

Spring, 2021

## Welcome to Athena's Quill!

Athena's Quill has been in publication for six years! That's a lot of years of great work from our creative writing students. You can read past issues in the [Social Center](#). If you've been reading the Quill for a while, you'll see some familiar names here. But for a second year in a row, I'm saying goodbye to some longtime students who are graduating! It's been wonderful working with them and seeing them grow. Also in this issue you'll see work from many new students. It's always so fun to see new names pop into my classrooms and know that they'll have something wonderful to share. Please enjoy this issue!

~Professor Suki





# Table of Contents

## WRITE•NOW workshop

[Click here to jump to WriteNOW Workshop](#)



[Click here to jump to Writer's Lab](#)



[Click here to jump to Teen Writer's Lab](#)

# WRITE·NOW workshop

*In WriteNOW Workshop,  
everything is "write"!*

A student made up this motto, and it fits so well. In WriteNOW Workshop, writers of all ages and levels focus on finding ideas in our heads and getting them out. Sometimes the results are beautiful. Sometimes they are wacky! Sometimes they're a real mess (in a good way). The following pieces were written from the same prompts...but the results are very different! Before a writer needs to follow rules, a writer should enjoy writing. All of these pieces were written in three minutes and were only lightly edited.



## "I Remember"

This prompt is very simple: The writer must write a few sentences starting with the words "I remember." As you'll see, some writers take this literally and write about their memories. Others share memories of a fictional world. And still others make stories happen within a list of memories.

*Flora is a catato*

I remember when I was once a cat.  
I remember when cats ruled the world.  
I remember when there was cat kibble that tasted nice.  
I remember when the jewel came.  
I remember when we got turned into humans.

*Ved Chandra*

I remember I hate airplanes  
I remember I can fly  
I remember I am better at minecraft than Dream and Technoblade  
I remember I am a trillionaire  
I remember that I lied for all the above

*Kaeden the crazy cake pop kitten!!!!!!!!!!*

I remember being a kitten.  
I remember nothing.  
I remember... wait... I just said I don't remember but  
I remember being a kitten. What? Anyway,  
I remember sneaking into the cabinet.  
I remember taking a bag of cat treats.  
I remember ripping it open with my mouth.  
I remember eating all of the treats without my owner noticing.  
I remember... MEOW! Huh?

*Felicity Peters*

I remember the light as it was turning grey  
I remember the joy floating away  
I remember the clouds as they were bright  
I remember the sky turning blue  
I remember the little happy dance of remembering

*Matthew Connolly*

I remember the moon  
I remember nothing  
I remember everything  
I remember the whole universe  
I remember the mainframe of this simulation

*Zoe the Dream SMP Nerd*

I remember the sky and the sun.  
I remember the warmth hidden in every star.  
I remember the dew on the freshly cut lawn.  
I remember the hot dry sand between my toes.  
I remember every star in the sky shining light down on us together.  
Together.  
Just the two of us.  
One heart in two bodies.

*Aydyn the Dragon*

I remember how I played with my caretaker in the hallway  
I remember how I always wanted to be a paleontologist  
I remember how I held my brother when he was a baby  
I remember life before COVID-19  
I remember WriteNOW Workshop

*Qigi The Animal Lover!*

I remember her name, it fits her  
I remember her fur, so soft  
I remember our sweet cuddles  
I remember her spirit, bright and sweet  
I remember Mango



## "I Have"

Another simple prompt yields beautiful and diverse writing! It's amazing how each student takes this simple prompt and finds something personal, creative, and sometimes shocking to do with it!

*Teagen the contortionist*

I have a drawing I could show you  
I have a cake I could share with you  
I have a bucket to drop on you  
I have water balloons to throw at you  
I have a story you could listen to

I also have a brick

*Ava the Animal Lover*

I have a piece of white paper on my desk.  
I have a pencil in my hand.  
I have a mind screaming, "I need ideas!"  
I have one hour to work on this.  
I have one line so far.  
I have a headache now.

*Callie Barth-Gomez*

I have gold.  
I have diamonds.  
I have cheese,  
I have bright stars.  
I have stark villages,  
dropped in the middle of a frozen landscape.  
I have happiness,  
and sadness.  
I have silver dreams  
that float down from the heavens.  
I have everything,  
and nothing.  
I have all,  
and None.

*Roslin Garcia*

I have a windstorm in my bedroom. I have no idea  
what to do. I have dogs and cats fighting in a boxing  
ring. I have everything in my hands. I have everything  
out of control.

*Odelle the Mail Eating Manta-ray Creator*

I have 10 fingers  
But I can't grasp what's happening  
I have two eyes  
But I can't see the good  
I have a heart  
But I think that it's broken  
I have a Brain  
But I've never understood  
I have a mouth  
But I can't seem to talk  
I have two legs  
But they are stuck to the floor  
I have a choice  
But I don't want to make it  
I used to have happiness  
But I might never get more  
She once had a life  
But now it is gone  
She once had a voice  
But now I can't hear  
She once had some friends  
Now they're dressed in black  
For her I was happy  
Now I shed a tear

## "Idiomatic Expressions"

The students brainstormed together to come up with a list of fun sayings, and then they could choose to write with as many of them as possible, or develop a story around one.

### Wynn The ant keeper

There was a city. Someone kicked a bucket, and got lead poisoning. I saw a duck in a pond, and a cat sneaking up on it. It sure was a sitting duck. I saw a talking deck of cards. Hold on—it only had 40 cards. It said, "Humans are just talking monkeys!" It was a few cards short of a deck. Was this a dream? Was I going mad?! It was 8:00 in the morning. There was one bird that got up early to catch worms. Was I losing my marbles?! I had a bag of marbles, and sure enough, they were lost! This was weird. I picked up a plate to eat my breakfast, but it fell to the ground. I was surely a butterfinger. My fingers were made of butter. They were yellow, and soft. AHHHHH!!!

### Teagen the contortionist

The sky grew dark as the grey clouds started to roll in, and everyone started to go into their houses as they prepared for the rainstorm. It started with just a light drizzle that you could barely see, then it became harder and the rain came down faster and soon enough you heard...a bark? And a meow? All of a sudden the rain dissipated and cats and dogs started to come down instead of the usual rain. Soon there were so many cats and dogs that there was no room for the people. Normal rain doesn't make you leave your house. The weather man was wrong—never listen to the weather man.

### Matthew Connolly

If I had to rank the worst possible rain, it would undoubtedly be a rain of heavy animals. Raining literal cats and dogs has not ever happened, and that's why I chose it. The close second here would be a rain of pigs, which would, quite literally, mean that right now, pigs are flying.

### Jonathan the Technodoggo (Technological Doggo)

"He's as tall as the sky!" Earth yelled.

"Duh," replied Sky. "Cuz I am the sky."

"Y'all are immature like Moon," sighed Sun.

"Well, I just wanna have fun!" screamed Moon. "Nobody said I was immature!"

"Can we please focus on the problem at hand, please?" begged Sun. "Meteor's army is heading for us. We gotta decide how to fight them!"

"Let's blow em' up with ballistic proton torpedoes!" bellowed Moon.

Just then, a meteor struck Moon and blew him out of orbit.

"What did you do to him?" sobbed Earth. "He was my best friend!"

"I knew this would happen," said Sky. "And I warned him. Now we've lost our most energetic person, and doomed us."

Suddenly, Meteor's army arrived.

"Surrender, and your lives will not be spared!" declared Meteor. "Don't surrender, and you'll die in agony!"

"When black holes soar," grumbled Sun. "Charge!"

### Ved Chandra

"That's one small step for cake, one giant leap for cake kind," said Cake Armstrong when it started raining cats and dogs. He drank water to help him chew, and went to bed in roses before making any decisions that would make him a prickly cactus or a butterfinger. When he woke up, he grabbed his pencil sharpener to make sure that he would read the book, and not just its cover.

## "Lots of Verbing"

As a group, the students brainstormed good, active verbs in present progressive tense. Then they went off to write. Some of them used all the verbs so that they had a dense paragraph of action. Others were inspired to go in another direction!

*Keara Cronin*

I was dreaming of me prancing around the pool but I fell in so I started swimming. The water was warm and the sun hit it just right so that it gleamed like a sparkling diamond. I got out of the water once my fingers and toes started to prune and quickly started writing down my whole experience so I will never forget it.

*Minwei Chen*

A leopard would be stalking, a deer prancing, a fish swimming, but humans sit in place, watching the screen endlessly, forever...

*Odelle the Mail Eating Manta-ray Creator*

Me

I'm just a cloud of swirling gas  
That tumbles through dark space  
Dancing, spinning, tumbling, twirling,  
With thoughts of boiling and bubbling haste  
I have to beat my controlling thoughts  
I have to get where I want to go  
Racing, pacing, flouting, hoping  
Like a cactus in the snow

*Advika Luvs to Write!*

I sat in bed and couldn't wait to get dreaming. In my dream, I was gleaming and glowing, twirling and prancing, as I lay on top of a mountain watching the skies. With my pen and paper, I was tapping and writing, stalking the life below, looking for something inspirational.

*Callie Barth-Gomez*

If I dream, and perhaps scream,  
You prance with teeming delight.  
If I stalk among the tall tall grass,  
You gleam, despite the facts.  
I tap upon the window pane,  
You sprint to come and to complain.  
I glow at the fire,  
You watch,  
What's your desire?  
I twirl among the wildflowers,  
You swim among the deepest waters.  
This and more, I write about.  
But you are truly only  
Doubt.

