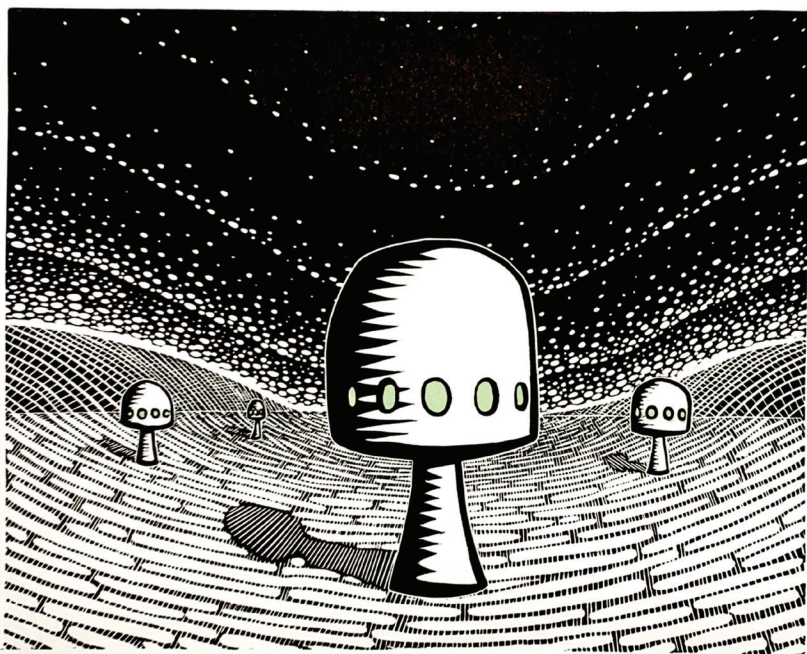


The Noisy Water Review

Whatcom Community College



2024

The Noisy Water Review



A WHATCOM COMMUNITY COLLEGE SHOWCASE OF
STUDENT WORKS, INCLUDING NONFICTION, POETRY,
FICTION, AND VISUAL ARTWORK OF ALL KINDS.

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Noisy Water Review*, Whatcom Community College's anthology of student work including poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and various forms of artwork – including even a music piece this year!

This small annual publication is an opportunity to celebrate the hard work that WCC students have done throughout the year – diligence that doesn't always see outward recognition. We hope we can make students feel seen in all their many talents and interests.

Every year, it takes a full and busy team to pull this publication off – editors of the *Horizon* to find funding (Annette), to create advertising posters and handbills (Riley), to download and log submissions (Maggie), to make images print ready (Summer) and to edit the writing (Annette and Joanna). It also takes reviewers from different disciplines, instructors to encourage their students to believe in themselves, and Writing and Media Center staff to help folks produce, revise, and showcase their work. And of course, it takes you – the readers – to complete the circle with your pleasure and appreciation. I thank all of you!

And next year, if you don't see your name in this production, I invite you to jump in. We take work from all disciplines, and help from all areas. Looking forward,

Joanna Kenyon
English and Journalism
NWR Project Manager

A Raven's Yearning

by Violet Fowler

Amidst the starkness of barren trees,
ravens perch, black silhouettes stark against pale skies.
Their glossy feathers, iridescent yet ashen,
glimmer with a sheen of untamed wilderness.

No tender caress in their rigid grooming,
no bond of affection in their shared task,
as they pluck and preen, each feather pliable yet brittle,
no trace of warmth, no whisper of kinship.

Silent and stoic, their ritual unfolds,
a dance of detachment in each flick of their beaks.
Feathers fall like solemn confetti,
drifting gently to the earth, forgotten fragments.

Their shadows stretch across desolate landscapes,
a tableau of detached beauty amid desolation,
ravens and their feathers, a study in solitude,
a solemn ballet devoid of love's tender touch.



Fluid

by Marley Krumpak
Mechanical Pencil



Dilution Caves

by Lewis Paige

12"x16" Acrylic on Wood

Whispers in the West:

Exploring Haunted Tales from the Frontier

by Christian Beatty

Imagine a frosty night in the southern United States during the mid- to late- 1800s. The land surrounding you is a never-ending desert. The sand crunches under your boots as you walk through it. Despite the scorching heat that overtook the day, you can feel the howling winds blow against you, sending a chill down your spine. You swear you can hear a train in the distance, its recognizable horn blowing in the distance.

As you look, however, all that meets your gaze is a dilapidated railroad. One that hasn't been utilized in at least a decade. You turn around, assuming nothing of it as you begin moving towards a town left abandoned after the gold rush passed its prime. But, as if to wave goodbye to you, you hear the horn again and upon turning around, you spot the strangest thing.

Something so strange in fact, that it could be mistaken for a mirage. As you turn your head back, you spot a ghostly, transparent, and white train gliding across the railways. Its exterior is constantly moving and altering but remains in that recognizable form as it glides past. The ominous horn blares one more time, and as you blink, it disappears without a trace.

The Wild West has always been an interesting topic to me. In my youth, I would always wear a cowboy outfit

continued →

wherever I went. I distinctly recall my mother taking me to rodeos, watching cowboy films and shows, and going to western-themed locations that were in my area. Growing up in California, I was never left without cowboy-themed places to go to, but I always loved places like the old town in Temecula and the western area of Knott's Berry Farm. This, along with an interest in the paranormal and ghosts led to an interest in combining the two.

I always recall watching films like "Someday I Wanna Be a Cowboy," a VHS for kids made back in 1995 by Good Times Video. In the video, there was a specific part that always intrigued me: the mystery of "The Ghost of Wrangler Gulch." The mystery surrounds a gem stolen from a Native American tribe by a band of bandits. This act of theft had cursed the land, and it was up to the children to return the gem to the tribe. Once it was returned, the curse was lifted, and they returned home. While not a very well-known video, "Someday I Wanna Be a Cowboy" had been one of my first experiences with the Western paranormal. Thus, I became interested in learning more about other stories, whether fictional or not, alongside how history may have changed the way they were told.

Many stories were oral during earlier times. As folks had fewer means of communication and thus fewer ways of gathering knowledge, local fears tended to grow more easily and much more rapidly.

One such story I recently learned of was that of the "Red Ghost in Arizona." In 1883, a woman was found deceased near the Arizona-New Mexico border – the cause of death trampling. Although this wouldn't seem necessarily out of the ordinary during those times, the description given by a witness of what may have caused the trampling was a source of concern among locals. According to Azcentral,

“The woman inside the cabin raced to the window, looked outside, covered her eyes, and began to pray. Then she barricaded the cabin door and waited until the men returned that night. She told them what little she saw – a flash of red. Hooves and old bones” (Dungan, 2015). The husbands of the two women followed the trail, guns in hand to find it led to a bush. In it, they found red hair.

