voice.

Dropping to his knees, with both hands he grasped at Garios's crowned bascinet in an attempt to tilt his head up.

Blood poured out.

His throat was open from ear to ear, exposing his blood-flooded windpipe.

Lorian stared into his still open eyes for a moment and collapsed over him, wrapping his arms over his shoulders, and thus, letting go of his helmet, left his head to now rest on his gemstone studded pauldron.

Jon too dismounted, and as he walked deliriously to Lorian, found his attention shift as the reinforcements he saw leave after them finally arrived.

An old, blond man who looked of high birth approached Lorian as Jon stumbled backwards over a body.

He found the only thing he could do was disassociate, and so he did.

Lorian and his mercenaries had caught up to the boys. The magister warned him before he left that they were hasty, and he wasn't wrong.

"Spread out, secure the area," he said, decisively, as he approached the battlefield.

"Lorian, boy," he said commandingly, as he looked around and assessed the area.

Scanning his surroundings and analyzing the slaughter, he found and realized a few things.

Firstly, the countless corpses, all of which were recognizable as being the king's men, lay on the forest floor, completely riddled with wounds that could have only been from barbed arrows. In spite of the wounds, no arrows were present. Someone cleaned up, and did a good job at that.

Secondly, a mutiny was off the table. The only troops with ranged capabilities that could've been travelling on their land right now would've been the kingdom's crossbowmen. None of which were supplied with anything even close to resembling barbed bolts.

Lorian only now responded to his name being called, and in an attempt to face the noble, accidentally knocked Garios's clasping hand from under his breastplate.

His fist hurled out as his fingers sprawled open, producing a small object.

He squinted from his horse in an attempt to identify what had come flying out. This proved ineffective, however, and he was forced to dismount. He calmly descended from his massive destrier with a sigh, and walked over to the object, staining his deep, red cape with wet dirt.

Now on one knee, he reached out a leather, plated gauntlet, and picked up what Garios had previously been clenching.

“The fletching of an arrow... I—” he growled quietly, as fear flashed through his mind.

“This was no rival kingdom's attack, Lorian,” he said, voice booming as he kept his face stern.

“This was an assassination.”

Lorian let out a tortured wail. The bite of reality was cold and sharp.

To be continued...

Magical Irony
By Shauna Caine

Once upon a time there was a family which had their ups and downs just like any other family. This family was called The Godfreys. One day this family had a struggle, a struggle to stay together. The spouse named Nick started to act very bizarre. He started to come home late from work or projects. Nick's wife's name was Abby. She was getting infuriated and so were his kids. All they wanted was him to be home more often.

“Nick, why are you coming home late again?”

“It's nothing, I was just working late.”

“You're always working late, even when you say you're going to be home early.”

Nick rolled his eyes and walked away.

The next day he was coming home from work and he saw his wife walking to the bank, so he pulled over and walked over to the bank. Before he could get there, Abby came out of nowhere and started to freak out on him.

“So when were you going to tell me?” said Abby.

Nick froze, as he remembered that he was at a Coin Show when he met a coin dealer who specialized in collecting mythical things. He'd been spending a lot of money! Abby didn't understand where all their money was going and she wanted to know more so she confronted him about it.

“Nick, where is all the money going?”

“It is going into my projects” Nick replied.

“What projects? You never tell me anything!” Abby left because she was so upset with him.

A few days later, Nick went back to the coin show to talk with the person he met there. A few moments later, the guy showed up and

said, “Hey Nick, do you remember me?” with a weird smile on his face.

Nick did not seem to remember his name, so he sat there quietly trying to remember.

“Are you trying to remember my name, Nicky?”

“Yes, what is your name?”

“My name is Derek,” he said. Nick quickly tried to say, “Well, I want more of your mythical creatures, I’ll even pay ten thousand dollars for them.”

Derek was thinking about this deal that Nick was trying to make. Derek calmly said, “Okay, but I want your wife and kids in exchange for the ten thousand dollars and my beings.” Derek made a weird smile again. Nick only agreed because he was trying to create something stronger than anything human. He believed that it would help with all his problems.

Nick arrived at his house and saw that his life had completely changed. He had no wife, no kids. He decided to keep going on with life. So he continued to work on his “projects.” Days turned into weeks, into months, till finally he was finished and he said to himself, “It’s alive.”

But then months later, he started to feel so lonely. Nick started to go crazy. He missed his wife and kids and his memories of them were starting to disappear. He started to drink. He was losing himself. He started to think if he gave the monster he created to the dealer, maybe he could get his family back, so he started to think of ways to do just that.

So a few days went by and he went to the coin show and met up with Derek with a huge container. Derek wasn’t so happy to see him again.

So Derek said, “Why are you here?”

Nick was surprised by this. “I'm here to give you something you're going to want.”

Derek thought about this for a moment. Derek went to speak, but Nick cut him off. “But I'm making the deal. I want my family back for this.”

Nick showed him the gross-looking monster. It had big yellow eyes and a small mouth. This thing was at least seven or eight feet tall. Derek had the same weird smile after seeing the monster. He said, “Anything else?”

Nick said, “No, I just want my family back.”

“Here, the deal is you can have your family back, but I want this and all my other monsters back.”

Nick kind of didn't know how to tell him that all his monsters turned into one. Nick said, “This is the most powerful monster on the market. Please take this and give me my family back.”

Derek finally got what he wanted this whole time, so he said, “Okay you can have your family back and you'll never see me again.”

Nick agreed to the deal and poof! Derek was gone and he couldn't remember what happened. He went home to find his family safe and sound. He explained to his wife that he was sorry, but he couldn't remember what happened and why a lot of their money was gone, but once he did he'd tell her.

A few months later, Nick went to a restaurant with his family and he saw Derek. He quickly told his wife that that was who he'd been going to see and spending most of their money with and he finally told her that he was buying these weird looking creatures. He promised that he'd never buy them again. It was the worst decision he'd made.

After the beautiful night out with his family, they started walking home and they all saw a big black creature that was running very fast at them, so they started running away from the monster. Nick realized that it was the creature that he'd created.

Nick stopped running because he knew that they couldn't outrun the creature but his family, on the other hand, continued to run away not knowing if they were going to live or die. Nick yelled, "Stop! You can't outrun this!"

Abby stopped with the kids and said back, "Are you insane? You have to run!"

Nick didn't know how to tell her that it was the project that he'd been hiding from her.

"Abby, this is the project I didn't tell you about. I didn't know how to."

Abby was so upset, she grabbed the kids and started to run again. She tripped and hit her head. She passed out and they all got abducted by the creature Nick had made. That was what he was afraid of and they were never seen again.

The End

At Night
By Jaden Jones

Losing consciousness
Fading in and out of it
Thinking about things I should have done
Yesterday missing it
Keeping my distance
Counting the minutes
Memories are fading
My mind is vacant
I see an image and I'm shaken
Every look is breathtaking
Think I hear something but I'm mistaken
I start replaying
All my conversations
And nostalgia starts betraying
Try to feel the words, too jaded
Heart starts racing
Pain I start facing
Floating
My breath begins slowing
My eyes start closing
Thoughts, I can't control them
Nights repeat with different details
I get weaker with every inhale
The room starts spinning around me
I try to focus, but I'm too drowsy
Barely present
The darkness takes over, I'm infected
And now there's no more repression
Only obsession.

Meteor shower

By Matthew Katsampas Figueroa

The whole family was sitting on the couch watching the news and then they said there might be a surprise meteor shower tonight and it was supposed to be a big one too.

Alex, an architect, received a phone call from an amber alert telling him that he and his family must go to the military base so that they could bring them to the hidden bunker in Iceland. It was strictly forbidden to bring anyone else who wasn't in their family no matter what. They gave Alex an address to go to and hoped that they would make it

Everyone was at their house watching the meteor shower on TV and there was a countdown, three, two, one... And nothing so it seemed like there was something wrong with the countdown, until they looked outside and there was an asteroid bigger than Planet Earth. As soon as everyone saw the meteor they went into panic mode and freaked out.

As soon as Alex saw the meteor in the sky, he realized that the amber alert call was serious so he took Chloe and his son Nathan. They packed their bags as fast as they could, but they couldn't bring too much because there wasn't enough space to be able to bring everything and they didn't know if they were packing for hot or cold weather. So they brought their son's diabetes medicine and two or three pairs of clothes and immediately left their house to go to the address they were given to go to for safety reasons.

While they got into the car they received another phone call telling them to go to that if they did not make it by 8:00 pm tomorrow, the plane would leave without them so they started rushing and panicking and then BAM! A tiny piece of the meteor

crashed into Los Angeles and in a blink of an eye, everyone that was in Los Angeles was dead.

After that happened, LA was burnt. Everything and everyone died in that blast. After seeing that disturbing video of that happening, Chloe immediately shut her phone off and suddenly Nathan was feeling sick because he hadn't had his diabetes medication. As soon as Chloe realized that, she went to the back of the car and looked in the bag, panicking trying to find his medication. After 5 minutes of searching she couldn't find it anywhere so she was convinced they had left it at home.

They were about to approach the military base, but there was bad traffic because only 5,000 people were selected to go to the hidden bunker so they were starting a riot in front of the gates of the military base. As soon as they saw all that Alex rushed his way to the front of the gates and told the soldier that he had gotten a call from an amber alert and he and his family were selected to go to the bunker.

After they got inside the military base they realized that they'd forgotten Nathan's diabetes medication. They went back to car and Alex said he'd be back and he started running to the car that was half a mile away—the plane left in 30 minutes.

As soon as he left the military base, he started rushing to the car and had to pass a mosh pit of people. He got to his car and couldn't find it anywhere but it was right underneath the driver's seat. When he found the medicine, he went to the military base and got back in. They got on a plane to go to a hidden bunker somewhere in Iceland. The bunker had enough food for about a year. When they got there, they had to stay in there for nine months because the world was going up in flames and no one would be alive except the people in the bunker.

Aaron's Quest
By Jamal Primus

“Aaron, what are you doing? Get down from there!!” said Aunt Everlyn, as she and the surrounding bystanders looked at the boy climbing the village square tree.

“There he goes again, always starting some kind of ruckus around here. When will he ever learn,” said one of the village district guards men.

“Aaron, can you hear me? Get down. You're going to get yourself hurt!!”

“I'm fine, I can take care of myself you kn-ahh!”

“Aaron!!” said Aunt Everlyn.

This is a story about how one boy's mistake leads him on a journey to save his aunt and his people.

“Damn it, Aaron, if I didn't have wings you could have fallen and broken a few of your bones. You need to stop putting yourself in such dangerous positions. I'm not always going to be there to save you,” said Aaron's aunt. “You wouldn't have to save anymore because tomorrow I'll be getting my blessing and receiving my wings,” said Aaron.

On every child's twelfth birthday, they are blessed by the gods and receive their wings, and tomorrow was the day Aaron would get his.

“Being able to fly doesn't mean you are invincible, you still have to be careful,” said Aunt Everlyn. “Promise me that when you do get your wings you wouldn't be doing such reckless things.”

“Okay, you win. I promise to keep my promise and try to be careful, okay?” said Aaron. “Anyways, I'm gonna head over to Cliff's house. I'll be back in a couple of hours, bye.”

“Be careful when you are coming back.”

When arriving at his friends Clifford and Sam's house they walked around the village playing games until it was time for Aaron to head home. The next day, Aaron, along with his aunt, headed to the temple to be blessed by the gods so he and every other child who had turned twelve could receive their wings. After the ceremony, Aaron went back to his aunt.

"There, see? Now that I have received my wings from the gods you don't have to worry about catching me when I fall anymore, Aunt Everlyn," said Aaron as he flew around in the sky. "I told you that it doesn't matter if you have wings or not, there will always be danger if you keep doing reckless things."

Sighing, Aunt Everlyn said, "Anyway your friends are calling you saying that you wanted to take them somewhere, just where are you going too?"

"Don't worry, I'll be safe this time, okay?" said Aaron.

Aaron took his friends to one of the surrounding islands where an old altar was located.

"Finally, I've been wanting to come here ever since the teachers at school told us about this place. This is the place where I'll finally be able to start my adventure," said Aaron.

"How is a pile of stone gonna help you in any way?" said Clifford.

"This is where the hero and his friends supposedly slay the demon that was causing trouble here, all those years ago."

"You want to be a hero? Really? Ha ha ha!"

Startled by a voice coming from behind them in the trees, Aaron quickly turned around to see who the voice was coming from only to see that it was Ryan. Ryan was one of Aaron's bullies who always found a way to try and push him and his friends' buttons.

"Ryan? Why are you here?" said Sam.

"Followed you losers to see why you took off in such a hurry," Ryan said, leering at Sam.

"So, what're you guys doing here exactly?"

Sam glared at Ryan. "What we do is none of yo—"

"Don't pay any attention to him, Sam. He's just looking for an excuse to rile us up since he's so miserable himself," said Clifford."

"Let's just go back to the village and hang out somewhere else where this guy wouldn't interfere."

"Fine, whatever. I better not run into you guys for the rest of the day then."

As Aaron was about to take off, within the crumpled altar he heard a voice whispering to him.

"Save us," said the mysterious voice. "Save us, please, save us and we will grant you anything you want."

The voice was cold and dreary, but Aaron's curiosity got the better of him and responded to the voice.

"A—anything I want? Is that true?" said Aaron.

"Of course, child, anything you want, all you have to do is undo the seal that was placed upon this statue," said the distorted voice.

Aaron moves aside the rubble to reveal a peculiar seal.

"Wait, how do I know I can trust what you say is true, if you were some sort of dangerous creature sealed here for a reason," said Aaron.

"It is true that we—I mean I was sealed here because I was dangerous," said the distorted voice, "but that's only because people were abusing my wishes to cause others harm. But I sense you are different, you are meant for greater things."

Aaron was hesitant at first, about whether to trust the strange voice, but those words were enough to completely sway him into freeing the voice he was hearing. He pushed aside the seal and two shadows rushed out of the hole.

"FREE!! FREE!!" cried the female demon. "It's been four thousand years since I was last able to breathe and feel."

“Yes indeed, sister, and it's all thanks to this one,” said the male demon.

As the two demons turned to the boy, he stood there shivering in fear, unable to process the sight before his eyes.

“Demons?! You were demons?!” said Aaron.

“Kekekekeke!” the male demon laughed. “Yep, allow us to introduce ourselves, my name is Ethan and this is my sister Elaine. Thanks for freeing us from our seal. We will spare every child's life.”

With a wave of their hands a dark fog covered the entire island, spreading from one island to the next until, eventually covering the town Aaron lived in. Soon after finishing the spell, the demons took off to the skies cackling as they went. Still shaking in fear and unable to process what he had just unleashed, Aaron rushes back to town only to meet every adult turned to stone.

“Aaron you wouldn't believe what happened,” said Clifford. “All of a sudden there was this dark mist everywhere and it turned everyone except us kids to stone, what could have done this?”

Seeing his friends Clifford and Sam in such distress, Aaron couldn't bring himself to tell his friends that he was responsible for what happened to everyone. He did not want his only friends to stop being friends with him.

“Don't you think that this is similar to what happened in that history lesson we learnt about in class,” said Sam.

“Maybe the demons that were sealed somehow broke free. We need to seal them back up then,” said Aaron. “It said that the hero was able to defeat them by using a seal stone he found in the basilisk tower, right? Then all we have to do is find this basilisk tower and re-seal those demons.”

With a nod of approval Clifford and Sam followed Aaron into the library to research some more on where to find the basilisk tower, only to find out that it was located under the town hall. Without any delay, the three hurried off to the town hall to look for the entrance. After they were inside the building they started searching everywhere for even the smallest thing out of

place, which could lead them to the underground tower. A while later they discovered that one of the lamps on the wall was a tunnel that led to the tower and so they entered. Once they reached the bottom of the tunnel, right in front of them was the basilisk tower. As the three friends entered the tower, before them stood the basilisk, its scales were green and its body was as long as the tower they stood in. Feeling only a tad bit intimidated, Aaron stepped forward and with his voice trembling he spoke.

“Guardian of the tower me and my friends have come to you to ask for your help,” said Aaron. As the basilisk looked at the group before it with a long pause, it finally responded. What exactly do you seek from me?”

The basilisk voice boomed and echoed throughout the tower, almost enough to make Aaron and his friends want to turn back and run away, but their determination and the hope of everyone they knew and loved kept them from leaving.

“A—All we want is for you to give us the seal stone, one strong enough to seal back the same demons that the hero sealed away,” spoke Aaron, his voice trembling with every word.