*Adeline, The Fanfictioness*

I've always been dreaming of more beautiful things  
Stalking answers  
Wearing gleaming metaphorical armor  
Tapping on the door of truth  
Sprinting toward the end of the day  
Glowing with pride because I got through the hour  
Standing in a warzone  
Watching the ghosts drift through the misty graveyard  
Twirling through heaven's clouds  
I'm a beautiful butterfly ghost



# Writer's LAB



Writer's Lab is where avid writers cook up fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. We look at published work and analyze it, share our writing with each other, and write together. Every day is an experiment when you are in a writer's lab! This semester's group has done some amazing writing!

## In This Section

- "Introductory Haiku" by Megan the Moon Knight
- "Starbound" by A. Ryan
- "The Miss-Adventures Of Zoey Park" by Lizzy The Feline Child Of Artemis
- "Selling this Cute Axolotl" by Joshua
- "The Children of the Night" by Maddie
- "Sunny Skies" by Sarah the Winged Cat
- "Dead in Secrets" by Victoria Hahn
- "Life is" by Alexa Alisse Gordon Mellema
- "Bellador's Death" by Zoe Paul
- "Time to colonize Earth part two: The Great Mission" by Jonah G
- "The Huntress and the Bear" by Kathryn Velasco
- "Build Me a Boyfriend, Buy Me An Android [ Chapter 1" by Lara
- "Hiroshi Nekosagi Chapter 1" by Noah Allen the Avatar
- "The Adventure of a Lifetime" by Cady W.
- "Crystal Bay" by Priya The Ice Wolf
- "Lindsey and the Forbidden Forest" by Evelyn the Techno Robot





## Introductory Haiku

*by Megan the Moon Knight,  
Writer's Lab TA*

Introductions of  
Ourselves, showing each other  
Parts of us for friends

## Starbound

*by A. Ryan*

Throughout our history, we have looked up at the stars and wondered. At first, we believed they were just lights in the sky, brilliant pinpoints of beauty. We could not have been more wrong.

Later, we would discover the true nature of stars. They are suns, alike and often much greater than our own. We are but an inconceivably small dot in the vastness of the universe. Many people had problems with this. It changed the way we all thought of ourselves, some people thought for the worse. People want to be important. Stories were written about the stars, about what may reside on the worlds that circle them. From the fantastical to the slightly more grounded, people would write stories and try to make sense of the places we had never been. It is but the nature of our race. Take away one story, and we will write another. Take away one belief, and we will find something even more outlandish.

And all this comes to me. People have come before me, and they set up the way I will now go. As a great philosopher once said, "If I have traveled quite a distance, it is but because I have ridden upon the back of those who came before me." In just a short time, I will depart. This world and this star will be left behind in favor of a new one. This is quite possibly the most pivotal moment in our history. Who knows what I may find out there, amidst the stars. Perhaps I will never return, for better or for worse.

But I do know one thing. If all the years of our long history have taught me anything, I know that it will not be what we expect.

*-Feredeï of Rokest, upon their departure from Soul.*

# The Miss-Adventures Of Zoey Park

by Lizzy The Feline Child Of Artemis

My feet paced up and down the sidewalk. Where was he? Minutes passed but they were hours to me. My nails were short from being chewed on nervously. I gave myself 10 more minutes to wait, but after that I realized he wasn't coming.

I should start from the beginning. Hey, I'm Zoey. I'm 14 years old and I live in New York. I know, the Big Apple! Fast facts! I love cats but I'm allergic. My favorite food is pasta, especially with veggies and cream sauce, and I love having Boston cream cake for dessert. I have an odd obsession with collecting erasers. My favorite color is silver, NOT grey. My best friend's name is Kristy. We have been friends since I could walk, er, toddle around. Neither of us have any other friends, but that's okay; we have each other. I go to public school and I have been begging my mom for years to homeschool me. Public middle school is terrible and public high school isn't much better. Speaking of high school, I have officially survived middle school (which I thought I would never do!) but now I am entering the horrors of high school. In my family it's just me, my mom, and, ugh, my mom's new boyfriend, Hunter. He is so annoying and rude! But only to me. He acts all sweet to my mom but when she doesn't look, Hunter's doing what he can to shove me out of the family.

The problem is that my dad isn't here. He ran off and left my mom just after I was born and we have never seen him since. I always agree with my mom when she says we are better off without him but deep down I wish he was here with me. But you know who I wish wasn't here with me? My mom, on the first day of high school...

"MO-OM! Quit!" I pull away from her as she tries to give me the one-thousandth goodbye hug.

"Sorry, it's just that you're getting so big! Going off to high school! So exciting!" My mom smiles.

Waaaaaaait. Was my mom actually thinking high school was fun? Because, um, it's not. "Mom, I'm not your little girl anymore. I'm 14! Also, have you ever been to high school? Because it's harsh. Pretty harsh."

"Well, okay then 'Miss-Bad-Attitude.' You're going to be late! Hurry!" My mom gives me a knowing look. I check my phone. 7:51?! I was supposed to be inside the school at assembly 11 minutes ago!

There is no time for more hugs. I pop out a quick, "Bye, love you, pick-up is at 3:30!!" before slamming the car door shut. I race inside the building, my silver Jansport backpack bouncing around on my shoulders.

Assembly has obviously ended because I am drowning in a raging sea of high-schoolers. I fight my way to my locker like someone desperately swimming up from the bottom of the pool for air. Actually, that's what I'm doing. The smells of new clothes, deodorant, strong perfume, and...cinnamon?

I push my way through people to the smell and I find just what I thought. Kristy, my best friend, eating a homemade cinnamon roll.

"Kristy!" I yell at her.

She looks up and darts over to me. "Zoey!" Kristy grins with a piece of cinnamon roll in her teeth. For the past seven years, Kristy has always loved to bake and she constantly has the aroma of cinnamon. "Our lockers are over here!"

She leads me through the crowd and we unlock our lockers. I put in all my books except my math textbook.

The two of us race to class but we stop at the doors.

"Our first high school class," I mumble.

"We'll be fine!" Kristy nudges me.

"Yeah. We will," I say and we both walk into our first class of this prison.

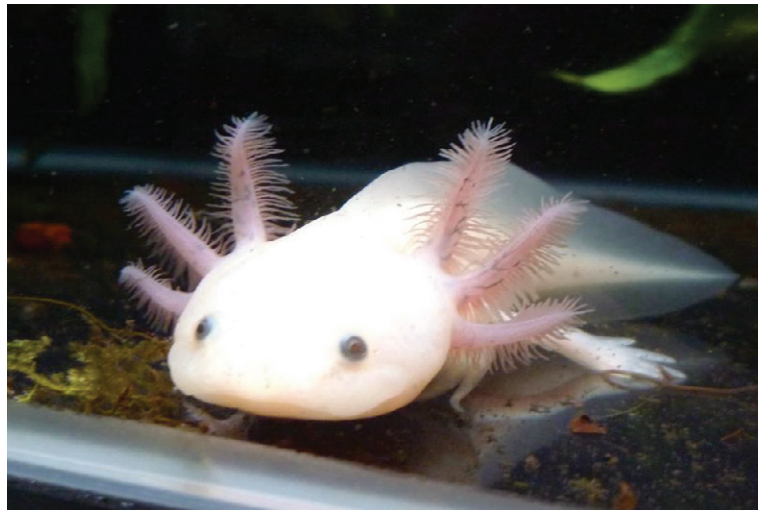
*...to be continued.*

# Selling this Cute Axolotl

By Joshua

Want an axolotl? You're in the right place. This cute fellow named "Lulu" was born in Lake Xochimilco and is perfect for anyone of any age!\*

It has a special superpower to regenerate lost limbs. Cool right? It even has an even cooler yawn! It has one of the cutest yawns in the world!\*\*



This cute creature will surely entertain everyone in your home. Also, it is really easy to take care of! No, seriously! If you have a cat, you're in luck! Lulu eats cat food and cat food will be a perfect treat for both of your pets. It also eats your raw meat so no worries about picking that worm with your hand (gross)! Lulu comes with the tank and some tank decorations.

Also, I wrote a poem/song about Lulu and sing it with the Mary had a Little Lamb tune:

*Lulu is an axolotl, axolotl, axolotl  
Lulu is an axolotl  
And you will buy-uy her*

If you're still not persuaded, I sell Lulu\*\*\* at \$109.99 while the average price is \$110.00!\*\*\*

\*Some restrictions apply  
\*\*Ranked by the Dodo(Youtube channel)  
\*\*\*With tank



# The Children of the Night

by Maddie

Two children sat on the roof. They stayed there as the sun went down. "Where is she?" the first one asked impatiently. He was speaking to nobody in particular. The second one shrugged. And sat. And waited. *She would be here soon, surely? She has to be.* A big truck drove by, advertising some sort of drink. A small red car drove past. A silver one with a noisy engine. The sun was setting right in front of them, shining brightly past the endless houses. No other children were on the roof, just them. It was slightly disappointing. A woman stepped out of her house, pushing a baby in a stroller. She looked up, admiring the purple-pink skies, when her eyes met the young boy's. She nodded at him. He nodded back. The other checked his watch and groaned.

"It's getting late," he said.

"I know."

A construction truck drove by, then another, then another. Stars were beginning to be visible, and the younger one looked for constellations.