A few days later, a group of prospectors found a similar creature tearing through their campground. Upon following the trail left by the creature, more red hair was found, but the creature remained on the loose. Soon more stories began to arise, some said the creature had toppled two wagons over, others said they spotted it killing and eating a grizzly bear, and even a few stories of the creature disappearing into thin air. However, all descriptions retained one similarity: the creature on the loose had a skeletal figure riding on its back.

Eventually, a few armed men found the beast and shot their rifles towards it. While the beast wasn’t hit by anything, the head of the skeletal figure was blown clean off. As the creature fled the scene, a decomposed head with clumps of hair and skin clinging to it was left behind.

However, surprisingly enough, the creature was found grazing in a local farmer’s yard. According to Legends of America, “In 1893, when an Arizona farmer found the red camel grazing in his garden, he shot and killed the beast. By this time, the large camel had shaken free of its dead rider but still bore the saddle and leather straps with which the corpse had been attached” (Weiser-Alexander, 2021). It was made clear that the Red Ghost had been a camel driven mad by having a corpse tied to it so tightly. However, the nature of its situation is still speculated today. Some say the man was a prospector dying of thirst who tied himself to the camel in hopes of finding water. Others claim it was a

member of the United States Camel Corps learning to ride a camel when it suddenly bolted off. Nonetheless, after the creature was put down, the popularity of the story dropped.

Before writing this essay, I knew considerably less about the Red Ghost; all I knew was that a dead man riding a camel was mistaken for a demon. However, after my findings, I realize now how gruesome and frightening the story truly became. Of course, I'm happy to know the poor animal was put out of its misery, and that we all get a semblance of closure from this frightening tale. However, I also find the remaining mystery of how the animal came to such a grim fate quite intriguing as well. Who was the man riding on its back, and how did he die? I'm certain we'll never know, but that makes the story even more ominous and enticing.

Ghost trains hold a particularly special place in my heart as shown in my first example. My interest in trains through my youth was unquenchable, with my eyes being glued to the screen whenever Thomas was on or my incomprehensible excitement whenever my family would take me out to watch the trains in the station. Thus, it was only natural that my affinity for paranormal stories would take me to investigate ghost trains. Thus, another much shorter story I recently heard of was that of the "Phantom Train of Marshall Pass."

A story written in 1896 by Charles M. Skinner, the story focuses on Nelson Edwards, a train engineer, and his experience with a paranormal Freight train that sped behind his own. In the story's beginning, we are introduced to Nelson Edwards, an older engineer for a Passenger train. The route they took passed through Marshall Pass, a dangerous rail to travel along, with one part even reaching the height of twelve thousand feet above the sea. On one

of his many runs, Nelson got the message to stop the train from his conductor. Confused by the train's sudden stop, the conductor entered Nelson's cab and inquired why he stopped the train. Nelson responded by asking why the conductor gave the order to stop, which the conductor denied doing. Both confused by the events, the Conductor dropped the subject and told Nelson to climb speed, for a wild train was climbing behind them.

Despite Nelson's efforts to gain speed, and even after sounding danger signals, he could still hear the distant whistle behind them approaching, threatening to derail the train. Upon entering a curve, he looked out his window to see that there was, indeed, a runaway train inching nearer. Pulling the throttle wide open, he lunged his train into the snowbank. After making it successfully through the bank, the train roared into a shed, approaching the defective rail. Ignoring the danger ahead, he was much more occupied with the oncoming train. He continued to pile on more coal into the engine's furnace until he was drenched with sweat. The smokestack in turn had begun to throw fire into the air as it sped. In wake of the madness, the passengers had gotten dressed and were watching from the windows. Whispers emerged from the passengers that there was a wild train driven by a mad engineer speeding behind them.

Upon reaching the summit, Nelson surrendered his train to the force of gravity, shutting his steam off. As he went about another sharp turn, he risked another glance back. In the distance, he saw the pursuing engineer, cackling. The story describes his face to be like dough.

Nonetheless, Nelson's train flew across the bridges, shaking them in its wake. Soon, they reached the suspension bridge and Nelson feared for the worst. However a miracle occurred, and Nelson's train cleared the chasm by a bound.

Nelson anticipated a fork soon after but found no such branch in the railroad ahead. Instead, he saw a red light in the distance that notified him of an oncoming obstacle. Making a last-minute decision, Nelson threw on the brakes and sat in a moment of pure dread. As he turned back to look at the oncoming train, he was shocked to find it turning straight into the canyon and disappearing without a trace. Much to Nelson's surprise, he didn't hear a thing – no screaming, no hissing, simply the groaning wind as it rolled.

Time passed and Nelson arrived at his destination ahead of schedule but was in for one final surprise, A message written on the frost that developed on his cab that stated "A freight train was wrecked as you saw. Now that you have seen it you will never make another run. The engine was not under control and four section men were killed. If you ever run on this road again you will be wrecked" (Skinner, 1961).

Before writing this essay, I had only known of the story from its name and theme, and saved it for when I started working on this. The story was remarkably interesting, and I imagine fits the niche I enjoy particularly well with its ominous nature. The story is not only very entertaining, but it is also a cautionary tale to railroad engineers, warning them to pay heed to defective rails.

I believe this this has been a highly informative experience, reading different stories and reminiscing on my childhood has certainly given me insight into different tales and stories of the time, whether factual or fictional. The messages they convey can also prove to be informative, with lessons from the likes of Marshall Pass being insightful to even today's population.

And with this, I believe I may be able to answer the questions I provided myself previously: "How have Western paranormal stories evolved over the years, and how has

history affected it?”

Paranormal stories, from the three separate tales and films I covered have indeed changed slightly, particularly in the fact that fictional stories are still being made, while true stories seem much less popular in this niche.

As for how history has affected paranormal stories, I believe it depends on hindsight and mystery. Choosing the Red Ghost as my primary example of this, I believe that once people found out that it was simply an animal in pain, the story lost its magic for most people. If Mizoo Hastings never shot the camel, folks may have never found out what the Red Ghost truly was, which would have cemented its mystery. People generally tend to lean more towards mysteries because it frightens them. Fear of the unknown is a very popular fear to have.

On the opposing side of the spectrum, The Phantom Train keeps its antagonistic engineer a mystery. We never learn a name or an in-depth backstory. All we know is that the freight train he was driving crashed, and in turn, ghostly engineer haunted Marshall Pass. And that is why I believe that in some cases, less is more: it allows the audience to draw their conclusions and shrouds the story in uncertainty.

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Matchless

by Gabriella St. Martin

A puzzle piece without a place.
Collecting dust on a shelf it sits -
Maybe it should be thrown away.

It never connects with an embrace;
Countless hoped to make it fit...
A puzzle piece without a place.