“If you require my stone then you must prove your worth,” said the basilisk. “You must admit your sin and reveal the secret that you have been keeping from your friends.”

The Cow Abduction

By Noah Wani

The year is 3069; much has changed since our era. Technology has advanced, our minds have advanced, the workers' values have changed and the world we know today is not the same, some may say for good, others for worse. Cows have been valued as a top tier animal due to the fact that their meat was discovered to have an amazing source of protein recently named tundra berry. This protein massively helps with muscle growth and with IQ levels. There was a study that indicated that if someone were to eat cow meat only for three weeks straight they would gain 20% muscle mass and one IQ point.

Researchers have been doing tests on cows trying to understand this source of protein, because the only thing where you can find this protein is in cows. So they have been trying to replicate it and sell it like other vitamins and proteins. A lot of people are against this because they need to conduct experiments against cows, which is morally wrong. There have been some farmers who claim their cows have been getting abducted during the night and replaced with another animal but everyone seems to be dismissing it.

There is a farm that is quite close to Area 51 and everything has always been normal around there and this farm has primarily cows in it, but what makes it special is that this farm has the largest number of cows in all of North America. The farmer's name is Garrison and he never believed what everyone else was saying about their cows being abducted, until one night.

One night, he wakes up to a loud noise, so he goes to see his cows and make sure they're okay, but he noticed he was missing a few. He searched all over the farm and searched every single last inch of his farm, but could not find them anywhere.

Garrison thinks it was a bit weird, but does not stress very much over it and decides to go back to sleep because he'd smoked some weed and was very sleepy. The next night he wakes up to the exact same thing and another few of his cows are missing. After two nights in a row of his cows going missing out of nowhere, he knows something is going on. He decides to call one of his closest friends—Jeffery the investigator.

Jeffery is a P.I. He receives a call at three in the morning from Garrison who says it was urgent, so Jeffery rushes over and gets there at 3:30. As soon as he walks in he says it smells a bit herbal and Garrison says it's just some of his plants he's been growing.

Jeffery starts to try and gather some evidence around the farm to see if he can make a hypothesis as to what exactly happened to Garrison's cows. After looking all around the farm he comes up with the exact same thing as Garrison, which was absolutely nothing.

Jeffery is very confused and gets concerned but then he remembers something. He had seen and read reports from other farmers claiming their cows had been abducted too. Garrison reminded Jeffery that all the cases got dismissed and Jeffery says it seems weird every single case got dismissed and they all claimed the same thing. He does some more research and finds out that scientists have been taking their research on the tundra berry protein extremely seriously and some say it's even become an obsession.

Jeffery remembers something very important. Garrison lives close to Area 51, one of the biggest research facilities on the planet, with countless scientists. The night Jeffery comes they fall asleep and wake up to more than half of Garrison's cows gone. They write a report but it gets dismissed like every other case. They decide they know what had to be done. They're going to break into Area 51.

Luckily for them they know just who to call to help them get the job done. Adolfosir the spy. They call Adolfosir and he comes instantly. They devise a plan to break into the facility and after five hours of planning, they are finally ready. Adolfosir bring all sorts of weapons and gadgets to make their mission easier.

They manage to break into the facility and get past all the security measures and guards. They get into the main research room and find not only all of Garrison's cows but all of the other farmers' cows also.

As they are about to teleport them all out with their teleportation gadget, the main scientist by the name of Samara the Great barges in with a super mech suit. She sends them into a wall with a single hit.

Adolfosir creates a very quick plan to defeat Samara. Jeffery distracts her and Garrison, and Adolfosir jumps into the mech suit to disable it. But right before they do so, Samara the Great kills Jeffery by grabbing him and crushing every bone in his body.

After they disable the suit, Garrison is so mad and vexed and blinded by rage, he takes a Glock 19 and shoots Samara right in the middle of her forehead and ends her right there and then.

One year later, everyone gets their cows back and are happy, though Garrison and Adolfosir are still mourning Jeffery.

The Magical Life for Remi

By Billie White

Monday was the first day of magic school for this young girl named Remi. Remi wasn't like the other kids in her school; she had magical powers. She was only 17 years old so she understood that when she grew so did her powers. Remi had no choice but to keep her wonderful but dangerous powers a secret from the other kids in her normal school, only because they wouldn't have understood her any more than they already did. Remi heard about this magic school from her best friend Michael who also had magical powers. Her best friend actually went to that school and he thought it'd be a better idea for her to go there so she could relax and be herself. Everyday Remi would beg her mother to let her go to the magic school since it was free, and she could be herself and have actual friends that accepted her for who she was and is as a person. After some days of Remi constantly begging, her mother finally accepted and allowed her to go. You might think this is crazy, and you're fully right, this is crazy.

Monday was today and today was the day where Remi got to be herself in her brand-new school. Remi and her mother walked alongside Michael through the forest. Once they got to the end of the forest it looked like the end, and the cliff was near but it wasn't the end, it was only seen by the ones with powers.

Michael looked at Remi as he said, "Your mother cannot pass through the portal, because she doesn't have powers so you have to say your goodbyes 'til after school."

Remi looked at her mother as she hugged her tightly. "I love you, Mom. Thank you so much for approving and letting me go," she said as she smiled.

Remi's mother smiled as she hugged her back just as tight. "You're welcome, love. Now go to school and make me proud," the woman said as she smiled.

After some time, they finally let each other go. Remi and Michael walked through the portal. On the other side of the portal was a path to the school. The school was a large castle and there were witches, wolves and vampires. There were so many types of people with all kinds of sides to them. Remi looked around as her eyes lit up. She was happy to see that she wasn't and didn't have to be normal for no one. Not for her mother, not for the father that left her, not for her old school either. She just could be herself for her.

Remi walked with Michael to the school. Once they got there, they were greeted by a teacher from the school. She was young and had blue hair, green eyes and a witch dress and hat on. You couldn't see the shoes she was wearing but she wore black heels with purple tips on them.

The woman looked at Remi. "Hello there. I heard you were coming to this school today. Welcome. Allow me to show you around. Of course, you could join Michael in his classes."

Remi heard the teacher speak as she nodded. "I'll come with you Ms..."

The woman chuckled softly, having forgot to say her name. "Oh silly me. My name is Mrs. Tetherball but the student here call me Lucy."

Remi smiled. "My name is Remi. People call me Rem for short."

Lucy nodded as she walked with her around the school showing her around. She showed her the classes she would be in as well. Remi got her own locker and she put all her things into it.

School went on until 3:30 p.m. She was happy that she made so many new friends who weren't normal like her. She met a

vampire, and she started to hang out with him. She met a lot of people who were like her and didn't act normal for anyone, they just acted like themselves for them.

Remi and the male vampire, Myles, walked through the portal. Once they were through to the other side all that was there was a forest. Myles didn't look like a vampire anymore he looked like a normal human being, with blue eyes and shiny brown hair that glowed in the sun. Remi and Myles walked through the forest until they reached the end and got to the city where they ended up going their own ways.

Remi went to that school for over three years. She made so many new friends every year. And she fell in love with Myles. Remember him? The vampire? Yeah, they were dating now and were happy. They all graduated and Remi became the greatest power wielder in the whole entire world. Remi and Myles have been dating for two years and three months so far. Michael was now the hero in New York.

Remi had lived the most amazing life she could have ever lived and it was all thanks to her mother for saying yes to going to that magic school.

Secluded
By Destiny Akinlade

Staring out the window
With tears streaming down my face
I reach for the phone to dial anyone I could think of
But I know, no one will pick up
Here nobody can help me

I make my way downstairs
Towards the door
I take a deep breath, gently opening the door
A cold air rushing past my weak body

I start walking
But quickly realize my mistake
“My Captor” waiting for me everywhere I went
I knew what would happen
I gave in anyway

I did not fight or scream
It would be pointless
As pointless as trying to escape this place
Caged by my relentless mind
Eager to torture me with harmful words
Destroying any chance of being happy

At war every day, wondering if I should listen
To the mind that has me buried
Slowly suffocating the little life, I have left in me.

People of the forest
By Abbilongo Bertley

Far from the town,
Deep in the woods,
Within the lown,
There stands a hut.

A small little thing,
No higher than a maple,
Shaded by its wings,
And covered in ivy.

No old lady here,
No hag, no evil,
No fear, no hexes,
Just people of regal

Inside they gather,
From far and wide,
To discuss every matter,
With guidance they'll provide.

But do not be fooled,
For they're no people of norm,
They can twist and churn,
And bend any rule.

Any spell they can brew,
Any old, any new,
All ranges of colour,
Even royal blue.

So be 'fraid not of what lingers in the bushes,
For a smile is a simple greeting to them.
Be kind to all those old young,
And be wary of phrases you let linger.

Darkness of the mind
By Unknown Calligraphy

We are not changing, stuck in our own mind.
We mourn the loss of pain and its meaning.
It's so contagious that it inflames the hatred lane.
Words can be bullets with shells that burn.
We turn to dust and blow away without a fuss.
We scream, we talk, we try to protest our own darkness.
The blood floods through our mind.
The police stand there and leave us squirming on the ground.

When Anger Hits
By Chaim Maizenberg

When he gets angry, he says, “Shut up!”
When he says, “shut up,” he puts his head down.
When he puts his head down, he looks like he will cry.
When he looks like he will cry, he is just talking to himself.
When he is talking to himself, everyone else thinks he is crazy.
When everyone thinks he is crazy, he brings his head up.
When he brings his head up, he leaves the class.
When he leaves the class, he starts cursing.
When he starts to curse, everyone thinks he has issues.
When everyone thinks he has issues, he comes back into class.
And the next day,
repeat.

The Courage I Have for Myself
By Dodridge McFarlane

I am a virtue
Over time
My character changes
Trust in myself
Comes with that.

Change comes with practice
And must happen consistently
Not erratically

It's emotionally tiring
But you gotta keep fighting
The sacrifices that you must endure
To find the cure.

'68 Mercury M100 pickup
By Nicholas Pearson

She lays in an
open field of golden wheat
swaying in the wind

Covered in rust, the engine bay a squirrel's
own penthouse

That beautiful harbour blue paint, slowly chipping away
like petals from a withering flower

Originally
A symbol of Canadian ingenuity
Exclusively Canadian

A workhorse that can go on for decades
The Canadian countryman's best friend
Like a horse in a stable, a farmer in the M100

Be prepared, As time slips away
By Brooklyn Wolfe

I am not a toy.
I'm not calling you a man when you act like a boy.
I am not a failure.
I'm not your rebound girl.
I am not selfish.
I'm not heartless.
I am not your phone so don't play with me.
I'm not ordinary, just open your eyes and you'll see who I really
am.
I am not infinity, I'm an hourglass.
I am a box so don't open me if you're not prepared.

Words
By Zaynab Damilola Alade

We should speak words that build up,
That embrace people,
Speak words that love,
Whisper words that heal,
Because words are full of power.
Words that make people feel insecure,
Doubt their self-image,
Are words that should not be spoken.
The words we use with each other,
Should show respect,
And lift each other up.

A Guinea's Spell
By Tina Bobina

“Okay Nelson. After I say this spell and snap my fingers you will be able to talk.”

I'm quite the lonely individual, no friends, no siblings or cousins. Desperate cases lead to desperate measures. Nelson is my desperate measure.

“As rodent as thee, you may not speak, but after this deed your voice will be freed... And now *snap!*” I tried snapping my fingers but in reality I don't know how. I picked up a rubber elastic band and snapped it against my wrist to imitate the sound of fingers snapping.

“Did it work?” I walked towards Nelson and patted his forehead. “Can you speak, little guy?”

“What did you do?”

Did Nelson just speak? “Did you just talk?” I asked, slowly backing away from what I thought was a guinea pig. Now I remain unsure.

“Wait, you can hear me?” I stood there expressionless. I tried pinching my skin to see if I was dreaming or not. “Ouch.” I whisper as I rubbed my palm on the sore redness I created from such a tight pinch.

“Where is my Nelson?” I asked, holding a poop scooper towards the guinea pig. “It's me. I'm Nelson. Help me get out of here.” Me being me, of course, I was not buying into that.

“Prove it,” I said, crossing my arms. “You haven't showered for six days so far. You're trying to break the record of not showering. Instead you're breaking the record of who can grow mold in their armpits the longest.”

“You really are Nelson!” I said running up to him, picking him up and holding him close to my chest.

“Please open a window.” This guinea pig had a whole lot of attitude.

How lovely.

After a rough night of trying to put Nelson to bed and him refusing to quit talking, I finally was able to go to sleep.

When I woke up Nelson wasn't in his cage. I remember putting him in the cage. I still had the bite marks.

“Nelson, where are you?” I whispered while looking between the bed boards. “I'll give you lettuce if you come out.”

I heard rustling between the bags and shoes in my closet. There he was. Little old Nelson. Knew he loved lettuce.

“Bring me back to human form,” he said sturdily. Nelson was very sassy, so I tried to see if there was a way that I could make him become more polite and friendly with me.

“Let's go to the mall,” I suggested. “Maybe it will put you in a better mood.”

It looked like he was contemplating going to the mall but getting ready to reject the idea. “I'll buy you whatever you like if you come with me?”

“Whatever I want?” he asked.

“Whatever you want,” I responded. I knew I'd regret it later on but I was never really able to spend time with Nelson outside of my bedroom. Now that he could talk I'd use that opportunity to have a friend to go out with.

I got Nelson ready with a little red bow tie and a fedora. I put him into my bag and got out of the house.

We went to several stores but kept getting escorted out. Apparently pets weren't allowed at PetSmart. If pets weren't allowed then why did they call it PetSmart? Nelson was a pet who was smart. He could speak English fluently and had a British accent.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t go to any stores, Nelson,” I said with a face filled with guilt.

“I can go into stores, just not with you,” he said. I wasn’t sure if this was him calling me smelly or bringing up a new idea on how to get into stores.

“What do you mean?” I asked wincing. I didn’t want to get bullied by a tiny but fat guinea pig out in public.

“I mean that I’m small and people won’t be able to see me entering stores.” This guinea pig really was smart.

I agreed to the idea although it seemed risky. If we ever got caught Nelson said he would bite them and purposefully let out some extremely toxic gas. I was assuming he was talking about farts.

Hours went by of me casually walking around the store while Nelson took things from the lower racks and shelves, while quietly, discreetly exiting with them.

“Is this stealing?” I whispered to myself. Thinking about the morals of letting a guinea pig steal items from stores and bring them back to you outside of the door made me feel bad, but then I remembered that it was Nelson stealing, not me. Which made me feel real worse after thinking about it.

“Okay, Nelson, let’s go home.” It hadn’t even been a full day since Nelson was able to talk but I felt like I was using him. Although he was the one who chose to get the items and even keep them for himself, it made me feel bad. Especially after remembering how he said he was a human trapped in a fat hamster's body.

When we arrived home, I put Nelson down for an intervention. “Nelson, we need to change you back to human.” I said sternly. I knew he wanted it too.

“Really? Like you really mean it?” he asked enthusiastically. It was the first time I saw him—or any guinea pig, to be exact—smile. I wondered what he really looked like as a human.

“Yes. I will help you.” I went on my laptop and went back to the website where I found the first spell I used. I had it bookmarked because I wanted to write a review about how it actually worked.

I scrolled down the main page and couldn’t find anything so I resorted to Googling instead. I typed, “how to turn your guinea pig into a human,” and all I found were joke videos and articles about fantasy roleplaying. After scrolling for a bit, I finally found something.

“Nelson, I found a spell that might help,” I told him, eager to turn him back to see him in his human form. “Okay, I’m ready.”

The instructions said to slowly pet the guinea pig's head and recite words in pig latin. I was afraid that if I butchered the pronunciation the spell wouldn’t work, but I gave it a try regardless.

I recited the 20-word-long spell as I scratched Nelson's head. Nothing happened. “Am I human?” Nelson asked.

“Does it look like you’re human?” I responded. Tired of not getting any results I closed my laptop and put Nelson back in his cage. “We’ll try again tomorrow,” I told him.

The next day I woke up to Nelson on my bed. “How’d you get out of your cage?” I asked him, bewildered by what I had just woken up to. “You left the cage door open,” he told me blankly, unbothered by my repetitive behavior.

I got back up and opened my laptop and continued searching for spells. Then I got the best idea ever.

“Nelson I got it,” I told him, rushing to find the bookmarked spell. “What? Got what?”