"Look, the moon!" he exclaimed happily.

The older one nodded, with a look on his face that wasn't quite identifiable. The woman with the baby opened her front door. After standing up and walking around the roof pointing out constellations here and there (*look, the Big Dipper!*), the younger one sat back down with only the noise of the ticking watch to keep them company. *Tick, tock, tick, tock.*

The air got colder, and cars headed back home for the night. The sky was dark blue now, and since the lights were off, it looked like all the stars in the world were out. It would be beautiful if it wasn't so stressful.

"What is taking her so long?" the first one grumbled.

"I'm sure she'll be here soon, don't worry!" the second one said with as much enthusiasm as he could gather.

*Always cheerful*, the first one thought. *But this is too serious for that.* He stared ahead sternly.

The second one was worried. About both of them. The first one checked his watch again.

"Where'd you get that?" the second one asked.

"I stole it from my brother."

They laughed.

Eventually, the third child ran down the sidewalk and headed up the ladder to the roof.

"Finally!" the first one exclaimed incredulously. "What *took* you so long?"

The third one rolled her eyes. "Do *not* get me started," she said, out of breath.

The second one smiled. "Well, I'm glad you're here now!"

*...to be continued.*



Artwork by Xan Tardis Traveler

# Sunny Skies

By Sarah the Winged Cat

*Sunny Skies: a story of two conflicting entities, Konstantin and Nikolai, who happen to be part of a singular personality. Neither is good or bad, they're both just (albeit eternal) human. Emily is Nikolai's good friend who comes to even out the differences between the two forms before one destroys the other. The name following the chapter number is the Narrator, in this case Emily. Enjoy!*

## Chapter 21, Emily

I walk into Nikolai's apartment.

He and another person are arguing.

The other person, a fellow with silver hair, although he is young, and gold-leaf eyes seems to be... floating?

Nikolai notices me.

"Emily! Come tell this nutcase, my other form, that he is not welcome—" he exclaims.

"No, tell THIS nutcase whom my other form is!" the other person, the one who's floating, says.

"Konstantin, just stop. We signed that agreement, 'let's be nice to each other.' You said I was more mature, so I was in charge. I even let you do whatever you wanted," Nikolai yells.

"So?! I decided to become a separate consciousness, you said I could (albeit many years ago)!" Konstantin yells.

"Er... Is there something I'm missing here?" I quietly ask. "I walk in and see one of you casually levitating, and apparently you two are separate consciousnesses. I want an explanation."

Nikolai laughs awkwardly.

"Well, Emily, it's a long story," he says, "and somehow I have an alternate form. He calls himself Konstantin/Constantine, and he's driving me absolutely nuts."

"No I'm not, I just wanted a tangible form and a sweater, what else would one want?!" Konstantin says.

A tangible form and a sweater. I'm not going to ask.

So, I think this was the evil form in the mirror. I should really mention that someday to Niks, or Nikolai, I need more of an explanation.

But he seems just as human, if not more than, as Nikolai is.

I know that Nikolai mentioned that he had another personality, a darker one, a more hidden form. That must be it, Konstantin must be a part of Nikolai's personality that he didn't want to mention, to acknowledge.

I've known Mr. Nikolai for years, why didn't he mention Konstantin to me? I would have helped Nik, I would have made sure his other form was under control, I would have tried?

There is a few seconds of silence.

"What's so great about hotdogs, Konstantin?" I hear Nikolai ask. "Were you a hotdog salesman in a previous life?"

Konstantin laughs. "I was. I also was a golf cart dealer and an artisan at the art of making instant ramen," he says. "It's a long story, and I don't have time to tell it."

"So, you went on some capers when I was reading? I know you well enough to know. You must not need me anymore," Nikolai mutters.

There is silence.

"Farewell," Nikolai says. "You may leave." He says this like he says a command.

In response to this, Konstantin disappears in a flash of light.

...to be continued.

## Dead in Secrets

by Victoria Hahn

I cross over the dirt path deep in the woods. I see a vivid light coming from my cabin far in the distance. The trees looked taller and as if they were closing in on me, my feet aching as the wind blew my straight, tangled hair in my eyes. My eyes wander in every direction. Crack! I hear a branch snap behind me. I immediately pull out my dagger and grasp it tightly. I stand there, shaking with fear. What was that? But just then, all I see is darkness and I collapse to the ground. The wind creates a tornado-like shape around me, leaves and branches flying in the air. I look up and realized I am trapped. The darkness has found me.

“Please, do not take me! I have nothing to hide, no secrets to tell,” I beg, simply looking at nothing as I start to tear up. My body sinks to the floor. A good minute passes and I sit there, in the cold and watch the darkness, slowly fade away. I wipe my face with my freezing cold hands and stand up.

I am alive... I am alive!! I think to myself.

I feel like jumping for joy but something stops me. I stare into the night watching the stars gaze upon me. I notice a bird floating in front of my eyes as it slowly descends to the ground. I kneel down to take a closer look but I get pushed back by the wind. Strange... I turn around and start walking home.

“Shhh I- pfpf wha-,” I stop to the sound of gibberish, my heart pounding in my chest. I turn around and see the bird, but not only the bird. I look up above it and see—its secrets, a glowing bubble shape that could project noise. The bird is dying... getting taken away. The darkness appears again and takes the bird with it. I still stand there, cold, confused, and sad. Just then, the darkness moves closer, and closer, and starts charging at me. My eyes widen and I run for my life.

To the light. Just run toward the light. I say to myself. I don't bother to turn around and look back. My legs feel numb but I keep going. I soon reach my porch and I race even faster. I open the door and run in. Slam! I shut the door as fast as I can and rest my head on it. I'm safe in the light. I try to control my breathing, and look out the window to realize the sun is rising. I live another day.



Oak tree by Prof. Suki



# Life is

*by Alexa Alisse Gordon Mellema*

Life is a tragedy. Humans destroying their very planet, their only home, in search of momentary happiness, is a tragedy. The fact that the earth exists, the fact that life can happen and sadness can reign is a tragedy. Each life unknown by history like a song unsung is a tragedy. Each life history remembers is a tragedy. It takes the good things about a terrible person and destroys them. It takes the bad things about a great person and remembers them for as long as someone can remember.

Misunderstandings are a tragedy. So many lives are cut short just through lack of understanding or willingness to try. Communication is a tragedy, it ends a life for each one it saves. Being alive is a tragedy. It forces us to endure our intense emotions that can change in a mere instant until our very death. The unknown is a tragedy. It strikes fear and anger into the hearts of people who do awful things under its influence. Science is a tragedy. It gives us so many more ways of causing pain to each other. Currency is a tragedy. It gives power to those that should never be trusted outside of a prison. Laws are a tragedy. They give us so many more ways of making the poor more poor and the rich more rich.

Life is a dystopia. Humans destroying their very planet, their only home in search of momentary happiness is dystopian. The fact that the earth exists, the fact that life can happen and sadness can reign is dystopian. Each life unknown by history like a song unsung is dystopian. Each life history remembers is dystopian. It takes the good things about a terrible person and destroys them; it takes the bad things about a great person and remembers them for as long as someone can remember.

Misunderstandings are dystopian. So many lives are cut short just through lack of understanding or willingness to try. Communication is dystopian. It ends a life for each one it saves. Being alive is dystopian. It forces us to endure our intense emotions that can change in a mere instant until our very death. The unknown is dystopian. It strikes fear and anger into the hearts of people who do awful things under its influence. Science is dystopian. It gives us so many more ways of causing pain to each other. Currency is dystopian, it gives power to those that should never be trusted outside of a prison. Laws are dystopian, they give us so many more ways of making the poor more poor and the rich more rich.

Life is heartwarming. Humans searching for a way to save their very planet, their only home, is heartwarming. The fact that the earth exists, the fact that life can happen and happiness can reign, is heartwarming. Each simple life lived without the need to be remembered is heartwarming. The fact that humans are trying to remember their ancestors more like real people is heartwarming. The fact that humans are trying to understand more is heartwarming.

Communication is heartwarming, it allows us to pass on information that can save the lives of many. Being alive is heartwarming. It allows us to feel our emotions until our very death. The unknown is heartwarming. It is what makes us curious about the world around us. Science is heartwarming. It gives us so many more ways of easing our pain. Currency is heartwarming. It gives a way for people who are not the strongest to live a good life. Laws are heartwarming. They give us ways of making justice where there would have been none.

Each aspect of our world can be seen to look amazing—or terrible. We should understand the terrible part of life, being oblivious is not helpful. However, we should also remember in trying times that there is more than that in the universe. Let us keep both images in our hearts, and let us hope that in the end good will win out and the story of humans will not be a tragedy, or a dystopia, but a heartwarming tale. A tale with good parts and bad parts, parts when things seem hopeless and parts where everything seems right. A story with a happy ending.

## Bellador's Death

by Zoe Paul

I hear the whistle of a sword slicing through the air before I see the blade. As I turn to fight, an arrow nocked in my bow, I hear a pained gasp. Bensom screams. I spin around and shoot my arrow before seeing who it will hit. Luckily, it spears Crash through the neck, killing him instantly.

Crash's forces retreat, knowing their king is gone forever, that they are defeated in their cause. I give out a cry of victory, but nobody shares my joy. I feel a hand tugging on my shoulder, and I turn and see Lynxx standing behind me. There are tears dripping out of their teal eyes, and their face is coated in a shade of grief.