At times, one or two pieces may stay,
but the puzzle works best without it -
Maybe it should be thrown away.

Raw edges smoothed to find a space -
Nope, it's still too intricate.
A puzzle piece without a place.

Some say it's too colorful, some say
not enough; the picture stays crooked -
Maybe it should be thrown away.

Little by little it decays,
edges flat, forever misfit.
The puzzle piece without a place -
It's been thrown away.



What Memories Visit

by Summer Star

Photograph



Midnight Moon

by Krystan Andreason

Photograph



Succulent Sun

by Krystan Andreason

Photograph



Sansa

by Marley Krumpak

Mechanical Pencil and Micron Pen

Top Ten

by Sophia Johnson

1. How much Top Ramen can a scholarship buy?
2. Unspooling the noose of student debt. Does it unravel like noodles in boiling water, like the package promises, or remain a latticed barge, impossible forkfuls wound too tight to separate? You eat dinner like it's a steak with no knife.
3. Another double shift, another textbook earned.
4. What has inflation done to instant noodle prices?
5. How many flavors? Salty pork, savory chicken, sweet beef, that one vegetarian option your vegetarian sister won't eat because it doesn't taste vegetarian. You flip the package, declare the ingredients. Riboflavin. Disodium Inosinate. Maltodextrin. Neither of you wins.
6. Maltodextrin. The heck is maltodextrin?
7. Did you know? About student loans? That in school—during homework and exams, the stress-deferred grace period—the interest stacks up like dirty dishes? Their advertisements don't mention it. Probably hidden in words like low-interest rates and origination fees and maltodextrin.
8. If each Top Ramen package cost 10¢ sixty years ago, and now costs \$1.29, how many Top Ramen packages equal tuition plus student loans rotting in your sink for decades? Let National Debt Crisis be x .
9. How much Top Ramen can a \$1,500 scholarship buy? How many textbooks, tutoring sessions, alarm clocks, classes? How many extra shifts turn into extra studying, into test scores into grades, into a degree into a career into an investment in an individual? What can you accomplish when you don't have to worry about Top Ramen prices?
10. 1,162 packages. Pork-flavored.

Goodwill Psychic

by Adria Clines

My mom said not to see the fortune teller,
so I went to the Goodwill instead.
To comfort other people's fallen idols,
because, she said, unlike fortune tellers,
inanimate objects wouldn't possess me
if I showed them some attention.

There, I conjured all my insecurities
to a mystic frog macraméed in the corner
of the décor pile, who asked me:
why do you polish your nails?
Because I'm guilty and troubled and cursed,
I say, or think, because if I do not,
my fingers will look stubby, or stubbly, or stuffy.

But his were stuffy with felted skin between
like an amphibious bat, and I wanted to
Sing the praises of bats!
He prophesied through me
Before I could say it.

Praise what?

The webbed kites, parachutes,
furry fields of thin extremity, accessory.
The appreciation of folds and flex
that unpeel the sky into spheres
in such succulent circulation, the swiftness
pulls out the fur between our eyebrows,
to make bristly welcome mats
for me to read when escaping
to their upside-down homes.
Is it right-side up to you?

Oh, mystic frog,
Do you use sonar telepathy to find this home?
 Your ears are no more
 analogous to flying foxes
 than the plate of derma
 in between my ring and middle
 that I touch to channel
 tickling in my inner cochlear
 like a disco nerve train.

But maybe that tickling is you:
 dancing in my stereocilia,
 to show me that thoughts
 can take mythical tracks from one
 cerebrum to another.

Oh mystic frog, macraméed, in my car seat.
Does the train not stop for motherly cerebrums too?
Could they ever find peace
In your homeland puddle?
 The living, boggy glass where reflection is
 not an evil, but a portal,
 like chaining water bodies,
 wisdom bodies,
 from the goodwill,
 past the fortune teller,
 back home.

Silent Truth

by Deonna Haywood

Growing up in a predominately white area has taught me a lot about myself, the school curriculum, and others. My mom always told me leaving California would give me a better education with opportunities for a better future, although I didn't necessarily agree with what she had to say. A lot of my culture was based on where I came from, and I felt it was being stripped away from me moving to such a small town with not much nightlife besides good school opportunities.

It was hard for me to make meaningful connections with the kids I grew up with; we didn't have much in common given the fact that being black in a predominantly white school and neighborhood made me feel left out, like an oddball you could say. The kids always made me feel like I couldn't fit in, as if there was something wrong with me or that I wasn't good enough to attend the same schools, be a part of friend groups, or join group activities in class or gym class – due to the color of my skin tone.

As a child I never fully understood racism or even the differences between color besides black and white. I thought I was normal or even the same. I knew I stood out based on the reactions or stares people would give me; I felt like a caged animal at times. High school was harder, with more expectations from teachers and peers. I felt like I had to pretend to be someone else to be liked or accepted as a person based on my skin color, even though I was in my head a lot as a teenager – constantly worrying about every move I made or if what I did even made an impact on other kids like me.

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My mother would always tell me I'm here for my own well-being and not to worry too much about everyone else's opinions. But I couldn't ignore the fact that I was being treated differently and how the staff was treating other students like me. For example, I had a teacher who would purposely call out students of color to make them feel out of place, then disregard them with their stares along with uncalled-for comments.

As a student I questioned the staff and their morals regarding the future of students of color and other cultural backgrounds, wondering if the teachers even wanted to see us succeed in school and in life. I contradicted myself and the abilities I had stored inside of me. I didn't know what life had expected for me after I graduated high school, or if I even had it in me to finish school.

My mind felt like I was just a high school graduate with no goals yet for my future, and after high school, I struggled with my identity and my place in the world. I carried my experience from high school with me into the work field, working with different cultures every day and surrounded with new atmospheres that made me see a different side to people and work environments. Yet, I still felt different.

My mind was so focused on my past experiences that I couldn't let new ones in. Being too worried about repeating similar encounters with people made me keep my guard up more than I liked.

Growing up in Bellingham wasn't terrible, but staying connected to my roots made it hard to like the place I grew up in. The feeling of constantly being under a microscope everywhere I go – judged not by character but by the color of my skin – adds an emotional burden that weighs heavy. The experience can be isolating and exhausting. Accessing resources, opportunities, even basic services can feel like a restless battle. Lack of representation within our

community, leaderships positions, or a role in decision making, keep the feeling of alienation.