“I know what we have to do, to turn you back,” I said smiling, hoping that this information would make him as happy as I was at the moment. I picked him up swiftly and placed him on my floor, making sure that no possible injuries would happen when he went back to human form.

“Now, read,” I said, after I placed the laptop in front of him.

“I’m a guinea pig, I can’t read.”

I hadn’t thought this through. “What do you mean you can’t read? Try harder.” I was getting impatient but Nelson wasn’t budging. He really couldn’t read.

I read the spell out for him. After every word, I said *period* to represent punctuation so that the spell wouldn’t go into effect. After repeating several times Nelson was finally ready—ready to be human again.

“Okay, let’s go, Nelson. Read it out!” I said sitting on the bed while I listened to him cast the spell on himself.

“And now, *snap!*” And just like that, Nelson was done reciting the spell. But nothing had changed.

“It didn’t work,” I said in a sad tone. I was defeated, I felt bad for Nelson, knowing he wanted to go back to human form. I also wanted to know what he’d look like. Guess I’ll never know.

“Where are you?” Nelson said, “It smells even worse in here.”

I was right here? Why couldn’t he see me? I got up and tried to get off the bed but fell. It felt like I fell from 50 million stories. I rushed to the mirror to see if I had any injuries, then I realized the spell had worked.

“Nelson,” I said. Hearing my own voice, how higher pitched it was.

“Oh no,” Nelson said.

“Oh no,” I repeated.

There I was. In front of the mirror. Same height as Nelson. A tiny, small rodent. The spell had worked. I had turned into a talking guinea pig. Flabbergasted by what I saw I rolled on my back but couldn't get back up.

"Help me, Nelson," I said, laying on my back like a dead squirrel on the road. Nelson used his guinea pig head, to move my guinea pig body back on its stomach.

Nelson and I were talking guinea pigs. There was nothing we could do about it.

We spent the rest of our days eating greens and sometimes nibbling our poop. Life was simpler as a guinea pig.

You Are Special

By Kayla Di Napoli

When a baby is born they all get gifted a rock which later they get a power from. The main rocks that are gifted to the people are Sapphires for the strong minded and wise; Amethyst for the smart and independent; Jade for those who can speak to animals and are nature loving; and finally Fire Quartz for bossy and close-minded people. Kayla wasn't born with any of these rocks.

Kayla's in high school now. It's the typical high school with typical drama. There's the mean girls, the jocks, the nerds—you know the types. Kayla doesn't fit into any of those groups because she was never gifted a rock so she simply does what she needs to do to finish high school and move on with her life. She has never really had friends because of the fact she is different from everyone else. She constantly gets made fun of by the “mean girl group” at her school.

One fateful evening, during the full moon, Kayla is up late drawing but finally decides: “It's getting late, I should head off to bed.” As she settles comfortably in her bed, her eyes slowly start to close and Kayla drifts off to sleep. All of a sudden she sees the river she had been drawing come to life. She is curious and begins to slowly approach the flowing water. Beside the riverbank there are beautiful, vibrant flowers and the sky is clear blue, like clear-blue oceans. Not one cloud in sight.

She approaches a beautiful flower standing out from all the other flowers. It is a stunning white rose with velvety petals. As she gets closer the rose blossoms and blooms and she sees inside the flower there's a Black Kyanite just sitting there waiting to be picked up. She reaches inside the flower to pluck out the crystal. Suddenly, she begins to feel different and as if she's gaining power from her legs all the way up to her chest and she starts to glow!

She wakes up and runs to the bathroom to vomit. Kayla is shaking. “That felt way too real!” she thinks to herself. She begins searching around her room to see if she could find the rock. Sadly she is disappointed. She does not find what she is looking for.

Kayla stands in front of the mirror asking herself, “What's wrong with me? Why can't I just be like everyone else?!” She begins sobbing on the floor. She closes her eyes and tears run down her face. All of a sudden, as she slowly starts to re-open her eyes, she sees the Kyanite just sitting there waiting to be cradled in her hand. When she picks it up, she gets the same glowing shock throughout her body! From that day on, Kayla becomes the most powerful of them all. She can draw and make things come to life.

In life, those who struggle, those who think they are born without gifts, need to look through their tears to find their crystals. Everything is worth it in the end.

A Dangerous Loner
(A short story of a STALKER named Artyom Rushilei)
By Adam El-Harrouzi

It is a dark scary world, where there are mutated monsters and supernatural beings that can kill you at any moment. In a world where all go to hell thanks to the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. All of Pripjat and its surrounding is a new hellscape for what's to come. From opposing factions to deadly creatures lurking about, your only hope is the person next to you. But what if there's no one at your side?

The Fight for Survival

As the sky grows darker and the wind grows stronger, a rustle in the woods can be heard. A tall man in green and black camo fatigues is running through the branches with his rifle slung around him. It's Artyom, panting as he sprints and jumps through terrain, while bullets fly past him hitting and ricocheting against the trees in front of him. This one lone man runs for dear life from a group of armed men all in white gear, and who are known as Monolith.

As Artyom continues to run, he stumbles into a hard concrete road barrier where he decides to make his stand. It's the only hardcover he's found during his attempt to run from the Monolith. Artyom unslings his AK-12 and conceals himself with the surrounding shrubbery.

As the night continues to grow darker he prepares himself for the fight that is to come. Meanwhile, he hears Russian insults being called out in his direction. The loner remains calm and uses their arrogance to his advantage.

Not two minutes later, with the wind finally calming down, tree branches snap and bushes shuffle against the Monolith soldiers' shoulders, their equipment banging, as they jog towards Artyom's last known location.

Artyom, who is fully aware of their presence, remains still and quiet as he attempts to go through the velcro grenade pouch on his chest rig to grab a grenade. The Monolith soldiers, panting from exhaustion from running with all their heavy equipment, don't hear Artyom's loud velcro pouch, leaving them vulnerable.

As the loner prepares his grenade, it's actually the removal of the pin creating a faint clink sound that finally alerts the Monolith soldiers. This causes them to open fire at his concrete barrier. Round after round hits the wall on the other side of him, chunks breaking off while dust flies everywhere. Artyom blindly tosses the grenade over the barrier towards their direction, causing them to run for cover—then a brief ceasefire until one loud explosion reverberates and echoes through the forest. It can be heard a couple of kilometers away. Artyom peeks his head up and starts shooting towards their general direction to keep the Monolith undercover as he moves back, ducking behind the huge trunk of a fallen tree log.

A Monolith soldier from the group branches away from his three other comrades attempting to flank Artyom's position, as the other Monoliths continue lobbing grenades and shooting at the trunk of the tree Artyom is using as cover.

The loner decides to hunker down, aware of their flanking plot. He peers to the left side shooting off one round into the Monolith soldier who was trying to flank him. A pink mist rises through the hazmat suit for his comrades to see, angering them even more as the Monolith soldier drops to the ground, face down.

As the night grows even darker, the firefight continues leaving Artyom and three Monolith soldiers still standing. Rounds crack in the air and shrapnel fragments ricochet from their grenades.

Artyom stays in the fight more determined than ever. Low to the ground on the right side of his barrier, he shoots the leg of another Monolith soldier, making him fall to the ground screaming and writhing in pain. Then another bullet to his head, finishing him off.

The two remaining Monolith soldiers start to slowly pull back retreating as Artyom continues to suppress them. Almost out of ammo, Artyom uses his final grenade, killing the two last Monolith soldiers, with the blast rumbling through the forest.

Throughout the ambush Artyom hasn't been hit once. Four bodies of Monolith soldiers lay to waste on the ground, spread out in the woods of Cordon, Ukraine. It is the middle of the night, as Artyom walks away, under the moonlight, back towards his home.

La Fin

The Victims of War

By Gianluca Ficocelli

The afternoon in France had dawned. It was warm and clear, with a freshness that hinted at the end of spring. There was a stillness throughout the land, for a vicious three-year war had just ended, and also ended the lives of many.

Tavion Devante was planting tomato seeds behind his tavern, A Fellow's Rest. He had built it with his father two years before the brutal war had started. It was a stroke of luck that it was still standing after so much had been destroyed.

He had gotten them from his homeland in Italy, during the war between elves and humans, in 1467. It was known as The War of Steel and Magic. His lovely wife, Dalius Devante, was of the young age of only twenty-six. She had short blond hair and blue eyes.

She called for her husband, "Tavion! We have three guests. I sent Arthur to settle and feed their horses." Arthur was their faithful servant.

"I'm on my way," Tavion answered with disappointment, for he had not yet finished planting his tomato seeds.

Following his wife, Tavion entered the tavern. Two of the three guests were dressed in full knight's armor, one with a broadsword and the other with a short sword hanging from their waist. The third guest had on an expensive suit and was shorter than the rest of his companions. He had a wretched burn mark across his left eye so that his eyelid barely opened and his face bore a menacing grimace. He held a leather bound book in his right hand. Upon closer observation, Tavion observed that all three men donned brooches on their chest with swords going through elf ears.

Tavion knew immediately that he was in trouble. Consequently, he was extraordinarily polite and courteous. “Welcome fine gentleman to my fine establishment A Fellow’s Rest. What is your appetite?” Tavion asked them with a friendly smile, though his stomach lurched.

The man with the book spoke. “My two fine companions will have a glass of your most delightful ale and I will just have a glass of milk.”

“Of course.” Tavion looked at his wife knowingly and told her to go fetch the drinks and to get Arthur to help her.

While Dalius left to fetch the beverages for the soldiers, the burned man asked, “I would like to have a conversation with you—may we sit?” Tavion nodded his head and waved to the table; the biggest one in the tavern. The burnt man sat first then implored Tavion to sit opposite him. The knights flanked Tavion, one on each side.

As everyone seated the burnt man opened his book while saying, “Before we begin, I realize I have not introduced myself and my companions properly. The knight sitting to your left is Michael Pride. The knight on your right is Lucas Ravant. I am Devon Simmons and you are Tavion, if I’m correct.”

After some hesitation Tavion acknowledged, “That is correct.”

“Well, Tavion now that we are all properly introduced, we may start this conversation.” But before Devon could even start, Dalius and their servant Arthur brought the drinks they had ordered.

The two knights were served Mesigner Reams, the finest ale Tavion’s tavern had to offer and Devon was brought his glass of fresh milk.

“Ah! Thank you for the drinks. Tavion you have such a fine lady,” Devon said menacingly, smiling and showing all his front white teeth—which were rare for the time.

“I appreciate your words,” Tavion said with not such a big smile for his teeth were not as polished and white as the scarred man who sat in front of him.

Dalius and Arthur went back into the kitchen to let them finish their conversation. The two knights chugged their drinks for their mouths were parched from the ride to the tavern from the city.

“Now that we're all served, we may finally talk. The reason I have come to your establishment is for after the war ended, as I'm sure you know, King Thyper banned all elves from France. He sent the honored ones to the Americas of the North. We have been made aware that there are some elves who are still in hiding. That is forbidden by King Thyper rule. In my investigation, I have discovered that the elves are hiding in this very location! So, before I send my two knights to destroy your fine tavern in search of these devilish elves I would like to offer you the opportunity for you to point them out. Understood?” Devon said it with no more smile but rather a serious tone that made the room cold and dark.

“I... I do not know what you are suggesting?” Tavion stuttered.

“THERE IS NO TIME FOR YOUR PETTY LIES!” Devon yelled as he stood up from the table. He yelled with such terror he even frightened the nearby wildlife that laid in the forest behind the tavern. Then as suddenly as he stood, Devon sat back down and more calmly said, “As I stated before I will send these knights to make sure this tavern is sent to blazes!”

Meanwhile, under the floorboards...

“You have such delightful food Mrs. Dalius and we are very grateful for it,” said a woman whose birth name was Shantier La Verg. She had sharp pointy ears that stuck out through her bright red hair.

“The blessing is all mine,” replied Dalius with sadness in her voice. “You are such kind-hearted people but now I must go and let you finish your meal.” Dalius rushed away and the woman elf brought the warm food to the rest of her family. Her family of elves.

There were five of them, all carrying the last name of their father, Brendan La Verg. They were in hiding not that they had done any heinous crimes, but because they were banned from the Kingdom of France for just being elves; for not being the same race of the royal bloodline of France or for being regular human-folk like Tavion.

The elves finished their meals and were going up to bring the silverware when they heard the shouting... a man whose voice they recognized; a man they feared screaming for the lives of the elves—none other than Devon Simmons. The Elf Hunter.

Back in the tavern...

“Understood, I will show you where they stay.” Tavion got up, his head lowered. He was soon followed by the two knights and Devon. They walked on the tavern's creaking, wooden floor, past the kitchen where Dalius and Arthur hovered. They knew what had happened, for everyone had heard the shouting of Devon.

Tavion stopped above a red leather carpet that was adorned with an embroidered lute. Sweat dripped from each pore of his skin. He dropped to his knees as if he were about to pray but instead pulled out the carpet revealing a trap door, leading to a cellar.

“Open it!” Devon demanded. Tavion did as he was told, for he feared his family would be murdered, or worse, brought to the city for a public execution.

The hatch opened and the elves scattered to the dark corners. The room filled with palpable fear, but not for Devon, for on his face there was a smile with all his teeth gleaming. He finally opened the book he was carrying and spoke: “CARA VERRA!”

Flames jumped from the book and headed towards the innocent elves but Tavion’s faithful servant, Arthur, interfered and jumped on Devon, diverting the flames of fire at the wooden tavern walls.

The knights defended Devon by piercing Arthur through the head and chest with their blades, killing him instantly. While this was happening, Tavion reached behind the door where he hid his crossbow that had an emblem with an arrow going through a crown. He fired the crossbow, puncturing the skull of Lucas Ravant, making him drop to the ground.

The other knight charged with his sword behind Tavion’s back to Dalius who was trying to help the elves escape. With one fell swoop of a short sword, Dalius was decapitated.

Her head rolled towards Tavion.

Tavion, furious, dropped his bow and picked up the long blade of the fallen knight and swung it through the chest of the knight that had killed his beloved. The blade pierced the armor and came out of his back.

Devon pushed Arthur off him and got up. He reached for his book and cast another spell sending a fireball towards the elf Shantier La Verg and her husband making them both burst into flames, internally combusting into ashes.

The two remaining elves who had just witnessed the murder of their parents whom they loved dearly, decided to run away. Devon, weakened from the two previous spells, was still full of

rage and ready to set them ablaze, like he did to their parents. Though before he could cast the spell again, Tavion rushed in, cutting off the arm that was holding the book of spells. The youngling elves were able to scamper away and escape in the nearby forest. Devon, bleeding out, uttered his last words, “You will pa... pay badly for th... this.”

After these words were spoken, Tavion swung the long sword at Devon's neck, with whatever strength he had left, but only making it halfway through. So he pulled the blade out and swung it again, fully detaching his head from the rest of his body.

Tavion fell to his knees in anguish, while the tavern he'd put his blood, sweat and tears into went down in flames, the four walls around him collapsing to the ground. The last words he uttered were, “ I shall pay nothing, for I have lost everything.”

His tavern, A Fellow's Rest, was engulfed in flames and so was he. The only thing left was his garden and his unplanted tomato seeds.

The End

For Our Women
By Kathryn Gonzalez

What happened to loving our women,
Caring for our women, being there for our women.
But most importantly, respecting our women.
Women are scared to go out alone, dress a certain way
Or even take public transportation.
In the UK a 33 year old woman wearing regular clothes,
went missing and was raped by a police officer.
How is it *that* someone we are supposed to trust and feel safe
around?

Now I know you're gonna say, "Not all men."
And that's very true, not all men do this kind of thing. Why?
Because they were educated properly,
And told how to treat women,
Told to listen when a woman SAYS NO.

We should treat our women better,
We should thank our women for giving us life,
We should appreciate our women for being able to do what they
do.

We have to give back to our women.
We have to stop hurting our women.
We have to start helping our women.
We have to start fighting for our women.

Not only do we have to give back to our women,
But we have to be there for our women.

WE HAVE TO GROW UP AND REALIZE WHAT THE
FUCK IS HAPPENING TO OUR WOMEN.

My Day One: Akim
By Camron Gordon

There is no one else I'd go to hell and back for.
The friends I have now keep me sane,
they will be with me even if I lack fame.
Someone I can talk to when I'm down
to change my frown.
Someone to make me laugh
when I'm in a dark place
to brighten the room
and show me the way out.
Akim has been my friend through everything.
Heartbreak, a loss in my family, a broken bone.
In the thirteen years I've known him
I've helped him through a lot as well.
We've always been there for each other
And I wouldn't ask for anything more from my brother.