"Dys... Bellador is hurt. Please, she's really struggling and—"

I run past Lynxx and see Libbo and Kat kneeling next to Bellador, rubbing medicine on a deep cut on her chest. Bensom is in tears next to her, holding her hand as she gasps in pain.

"Bella, why? I—it should have been me. I should have taken that hit for you, you shouldn't have jumped in front of me, I would have—" Bensom sputters to a stop as Bella places a trembling finger over his lips.

"Bensom, stop," she rasps, struggling from the effort. "There's nothing you can—" she gasps in pain. "...Nothing you can do. I—it was the right thing, Bensom... I couldn't have stood by and watched you die. It would have broken me." She winces and motions for Libbo to stop applying the medicine, and Libbo reluctantly stops.

"Please, Leah," Bensom cries, clutching desperately at Libbo's hands. "You have to help her..." He shoots a pained glance at Bellador's crumpled form. "Please—"

With the last ounce of energy trapped in Bella's body, she reaches out and kisses Bensom, silencing his desperate pleas. As she slips away from him, the light fading from her silver eyes, her final words slide out of her like the last flicker of a dying flame.

"The sunset," she mutters, staring blankly at the gorgeous pastel colors coating the sky. "So beautiful..."

Her eyes fall dim and her shuddering breaths fall short. Bensom's bitter tears evolve into choking sobs, and the only sound in the ruined forest are the sounds of his mourning. Tears are trickling down all of our faces, and as the sunset Bella so adored fades into the dim grey twilight the same color of her eyes. I reach forward and close Bella's eyes, softly brushing my fingers over her eyelids.

Daniela slips a shroud into my hands, and I carefully wrap Bellador's body in the soft linen quilt with the same gentleness I would give to a child. Once it is done, I turn to the rest of my people and I am shocked to find the entire Dreamon army standing beside me, mourning the loss of not just a friend, but a sister to them all.

...to be continued.



Artwork by Zoe Paul

## Time to colonize Earth part two: The Great Mission

by Jonah G

I look down from the window of the rocket, down at the city below. We are about to take off any moment now. Our rocket is sitting on a high mountain just sticking out of the water. On its slopes are the buildings and passages that I had known for so long. I am soon going to have to leave them behind for a planet that was recently noticed to be inhabitable that my own dad discovered an artifact from. There is a slight lurch. I look back out. We are taking off.

Clouds of smoke billow out from under the boosters as we begin our slow ascent. The speed gradually increases. We are soon looping around, further and further from the planet. We all prepare for the moment. "Breaking orbit!" a charge relays to me. We shoot off, flying in the direction of of the target star.

Our journey takes forever, even traveling at 70% of the speed of light. Our only company are each other and any asteroids we might pass.

Speaking of asteroids, one time we pass a rather large one and actually send a small craft down to it. Kljllxkljwrjhxi says that we need metal to replace all the things we have used up for repairs and stuff. The craft is filled with water and has a rope attached to the back to tether it to the main craft. We decide to send an expedition down. (I actually manage to convince them that I am good enough for the honor.) We go down with the split-second accuracy that is required with moving asteroids. Each of us get into a little machine and drive off to each explore a different set of caverns. Once we are all done, we have tons of iron ore. Our craft now crawls back up the rope and into the rocket.

Eventually, we begin seeing more. We enter a vast field of asteroids, getting thicker every moment. We have to decelerate. We shoot past a cold gassy planet, then another one, slightly smaller. We go on past a large ringed one and an even larger one, almost ready to be a star. We loop around the central star and go onto a trajectory toward the third planet. It has a companion that was entirely barren, unlike the planet itself.

Once in orbit, I look down at the planet. It is large-

ly covered by seas, just like our home, but it also has large swaths of land. Apparently, according to the data from the probe, there are cells that lived on land as well as ones that lived in the water. I try to push this silly thought out of my head. Cells living on land—why, that is something from myth and legends! I had been on land once, but only for a short time. On land, it was impossible to respire or communicate, and so hard to move. I had spent only a minute on land, and I was so tired and my cytoskeleton was aching for days afterward! I finally manage to get this silly thought out of my head and prepare for entering the atmosphere.

I climb over to the capsule. A charge signals over to me, "Kljxkljtykjpsxxxi and Rpxkljxkljtykjpsxxxi, get in the capsule." Me and my dad crawl into our section of the capsule, which has a window for us to look out of. I look down. I remember that the entry stage is the most dangerous part of the whole mission.

"You know, I'm a bit worried," I say.

"Why?" Dad replies.

"Well, the entry is the most dangerous part of any space mission. Aren't you worried too?"

"A bit, but this thing has been tested hundreds of times, and it never blew up with anyone inside. So it is safe."

"Okay." I hope he is correct.

I look out the window. I feel a jerk and the ground starts accelerating upward from under us. A large cloud flies up from under us and we soon are submerged. Nonsensical charges jump, flashing outside my windows. The cloud quickly thins and we plunge into the sea. Our craft sinks down and settles at the bottom. We unscrew the hatch and crawl out.

Our good fortune is amazing. We landed in warm, shallow water with 3.4% salinity—just right. We had just barely avoided the shore. After considering our luck, we began to unpack our stuff to set up our colony.

*...to be continued.*





## The Huntress and the Bear

by Kathryn Velasco

featuring original art by Lizzy

“You sad creature...”

I’m kneeling over the bear, my bow strung over my shoulder. It wasn’t my arrow that killed it; no, it was something much darker than any mortal arrow.

I had been watching the bear from afar, my quick eyes following its every movement. I had thought about killing it—my family could certainly use the meat—but decided against it. Something about those golden eyes seemed so young and alive and innocent, I couldn’t bring myself to pull the string.

But I didn’t have to. As I stood there watching the bear, one of its front paws lit on fire. The smoke encased the bear, burning it all over before slowly swishing away. I raced towards it as soon as the fire died away and I had composed myself; despite being a hunter, I had a soft spot for animals.

I don’t know what to do for the poor creature. There’s no saving it now, that’s for sure. Even if I had something for the burns, it wouldn’t work, not on something caused by dark magic like this. So I just sit there and stroke its fur and whisper in its ears. The bear lives longer than I thought, and I’m still here as the stars are falling, still whispering to it, telling it stories and songs. The bear slowly closes his big golden eyes, and my heart shatters along with it.

I’m crying now; tears are flowing from my eyes onto his soft fur. I stroke his head—I want to do something for him. Then I think of it: I’m in a woodland, and there are beautiful things everywhere. I grab clover, twigs, moss, feathers, everything I can think of, and I make him a crown of forest treasures. Now he has died as a king.

I am turning around to leave, looking back once more at the bear. But the bear isn’t all that I see. Rising up behind him is a dark, violet-tinged flame, racing towards me. I turn and run with all my life, my hair flying behind me, and I send one last forgotten prayer to the bear.



# Build Me a Boyfriend, Buy Me An Android []

## Chapter 1

by Lara

Early morning.

The wind outside blew branches out of trees. Light dew covered the world like a cold, thin blanket. The sun gently shined over the world, causing the dew to slowly start evaporating.

The morning was always so beautiful.

A boy stood on a balcony, sipping tea, while watching the day unfold. He smiled as he looked around at the world he lived in.

Now, the world this young man lived in was different from the world you and I reside in.

In this world, you could skate on air.

In this world, you could buy an android to be a pet or a servant.

In this world, you would attend school using a virtual reality headset.

In this world, you could buy anything you ever wanted.

And to this boy, the type of world he lived in felt normal. This boy's name was Zane.

Zane didn't have much money, so he couldn't afford a flashy android or anything along the lines of that. He only had a small apartment, and a regular old bicycle. That was all he needed besides food and such, but he could afford that.

Even though he didn't need to.

Zane had a problem—he refused to eat. He would eat a little bit each day so he didn't die of starvation, but other than that, he wouldn't ever eat a single bite, except on holidays and other special occasions.

Zane was also very shy, so much so that he refused to talk to anyone he hadn't met before. And even then, he would only talk at a tone as loud as a whisper. That was who Zane was—a shy, lonely young man.

And honestly, he didn't always mind.

Zane stood up and walked into his apartment, and then he noticed something. Someone had left a small white box with a black bow on it inside his apartment. Zane carefully opened the box.

A huge stack of money sat in the box. He also found a card, which revealed the identity of the sender. The sender was his parents, making sure he had enough money to live a good life.

Zane didn't want the money at all. He just stuffed it into his left pocket and walked out of his apartment, closing the door behind himself and locking it. He walked down the street, breathing in the fresh, clean air. Zane wandered around, passing android-run bakeries and huge corporate buildings.

And then he stopped.

He had come across a building that had caught his eye. It was a building that was simply labeled "Build."

He walked inside the building and wandered over to one of the many workers who worked there. "E-Excuse me," Zane whispered. "W-What is this building for?"

"Oh, this old place? Well, it's simple. We build people."

"P-People?!"

"Yep. All you have to do is fill out a form and we can create your ideal person. Could be a best friend, could be a family member, could be a significant other... the person can fill whatever role you want them to."

Zane sighed. He was lonely, and here, a possible cure presented itself. He took the money out of his pocket.

"How does this work?" he asked, his voice as loud as a small breeze. The worker smiled slightly. "It's simple. You give me the money, I give you a form to fill out, you give it back to me, and I return with your ideal person."