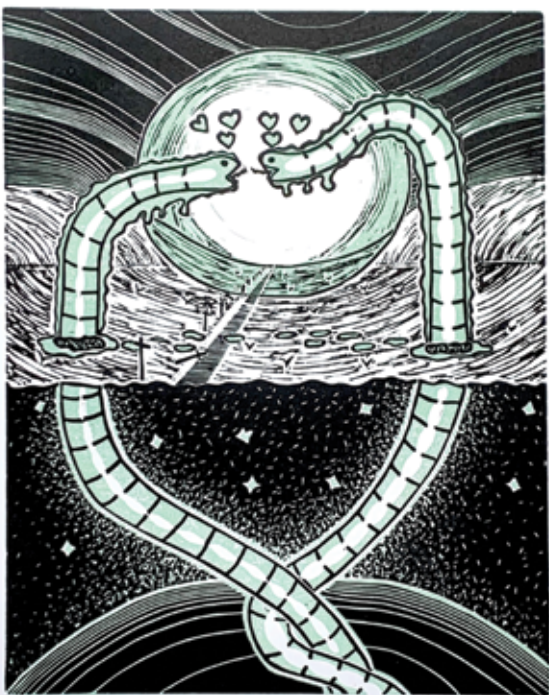
Being a black woman in America is strength and unwavering determination. Despite systematic barriers and societal expectations, I continue to carve out spaces for myself that I feel safe in. Finding my voice and rewriting my script for my own destiny makes me feel resilient and unique in my own way, feeling more self-aware.

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Rolling Rock
by Krystan Andreason
Photograph



...and they were both worms

by Nettle Ada

8"x10" linocut reduction print for Justin Martin's Art 175

My Crisis

by Matthew Waschke

Inspiring glass works
to cut my finger on and bleed,
drip and drop on the canvas below,
making marks no one knows.
Who am I?
Your friend or your foe?

I am not someone you know.
You may think you do
but I will always keep myself to myself.
More than you could fathom
my crisis is yours.
Did you know that I'm afraid?

Of scaring you.
I depend on you.
You're like my friend.
More than that
you're who I want to be.
But I know
they/them is a hard challenge
to adapt to when you're
not aware of who you really
really are.
What if I'm appropriating?
What if I'm not true?

Glass works inspiring me,
my reflection looking back
through the blue spiral.
They know who I am
more than myself.

Dragged Down Deep

by Katerina Kravchenko

Before me lies a frozen lake
I have to cross it. I have to. It doesn't matter why.
I walk the ice

It seems strong today. Steady. Safe.
It isn't
a frozen lake never is
for something lurks deep below

I walk the ice, eyes shut nearly all the way against the harsh
biting wind, the snow.
My heart racing- pulsing and pounding as if trying to break
free from my chest. So I don't see it.
The crack in the ice.

A loud pop rings out.
I freeze.
A split second of silence.

Then I fall through

Ice water forces air from my
lungs
as I plunge
It's so cold
Thrashing gasping splashing in the frigid water
I reach for the sides of the hole in the ice I've made
but the ice shatters
sharp shards slicing skin into ribbons raw
I can't get a grip

My thrashing
 splashing
catches the eye
of something lurking deep below.
A rusalka. A lake witch.
She swims up toward me
me, unaware,
still gasping for air

The lake witch reaches me.
I don't notice her
how can I with ice water filling my lungs
as I gasp from the cold and flail and panic I
can't breath it's so cold so cold so cold I can't think I can't
breath it's so cold so cold I'm starting
to sink sinking deeper into the cold

Arms wrap around my chest
and I think I'm saved.

Until the rusalka starts to drag me down
down
down into the frigid lake
down into the depths
down into the dark
down
 down
 down

Until I can breathe no more.

Alone With the Sun

by Sydney Coons

Everything is quiet. The sun is shining high and bright, looking like a gold medal in the sky, all smug and free. Just floating there, having all the trust in space and science like it's not a care in the world. My nose wrinkles.

"How can you trust someone so easily?!" I scream into the vastness.

I sit there, knees up, my emerald green eyes fixated on the sun. My dirty blond hair cascades down, dancing with the wind's gentle caress. The cool breeze brushes against my face, a tender kiss. The clouds, like sentinels, reflect the sun's rays, creating a light shield. I recline on the fluffy surface, sinking into the white, shimmering memory foam of water. I stretch out, immersing myself in the golden light, reluctant to return to the harsh reality. I flutter, my eyes closed, releasing a breath, savoring the warmth and tranquility.

I wake to the shouting of my mother.

"Get up; you'll be late for school!"

She pounds on the ceiling, which is actually my bedroom floor. I can hear her grab her keys and put the coffee pot back before she runs out the front door, slamming it behind her. I swear it rattles the whole house when she does this. Looking at my alarm clock, it reads 7:02.

I flop back into bed and squeeze my pillow to my face. I scream into the pillow. I regret my life choices that weren't mine to make. Rolling out of bed, I drag myself to get ready for school. Still, in a sleepy state, I daydream of a far-off place while my teeth get rattled by my vibrating toothbrush.

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I open my eyes, and the sun seems to wink at me as if to say, 'It's okay, you can dream.' I stand, feeling a surge of anticipation, and unfurl my vast, magnificent, light brown feather wings. I leap, and the wind catches me, carrying me higher and higher. I soar with the flocks of ravens, finch, and swans, feeling a sense of liberation I've never known before.

It is cold out; it has to be less than 30 degrees. I start stomping my way through snow and ice. My eyelashes are gaining snow, and my hair is frozen to ice straw. I hate Pennsylvania winters. Tramping through the feet of frozen snow, I hold my coat as if it's about to blow away.

It looks like a winter wonderland, but is a nightmare. An exquisite sight with snow freshly-laid over the ground and towering trees. Like gingerbread houses, the houses look like they have frosting on their rooftops, and the cars are almost entirely covered. But it's a nightmare because the roads are covered and blocking all of us in where no one can leave. The wind is swirling and taking some of the snow with it – flicking it and moving up and down the block, stinging me in the face. The streets are abandoned, and no one is in their houses either. It's a snowy ghost town.

I drift into space, trying to keep my thoughts happy and my feet warm. I start thinking about what I want for dinner, what I need to do after school, and how fast I can go back to sleep. Then I start thinking about my dream: What does it mean? What was it? Why did it feel so natural and welcoming?

I begin to drift.

I fly high over mountain tops, cut in between trees, and dive atop lakes to run my hand against the water. I see my reflection in the water. A smile on my face and the wind in my hair. Flying in and out of sun rays. Saying hello to everyone there. The tropical smell

of scent-filled flowers and humidity. I fly up the side of a mountain with a waterfall racing me the other way down and rising higher through the water spray, dampening my hair. I turn, folding in my wings, and dive straight down, racing the waterfall. Flattening my wings, I soar along the water, watching the fish swim under the glass.

I look into the pond under the bridge. Fish frozen in place, staring up at me in horror that they can't move. From the direction I came, I see my footprints already getting covered up. Like I never existed. Like I never mattered.

I turn and look ahead of me. Everything is white, and it is hard to see what's ahead. I look back down at the pond, at the poor fish, and continue on.