The Return of Jinn Lucifer

By Arshad Kachchi Mohamed

One day, a boy named Arshad was with his friends David and Jacob. They were playing video games and were extremely bored. They all went outside to ride their bikes and look for a real-life adventure. They stopped when they saw an abandoned mosque. They wanted to go inside but Arshad and David were too scared. So they all went back home telling each other stories about that place.

Jacob was able to rally the troops, encouraging them to build up their courage and go back. They went back to the abandoned mosque at midnight. They entered the mosque with a flashlight to check everything out.

Jacob left Arshad and David and went into the basement but called out to them later. He showed them this book he had found and Arshad screamed at Jacob, “DON’T TOUCH THE BOOK!”

Jacob and David asked, “Why?!” Arshad then told them the story about Jinn Lucifer.

To make a long story short Jinn Lucifer is like a devil and he has a lot of power. He was put in a dungeon because he tried to make the world his slaves. But someone named Jinn Alex, who is a good Jinn, stopped him and Jinn Lucifer was imprisoned in the dungeon. The legend said that if the book was opened, Jinn Lucifer would be released and he would surely attempt to do the same thing again.

They decided to leave the abandoned mosque. Arshad gave them a green jade bracelet to protect them from the Jinn. The bracelet would turn red if someone got possessed or they were two feet away from someone who was. Arshad had got the bracelet from his grandpa, before he passed away. He had given Arshad a

couple of the bracelets and told him the story of the Jinns. That's how he knew what the book was in the first place!

The boys all wore their bracelets and went to sleep. Except Jacob. He thought what Arshad said was stupid. He took off the bracelet and snuck out and went back to the mosque. He went downstairs to the basement and found the book again. Then he opened it and read, “باسم (جين لوسيفر) سأطلق سراح الجن” which means “by the name of Jinn Lucifer, I shall release the Jinn.”

Then a wind started circling him like a tornado. He was finally getting scared and realized his two friends might have actually been on to something. The wind stopped as suddenly as it had started and a figure appeared, standing behind him. The hair on the back of Jacob's neck stood up and he turned around and screamed when he saw the figure towering above him.

He screamed for “HELP!”

The figure told him in a steady and solemn voice, “Calm down, Jacob.” He introduced himself as Jinn Lucifer.

Jacob remembered Arshad's grandpa's story and started to run away from him, but Lucifer used his powers and teleported him back.

Lucifer said, “I will give you one chance to join me and help me conquer the world.”

Then Lucifer said, “In return, you could have anything in the world. Anything! You just have to help me.”

Jacob knew it was an offer too good to be true, so he disagreed. Jinn Lucifer then let him leave.

“That was easy enough!” Jacob thought to himself. But what Jacob didn't know was that the Jinn was inside of him. Possessing him. In fact, Lucifer could possess Jacob at any time he wanted. He could also hear and see whatever Jacob was doing.

Jacob ran home and woke up Arshad and David. He explained what happened and they both got mad at Jacob. But they didn't know what to do. All of a sudden, Jacob started attacking Arshad and David. They were both confused and held him down. Then Arshad realised their bracelets had turned red which only meant one thing.... Jacob was possessed by Jinn Lucifer!

David didn't know what to do. But Arshad did! He had learned what to do from his grandfather's story. Arshad tied up Jacob and went to get the Quran. He started to read it and Jacob started screaming. When a possessed person screams from the Quran, that means it's working. Arshad read it and didn't stop reading until Jacob stopped screaming. When Jacob stopped screaming Arshad knew the Jinn had left his body and gone back to Lucifer.

Arshad quickly gave Jacob a cup of water. Jacob started to cry and apologized to Arshad and David. They both quickly forgave him and Arshad asked Jacob to help them stop Lucifer. He agreed and they went to work.

They couldn't stop Lucifer without Jinn Alex. David asked Arshad, "How are we gonna find him?"

Arshad replied, "He lives inside the mountains of Los Angeles, California."

David asked Arshad to clarify, "What do you mean he lives *inside* the mountain?"

Arshad told him, "Jinn Alex has the power to do that! He made the inside of the mountains his home."

Arshad, David and Jacob all bought tickets and went to California. They then went to the mountains at night. Arshad read the verse "جِئِ الْيَكْسَ نَحْنُ نَسْتَدْعِيكَ لِلْمُسَاعَدَةِ" from the Quran which means, "Jinn Alex we summon you for help." Nothing happened.

They tried reading the passage together. Still, nothing happened. They tried a couple more times and were just about to leave the mountain when all of a sudden they were all teleported to the inside of the mountain by Jinn Alex.

They were all tied up. Jinn Alex was angry. He demanded to know how they had found him. Arshad explained and the Jinn untied them. Arshad also explained what Jacob did and that he was extremely sorry. Alex then said he wouldn't want to ever face Lucifer again. They asked him why and he replied with, "I just don't care." Arshad could tell that Jinn Alex was actually scared. But when Arshad asked him he got mad again.

Eventually he did tell the boys why he was scared. Jinn Alex told them that he almost got killed fighting Lucifer and didn't ever want to see him again. They all begged him to help saying that he was the only one who was as strong enough to stop Lucifer. He finally relented, only to get the stupid boys out of his sight and teleport them back home.

The boys all stared at each other and didn't know what to do but face Lucifer themselves. They searched everywhere for Lucifer until Lucifer found them—and captured them! They couldn't do anything right!

Lucifer tied them up and took out a shiny sharp sword to slaughter them; but someone stopped Lucifer in his tracks. He was frozen in time and space. Then, all of a sudden, Lucifer got pushed and fell to the ground. When Lucifer realized what had happened, he said with a sneer, "So we meet again, Jinn Alex!"

Alex had just enough time to untie the boys and gave a book to Arshad that he had never seen before. Jinn Alex instructed Arshad to read the first verse of the book, when he told him to. But it was too late. Lucifer cornered Alex and had his pointing sword poking into his neck.

Alex screamed “NOW!” and Arshad read the verse which said “أنا أطلبك بالعودة إلى الزنزانة” which meant, “I DEMAND YOU TO GO BACK INTO THE DUNGEON!”

Right when the word “dungeon” was read, Lucifer started to vanish into dust and returned back to the dungeon. Alex took the book back from Arshad so nothing like this would happen again. Arshad and his friends thanked him. Alex smiled and disappeared.

They were all happy that they didn’t die that day. They all went back home and started to live their regular lives. The next day Jacob called Alex and Arshad and asked them if they wanted to play video games...

THE END!

But Then...
By Arianna Koutrias

We will never be equal
No matter the people
We will always have a sequel
That can't defeat this evil.

I grew up privileged
I grew up white
But I am a woman
Still fighting for my rights.

I can't get payed the same as men,
Can't go for a walk past 10
My friend Ben, he understands
But it still happens again and again.

But then..

The people getting killed for their skin colour
No justice to make them feel smaller?
Why don't we discolour?
“No” said the privileged scholars.

But then..

Woman gets shot for the “scarf” on her head
Nobody speaks, she's on the sidewalk, left to bled.
Soon she's dead
You know what the justice system said?
Nothing, they are airheads.

Only do anything for the bread.

But then..

Stolen sisters

Facing twisters

First nations

They built the foundations

Now they steal their locations.

But then..

You must pray

To not be gay

You'll get hurt

For wearing a skirt

There will be a murder

For what they prefer

But then..

Who do we blame?

Nothing to ease the pain.

What do we claim?

Others laugh like it's a game.

Some are born with privilege

It's a shame

While others fight for it

Say their names.

But then..

Broken Friendship
By Anthony Persechino

BRIING BRIING! Suddenly everyone shoots their books up in the air screaming, “SUMMER!”

It was finally summer vacation, the day we’d all been waiting for since the beginning of September. My best friends since birth Ethan and Charles made so many plans, like visiting water parks, amusement parks and going to watch the new Matrix.

Charles shouted, “Hey Alex and Ethan, you wanna come over and play some Call of Duty.”

I replied, “Sure, I’ll come.”

Ethan said, “I’ll come also, but I’ve got to be home for supper. My mom is ordering Antonino Pizza.”

As we were walking to Charles’s mansion, three gang members came up to us pointing a knife, shouting in a squeaky irritating voice, “Empty your pockets!”

I did not want to fight because I had been hiding my fighting skills from Ethan and Charles. But all of a sudden one of the guys punched Charles in the face, so I did what I knew was best, and fought back. I immediately punched the guy back, sending him 30 feet as if a 16 wheeler truck had hit him.

The guys ran off. Charles said in a confused voice, “Thanks Alex, but what did you just do?”

I whispered nervously, “There is something I’ve never told you guys, but when I was born I was given the powers of super strength but I have no idea how.”

Charles mumbled in a sketchy tone, “Ummmm, okay.”

We kept walking to Charles’ house until eventually we made it to his mansion. We were playing Call of Duty all night until, out of the blue, Charles said, “Hey Alex, do you have any weakness and if so what is it?”

I replied, “Yeah I do, it’s gold. Any type of gold will rob my powers from me.” It started to get late so me and Ethan decided to head home.

A couple days later after just staying inside playing Call of Duty, Ethan called me asking if he wanted to go play basketball. I told him, “Yeah, meet me at my house and I’ll call Charles.”

“Ring Ring,” I heard on the other end. “You’ve reached Charles, leave a message.” I told myself, that’s weird. Usually he always answers. But I shook it off and went to play basketball with Ethan.

Exactly three days had passed with Charles not answering my or Ethan’s calls. We started getting worried. But suddenly we got a text saying, “Hey guys, I’m sorry for not answering. My dad took my phone away. If you want to pass by my house tomorrow we can go swimming and my dad will make his famous burgers.”

Ethan and I replied, “AWESOME! We will be there!” Ethan and I woke up bright and early on a beautiful day to prepare bathing suits and towels and we started to bike to Charles’s house.

As the day of swimming and much more fun activities went on, it started to get really late so Charles asked, “Do you guys want to sleep over?”

I said, “Yeah, I’m down,” but Ethan couldn’t because he had already made plans with his grandmother. So it was just going to be me and Charles. As hours went on my eyes felt so heavy and I eventually passed out.

All of a sudden during the night I felt someone grab me. I woke up and saw Charles in front of me. But his house was different and I was locked in a chair with solid gold chains keeping me down and helpless.

I chuckled, “Ha ha, so funny, Charles. Now get me out of this.”

He replied, “No, you are staying here until you tell me how I can get your strength. If you do not comply with me I will kill you and your family.”

I saw Charles had around 10 to 15 guards patrolling the area and at that moment I thought I was over. I replied to Charles, “I don't know how I have my power. I was born like this.”

Charles took a needle and extracted a blood sample out of my arm. I told Charles, “Taking my blood will not work. My cells will overpower yours and you will die.”

Charles responded, “Then I will have to find a way to mix bloods through various tests.”

As four days passed, Ethan was wondering where me and Charles were because we hadn't answered in so long. So Ethan being a geek, decided to hack into me and Charles's phone to find our tracker and see where we were. Ethan was shocked to find that we were still together; he felt left out and decided to go confront us.

As Ethan was walking up to Charles's house he heard me screaming, “HELP! HELP!”

Ethan walked towards the screaming voice until he found a tiny window near the basement. At the moment he saw me chained up in gold, with guards surrounding me, Ethan told himself, “I've got to get him out.”

Ethan ran home to make a plan to get me out. After five hours of planning, he made a perfect plan. He was going to go through the vents with a blow torch able to burn at 1200 degrees. Ethan took his bike back to Charles's house, hiding it behind a thick bush. Ethan walked into a vent at the exit to the house and popped it open and started crawling in very quietly. After 30 minutes of trying to follow my screaming voice, Ethan finally found the exit to find me.

Luckily for Ethan, there were no guards. Ethan jumped out the vent. Alex turned around to see Ethan. My face brightened up like the sun and I had a smile from ear to ear. I whispered, "Ethan get me out quick, before the guards are done lunch break."

Ethan started melting away all the gold while I felt my powers coming back. As soon as both chains were off a loud manly voice yelled, "HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

With a blink of an eye I punched him so that we could get past, but all the guards came running to the room, with Charles hiding behind them.

I told Ethan, "I have to fight, we can't run. So I will fight and you focus on getting Charles."

I started to fight all of them while Ethan was chasing Charles around the mansion. After fighting back for about ten minutes, I took all the guards down with only one enemy remaining being Charles.

I met up with Ethan asking, "Ethan, where did Charles go?" Ethan pointed at the door quietly replying, "He's in there." I kicked the door down to see Charles hiding like a baby behind a desk. I grabbed the zip ties on the desk. I grabbed Charles, tied him up and told him, "You're going to jail."

As we were waiting for the police to come pick Charles up, Ethan and I were disappointed that our close friend betrayed us. I asked Charles, "Why would you do this?" Charles did not even answer; he just shrugged his shoulders, keeping his head down. As the police were putting Charles in the car he started to cry.

After several days I got a phone call from the police department telling me that Charles had been charged for kidnapping, which got him an eight year prison sentence. I never heard news of Charles from that day on.

Skinny
By Elias Pyrros

Different day, same shit. Wake up in the morning, put on the same grey sweats and black hoodie with a black hat, then I go out and do what I do, Skinny thought to himself.

Skinny stayed posted on the corner down the block making eye contact with the regular customers that he served. After Skinny was done serving the customers he headed to the grocery store and did some shopping. He had to get groceries for his mom and his little brother, Ryan. He'd been taking care of his little bro and mom since his dad went to jail. When he got back to the crib his lil' bro was on the floor crying and his mom was on the phone arguing with her drug dealer, ignoring Ryan. Skinny picked up Ryan and brought him to the table and made him something to eat.

His mom walked up to the table and sat down. "Skinny, can I borrow 40\$?" she asked.

"Are you kidding me?" he said. "You already owe me forty from yesterday. I'm not supporting your habits anymore."

"I'm getting my welfare check tomorrow. Please Skinny, I won't ask again," she said.

"No, Tina! You always ask me for money. I'm the only person here bringing money home because you're too lazy to get a job, or too busy shooting needles in your arm."

She threw some clothes on and stormed out. "I'll be back later tonight. You have to stay home and watch your little brother until I'm back," she said.

Skinny spent the afternoon teaching his little brother the alphabet. They watched some cartoons and coloured together. At 11 p.m. Tina came home. Skinny and Ryan were asleep on the couch.

Tina was completely dizzy and out of it. She had a black eye and a cut on her lip. She decided that she was going to get some sleep, but on her way to her room she just collapsed. The loud noise of her head bouncing off the floor woke up Skinny. "What the hell was that?" Skinny thought to himself. His lil' brother was still asleep, skinny got up and slowly approached where the noise came from. "HOLY SHIT! Mom, are you okay?" he said.

Tina wasn't able to respond. Skinny didn't want to but had no choice but to call the police. The police arrived pretty quick, Skinny and Ryan went into the ambulance with Tina.

"I'm scared. Is my mom going to die?" Ryan asked.

"No she's not. She's just in a deep sleep and the only people that could wake her up right now are the doctors," Skinny said.

They had to leave their mom at the hospital so they could go home and get cleaned up and get some food. Skinny asked his girlfriend if she could baby sit Ryan while skinny took care of some business. He waited until his girlfriend came over, then he headed straight to 63rd and Saint Laurent's Street. That's where his mom's drug dealer stayed.

Ben Robinson, aka Big Red, was the main drug dealer from 63rd Street to 69th Street. Skinny knew that he couldn't just walk up there and mess up Big Red because Skinny wasn't armed but Big Red was. So skinny hid behind a wall from a distance to watch Big Red's surroundings and wait until he was alone so he could make his move. After a while Big Red started walking alone. That's when Skinny ran up behind him and completely blacked out with rage. Skinny laid rights and lefts until Big Red hit the floor. Skinny continued by stomping on Red's head. His face was covered in blood and he could barely move.

"IF YOU EVER PUT YOUR HANDS ON MY MOTHER AGAIN I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!" Skinny screamed. Big Red's boys came out around the corner and started letting off

shots. Skinny got shot in the leg. He couldn't get up. He was there right beside Big Red, both laid out on the floor. The police approached the scene and Big Red and Skinny got arrested.

Skinny was put in prison and denied bail because he had a history with the police and a criminal record. He was sentenced to 12 years for aggravated assault in MCC Chicago's federal bureau of prisons. Skinny was being held in the same prison that his dad had been in for the past 26 years. Skinny didn't really know his dad, but him and his mom used to visit him once in a while.