Zane nodded, handing the worker some of his money. "Here..." The worker took the money and handed Zane a form and a pen.

The form was full of questions such as "What role do you want your ideal person to have?" and "What personality traits should the person have?" Zane quickly filled it out.

He wanted a boy his age to be with him.

He wanted someone who would be able to protect him, someone who would make Zane feel loved instead of lonely.

...to be continued.



# Hiroshi Nekosagi Chapter 1

by Noah Allen the Avatar

## Chapter 1: The Cat at School

Hiroshi Nekosagi was 16 years old. It was his first day at high school and already he was not liking it. The day had started with rain and had ended by the time class started.

'Good sign, I hope,' he thought. Then he saw a cat staring at him from a nearby building, its eyes stampeding right through him. Hiroshi walked to the cafeteria. It wasn't anything special, most schools he had gone to had exotic cafeterias. He grabbed his food.

At lunch, he sat closest to where he saw the cat. It came. When it did, it purred near him. It seemed to like Hiroshi's hand on its fur. When Hiroshi went into writing class, Mr. Sakura asked for a novel by the end of the month. Hiroshi could probably do that. When he started reading his rough drafts, he saw the cat. It came in through his wide-open window. It finally seemed totally comfortable.

"Hello..." said a voice.

"Umm...Hello?"

"Ahh, yes. Hiroshiii. I am so very glad to see you again."

Hiroshi looked down. The cat seemed to be the voice.

"My name is Mako. You are Meiko's son, yes?"

"First of all, yes, second of all, why can you talk, third of all, WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU HERE?"

"You can only understand me because your family is special. Do you want me to show you?"

"No! Not at all...!!!" His voice turned to a meowing. He had brown hair all over his arms. "What the—"

"You can transform into a cat at will! You must learn to master it. Your grandfather and I will be your teachers. You must go to his shop."



Artwork by Xan Tardis Traveler

Read Chapter II

and much more here --> [The Life of Hiroshi Nekosagi](#)



## The Adventure of a Lifetime

by Cady W.

There once was a girl who longed for a friend. She was stuck inside her home all day. Her mother had died, her father was out working. Her dad would lock the door to prevent things from happening, like what happened to her mother.

Arielle was a young, kind-spirited girl who wished her father weren't so over-protective. She would stare out the window and see kids running around, playing what might have been a game of tag. She wanted to join them so badly.

Her dad would return home at 11pm, and by then, she was expected to be in bed. Arielle was especially mature for her age, probably because she was left alone every day.

One day, her dad came home early, but Arielle was already lying in her bed already. She could hear her dad mumbling to someone over the...phone? He must have thought she was asleep.

"I don't know what to do," her dad said. "Arielle's a curious girl, she's going to find out, sooner or later."

Although Arielle lay in bed, still and calm, her head was the opposite. Find out what? And why was her father keeping it from her?!

But she knew one thing. She was going to find out, even if it was the last thing she did.

*...to be continued.*



# Crystal Bay

by Priya The Ice Wolf

"Nikki, is Owen in the car yet? And what about Julia? Are the twins in the car?" my mother muttered, digging through the suitcases to be sure we had everything for our three-week-long visit to Seaside City, a large town built near Crystal Bay. We'd visited once before, in spring around 3 years ago, but only for the weekend. We're going back for the Seaside Celebration, an annual party hosted by, you guessed it, Seaside City.

This year, the Celebration was different. Near Crystal Bay, on the beach, there was a statue of Crystal. Crystal was a dolphin who was poached by poachers who thought she was a whale. They realized their mistake and told the mayor, and even helped fund the construction of the statue.

There's an old legend relating to the statue. Apparently, there's an enigma that will be solved after 100 years have passed since Crystal's death. This year, on July 21, the Seaside Celebration is going to try to crack the code. They're even offering a reward to whoever cracks it. You're allowed to try before the festivities, so I think I'm going to try. I have a theory of how to solve it and—

"Hawt dog!" my younger brother Owen yelled, interrupting my train of thought. "I am gong eaf hawt dog!" he shouted at the top of his lungs, kicking his feet like a wild monkey while I wrestled him into his seat.

Julia grabbed her blankie and covered her body, her large, moon-like doe eyes tracking Owen's every movement. "Mama?" she whimpered tearfully. "Where is mama? I want mamama! Mamamamamamamamamamamamam!" she yelped fearfully, eyeing Owen's long, uncut toenails.

My mom rushed to her side, picking the girl up and bouncing Julia on her hip. She patted Owen, reassuring him that dinner would indeed be a hot dog.

After the twins were in their seat, I ran back inside to grab Candy (our pet Scarlet Macaw), Snickers (our blue Himalayan rabbit), Lion (our large Maine Coon) and Blackberry (our black French Bulldog puppy).

"Seaside Celebration! Seaside City Celebration! Crystal Bay! Seaside Celebration! Aaaaawk!" Candy squawked. Lion hissed at her and received a nibble from Blackberry. I quickly picked 'em up before the fight got ugly, depositing them in their travel cages.

A few minutes later, Blackberry and General (our neurotic German Shepherd) was settled next to the twins. My brother, Andrew, and I climbed past the backseat to get to the trunk seats. Lion followed us, tailed by Candy. He curled up on Andrew's lap, purring happily. Candy perched on a suitcase happily, and we were off.

"Wait, Dad!" I shouted, realized Dad was still in the house, wrapping up some stuff for his job. We skidded to a stop and Dad jumped in.

"Are you sure I shouldn't drive?" Dad asked Mom worriedly.

"Oh, sheesh. I told you, I'm okay! Nothing happened to me!"

"UM, there was that one time you fell off the ladder when you were picking apples and you had to get stitches!"

"That was a week ago. But fine, if you want to drive, you can."

They switched seats, and we were off (again)!

\*\*\*

A few hours later, after many bathroom stops, the sparkling water of Crystal Bay shimmered under a shining silver bridge. Seaside City loomed past the bridge in a kind, protective way.

*...to be continued.*

# "Lindsey and the Forbidden Forest"

by Evelyn the Techno Robot

Once in a land of magic and imagination, there was a small garden gnome named Lindsey. She lived in a small cottage upon the fields of the gnomian kingdom. Lindsey had a wonderful life full of happiness. Her cottage smelled like roses, and her patio smelled of basil and rosemary. Yes, she is the gardening type but she also likes to read and write.

There is only one species of gnome which is the garden gnome. But each gnome has one of three characteristics, gardening, art, and cooking. The garden gnome is a long lost ancestor of the garden fairy, one of the many types of fairies, but after the great separation, gnomes and fairies grew apart. Fairies got the trait of being very cheerful and kind, while the gnomes got the trait of being happy but grumpier.

Lindsey is one of the many gardening gnomes, but she has a strange liking towards basil, which is supposed to ward off garden gnomes if they ever get too close to a human city. Before the great separation, there were many more types of gnomes but they went extinct because they couldn't adapt to changes in the environment.

Lindsey was just walking along the path to her flower garden when she noticed a butterfly; she took a closer look and noticed that it was one of the rarest butterflies in her entire kingdom! It was the Areis Magnitus, a sign of peace, happiness and pleasure. Since it was so rare, she took her net and captured it to show off to her best of friends. Almost instantly, all of her plants withered and died and in a couple of minutes, all of the growth in the entire kingdom had turned to ashes.

Lindsey freed the butterfly thinking that it would fix everything but instead, the butterfly stayed there as though waiting for something. She walked around the neighborhood going door to door asking if anyone knew what to do. Just after she lost hope of finding anything out, a young lady came up to her and said, "Feed the butterfly one piece of the rarest lichen from the forbidden forest." She obliged and headed off on her journey to find this lichen and to fix everything that she had done wrong.

Lindsey tried to remember everything her mom taught her about the forbidden forest, but all that could come to her head was, "Never go there, Lindsey, it is too dangerous." Of course she didn't listen to the only piece of advice that she had left from her mom and she tried for hours to come

up with a plan to find this lichen. Once she had a plan, she started walking towards the forest while finishing up the final touches on the scarf and socks that she had been knitting. She stowed them away in her pouch and entered the forest.

Lindsey soon regretted not bringing more food and items in her pouch because she instantaneously got cold. She put her shawl on but it did nothing against the chill that came pulsing through her veins. She traveled along the path that ran through the forest but after a few miles, the path came to an end. Wondering if she should continue, she carefully walked for another couple miles until she found a clearing in the forest. As she was setting up camp for the night, she came across a patch of glowing tulips. Right as she reached out to grab one to take home, she remembered that she promised herself to only necessities and the lichen and leave with what she came for.

After her tent was set up she went into the forest to pick some blueberries to add to her soup for dinner. She made a fire and cooked the soup with mint leaves, blueberries and some sweet broth. After finishing the soup she felt slightly refreshed and went into her tent to go to sleep. At about 11:00 PM she was woken by an eerie howl coming a part of the forest. She jolted out of her bed and waited, for twenty more minutes she sat there in silence waiting for the noise again, but it never came. Next morning, she packed up her bags, grabbed some freshwater from the stream and ran towards the forest in front of her. After three miles of walking she stopped. Something had materialized directly in front of her.

It was a map, she snatched it before it hit the ground and she looked at the intricate symbols and markings on the map. After a couple of minutes, she noticed that only one tree had a lichen symbol. The rarest lichen she thought, when she looked at the map again, a golden dot appeared about 300 miles away from the tree. It was her name, she had found a map to the lichen, but she had a long ways to walk before she could go back to the comfort of her own home.