It's getting harder and harder to see. I keep on trudging forward. I should turn back, but my mom would kill me. She would throw a fit if I didn't get to school, so I keep trekking forward. It's snowing harder now, and I think the temperature dropped again because I'm shivering even with my vast coat. I wrap my arms around myself, hoping to keep in body heat, which I think is escaping from my sleeves, but I am still shivering.

To keep my mind off the cold, I wander into my thoughts, into the corners of my mind.

Sitting on the ledge of a cliff, watching the sun lower towards its bed of water, I sigh with relief. I am letting the day go with the sun. I wrap myself in my wings and take in the sights—calm and free.

Sitting on the side of the road, unable to move from the cold, I sit there shivering, trying to call for help, barely getting any sound out from my frosted-over lips. My eyes feel like they are freezing together, and I've lost feeling in my hands and feet. The only pain left is in my abdomen,

where my heart continues to beat, trying to keep warm blood flowing through my veins. I'm so cold, and I can't move.

Maybe someone will find me, though I doubt anyone would be crazy enough to be outside in this storm; perhaps that makes me crazy. I feel everything going numb, and my vision goes blurry; I lay down on the side of the road, trying to keep myself warm.

Falling, my wings can't catch me; it's as if they are frozen and can't move. I hit the water hard and fade into the abyss. Just before I feel my lungs fill with water, it's as if I am pulled from the water.

My grandma pulls me out with a smile. She looks like her young self, no wrinkles or stories with age, just gorgeous. She spreads her white wings and takes off, soaring high into the clouds. I do the same; my wings are not what I remember. They are not a light brown anymore; they are a stunning glittering white that makes the sun shine back at itself. I spread my wings and shoot as fast as I can after her. I see the sun; it winks at me as it did in my dream, but this time, I feel the warmth, the comfort. It's welcoming and surreal. Only this isn't a dream anymore.

Only an Afterthought

by Violet Fowler

In the quiet ruminations of daily existence, there lingers a spectral presence that gently permeates the recesses of memory, residing in the fleeting spaces – an intangible residue of what once was but now subsists as a fleeting shadow in the corridors of remembrance, an ethereal whisper echoing through the passages of time.

The person, once a thread woven into the intricate fabric of life's tapestry, now assumes the form of a distant echo resonating faintly in the corridors of the mind – an apparition flitting through the periphery of consciousness, manifesting as a hazy silhouette in the sepia-toned frames of recollection, a fragment of nostalgia tethered to bygone days.

Their essence, once vibrant and palpable, now transmutes into wisps, swiftly transient, evoking a somber nostalgia that lingers – a silent companion in the journey through life's unfolding chapters, an afterimage that dances at the edge of perception, a testament to the interplay of transient connections.



This collage is a series of images that spoke to me. The placement of each one is intentional. As you look through the collage, some sections are more open than others; This represents the differences between my outer and inner personalities. The warmer-toned images are representative of things I'm willing to share about myself, while the neutral and cool-toned images are things I like to keep to myself. Any people within this collage are AFAB as I have several instances of trauma relating to AMAB people. This has one exception with the couple at the top left. There is a small text box layered over it that says "You drew stars around my scars" with several stars surrounding it. This specific section of the collage is dedicated to my best friend who has helped me heal much of my trauma over the years. Near the center top is a painting of Artemis, the goddess of wild animals, the hunt, vegetation, chastity, and childbirth. Some stories of Artemis and what she represents are things I hold dear to me. At the bottom left, a woman is reading a book and being crowned. This represents me and the external push from others around me to do better, be stronger, etc. The Spotify code at the bottom of the image leads to the song "Wasteland, Baby!" by Hozier, one of my favorite songs of all time.

Collage – Self

by Jay Greenawalt

Digital Media for Dr. Andrea Romero's English 194



Chris

by Marley Krumpak
Mechanical Pencil

Turn the Page

by Gabriella St. Martin

Breathe in -
sweet almond and vanilla
leather and cedar
earth and must
the decay of life

Breathe in -
harbored among a never ending
cascade, unconcerned and overtaken
as each title calls
but which to answer

Breathe in -
people are drowned
when pages flutter
and crackle reveals
inaudible
a voice, resonant

Breathe in -
past eyes, behold
past ears, heed
past nostrils, scent
past tongue, savor
past flesh, feel

Breathe in -
fear within withers
pauses while the spell
entrances, forgotten while
wandering the fresh spaces

Breathe in -

reset

Breathe out



Fruits of Earth Feed the Royalty

by Adria Clines

Coastal wind plucks zest from lemons
Off the tree overhead
Like grapes of luxury.

In tart environmental
Envelopes for absorption,
By the pores in the scalp

That open like mouths when the
Citrus oils of their frilly fronds
Burst ecstatic with the almighty fragrance

Powerful as an alpine field
Of mentha and powder snow.
Both knowing how to elementally scream,

This is luxury!
Fruits of earth that send
Themselves as parcels, and speak.

We Rise

by Matthew Waschke

Like a flower in spring
we bloom in time
while the clouds and stars are out.

Our faces may be hidden
but come dawn
the birds chirp
the curtain draws
and it's time.

Our brightness shines out
cling clonging like a bell
reflecting the light of our dawn.

Hate fear
Have no place here
We rise above and collect
our due.
Pride, lacking hubris –
our prize above it all.

We waited and bided our time.
Ask for more?
Who knows, it might come yet.
Shining ringing blooming
proudly and bold
Who cares who hears and sees.

We are noteworthy
for we've waited all night for this
and the dawn has come.



Siren

by Marley Krumpak
Mechanical Pencil

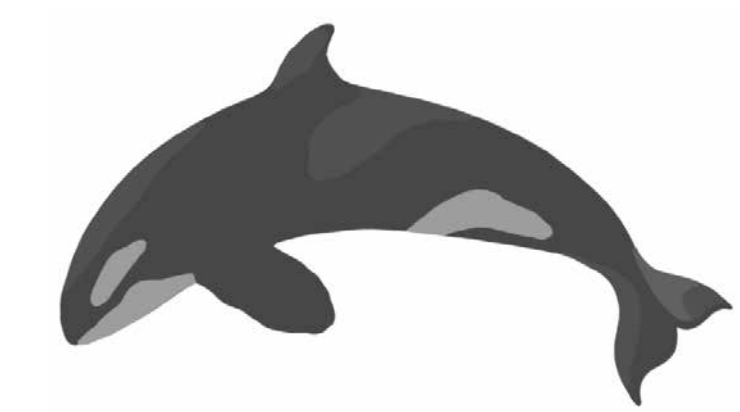


Holding It Together
by Brennan Solen
Digital Painting

[Untitled Demo](#)

by Saskia Saling

Visit above hyperlink in the WCC library archives!