"At least I have my dad I could talk to during the breaks outside," Skinny thought. Skinny entered the block and as soon as he put his stuff down this old guy started approaching him.

Skinny had his fists up ready to fight. "Put them fists down, boy. I'm here to teach you, not school you. Now let me see that paperwork," the old guy said. Skinny put his fists down and pulled out the paperwork.

"Alright, everything's good boy. Now I'm gonna tell you the rules to this place. If you break them, we'll break you."

The old guy explained the rules to Skinny. After he was done breaking down the rules, Skinny had a question. "Do you know Mason Miller?" he asked.

"Of course I know Mason Miller, he was the first person to kick my ass in this place. That's how we became friends. How do you know Mason Miller, boy?"

"That's my dad. I was wondering if you can tell me where his cell is."

"Oh, um, I'm sorry I gotta be the one to break it to you but Mason Miller passed away two years ago."

"WHAT?! How did he die?" Skinny asked.

The old guy pointed at a cellmate. "See that guy over there. He's the one that shanked your pops. In here you gotta put in

work to get respect. Mason Miller was a close friend of mine. Come by my cell during rec time and I'll hook you up. If you do this with the people that got the keys to the yard, you're safe. Fail or snitch, you gonna wish you were dead, boy."

Skinny didn't want any problems with the guys from prison. His only concern was to get out of this place. But then he found out his dad was killed and that was something that he had to take care of.

Skinny went by the old guy's cell. There was an inmate standing in front of the old guy's cell, he was about six foot four and tatted all over his body. "Alright, let him in," the old guy said. Skinny went into that cell not knowing if he would ever come out of it again. He came out a couple minutes later but he now had a shank with him the size of his palm.

Skinny was told to wait until it was yard time to kill his father's killer. A couple hours went by and it was yard time. Skinny had a lot of different emotions flowing through his body. Skinny was furious. He couldn't stop thinking about who was going to take care of his little brother or if his mom was okay or the fact that his dad got killed. Skinny was determined to kill the cellmate who ended his father's life. And that's exactly what he did, he walked up to the cell mate and shanked him multiple times in front of everyone.

A whole fight broke out between everyone in the yard. Guards took control and Skinny was fucked.

He was switched to solitary. A guard walked Skinny to his new environment. Right before shoving Skinny in solitary confinement, the guard said to him, "Welcome to hell, bitch."

Days went by and Skinny was all alone in a dark room with no windows, mold on the wall, cement for a bed and for the toilet,

there was no toilet, just a hole in the ground connected to the sewer pipe.

After days of being isolated and a loss of sense of time, Skinny contemplated suicide. He looked around his environment and realized the only way to do this was to run and smash his head on the wall.

He ran into the wall head first. It didn't kill him but blood was leaking so he did it again. Skinny went unconscious. He had a deep gash in the middle of his head causing him to bleed out. He started dreaming and thought to himself, "Am I in that forever sleep?"

Skinny got flashbacks from when he was small, when his little brother was born, when he had his first birthday, and the decisions that he made to get himself in here. But one vision that paused was the last time he'd seen his father. And slowly that vision morphed into his father. Skinny became a little boy again. Tears went through his face and he was in disbelief.

"Dad?"

"Who the fuck you think this is. I know I've been gone for a while but I know I haven't been gone long enough for you to forget your daddy."

Skinny was shocked, he had no words. "Wipe those tears off your face. Daddy didn't raise no pocket holder, he raised a warrior." Skinny erupted with anger.

"Fuck you! When you had the chance to play father you got up and left. When Momma was crying, I didn't see you helping her. I was. When Ryan was born you weren't there, I was. When the rent was due you didn't help with the money, I did. You were just a thought."

"Look, I can't apologize for the things I did, but this ain't about me, and it ain't about you. This is about your brother. If you don't get outta here right now I see the future and your brother

ain't in it because he's dead. Because he's going to make the same mistake as you and I did." Skinny just nodded his head that he was listening.

"You're gonna wake up in the infirmary, wait until the nurse gets distracted and you're going to take the sleeping pills from her bag. It's gonna be on your left. Once you get the pills you're gonna tell the nurse you need to use the bathroom. When you get in the bathroom you're gonna see an opening and climb through the vent. In five hundred meters you're gonna reach the water tank, slip in the pills and then go back to bed. You need to do this right because there ain't no second chances. It's either you escape or die trying. And remember son, I love you."

Skinny woke up believing it was all just a dream, until he realized he was in the infirmary. The nurse was busy and he saw the pills and just like his father told him, the plan was executed. This was where he realized that wasn't just a dream, it was magic. He waited until everyone was knocked out and went to the closest guard and took his keys and his clothes. Skinny then headed to the control room and opened the gates, right before stepping outside he took in that fresh air and disappeared.

Although police searched for Skinny and headlines said most daring escapes, Skinny and his brother were never seen again.

Rocca Life
Maria Rocca

I have over 40 years of memories
You can feel them
In the little cracks and scratches covering me
I am made of wood
The colour of caramel
People use me for homework
They depend on me
They lean on me

Cry cry cry
The tears running down your face
The Rocca's are strong
The pain is undeniable
We go through the pain everyday
Slowly over time the loss goes away
It took 17 years for it to be gone
Life comes with unprepared feelings
The feeling of my mom walking in
Waking up in the morning with all the healing
Thinking
Is my mom okay today?

Life comes with changes and challenges
I see my mom struggle because she's alone
Life is unfair it never balances
My life is a whole rollercoaster
Waking with no warning and your world might change
One day someones here
The next they're gone

Talk all the hate
Thinking your cool
Keep throwing the shade

My single mom is also my dad
I wish her happy mother days
I wish her happy father's day also
She is strong
She is independent
She has a big heart
She is funny
She is always there for anyone

The Birth of the Unicoïn

By Christopher Vincelli

One day Matthew got home from a long day of hustling on the corner street and saw his parents both crying at the kitchen table. He couldn't believe it because he had never seen his dad cry a day in his life.

“Mom, what's wrong?” Matthew asked.

“Nothing, Matthew,” she said. “Don't worry about it. Just go to your room.”

“Mom, please. Tell me, please.”

“I SAID GO TO YOUR ROOM!”

He went up to his room with a big frown on his face because all he wanted to do was help. He then overheard them talking and heard that they lost their jobs working at the factory and that they couldn't pay rent.

Matthew knew he could help them. He'd been selling weed at the subway in the Bronx but his parents didn't know about it. He kept it on the low, no one knew anything about what he did, not even his best friends.

Later on that night, Matthew was on his computer looking at how to code his own crypto currency and learned really fast. In a matter of two hours he had made his first crypto. The reason he made it was because he didn't want to sell weed anymore, he wanted to see if his crypto could blow up like Bitcoin. So later on after searching online for a crypto course, he found Crypto Paradise, a paid membership that teaches you tips and tricks.

In the meantime, he had to get back on the streets to make some money to pay for the crypto course. On Friday night, he went out on the streets with pockets full of weed trying to find hippies to sell to. He then found this one girl talking to a guy, but

didn't think anything of it. Later on that night the same girl asked him to sell her an ounce of weed, but she wasn't with the guy any more. So he didn't think anything of it. He then pulled out his bag and the guy that was with the girl came out of nowhere and pulled out a gun.

The robber said, "Give me everything you have before I blow your brains."

Matthew replied, "Please don't hurt me, I'll give you everything."

The robber then ran off with all his stock and left Matthew traumatized and speechless because he didn't know what he was going to tell his plug that fronted him his stock. He had a debt with his dealer of 645 dollars.

He couldn't sleep that night, that's all he had on his mind. He couldn't believe someone pulled out a gun on him. He finally realized the easy way wasn't the easy way after all. Selling drugs was dangerous and now he owed his plug money with no source of income.

He decided to get a job at Mcdonald's full time as well as a night time job as a security guard. He worked hard and barely slept to get his first paychecks. After one month of hard work he paid off his debt and his mom and dad's debt as well. Now that he and his parents were debt free they could relax a little, but not fully because they were still broke.

Matthew was doing lots and lots of research to create his own crypto, until he finally had enough knowledge to create one. Only thing he had trouble with was finding the right name to call it. After hours of being stuck on it, he fell into a deep sleep.

In his dream he was in a strange candy land full of weird fantastical creatures. Suddenly a unicorn came galloping towards him. It's horn was glowing hot pink. The unicorn ran right through him which made him wake up in shock.

He sat up in bed and finally came up with the name for his new currency... Unicoïn.

He had no clue that Unicoïn was about to change his life forever, and that it was all a matter of time.

His parents were very thankful and apologized for not trusting him and getting mad at him. His mom asked him if she could get a job at Mcdonald's too.

Matthew said, "Mom, I would never let you work there. You're better than that."

His mom replied, "Oh sweetheart, it's just that we have no money right now."

Matthew said, "Well, let's go for a walk downtown and find you a good job." After a long day downtown and a big discussion with AT&T, she got a job as the manager of the sales department.

Meanwhile Matthew started working on his business idea for Unicoïn. With his dad's help they decided that they would put their next pay all into promotions. They then came up with a plan to get into Trump Tower and wait for Donald so that they could preach their idea. He bought a suit at Hugo Boss and wrote a little script to say when he started approaching Trump.

A week went by, and it was said that Trump would be in town to discuss business on Wall Street. Matthew heard that and said, "Great! What perfect timing."

He told his dad and his dad said, "Great son, don't miss your shot. You got this."

The big day finally came and Matthew was extremely nervous and started thinking twice about everything. He began questioning himself. He asked his dad, "Do I look good? Will he take me as a joke? Is my idea good enough?"

His dad looked at him and said, “Son, this opportunity could make you rich and you’ve worked so hard to get here. Don’t start doubting yourself now. Just, go do what you have to do. You got this.”

Matthew shook off those nerves and waited for the bus that took him straight to Wall Street. The bus arrived and he was on wall street within 20 minutes. He entered the building with full confidence and waited for Trump with a document about his invention.

About two hours later, just when Matthew was about to give up, the man himself, Donald J. Trump walked into the building with a smile and looked right at Matthew. Matthew was extremely nervous and handed him over the document and said, “Hey Donald, this is my invention and I was looking to see if you were interested in buying it or investing in it? If anything, my number’s on the back, give me a call.”

Donald said, “Great, I’ll give it a look and get back to you.”

About a month went by and Matthew was feeling very down thinking that Trump thought his idea was stupid. Later that day, he got a call.

Matthew said, “Hello?”

He could hear Trump’s voice. “Hey Matthew, I looked at your invention and let me tell you, that’s a great idea you have there. I’ll offer you two million dollars for a hundred percent of your invention.”

Matthew never even heard of that much money. He was so excited that the first words that came out of his mouth were, “YES! I’ll take it.”

Trump had a little giggle, and said, “Perfect. Meet me at Trump Tower on Wall Street and I’ll write you a check.”

Matthew said, “Perfect,” and hung up the phone. He called a taxi right away to Trump Tower.

Meanwhile, he didn’t know that he was about to make the biggest mistake of his life selling Unicorn. It eventually went on to become a billion dollar crypto currency.

However, Matthew and his family were satisfied with their two million dollars. He went to Trump tower, got the check and after that New York City never heard of Matthew and his family ever again.

The Alley and the Rats
Anonymous

Countries, states, names, locations and peoples in this story are all purely fiction.

The world is filled with constant problems, some you sort out day by day and others you just throw under the bus. My name is Carlos. I'm 23 and Latino. I live in La Barrio where poverty floods the streets and the smoke thickens, most days are littered with tears.

Mi madre used to tell me to stay out of trouble.

I wake up on Sunday, 5 a.m., bright and early. The first thing I do is pray to God and thank him that I rose to see another sunrise and thank him for protecting mi familia. I then get out of my bed, am greeted by my kids with my wife, and get dressed for work. My wife says to me worried, "Why do you work yourself to death? It ain't gonna do no one any good."

I sigh and say, "Dont worry about it."

I work in construction and am working "under the table," meaning I get no insurance and am paid less than the average wage. As if that wasn't enough, my colleagues hate me. Hate where I come from and how I look. They don't just hate me, they hate who I am.

Today was different. The day went by almost silently and even the sound of the drilling, the jackhammering and the destruction of concrete walls sounded like a distant ripple off of the water in a nearby puddle. The day was calm, the air silent and even stiff. I just went to do my usual deconstruction and decided on a wall that I had never seen before which needed to be taken down.

I muttered, **“Just as I always have and just as I always will.”**

I took up my sledgehammer and started on a 10x10 concrete wall until night.

That night, slamming my hammer against that wall until my fingers bled and my hands shook. Faster, I swing and say softly, **“Just as I always have, just as I always will.”** I go on faster and faster, almost shouting **“Just as I always have, just as I always will!”**

The swinging stopped and I dropped my sledgehammer. I look at my hands, smothered in blood, blisters and calluses, and I remember my mothers words: *stay out of trouble, mijo*. I quickly cast my mother’s words out.

The night came to a close and my wife greeted me as I came through the door, silently. My kids were asleep and I didn't want to wake them, so I crept over to my room and closed my door. I laid in bed and told myself that I had got to find another way, that I had to get my family a better life. The night passed like water flowing under the rocks.

The morning after, I decided to meet up with one of my cousins, Paco and his friend Garcia. I knew Paco ever since we were kids, so for almost thirteen years, he was always a tough kid and had a knack for finding trouble. We met on Grand Boulevard and we stopped to talk for a little bit.

Paco said ecstatically, “Yo, how you doin’ ése? It's been so long, homes.”

I quickly replied, “I been good, y’ know. Work’s been tough but I’m keeping me and my family alive but ayo, listen dog, we gotta get moving. Staying on the corner ain’t too smart.”

Before today I had never had a bad bone in my body, but today I felt like I could self-destruct. I followed my cousin to his

crib and we chilled out for about four, five hours smoking. It was 6 p.m. and the sun was starting to set very slowly.

I asked Paco, "When's Garcia getting here?"

After he took a hefty inhale, he looked at me and smiled, exhaling words and smoke at the same time, "Chill fool. He'll be here soon enough."

He passed the *ses* and almost as if we spoke of *los Diablo*, Garcia walked in with a black duffle bag and said, "We're ready to go home."

I looked at Paco and he said, "This is your big chance right here, cuz."

Garcia unzipped the bag while my cousin said, "El Sueño Americano," or the American Dream.

The bag opened revealing a small armament, pistols and submachine guns all in one place, while cases of bullets sat in the other pockets of the bag.

Garcia told us, "We're gonna go jack some rich white kids." I had done stick ups before so I wasn't nervous. Garcia explained, "This kid hangs down near a run-down club, hangs with some of his boys and sticks up kids and hoodlums."

The Next Day

Me, Paco and Garcia were sitting in the car and we saw him, this short, blond kid. I don't even know his name, but he had some goons around him, friends. And just like that, we knew our mark was at the spot on time.

We crept around the block, driving slowly in a black lowrider, which is essentially a really broken down car, made to look new. We let some time pass and we smoked. As we finished, the kid walked out with his little crew, wearing a gold chain and some studs on his ears. The size of the rocks on this kid's fingers were

unreal, so we got out of the car and followed his crew to the alley nearby.

Garcia pulled the car up real fast in the alley and we all jumped out with our weapons drawn and loaded. The kids were all freaking out and we were just laughing. We had never seen people react like that when we came out. Paco was checking the kids, getting their jewels and cash. Garcia was aimed on them and I had a sawed off pointing and two others holding them there. Paco was looking through the clothes and bags ecstatically for cash, drugs and jewels, laughing and smiling as he rummaged through.

It seemed like just two seconds passed then Garcia looked at me, laughed, and all I heard was bang. I looked over, as time stopped, and I saw the remainder of my cousin's head. I dived towards a nearby dumpster immediately and Garcia hit two of the guys with maybe fifteen bullets each. Garcia was going to reload and just as he got in his clip, he got shot five times.

It was me and two other men and all I got was two buckshots. In a split second I hopped out and shot one while me and the others shot each other

I dropped and he went flying. I looked at my chest and saw the damage. Slowly the pain coursed down my legs like a waterfall. I thought about my kids as the burning in my chest started and as the air slowly drained, the blood slowly filled my lungs.