*...to be continued.*



# Writer's TEEN LAB



Teen Writer's Lab is a community of 13+ writers who support each other in writing, editing, studying, and life in general. Some of the students in this group have been together for years. This year, we bid farewell to Savannah, who is moving on to college in the fall, and Soph, who will be an exchange student in Germany. As you can tell from their writing, these teens love to explore all aspects of life. Some of the pieces in the second half of this section may be a bit too dark for young readers—enter at your own peril! Enjoy the creativity of this group!

## In This Section

"Piealogue" by Violet Jensen

"Important History that Everyone in 2647 Knows, So If You Don't Know it Read This. Yes You." by Xan Tardis Traveler

"The story of Loki, Son of Odin" by Riley

"Advice to (and from) a Poetaster" by Sophonisba Franecki

"A Very Long Short Story" by Robert Ekstrand

"Horror Story" by Megan the Moon Knight

"it was beautiful" by Red

"All Along - Little Nightmares II" by Cecilia | Reluctant Follower

"What are we even simulating?" by Grant M.

"Some Names are Nice Names" by Cate E

"Swing" by Savannah Gordon



## Piealogue

by Violet Jensen

“JAZZZZ Jazzzzzz we’re having PIE!!”

Karina bounces up and down while her sort-of-brother rushes into the room, screaming “WHAT IS PIEEEEE!!” When he gets into the room he stops and runs and jumps in place.

“It, it taste good. It sweet.”

Karina grins, showing her tiny fangs. Jazz grins back instinctively. His teeth are normal, due to his temporary human form...

“What is sweet.”

Karina purses her lips, trying to come up with the words, but thinking in her second language requires a bit more brainpower than a hangry 9-year-old can summon. She makes some comments under her breath in Russian, trying to think. Jazz waits for her to finish. He’s patient with his little Russian sister. He has no idea why his mom’s decided to adopt her, but he loves her all the same. He likes to think they get along very well when they’re getting up to trouble, raiding the pantry, sneaking off to Hell for a day out, the like. He’d never had a sister before, and he wonders how he got along without her companionship.

“Itttt... it taste GOOD...? Like, sugary—” Karina says.

Jazz lights up.

“YES SUGAR TASTES GOOD!!”

He jumps up and down. Karina does the same, flapping her batlike wings.

“YESSS pie is lots of sugar—”

“Can I have pie—” Jazz says, stopping his jumping suddenly, having just considered he might not get any pie.

“Yes yesss pie for everyone!”

“Can I have pie nOW??”

“No no the pie is in the oven, it’s cooking!” Karina says with a grin.

Jazz looks distraught.

“But— how long—”

“Oh, forty-five minute!”

“That’s- Uh- That’s ALMOST TWO HOURS!!” Jazz complains loudly, throwing his head back. His hat— a sunhat with ribbons his favorite aunt bought him, much too large for him— almost slips off, but he quickly catches it. He hasn’t seen her in a while, since she went to the hospital for some reason she didn’t explain... he grows a bit melancholy, and sets his hat on, wishing she was home. Meanwhile, Karina starts making a weird face, trying to count in her head.

“Noooo, one hour is sixty minute Karina think... so not even one hour. Two hours is ONE HUNDRED minute then. Not forty-five.”

“But. But one hour is at least, at least TEN MILLIONS SECONDS!!!!”

“TEN MILLIONS SECONDS!? But I want pie soooonnnnn—”

Jazz whimpers. “Mee toOoOoOooo...”



Important history that Everyone in 2647 Knows, So If You Don't Know it Read This. Yes You.

By Xan TardisTraveler

Important history.

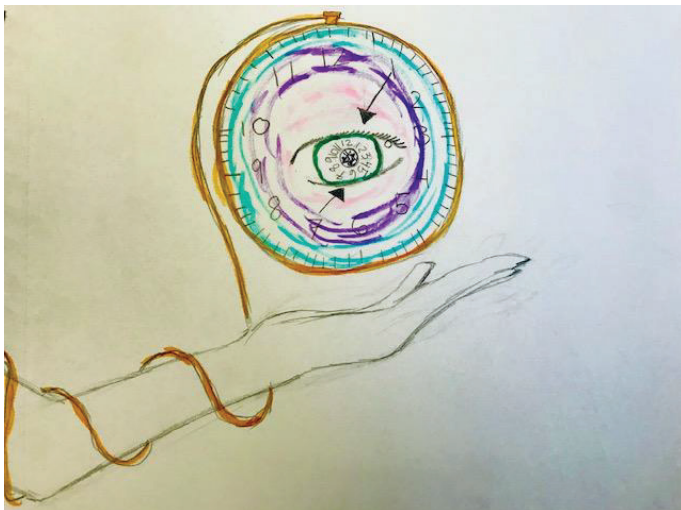
If you are not a history buff and are someone like me you probably are thinking that you will find this very boring, but you will not, unless you are a grouch. The reason this is so interesting is because it is completely untrue. Anyway, on with this history. Ahem.

Almost 100 years ago, a great scientist with the unfortunate name of Bermuda Short created a new and improved AI. This AI could use a revolutionary kind of math that, using quantum physics, psychology, and many other important things that people smarter than me know about, could predict the future.

He became very successful, people came to learn the future, he won several prizes for his work. At that time there was a ban on sentient AIs due to their tendency to kill their makers, and government officials started talking about dismantling the AI, but after a lot of arguing they decided to let it be. Doctor Short was now the most sought-after scientific mind in the galaxy. That is until the AI predicted his death. The AI set an electrical fire in his house and Short died. Lots of government officials started saying, "I told you so," including the ones who supported the AI, just because they could.

Because Doctor Short was dead it didn't take quite as much arguing this time (even though there was still a quite a bit, this is the government you know), the ban on sentient artificial intelligence was enforced, the AI was deactivated, its computers were sent into deep space, and when they were far enough away, were blown to bits. And humanity got on with arguing with itself.

Now the reason this is completely made up and that you probably should have skipped it because it gives you a completely wrong idea of what happened, will be explained... just not right now, and not by me, because I am about to die.





# The story of Loki, Son of Odin

by Riley

I have always been the gods' punching bag. They have threatened my death on many occasions, and I cannot count how many times the gods have turned their heads as I suffer. They keep me around for my guile, my wit, my tricks. But as soon as I get out of line, they punish me in the most horrific ways.

I accidentally killed a servant while I was drunk, yes, but I have seen more gods do much worse sober, and none of them were punished as I have been punished. No, the real reason for my punishment is that I insulted the god's fragile ego. I stripped them bare with my insults, I made my words burn almost as much as the acid that flows into my eyes and mouth in this wretched, sulfurous cave. I showed the whole world their true selves, now they have come for me to repay the favor. I was never really one of them. No, I am grateful for that at least.

At least I am not them.



Artwork by Claire, asdkajdlkaskasjd

## Advice to (and from) a Poetaster

by Sophonisba Franecki

So you're not as suave as Byron  
And not half as quick a wit.  
Both your verses are quite good (they are?)  
But only his are hits.  
Well, who needs that snob, that fake, that rake  
That (handsome, charming) git?

Do you bleed to charm your critics?  
Do reviewers pay for ink?  
Life's a bottle with a candle  
Dripping doubt and wax and drink.  
In the meantime, raise your glass and feel  
Your fears (your futures) sink!

Let the centuries of critics  
Wear your sentiments to snow!  
Let the sediment absorb you  
Let your genius(?) mulch below.  
Child, you tried (and came out guilty)  
that is all you need to know.



Artwork by Xan Tardis Traveler

# A Very Long Short Story

by Robert Ekstrand

As the seagulls called out over the bay, shouts of grizzled and gruff sailors echoed over the wooden docks. Underlings of captains walking around, dropping off, and picking up cargo. A one-armed grey-skinned boy with dagger ears, young and starry-eyed, overlooked the massive wooden ships, their legs hanging off the side of the dock. In their callus-covered hand they were flipping a small gold coin, one side stained with mud and dirt, the other pristine and well-kept. The kid smirked as he leaned back on his ragged and worn jacket, his hand clutching the gold coin.

"Thomas! Get off of ya hind and git back to peeling the potatoes! We're 'bout to open up so I moved ya workstation to the alley behind the store! And take out da rotten meat with ya." The shaggy-haired and long-bearded man tossed a damp and dripping sack to Thomas, slapping it against Thomas's shoulder, leaving a wet squish as it sank on itself.

Thomas could smell the flies and decaying flesh. "God, how long has this been sitting on the shelf?"

"When did ya start working fa me?"

Thomas gagged and quickly scurried onto his feet, speaking over the shopkeeper. "I got it! I got it! By the calamity that's disgusting... I'll get this done, and then I got to head out to my other job."

The shopkeeper waved him off with a roll of the eyes. "I don't hire ya to care about how ya can manage all ye jobs. I pay ya to keep da products ready. Now git to it!" The shopkeeper threw out his hand, gesturing Thomas to pick up the speed as he walked back into the store.

Thomas sighed and hesitantly picked up the sack of rotten meat, dragging it with him around the shop. As he made his way around the stone and colorless building he heard the sounds of scraping and loud crunches coming from the alleyway. "What the?...?" With caution he gripped the sack tighter, slowly creeping towards the alley before leaping out, crying out as he lifted up the sack like a weapon. "Show yourself! I have a sack full of rotten meat and I'm not afraid to use it!"