An Ode to Roadkill

by Summer Star

What is that? I cannot tell
It smells real bad, and looks like hell.

Something splattered on the road
Was it skunk or was it toad?

A tuft of fur, a smudge of blood
Or was it just some weeds and mud?

As we approach the sight grows worse
It looks like someone spilled their purse.

Tossed their cookies, chunked their lunch
And I think I have a hunch

That something here is not too sweet
Is that the scent of rotting meat?

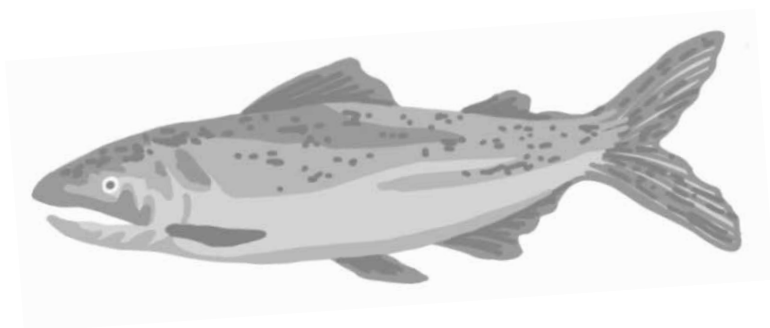
Little puppies, kittens too
Things that should be in the zoo

Life was not so sweet for them
Once they met Mercedes Benz

The death rate here grows higher and higher
I think there's some stuck on our tire

Is that the carcass of a 'possum
Mom says, "Gross!" Dad says, "Awesome!"

Or maybe it was someone's pet
That didn't make it to the vet
The freeways littered with the sight
To your left and to your right
Of furry souls that tried to race
Across the road with hurried pace
They didn't make it as you see
They should have stayed among the trees
And now I end this gruesome ode
"Be Careful When YOU Cross The Road!"



I Came to Save You

by Tucker Bergeron

A yellow kite flew in the wind. It rode the breeze like a sailboat in the seat, bobbing up and down, back and forth. Sun shined down from the sky, filling the Earth with life.

"Yondo!" a voice yelled. "Yondo, I've been looking everywhere for you!"

Yondo turned to see mother. "What's wrong mom? Do you see how high I got my kite!"

His mother embraced him with a tight hug that reminded him of the day he fell into the ocean and had to be fished out back onto their boat by his mom.

"Yondo, it's your father," she managed to get out. "He, he's gone."

"What do you mean he's gone?"

"He never came back, love," she said, holding back tears.

Yondo's throat tightened, and he felt a hard lump forming in his stomach. He thought of all the late nights he stayed up with his mom, waiting for his father to return. Sometimes his father's ship got blown off course, or he had to extend his voyage, but he always came back. He always came back.

His mother swept her long black hair out of the way, but there was no use; most of it still stuck to her teary cheeks. She released her hug and looked Yondo in the eyes.

"He's gone, son."

Yondo's father had been escorting a merchant ship from the mainland when a ship came speeding out from the distance. It was Yukoza, the feared and famed pirate of the South China sea. After exchanging rounds of cannon shot,

continued →

Yukoza's crew hooked on and boarded his father's ship. Waiting for him were fresh and green soldiers of the Royal Guard. Against the seasoned pirates of Yukoza's fleet, they were quickly cut to pieces and thrown overboard.

Yondo couldn't sleep. His bed felt hard as a rock as he tossed and turned. Images of his father, the captain of the guard, fighting off the hungry pirates flooded into his mind. He thought back to stories of his father slaying pirate captains and freeing their hostages. *How could anyone slay dad?* Yondo could feel it deep inside: his dad was not dead. As his eyelids started to grow heavy and his mind wandered, he dreamt up a plan to find his lost father.

The next morning, Yondo poured over his maps over breakfast. His dad always said, "a good sailor knows the sea." Yondo knew every little island and atoll. He had spent many summers on fishing expeditions, stopping at many of the dozens of islands that dotted the coast. But it was no good. *My dad always went further out to sea, I'll never find him in these islands.*

Yondo walked down a windy cobbled road to town. He kicked a pebble and sent it skipping across the path. The town was buzzing with activity and stank of the morning's catch, but Yondo stopped noticing the smell years ago. As he wandered through the squat buildings, something caught his eye. A sign read: "The Mermaids Peril." Yondo had been warned not to go near that bar, but he was already on edge and needed something, anything to take his mind off his dad.

As he entered the dimly lit bar, Yondo could not help but notice the smell. Lurking in the background, and hard to place, the place stank of booze soaked into the wooden floorboards, unwashed bodies, and month-old scraps. He took a seat and looked around, taking in his surroundings.

A table of smugglers argued about the recent storm, bemoaning their lost goods, which now resided on the bottom of the ocean floor. A wiry man sat alone in the far corner with a blank look on his face, sipping his drink. A group of young men sat around a table loudly boasting to each other.

The door creaked open. The bar's lively buzz quickly faded, and every set of eyes turned towards the front. A gang of men filed in.

Thunk, Thunk, Thunk, went the rhythmic sound of one man's peg leg dragging across the floor each step. Yondo raised his eyes to see a hunched man with long matted hair. He had a large grin on his face, despite missing several teeth. Another man stood tall and was armed with a heavy cutlass, a long scar running down his cheek. Leading the gang was a short man wearing a large round hat whose shadow concealed most of his face. He wore simple clothes and was only armed with a slim dagger and a flintlock hanging at his side.

"It's the captain of the Damned Damsel," one young man whispered to his friends excitedly.

"You're damn right. We're opening a charter," said the short man. "Any man who can hold a sword and scrub a deck is welcome on our ship."

The bar exploded with activity once again. Some of the older, wiser men began to find their way out the back door. The young men began rapidly exchanging taunts and japes, accusing one another of being yellow.

"You'll find us right here," the short man gestured to an empty table. "We sail with the tide."

He and his crew took a seat at the table. A couple pirates took seats at other tables and began catching up with old friends, namely the smugglers.

As the night went by, a steady flow of men signed their

name on the crew roster. Some old and some young. Some to make a little money and some to sail to the end of the world. As Yondo watched man after man inscribe his name on the paper, and watched the flash in the captain's eyes as they lifted the pen, he somehow found his own name on that list.

"Welcome to the crew," said the captain as Yondo jotted his name down.

Yondo awoke in his hammock. The soft rhythm of the ship bobbing over waves pulled him back to sleep.

"PULL YERSELF OUT OF BED, YA WORMS!" Boomed a voice. Yondo flew out of his hammock and turned to see a tall figure staring down into the cabin. The man had a thick neck, dotted with a forest of rough stubble. He had a fresh scar that ran from his temple to his nose on his left cheek. It was red and swollen, as though he had stayed up all night scratching at it. A golden ring hung from his ear opposite from the scar, and his head was wrapped in a black cloth. His thick chapped lips opened again.