*Reporter: The evening came to a halt as six men were shot and killed. The names of these men were as follows: Carlos *****, Paco Reyes, Garcia Herrera, John McCarver, Desmond Styles and Joseph Flores. The police say it was most likely gang related. No further statements have been made.*

“He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”
— Nietzsche

Gone Man in Cold Blood

By Patrick Dubé

Jeffery Cane's corpse was found outside, in a bush near his apartment building by the police at 2:34 a.m. and the police wanted to find out who performed the act. There was a burn mark on his chest, a stab wound in his bicep and two bullet wounds. The two wounds were on his bicep and also under Jeff's right ribs.

We knew that the bullet was taken out with purple latex gloves because there was a piece of the glove there. The stab wound wasn't just any wound. The weapon that they used was shaped like a square.

There was Jeff, the dead body, George the next door apartment neighbor, Tim, the elevator man, Bill, the ex of Jeff's girlfriend Alexa, and Alexa who lived with Jeff, but worked night shifts. Bill was Jeff's best friend, but Jeff recently ripped Bill off. They got into an argument over cash that Jeff did not give to Bill.

The elevator man liked to follow Jeff around. Bill just came back from vacation and the police noticed one of Bill's telescopic luggage handles had been broken. A telescopic handle was the handle used to pull your luggage.

It was 3:30am and Officer Joe Travis read his new murder case: Jeffery Cane, male, age 44, found dead. Officer Travis got into his BMW and drove to 5842 Tabo Street. He was going to meet with Alexa for some questions. When he arrived, he had a quick glance of the house. He saw a very nice red dress and the rest of the house looked like a pigpen, as well as an untidy house.

Officer Travis thought that he was seeing a spacecraft in front of Alexa's house, but he told himself that he was hallucinating because he saw a spacecraft. Then he remembered what he heard last night on Channel 4 News: there were dark

green aliens from Jupiter that were spotted near the lake eating humans and their guts.

Officer Travis didn't believe that aliens were true until no one answered the door at Alexa's house and he took a glance into the side window and thought, *Look at all the drunk people all over the place! This place smells like no one has showered for a few weeks! These people shouldn't be here. It looks like these people broke in by the back door.*

Not only was there a knife with blood on it at Alexa's house, there were also a fingerprint that did not match anyone's and it was not even human! Officer Travis looked at the fingerprint carefully and he suspected that it could be an alien print. He saw something shining out back and he saw a long ship with aliens inside of the ship! The large creatures had big eyes that stuck out of their head, no lips, freaky little teeth and they had blood all over their face and hands.

A few days earlier, when Officer Travis had come by to Alexa's house to ask her a few more questions and ask for her permission to look around her home, he didn't find Alexa. She was eaten by aliens. Officer Travis saw her head on a slant, leaning against the wall with her mouth open but there were no teeth in her mouth. Officer Travis saw a leg hanging out the window with another leg rolling casually down the stairs. A heart was on the couch and all of Alexa's teeth were literally on the carpet.

Bill left the country and he hadn't ever had problems with the police. Officer Travis learned that Bill had left the country because he went to Bill's house but no one was there. No cars, no lights on, no more furniture. Officer Travis got anxious because it looked suspicious.

Buzzzzzz.

"Hello. Who is there?" the elevator man said.

"Police! Open up. My name is Officer Travis."

The elevator man was far underground and he teleported to the lobby to see who was at the door. When he saw the police, he got really scared and anxious and started to spasm because he thought he was guilty. The police asked him how he got to the front door without using the stairs or the elevator but he had no answer, so he shut the door and locked it, then teleported back down to the basement. Far, far down, to the underground. No one knew, but there was a secret passage below where the elevator man lived, and it went to every apartment building around and every room, so the elevator man could spy on them. That was how he knew everything but no one knew that, except him.

Bill loved to drink blood. The police read his criminal record and it said Bill had a history of going to the hospital and drinking other people's blood. He also went to the hospital and drank people's blood for their blood test and got kicked out of the hospital.

A few days later he tried to go back to the hospital but got arrested and was given a warning that if he came back, he would go to jail. Then he got a death sentence in jail.

A few more details the police uncovered:

- The elevator man saw Jeff come in by the front door at 12:45 a.m. with Bill

- The security man saw both Jeff and Bill leave at 12:55 a.m.

- The elevator man left at 2:25 a.m.

- There was blood in Bill's car

- Gill gun residue was on Jeff's jean pants

- The gun was at Alexa's work

- Alexa allegedly left work an hour and fifteen minutes early and her work was 45 minutes away from the location of the murder

Can you guess who the murderer was, their motive and weapon?

Down Below
By Daniel Kingston

The Blues and Jazz siblings are playing terrible noises. I'm feeling panicked, breaking down doors and running from the sound. Door to door, in through the front, out from the back, apartment to apartment, with movements like a snake, weaving door to door. Running from something I haven't seen yet, only heard. Even though there isn't anyone in the apartments, it still feels wrong that I'm breaking through the doors. But right now I don't really care. It feels like nothing's going to stop the noise from getting to me, even though it's far away. I can't help the urge to just find a dark corner where I can bury my face and hide. I know they're going to get me. It's just a matter of how long I can run.

Life used to be perfect. I should've never made that deal. Now if I don't stop running, they're going to get me. I can't see my family. I can't see my friends. I don't even know why I'm running. It's hopeless, but I can't let them take advantage of me and take the power away from me. They said they were the government and that they would help. I didn't know it would turn into this. They said if I sold my soul to them, they would make me rich and famous, but now, with no soul, I can't live. I feel heartless, no ambition, no care for what I do. I am surviving to get my old life back. I don't want to give up on it, even though I hated it and hated everyone around me. After losing my soul, I lost my freedom. If I wanted money the next day, I would catch a break and sell a house down by the river. If I wanted another boy, *POP*, nine months later I got another boy. Anything I wanted was in the palm of my hands. Everything I wished for, I got. It was like magic.

After going so far with this, I've gone lower than I've ever been before. Right now I don't care about any of that. I want to

leave this place, just to find somewhere I could hide or leave. I'm scared and I know I can't pray to God, so I summon evil to get me out of this.

I thought of him that time as an immortal, like he was the only one that could help me and end this story of survival. I got on my knees and prayed to him with everything I had. I told him that I would do anything for him to take me anyway from this and to stop all this madness. I could feel his cold, wet, dirty breath right in front of me, glowing, yellow eyes resembling a goat, over ten feet tall, talking in an old, strange, evil dialect, I somehow understood. I understood not in a way, almost as if I had it in me already. Like the rumbling in me told me what he said. I had a choice: become the 8th Prince of Hell or stay in Limbo. The presence of him excites men and, in that moment, it made my choice inevitable. The live power he had radiated off of him. It filled me with life.

All humans have magical powers that give them life and consciousness. Jazz and Blues are the demons that took that away from me, made me their slave. After what felt like decades, I got away and I've been running ever since, but now I can get another chance at a second coming, a restart. This lively being will give me power and I will bring a smorgasbord of feelings to the wicked and the ones who do harm, like Blue and Jazz. To be more wicked. To punish the insidious.

The tall strong powerful being starts barking loud chants, busting new hands from his body. Blood is bursting everywhere, matching the color of his skin. I stand there, not fazed, with no shock or disbelief, but with a smile. Evolving right in front of my eyes. It's like my choice is not up to me.

"I want to be the 8th prince," I say to him.

He grabs hold of me. I tremble with fear. The most menacing, tragically terrifying rush anybody could ever feel grabs ahold of me and an aura of fear surrounds me, turning my heart

black. He brings his hand to my neck, slowly grips me tighter and aggressively rips my head off effortlessly, like he was tying his shoes, my blood spilling on the floor.

Without remembrance, I wake in bliss – nothing but pitch black. Nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. Living with nothing, a true blessing, for all eternity.

Behind The Red Door

By Joel Ross-Raitano

One night, I was on my phone all night watching TikTok for about five hours and this was three or four in the morning. I started getting tired so I put down the phone and went to sleep. All of a sudden, I couldn't wake up, like I was frozen and stuck. My brain thought I was able to move—I was aware of things. Although when I developed sleep paralysis I evolved as a person, because I would sleep, not move and couldn't open my eyes.

Then months passed. I was able to move my toes and open my eyes, which was a bit scary, but sometimes I could tell when my chest was closing in, making it hard to breathe. It was loud, like you know when you're on the highway and you roll down your window and you can hear the wind blowing? It was a very mysterious noise.

It made me feel like there was a presence in me, but when you think about it, it's terrifying. Mentally painful. I remember I looked at my door and it was red and not the original color which was white. I was confused and curious about what was behind it, then I remembered seeing *it* on my ceiling, in the corner, staring at me with this grinning smile that looked deformed. So I closed my eyes and hoped I would wake up.

Some people have different types of stages of sleep paralysis. The first stage is when you can't move at all and you get scared. The second stage is when you feel like there's someone watching you. Sometimes your brain will picture a very creepy person or creature. The third stage is when you hear a very disturbing noise in your ears. It hurts a lot. When you wake up, you get dizzy. The fourth stage is when you can move your fingers, toes and can open your eyes. Then you can control being scared, but that's not always the case. You can still get paranoid.

Also it's really common to have sleep paralysis when you sleep on your back. If you don't get enough sleep, you will probably fall into sleep paralysis, but for me it happens in any position because I don't get enough sleep. So to everyone who has or has experienced sleep paralysis, stay calm, go to sleep early and pray to God before you sleep. Also if you wake up from sleep paralysis, drink or eat something. It will help.



Fear
By Keiarah Smith-Coombs

Hi, my name is Leo. I'm 13 years old. I live with my mom, in Texas, in our little country house. My mom worked her butt off for it. I'm proud of her. She is a hustler and a fighter who never gives up.

My father is gone. Just gone. Nothing more than gone. I wish I had met him, but Mama tells me I don't. Sometimes I wonder how life would be with him, but besides that, today is my first day of karate class. I want to be as strong as my mama...

Monday morning, bright and early, sunny and bloomy, my first day back to school. I feel the warmth of the sun hitting my face as I stare out from my window. I smell the fresh pancakes mama put together for me for breakfast. I quickly brush my teeth and rush downstairs.

I hear my mom on the phone. She sounds upset. I don't know about what exactly but we've been struggling with the house so I have a strong feeling that's what it's about. I ask her what's wrong, she tells me nothing and to continue eating.

It's time to leave.

My mama drives me to school because she's afraid something might happen. I understand why. Around here, a lot of kids like me get stolen. My mama calls it kidnapping but I say stolen. That's the main reason she wants me to do karate class.

It's now the last period. My day was pretty tiring. I feel a heavy weight on my shoulder, almost like I'm carrying rocks. I can't get that phone call out of my head. It hurts me to see my mama struggle. She leaves work early to pick me up. It's time, time I take responsibility and take initiative. I'm gonna go to my first karate class all by myself. It's just up the street from my school.

Mama is going to be super proud... so I thought.

I'm halfway there and I never really had a full view of the area. It's beautiful! People are staring at me like I have “clown” written in bold across my forehead. I slowly start to regret doing this. Mama is probably worrying about where I am, so I decide to stop and walk back.

“Hey!” someone shouts from a black van. Mama told me never talk to strangers so I keep walking

“Hey you! Kid!” they shout again.

My hands start to sweat. I feel my heart beating through my chest. Fear, fear is what I felt. I begin to speed walk. The black van follows. I don't look back, but I hear the van come to a stop. I then check to see if I'm still being followed. I see a man with a bucket hat, white, kind of raggedy-looking running towards me.

The only thing going through my mind is to run and get away. Why? Why me? Why am I being chased?

I start to run.

I see an alleyway. I cut through there. Little did I know, it was a dead end. In less than a second, I'm being dragged by the raggedy man. I'm fighting, trying to escape with all my strength but unfortunately I'm strong enough.

Dark. Darkness is all I feel and see. It's been an hour. I'm alone in a trunk, tied up and helpless. I hear a noise coming from the front of the van. I'm confused and don't know what to do or what to think, even though so many different thoughts are running through my mind.

Mother's Point of View

“My son! Where is my son? I need my son!”

I cry, begging for an answer. People are looking at me so strangely, like I'm crazy. My son is gone. Where? Why? How?

No one is trying to help me. It has been an hour since he's been missing. I went to the police. They didn't care. They just

looked at it as another black, kidnapped child who's probably dead. Hopeless. No good to even bother looking for, but I will find my son and when I do, whoever that person is, will pay.

Leo's Point of View

Still helpless and confused. No longer alone. There's another kid like me black, innocent, scared.

The van comes to a stop. My heart drops to my stomach. My eyes begin to water. All the other kids look as terrified as I am.

The raggedy man opens the door to where we were.

I'm the first one he looks at and he says, "You! Out now!"

Dragging me like I'm nothing into a nasty basement. It stinks like old cheese. It's cold and windy. I feel the goosebumps starting to rise on my arms and legs.

The man begins to yell nasty things about how we look, about our race, our colour, about us being black—something we can't help but be. The man is a racist.

I begin to understand more of what this is. The fear starts to take over.

Now, in the basement alone, I hear crying. I look to my right and see one of the kids like me hugging his knees and crying his heart out. I feel terrible. I pat him on the back for comfort.

"Hey, my name is Leo. What's yours?"

He looks up at me, shaking and barely able to speak. "Jaa-Jaa- Jacob. My name is Jacob," Jacob stutters.

He seems younger than me.

"Well, hi Jacob. I can tell you're scared, just like me but I pray for us and I promise everything will be alright."

I don't know that but I'm relying on hope. I just wanted to make him feel better. I don't like to see people hurt.

"Why are we here? Why us? What did we do? I want to go home," Jacob says.

“We did nothing. Nothing at all. It's always like this. We do nothing and get treated with hate and unkindness,” I reply.

Fear

Imagine if we were all clear if the color of my skin didn't appear. If we all had the same hair, wouldn't hating me be like looking in the mirror?

If THEY took the time to see that all we want is PEACE, to look at us as STRONG, not weak.

There'd be less deaths each week. FEAR.

Victims

Why is it that young black men are harmed just for being black? VICTIMS.

Why is it that girls are being beaten and raped but yet the abuser always gets an escape— “victims.”

If we could only take our time and try and fix this corrupted system, there would be less families hurt, less girls screaming “stop it hurts,” LESS GIRLS feeling the need to “pull down their skirt.”

More black lives to LIVE and finally be HEARD.

Destination of Death
By Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara

Where do we go when we die?

A thought that's always in my mind.

Will we fly up above the sky?

Looking down upon the rest of the world

...

What will happen to my body when I depart from this world?

*Not to say that I am scared of leaving, but to say, that thoughts race through
my head,
about what happens in life after death.*

Lifeless Love
By Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara

He took her hands into his own,

He took his time admiring, *every perfect imperfection*,

And he wondered who could ever lay their hands on God's creation.

Staring at her pale face, lips that were once a deep ruby red were now tinted purple and blue.

He admired her face that was once filled with colour and life, but she was now lifeless and cold.

VISUAL ART



Say less!