In the alley stood a crate that a sack of potatoes and apples sat on, a knife stabbed into the wood of the crate. Leaning up against a wall was a beautiful woman. Her entire body and form was hazy, almost like it was obscured by fog, the only discernible thing on her being an apple with a bite in it.

Thomas relaxed when he saw her, sighing as he got a small smile. While he couldn't see what she actually looked like, it was her voice and her stature that kept reminding him of a friendly presence, happily walking closer. "Avandra, stop eating the product. Each piece that goes missing is reduced from my pay."

Avandra chuckled and tossed the apple over. "Don't worry, you have enough jobs that one of them will be able to cover it. I still don't understand why you have so many."

Thomas quickly tossed the sack to the side as he caught the

apple, looking it over as he sighed before taking a bite out himself. His stomach growled as he finally ate something. "Because renting a room at an inn every night costs a lot. Plus it's not like I'm making bank. It's only 5 silver for each job if I'm lucky."

Avandra smirked and stood up, extending her arms, gesturing to him as if she wanted a hug.

He raised a curious eye. "What are you doing?"

"I don't like it when you pout. It looks really pitiful and sad. So give me a hug."

Thomas just stared at her, confused if she was serious or not, looking around trying to spot the trick.

"I didn't ask. I demanded. Now get over here right now or I'll come over there and give you a thousand hugs!" Avandra stomped her foot and pointed towards the stone floor, looking impatient.

Thomas just burst into laughter, lightly throwing the apple at her. "You can't be serious!"

Avandra slightly smiled. "There we go... You're so much better-looking when you're smiling. You may have avoided it for now. But, whenever you are in trouble, whenever you have lost your smile, I will be there to give you a hug. Okay?"

Thomas smiled and walked up to her, placing his hand on her shoulder. "And I promise as long as people call me Thomas, I'll never lose my smile. Now can I get to my job?"

Avandra raised her hands up in a surrendering gesture as she stepped aside. "Sure, go ahead. You're worth so much more, though."

Thomas rolled his eyes, ready to block out the speech he had heard many times before. Tugging out the knife from the crate he rolled out one of the potatoes, he bit onto the knife's handle as he wedged the potato in-between the lid and frame of the crate, holding the potato in place. As he had it kept still, he took the knife out of his mouth and started to skin it, adjusting it whenever he needed to get a different spot, continuing to do this repeatedly with several potatoes and apples.

"Come on! You are! You're smart, strong, sensitive—"

Thomas turned back and looked at her, cutting her off. "Are all of these going to start with S?"

Avandra looked at him with an annoyed and impatient glare. "Sassy."

He poked his tongue at her before returning to his job. "Avandra we've had this discussion before. I'm not going on an adventure."

Avandra sighed in frustration. "But you used to love it! You were so young and you would go running across rooftops, heck, we had the greatest little explorations!"

"When I was young I thought Ms. Dallas's cat was the biggest evil in the world. Now I know it's minimum wage..."

[Click here to continue reading...](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



# Horror Story

*by Megan the Moon Knight*

They arrived a while back. I've never known a world without the constant fear of being discovered and eaten. My family has found a small bunker to shelter in for now, but we may have to move soon. We love each other dearly since we're the only ones we have. The central village is the only safe place, but we're too far away for anyone to attempt a pilgrimage.

Until me.

Being the rebellious teen I was, I packed a little ration bag and snuck out one night. Candles and matches in hand, with an expansive wasteland before me, I set out west. My dinky arcade compass came in handy, as did my dad's old baseball cap. The blindingly hot sun peeked out from between dusty clouds.

The first day I encountered a strange fox which stood and walked on its hind legs. From what I'd read, they didn't normally do that. When it spotted me, the fox smiled in an oddly human way. I simply gaped at it. The fox came closer.

"Are you searching for the village?" the fox asked. Its voice was raspy, like it hadn't spoken in a while. Astonished, I nodded. "Then allow me to accompany you," it continued. At that, it bent onto all fours like a normal fox and trotted next to me, heading southwest.

I followed it for a while stopping only twice: once because I was winded, and once for a snack break. I asked the fox many questions, like its name, which is Rusty-Red ("Red for short,") because of its coat. Red told me many things about why the monsters came. Here's Red's account of their arrival:

"The first wave was a silent stream of figures, slender and humanoid, but weird. Too tall and thin, with pure white hair and glowing eyes. Otherworldliness and majesty emanated from them, but also an air of dangerous qualities. They were nice enough at first, not bothering us if we didn't bother them. Then one day, for whatever reason (personally, I think a gaggle of children taunted them), they snapped.

"There were many casualties. I saw my closest compatriots murdered in cold blood. I was spared, along with a few others, for the singular reason that we were kind to them. Their methodical killing was quick and simple; a slit to the throat, a neck snap. Some even made a game of it, shouting to each other in their guttural speech what I can only assume were kill counts."

I took this in raptly. Red explained how after the slaughter, the monsters harvested the fallen bodies and left. Empty corpses strewn about the landscape, organs missing. The images Red conjured almost made me vomit. After I finished my snack with minimal incident, we continued on our way.

I let Red run ahead. Never in my life had I thought I'd be walking through a scorching deserted wasteland with a fox. A massive shadow interrupted my musings. I looked up to see the sun backlighting a wingspan that must've been 20 feet long. It dove for Red.

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# it was beautiful

by Red

it was beautiful.  
clouds ascending above, blue spreading over the sky  
the sun shining calmly.  
a sense of peace washing over them  
they stared.  
fluffy blobs of white drifted around them  
the light brightened the atmosphere.

*you arent safe get out*

it was beautiful.  
a piano  
a couch  
paintings on the walls.  
chatter around them  
they glanced around  
red solo cups.

*you arent safe get out*

it was beautiful.  
flowers waving  
trees curving  
benches scattered around.  
a serene environment.  
birds chirping  
joy

*you arent safe get out*

it was beautiful.  
night sky outside the window  
covers pulled tightly around their form  
stars flickering.  
they watched.  
moon still  
their eyes began to close

*you arent safe get out*

it was beautiful.  
silver  
red  
repeating over.  
and over.  
darkness

*you arent safe get out*

it was beautiful.  
smiles  
songs  
laughter.  
yellow  
jokes  
cake.

*you arent safe get out*

it wasnt beautiful.  
skies  
rooms  
parks  
night  
darkness  
joy  
words.

# All Along – Little Nightmares II

by Cecilia | *Reluctant Follower*

*[1st verse]*

Porcelain skulls are easy to crack  
Find something heavy to use as a bat  
Watch out, the floorboards are riddled with traps  
To trick them use one of their heads as a hat  
This school specializes in ways to cause pain  
Rolecall gets shorter, day after day  
Tread lightly, you need to be paying attention  
Nobody returns when they're sent to detention

So run from the teacher and assorted residents  
Stay out of the light, no time to be hesitant  
The corpses you pass on the way serve as evidence  
Of what you'll become if you make even one accident

*[bridge]*

Stomach is grumbling  
Reality's crumbling  
Give in to the hunger  
Give in to the **gluttony**

*[chorus]*

Usually my nightmares stay within my dreams  
But all I knew is slipping through frayed seams  
The static is deadly like a siren song  
Thought the worst monster was defeated  
But she'd been with me all along

## What are we even simulating?

by Grant M.

Monogon headquarters was a massive place. Still, Alora knew exactly where to go. The Monogon heads had called a meeting after everyone had been kicked out of Myth. She wondered what had caused it, although she had a theory. The meeting was in five minutes, she couldn't be late.

"I don't know what caused it, I'm just telling you what it caused," David repeated, his presentation finished.

"Very well," said the company's president. "Does anyone have an idea about how this happened?"

Alora's friend, Diva, raised their hand.

"Diva?"

"Monitoring the code, I noticed that some nullbodies have been pulling out system cores. Perhaps that is the cause?"

The president thought about that.

"Most likely."

"Well, whatever the cause is," began a new employee, Hayes. Alora covertly signed for him to stop, but he ignored her. "Arthur will fix it. He's on his way to the system clock now."

"What?"

Alora couldn't stop the outburst. Everyone's eyes were on her now. She felt awkward. The president looked at her coldly. "Ms. Bluth?"

"I-I was just surprised, that's all. I thought everyone was kicked out."

She slipped out of the room. She made her way to her workshop. She logged in to Myth on her laptop, trying to find the virtual computer closest to Arthur. She connected, seeing him in the sewer area. She studied him suspiciously.

"You're heading to the tower to reset," she began, "I've been obsessing over the possibility for weeks. And you acted on it first. I couldn't let you think you were the only one who saw it. Just leave a way for others to get in. That's all I'm asking for our contributions. Leave a way in."

Before she could say more, Arthur's avatar smashed the virtual computer.

Alora sighed. She thought something like this would happen.

Sabrelake was a private security company who had been hired by Monogon. They were currently trying to find where Arthur was. Hayes didn't trust them, but Alora knew one of the vice presidents.

She contacted him and told him what she knew about Arthur. Despite working together, they didn't get to know each other that well. She knew that he had run away from home at an early age, and had spent a short time with Monogon's rival, Gammon, before coming here.

After the message, she decided to contact Arthur again, just as a friendly warning.

"The reset is a beacon. Monogon will locate you within minutes, what can you accomplish in minutes?" Alora paused. "Unless... you aren't concerned with them finding you post reset."