"DID YA HEAR ME! OR ARE YOU DEAF AS WELL AS USELESS?"

By this time, most of the new crew had roused themselves from their hammocks and were staring warily, and some shakily, at the pirate. Yondo felt a flash of pain in his right arm and looked down at it. A wretched burn, in the shape of a skull and crossbones, looked back up at him. *Oh yeah*, he thought to himself, remembering the hot brand that was forced upon all the new crewmates.

"Aye," came a murmur from the men around Yondo.

"Good," the pirate added. His face relaxed and he took on a much more friendly tone of voice. "My name is Jiraiya, and you best remember that. Now get on deck. We've got work to do."

Jiraiya set half the group to swabbing the decks, to stop mold and moss from growing, and send the other half up the mast to patch the sails. He sent Yondo up first, as he was light and agile.

"Are we going to take it down first, Jiraiya?" Yondo implored. He looked up and watched the mast sway back and forth in the wind.

Jiraiya let out a deep laugh. "No, son. Where would be the fun in that? If you can't climb rigging in calm waters you might as well escort yourself overboard right now." He handed Yondo a knife and a bag of patching supplies. Yondo scampered up the rigging to the main sail. Perilously balancing on the battens, he inched along and began patching up small tears. He would have found the work relaxing, if it weren't for the sun beating down on him and the strong summer breeze fighting his footing.

With only a brief break for a bland lunch of rice and salted fish, Yondo found himself exhausted. As he climbed down from the mast, Jiraiya caught his eye.

"Not bad, son. Most people can't last more than an hour or two on the masts. That is, if they don't fall down first." Jiraiya had a grin on his face, a stark changeup from when Yondo first met him that morning.

"Erh, thanks," Yondo replied. He wasn't sure what to make of Jiraiya yet.

"I never did catch your name, son."

"It's Yondo," he said hesitantly.

"Yondo..." Jiraiya mused. "I haven't heard that name in a while." The pirate scrunched up his face, as if he was struggling to remember an old friend. "I must say," he said, "you look familiar, have we met before?"

Yondo was caught by surprise. "Met before? I don't think so. I would have remembered you."

"Ahh, you're right, son- I mean Yondo. Well, why don't

you join us for some drink?" A grin spread across Jiraiya's face, causing his scar to crumple up on the side of his cheek.

"Sure," Yondo said, hoping the old-timer's quarters stunk a little less than the recruit's quarters had.

It did not.

Yondo followed Jiraiya into the dimly lit quarters. There was a bar, if you could call it that, on the far side. An assortment of bottles, mostly empty, littered the broken cabinets behind the bar. An older group of pirates sat at the bar on chairs so abused and worn that Yondo was surprised they were still standing. To the right, an intense game of cards was being played. Coins were being passed across the table and one man erupted in laughter as he won the whole pot.

"Let me pour you a drink," Jiraiya offered. He led Yondo to an empty table. After Yondo sat down, Jiraiya searched the cabinet behind the bar and then grabbed a bottle. He returned with a smile and two glasses. He opened the bottle and poured out a dark, shining substance. He slid the glass towards Yondo.

Well, there's a first time for everything, Yondo thought. He picked up the glass and poured the contents into his mouth. Yondo thanked himself quietly for swallowing so fast, because as the rich liquid made its way down his throat it burned like hell itself. His mouth, throat, and nose were on fire. He felt his eyes tearing up and his stomach beginning to churn.

"Take a chaser, son." Jiraiya thrust a cup into Yondo's hand, the contents of which he quickly downed. Yondo began to relax as the amber liquid quelled the fire that the rum had lit inside him.

"Har har har," Jiraiya let out a deep laugh. "The ale always helps. I'm just surprised you kept the rum down. So, son,

what brings a boy like you on a ship like this?"

Yondo paused for a second before replying, "I'm looking for my dad. He got lost at sea."

"Well good luck with that. And I mean it. Nothing in this world is bigger than the ocean, and nothing is half as cruel..." Jiraiya trailed off and furrowed his brow, as if trying to recall a deeply buried memory. "Was he a fisherman?" he blurted.

"Uh, yes, actually, he was a fisherman. When he wasn't fishing he'd take me and my mom out to have picnics on nearby islands," Yondo lied. He knew he couldn't tell a pirate that his dad was the captain of the Royal Guard. It was only a half-lie, though. His dad did take them on trips to the surrounding islands on nice summer days. Yondo's favorite was Mercay Island. After beaching on the shore, his dad would lead him and his mom through the sparse forest to a small meadow that was shaded by a large outcropping. His mom and dad would lay down together while he went hunting for wild strawberries, popping them in his mouth as soon as he picked them until his stomach was full and his face dripping with red sticky juice.

Yondo sipped his ale and talked to Jiraiya late into the night.

The next day started out no different from the last. Chores had to be done, but it was too windy to climb the mast, so Yondo was down swabbing the deck.

"Why do we even need to scrub the deck? This is useless," a boy beside Yondo said to no one in particular. His hands were cracked and raw from the saltwater.

"Keep your stupid questions to yourself," an older man replied. "You slip on the tiniest bit of algae in a fight and you're dead. You let mold and rot take over your ship and the whole crew is dead. Get back to work."

Yondo already knew better than to ask questions to the crewmates, but he had been wondering the same thing.

“Ship on the starboard horizon!” Came a yell from the crow’s nest. “Ready yerselves!”

Everyone on the ship stopped and turned their attention to the newly spotted ship. The captain, Yukoza, directed his crew to prepare to board. “We may have ourselves a prize, boys! Ready the cannons, gather the hooks, go, go go!” The ship exploded with activity as every crew member went to man their station.

Yondo scrambled to put away his rag, frantic not to get in anybody’s way.

“This way, boy!” Yondo felt a hand snatch the back of his shirt and pull him below the deck. When he gathered himself and saw Jiraiya leading him down the ship he let out a sigh of relief.

It was crowded below decks. Jiraiya led Yondo to a cannon on the far side and instructed him to open the hatch. While he busied himself with that task, which was harder than it appeared, Jiraiya loaded the cannon. First, he took a powder horn and poured a generous amount of gunpowder down the barrel. He followed that with a ramrod to ensure that the powder was neatly packed in the back of the barrel. After yelling at Yondo to grab a cannonball from a nearby barrel, Jiraiya rolled it down the barrel and was already grabbing the wadding. The wadding was a dirty cloth, used to shove the powder and cannonball together to create a tight seal when it was lit that would send the cannonball hurtling out of the barrel. Jiraiya once again shoved the ramrod down the barrel, sending the wadding down to secure the load. He then carefully poured enough gunpowder to fill the vent. Once all he was done, he turned to Yondo.