Seymour Bale



Zach Koliakoudakis



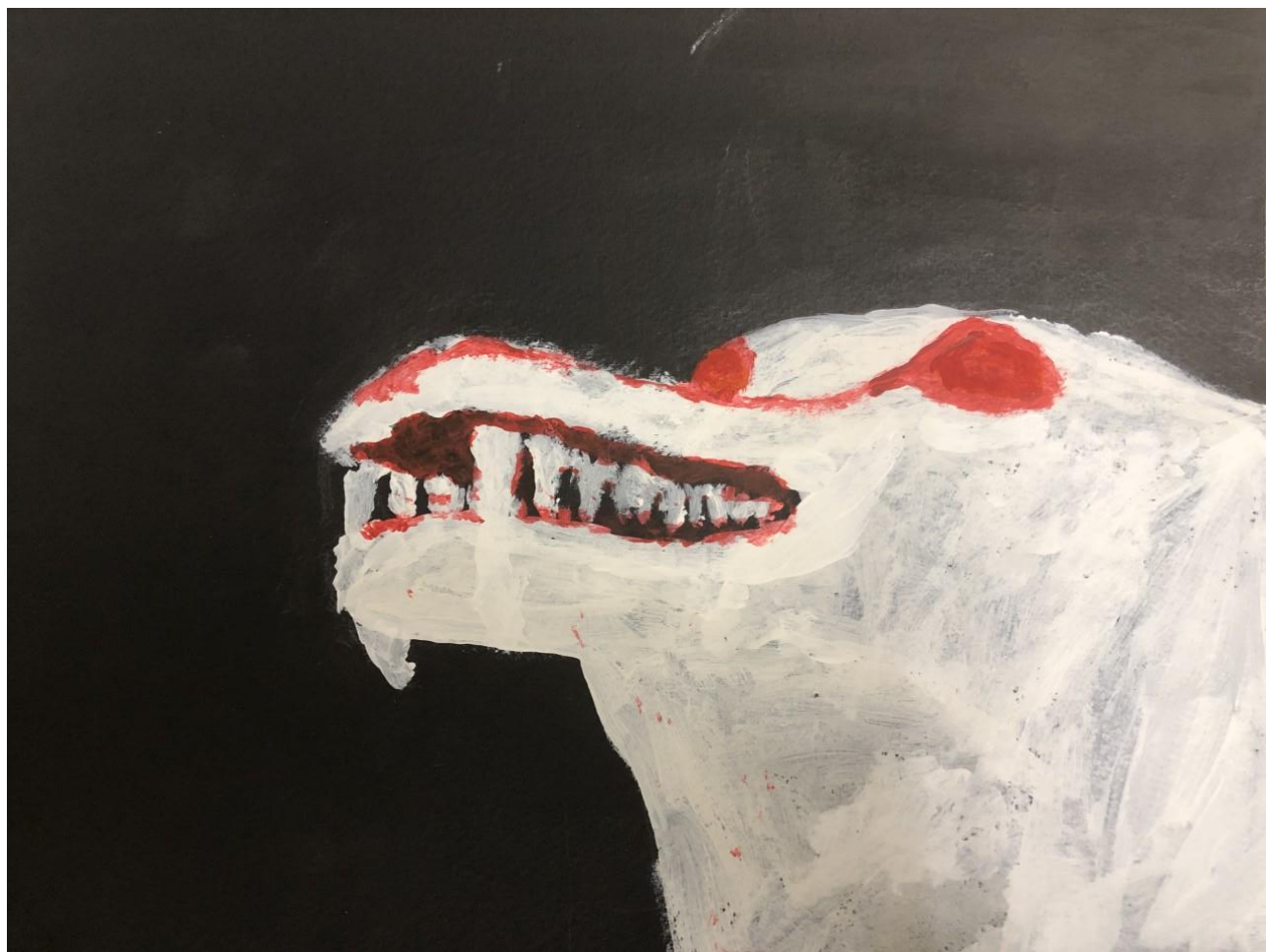
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Naomi Cavero



Shoshannah Lewy



Christian Dimitrov



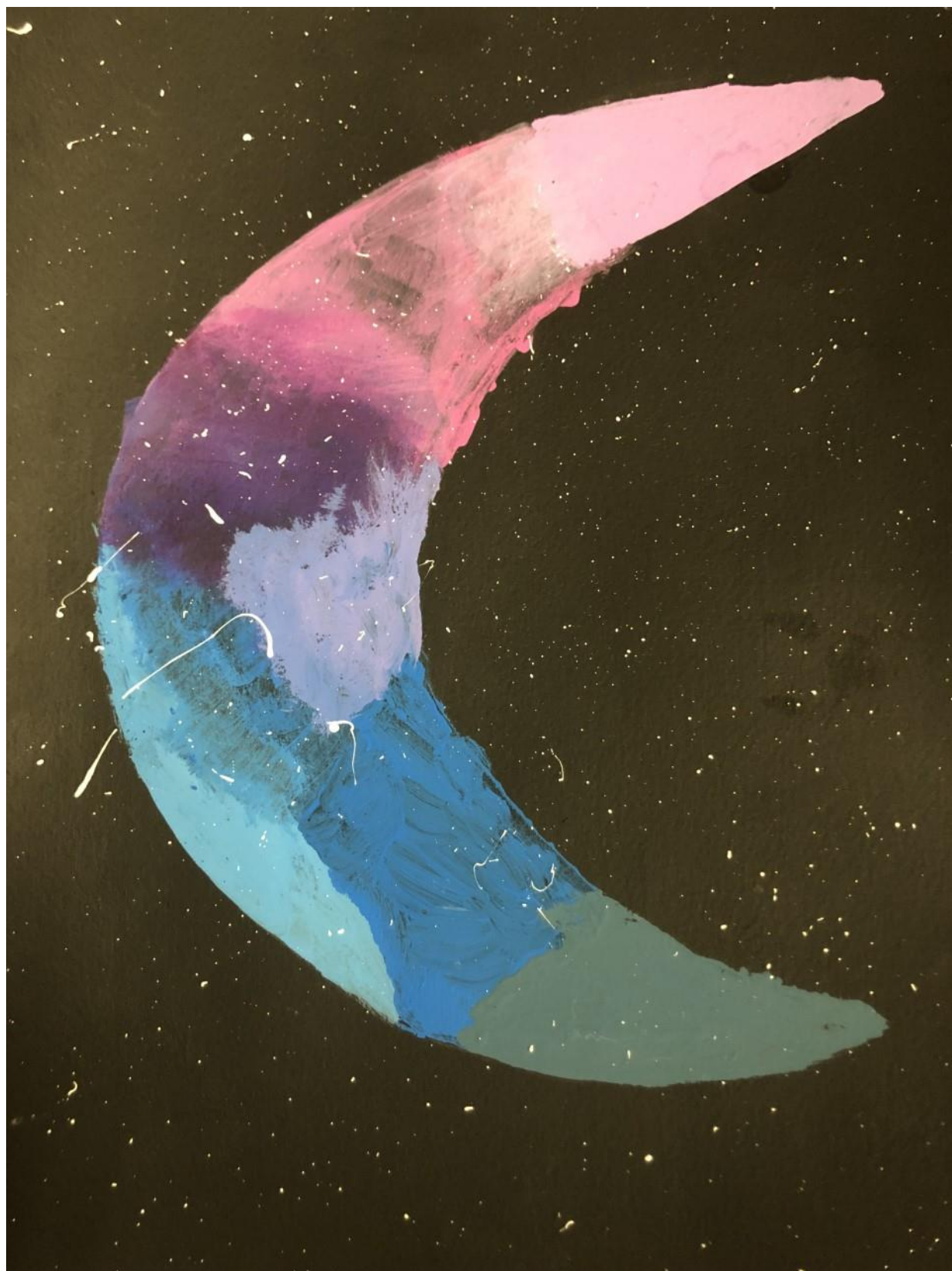
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Robyn Angilirq



Tyler Demaine



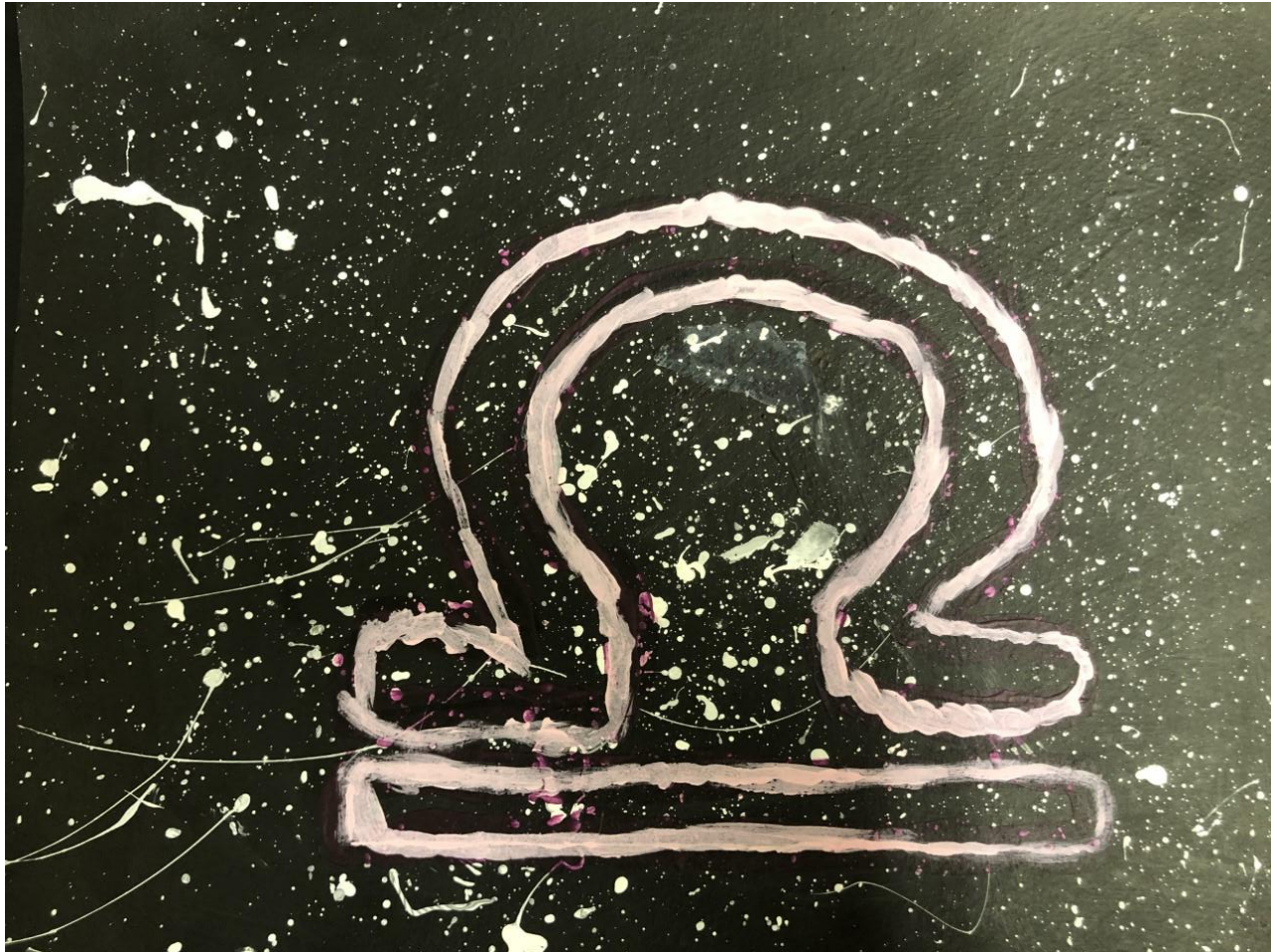
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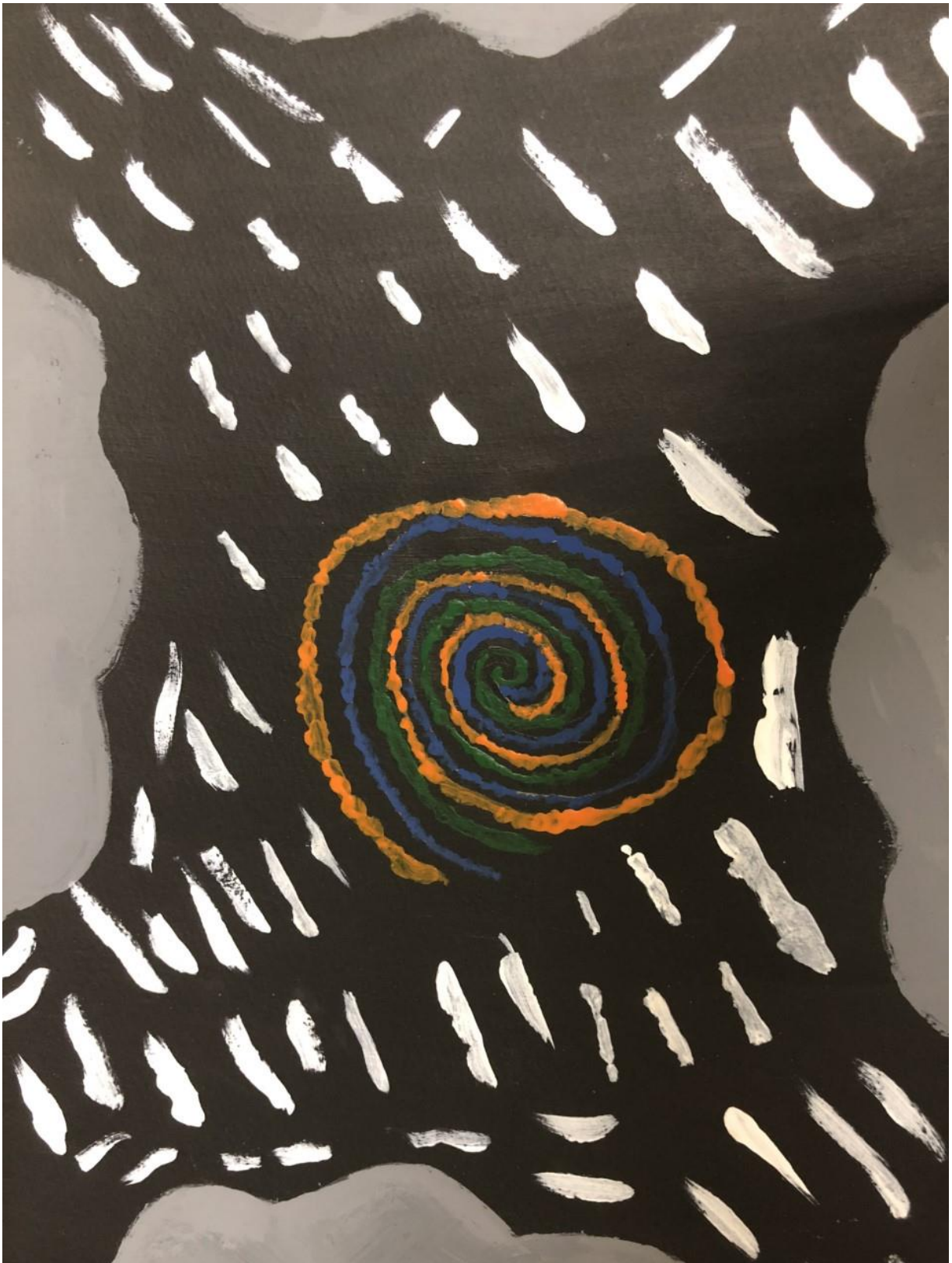
Chaim Maizenberg



Destiny Akinlade



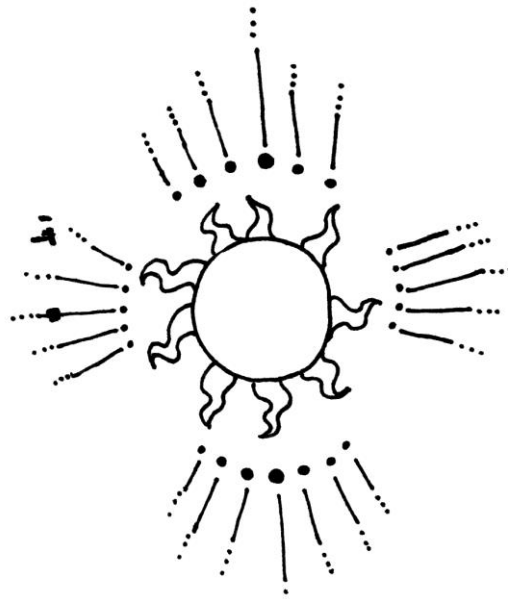
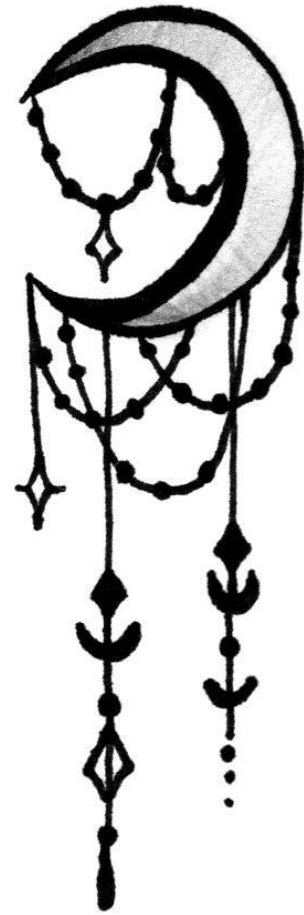
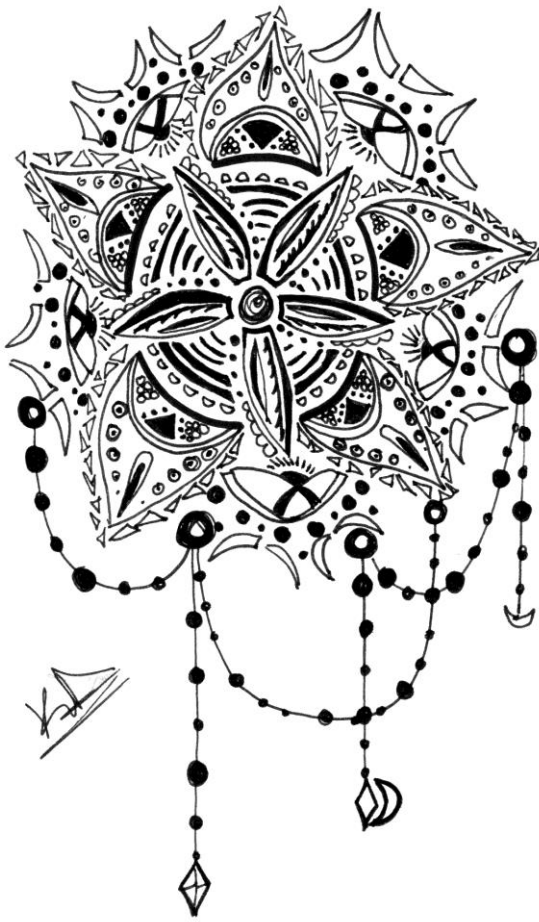
Dodridge McFarlane