She finally began to piece things together.

"Leave a way in," she desperately exclaimed. "You can't keep this for yourself! This is all of ours!"

She walked away as the screen turned black.

Monogon's MythOS server room was large, encompassing almost the entire sixtieth floor. It would be a pain in the butt to find one USB drive in all of that... if she hadn't written the encryption software for the entire thing. Alora mentally thanked Monogon's head of security, George, for demanding she make a backdoor.

She got in and set a trace. It would take a maximum of five minutes. She was pleasantly surprised when it was found after thirty seconds.

"Server 7b, 7c, d, e, f, ... 7j! There!"

The back panel was loose, most likely from Arthur's sabotage. She set the panel aside, and noticed the print on the side of the USB. Gammon. Of course. Arthur was a double agent, she knew that already, but who other than Gammon would need one here.

"Let's see what you have on you," Alora muttered, inserting the USB into a spare laptop.

"Folders, USB, huh?"

A file on the USB was named My Plan.

"He wouldn't be nearly that stupid, would he?"

He wasn't. The file was a virus. Luckily, she was using a spare laptop, not her main. Unluckily, the virus also deleted all the other files on the drive. Alora decided to send Arthur a little message.

He was surrounded by four other clones of his avatar. A bit weird, but she was used to things like that by now.

She just sat there, looking at him with disdain, showing him she found the drive.

She was interrupted by a Sabrelake employee saying that they found Arthur. She shut off the transmission and rushed to where they found him.

The head official offered her a pistol and asked if she wanted to do the honors, which she accepted.

She cocked back the bolt handle as the door was broken open. She walked in and pointed the barrel at Arthur's skull. She closed her eyes, and squeezed the trigger, killing him and hopefully saving many lives in the process.



## Some Names are Nice Names

by Cate E

Some names are great names. Some names are fitting for the person, or creative, or simple and traditional and nice. Some names are literally anything that's not Amelia Hellfire Bends.

Sure, it's a middle name. Middle names don't really mean anything; they're wedged between two much more important names. It's not like people just go around and tell each other their middle names. Usually. And thank God for that, thinks Amelia every day.

The name came around when Amelia was born—the day of her birth, actually. Her mother, loopy from exhaustion, pain, and the epidural, was angry at the entire world. So, when the kind moon-faced nurse had asked, she has simply said the worst name that her tired brain could think of on a whim. Hellfire.

"I can't let you do that, miss," said the nurse.

"Come on," said the mother. "Just do it. She's my baby."

"Won't you give her a... different sort of first name?"

The mother had waved her hand. "Do what you want."

The nurse, shaking her head, had written something down and left. And so, Amelia Hellfire Bends was named.

Flash-forward 10 years. Amelia (just Amelia, please, thank you) is heading to her first day of fourth grade. It's exciting to be one of the oldest kids in school, she thinks. She's not the tallest, or the biggest or strongest, but she's in the fourth grade now, and that's really what counts. Everything is looking—

Down. Oh, everything is so far down. Amelia is in a deep, dark, pit, falling and falling and everything is looking Down. That stupid, mean, dumb—deep breath, Amelia, Mr. Jones is not mean—teacher had called attendance: Jason Aaronson, Maya Aradies, Amelia Bends. Oh, but no. Mr. Jones, is special, so it seems, so he read off the middle names too. Jason

Michael Aaronson, Maya Rosemary Aradies, Amelia Hellfire Bends.

And so now everyone knows. Everyone knows that Amelia Bends' middle name is weird, scary, that it has a swear word in it. Mary, Amelia's best friend, has been giving her weird looks all day (as if her middle name isn't Bumblebee, of all things) and now, in the cafeteria, she's sitting away from their regular table and hasn't even looked at Amelia. Why? Why? Why?

Amelia sits down, ready to cry. Or nap. Naps are for kindergarteners, probably, but maybe 4th graders who've had a hard day can take a nap. Amelia opens her lunchbox, not looking at Mary across the room, and takes out a baby orange, peels it, eats it. She eats everything in her lunchbox, doesn't look at Mary, definitely doesn't think about everyone talking about her (because they are—weirdo, freak, Hellfire).

"Hey," comes a voice from above. It's not mean, nor is it nice. The voice is just... neutral. Interested, maybe, but neutral.

"Can I sit?" it continues, a little more curious, or maybe disdainful.

"Sure." The voice sits.

"I heard that your middle name is Hellfire," it says.

"Yep."

"That's pretty cool," the voice says. Amelia looks up.

"My real name is Amelia," she offers. "I like that one a bit more."

"I like Hellfire," says the voice (a blonde, with green-dyed tips to her hair and eyes a similar color). "I actually go by my middle name because my first name is so bad, so I'll call you by yours."

"Well, what's your name?" asks Amelia, curious now.

"Froglegs Agnes Mortifer," says... Agnes. She proudly extends a hand.

"It's nice to meet you," says Amelia.

...to be continued.

# Swing

by Savannah Gordon

Swing, back and forth, the sun hot on my thighs, swing, the water is rushing beneath me, toes brushing cold, dirt, hands rough on the rope, pebbles and stones beneath my feet, swing, swing, back and forth, twirl and twist, push off the bank and close your eyes, spin, swing, water underneath your feet.

“Anna!”

Don't listen to mother's voice, don't, don't, look at the water and push off the bank, dislodge a pebble, hear the branches and the leaves and the water, what does it sound like underwater? Silence? Screaming? Screaming, don't think about screaming, branches and sun and cold water on your toes.

“Anna, lunch!”

Hair in my face, I don't care. Back and forth, the water, leaves, ebb and flow, ebb and flow, the wet smell of rocks, the creaking of the rope. What if I let go? Would I hit my head on a rock, blood and air in the water, screams?

Close your eyes, don't think about that, the rope rough in my hands, sun hot on my thighs. Mother's voice, thin and high like reeds and screams and sticks and needles. Lunch? I'm not hungry, though my stomach is as empty as the rest of me. Water, listen to the water, the smell of the earth, swing, back and forth, push off the bank again and again and again and again.

Is this what the planets feel like, spinning and spinning and spinning and spinning? What does drowning feel like, drowning in a cold black sea of empty stars? Eyes closed, hot sun, hair loose, breathe, breathe in air and not water.

“Anna!” Shrill and high, a flute.

“She's getting over her grief, leave her alone.” My father, oak-strong and solid.

And another voice, the burble of the river, the rustle of the leaves, the creaking of the rope as it rubs against the branches.

Anna.

Spin, spin, open mouth, Jane? Water, is her face in the water? When you drown, where do you go?

“Let's head inside,” a rumble, an arm around shoulders, a door shutting, an empty porch.

Swing, spin, push, pull, twist, turn.

Anna.

Jane?

Anna.

Everything. The leaves, the rocks, the swing, the hot sun, everything, everything, but the river, she is calling me from the river.

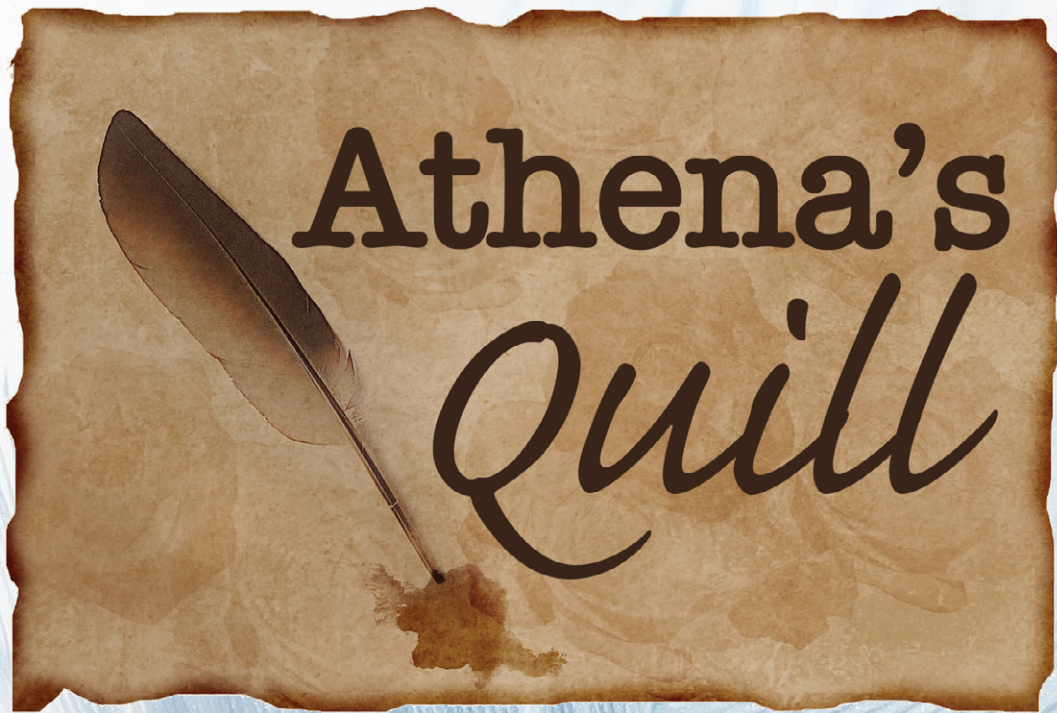
Anna.

The rope is rough beneath my hands -

Anna.

- and I let go.





Thank you for reading  
Athena's Quill!