Isaiah Glaze



Malachi Layne



Kayla Di Napoli



Kayla Di Napoli



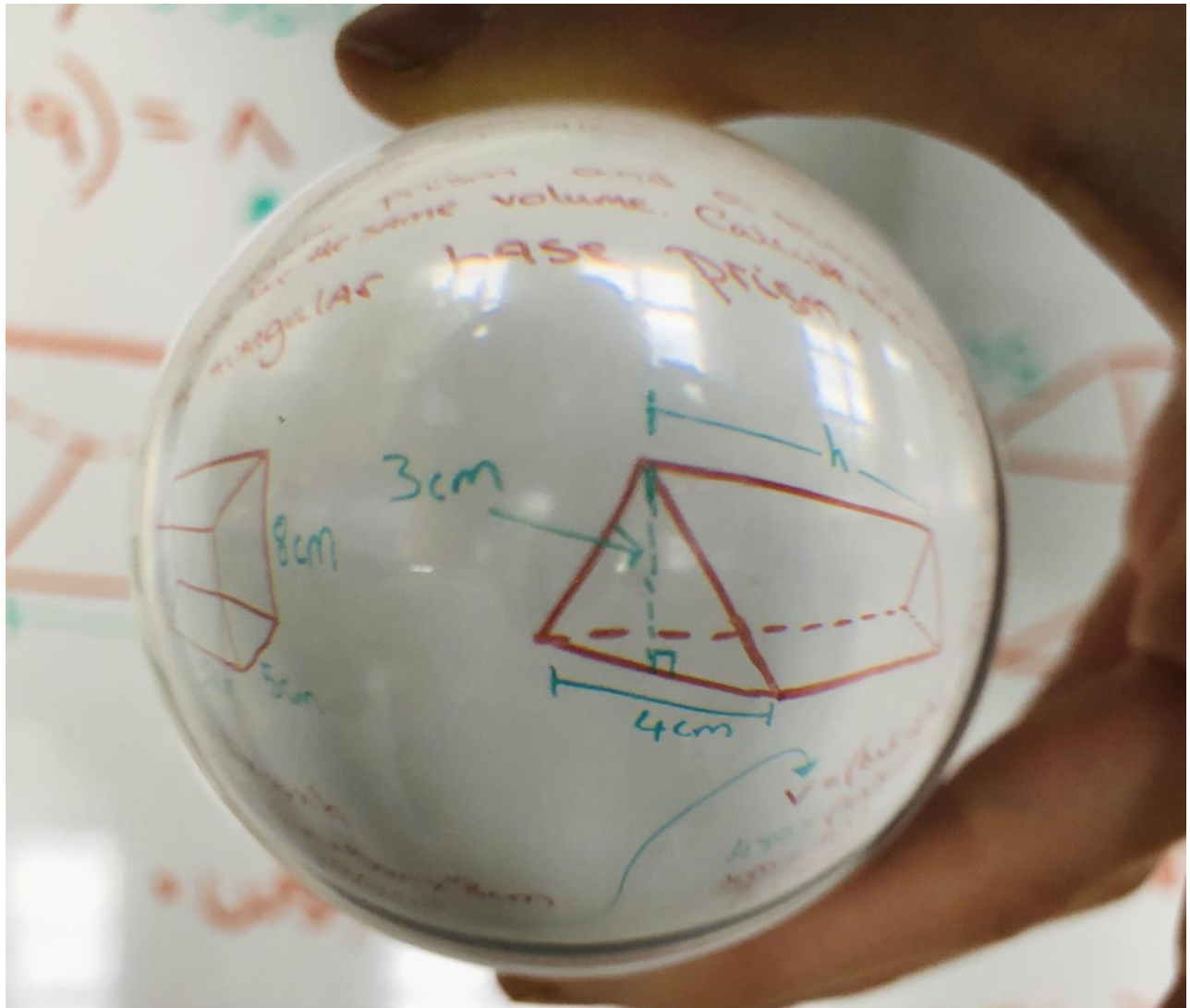
Kayla Di Napoli



Kayla Di Napoli



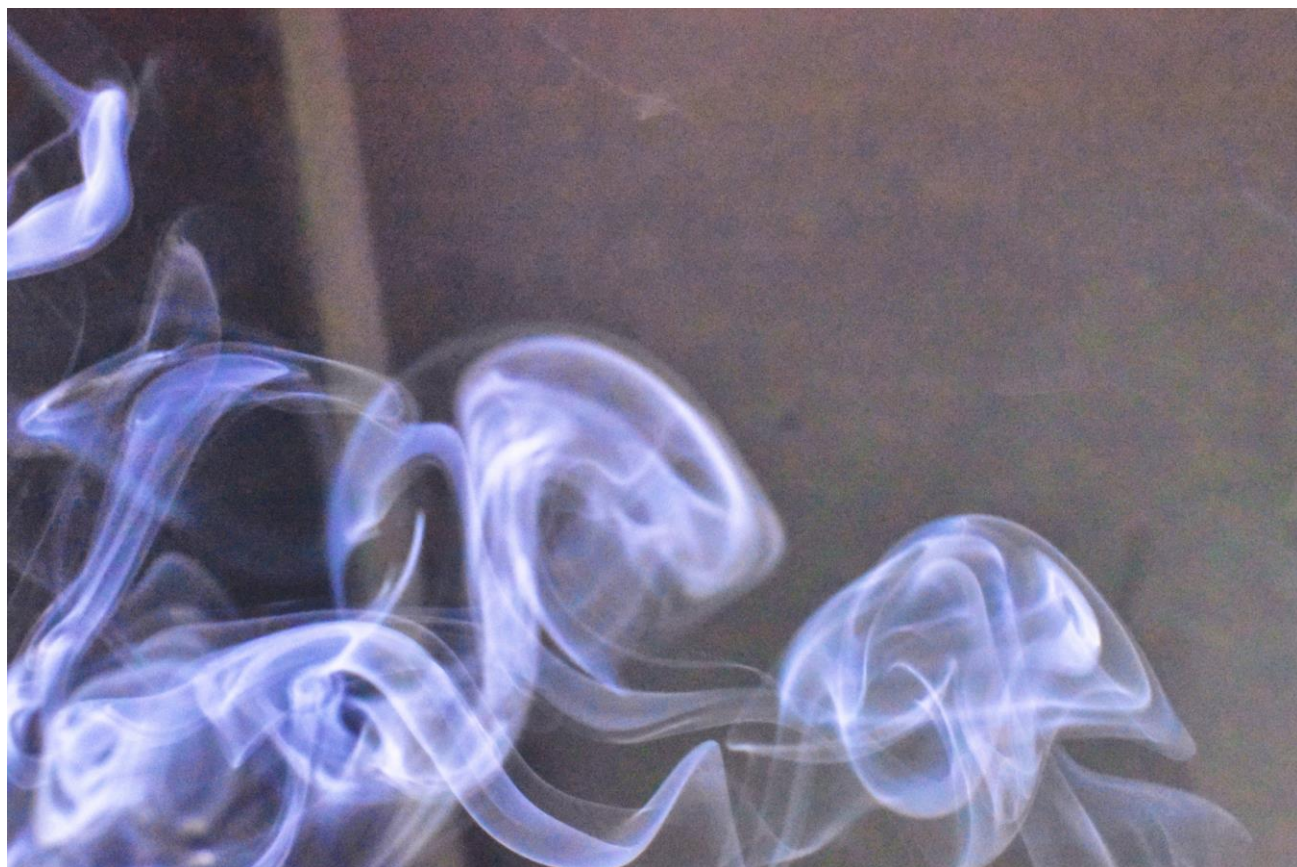
Kayla Di Napoli



Anonymous



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Ben Decarie-Groening



Destiny Youen



Destiny Youen



Destiny Youen



Joel Ross-Raitano



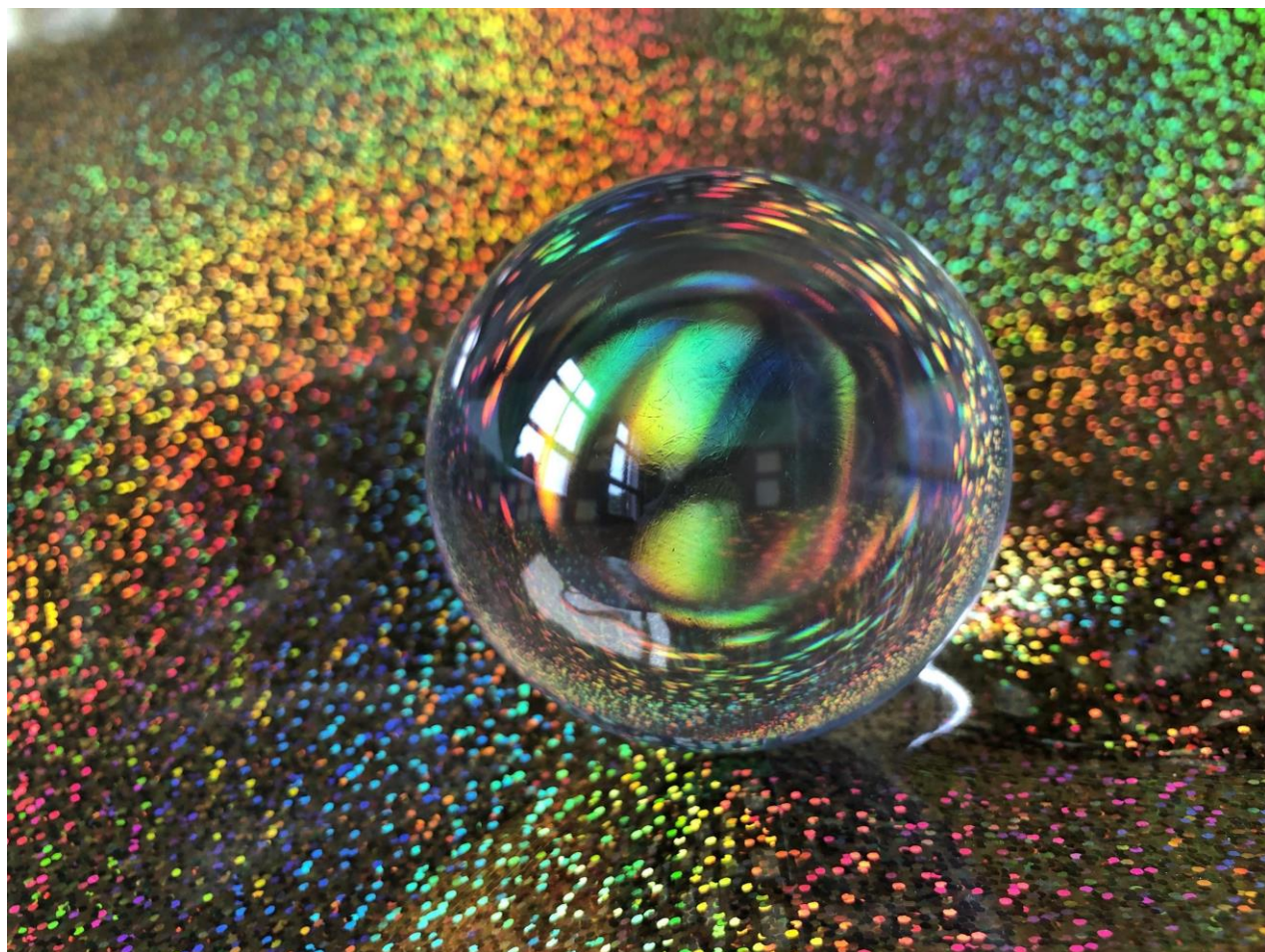
Joel Ross-Raitano



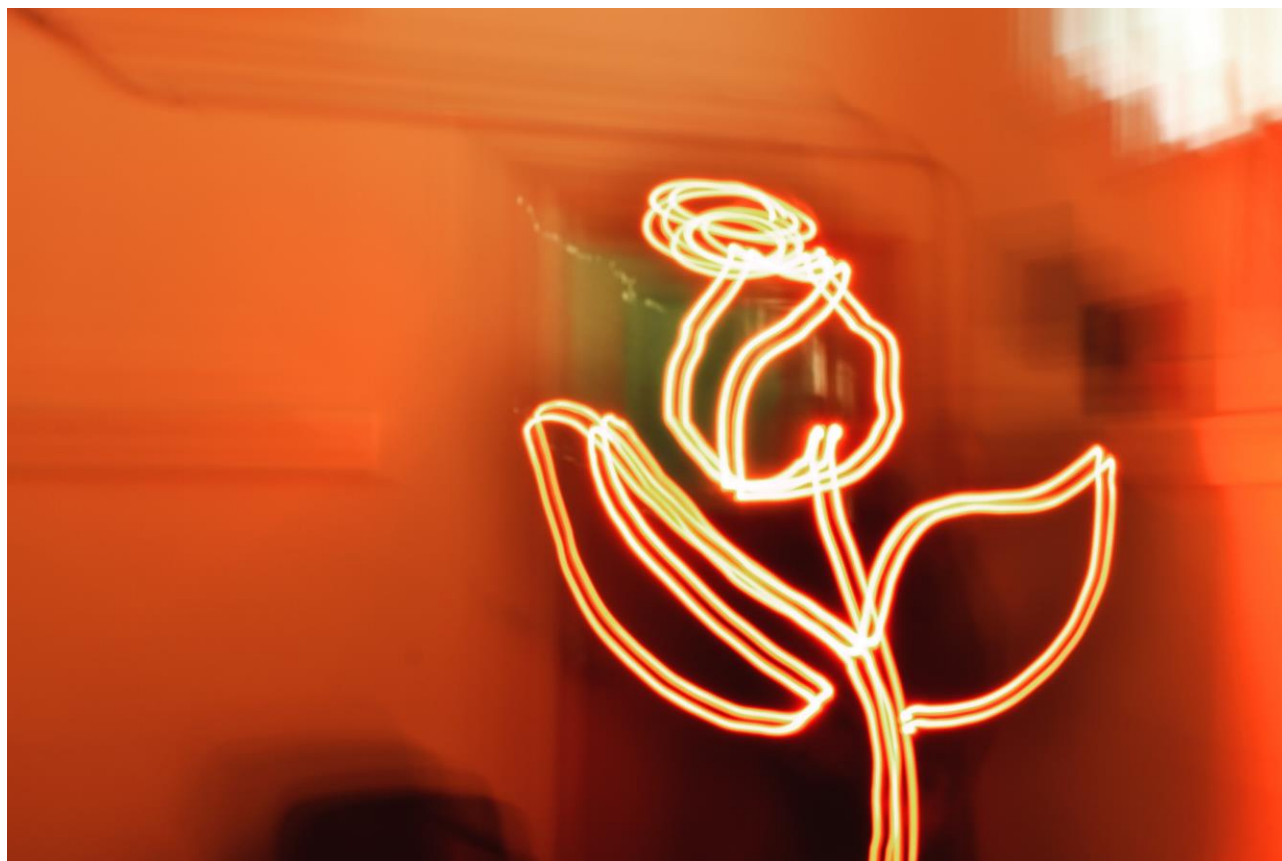
Keiarah Smith-Coombs



Marco Benoit



Marco Benoit



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Marco Benoit



Marco Benoit



Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara



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Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara



Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara



Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara



Triantafilia-Maria Nikitara



Théoni Raphaël



Théoni Raphaël

Alternative United



The magic is in you!