"You ready for your first boarding?" A grin crept up Jiraiya's face, which was glowing from perspiration.

"I, I think so," Yondo replied nervously. He had certainly never boarded a ship and had never even thought about it. *Funny, he thought. Joining a pirate crew without thinking about what a pirate does.*

"Incoming!" A bearded man yelled. Yondo saw the junk across from him swing their ship sideways. Flashes of light appeared through the gunports and the ship was rocked as dozens of iron balls made contact with the hull. Wood chips flew in Yondo's face, and he fell to the floor, spitting out little chunks that used to be part of the ship. Jiraiya stood unphased, bracing himself on the long iron barrel of the cannon.

"Get up," he ordered Yondo. "That was a warning shot."

At that moment a man signaled the men to ready their primers. Yondo thrust himself to his feet and looked at Jiraiya for direction.

"Brace yourself against the side of the gun. Do NOT stand behind it. Stay light on your feet." With that, Jiraiya responded to a call to fire and slowly lowered the primer onto the vent. A spark caught the powder on fire and followed it through the vent into the barrel. The firmly packed powder ignited immediately and propelled the shot out of the cannon. A volley of cannon balls flew across the gap in the sea and riddled the side of the junk. Several shots fell short of the ship.

"RELOAD!" The bearded man yelled. He was wearing a long black coat with several missing buttons. The ragged collar was twisted and standing upright, wrapping around his matted beard. The crew quickly began reloading.

Winding from the backwards blast of the cannon, Yondo secured himself to the barrel.

"Stop hugging it and help me reload it," Jiraiya hollered

at him. Yondo did just that, a little quicker this time, and used the ramrod Jiraiya thrust into his hands to smush down the powder. He loaded the shot, and then the cannon ball, and—

The ramrod tumbled through the gunport and thudded against the side of the ship several times before disappearing into the water. Yondo felt a knot in his stomach.

“That was my favorite rod, you fool!” Jiraiya yelled at him. Quickly replacing it with another, he packed down the load.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM. Shots rang out in succession. BOOM. Their shot lamely followed the others several seconds later, making contact where the ship met the choppy sea.

“Do that again and I’ll chain you to that post,” Jiraiya said, gesturing to a nearby support. “You understand me, boy?”

Yondo tried to get a nod out but was interrupted by a volley of enemy cannon balls smashing into the ship.

“They’re swinging around!” Jiraiya relayed to the crew. The men got off one last shot into the rearing junk across from them and then abandoned their guns, reaching for their arms. One man had two swords strapped to his sides. Another had two pistols strapped to his chest. Jiraiya placed an underwhelming dagger into Yondo’s hands.

“Really?” Yondo asked. “A little kitchen knife?” He stared down at the dagger. The leather-wrapped handle was peeling at the top and the blade looked about as sharp and the cannonballs he had just fired.

“A kitchen knife in the right hands will do more than a cutlass in the wrong hands,” Jiraiya lectured him. “But if you must,” Jiraiya handed him one of his pistols.

It didn’t look much better than the dagger, but Yondo felt a lot better with a gun in his hand. His dad had taught

him how to shoot starting when he was very young, but he had never shot a moving target, let alone a man with it. Regardless, he felt stronger with the gun weighing heavy in his hand. He shoved it into his belt and followed the crew up to the deck.

It was as quiet as the nights he spent alone in his hammock below deck, but it didn't matter, his ears still rang from the cannon blasts. The crew crouched behind the railing, armed to the teeth with an assortment of knives, swords, and guns of all shape and size. Before Yondo could peek over the railing Jiraiya pushed his head down and guided him to take their place at the railing. Jiraiya handed him a grappling hook, paused for a second, and took it back.

"After that incident with the ramrod I'm not sure you could keep this in your hands if you tried," Jiraiya joked. Yondo rolled his eyes in response.

He could see the masts of the approaching ship over the railing. It was so close he could hear the sails flapping in the wind, a sound he had grown quite familiar with during his time on the masts patching up holes.

"It may be a merchantman, but it's got men of the Royal Guard on it," Jiraiya continued. Look, you can tell from the purple and yellow colors it's flying."

Yondo peered past the railing to see the colorful flags dancing in the wind.

To his left, a thin man peeked his head over the railing. He never had the chance to pull it back down, in an instant a bullet made contact with his head and sent him sprawling back. The crew didn't even glance at him.

"Hooks out!" The captain yelled. A dozen hooks flew over the railing. A few bounced harmlessly off the hull, but Jiraiya held fast. He pulled the slack out of the line and looped it around the cleat in a figure eight pattern.

"I've seen you leap around the mast. Don't look down

and you'll be just fine." A flash of worry came over Jiraiya's eyes but disappeared just as fast. He gave Yondo a firm pat on the shoulder.

A few brave men took the first leap across the gap. The rest followed. Yondo tried to ignore the ones who missed the jump and fell into the small gap between the ships, sure to get crushed before they drowned. He climbed up the rail, steadied himself, waited for the ships to rock within arm's reach of each other and threw himself across. He landed on hard wood. His cheek was pressed to the rough deck, and he could feel the slime from the porous algae licking up at his face. *Somebody doesn't know how to swab*, he thought.

Chaos reigned around him. Men screamed, guns were fired, and swords glowed red with blood. He collected himself to a crouch and put and braced himself against the railing. He felt immediate relief. The crew of the merchantmen was much smaller than the pirate crew. While the ships were about the same size, no one could cram men aboard quite like pirates could. Yondo watched as Jiraiya thrust his sword into a man. He saw the life leave his eyes just moments after the man realized he was dead. In one fluid movement, Jiraiya yanked the sword out and whipped his pistol from his side, letting out a deadly shot into a uniformed man charging at him.

"Don't make me do it all myself," he called to Yondo.

Yondo pulled the dagger from his side and stuck his arm out as if to ward off the men of the Royal Guard. Jiraiya got pulled away to aid a crewmate and Yondo was left all by himself.

Before he could feel scared a man ran towards him, wielding a cutlass above his head. Without thinking, Yondo dove into his legs. They fell in a heap on the deck and struggled to right themselves. Yondo felt an arm on his face and grabbed at it. He could feel the stains from the ocean

spray on the smooth cloth. Before he realized it, the man was on top of him. *Where did my knife go?* There! Yondo reached out and felt his hand close around the leather handle.

The man shoved his forearm against Yondo's throat, putting all his weight on it. In a moment of desperation, Yondo shoved the knife into the man's gut. He didn't move. Yondo's vision began to darken, and he let go of the knife and the man increased pressure. All he could think about was air. Rich and heartening, he had seldom wanted it so badly. At that moment, all he wanted, even more than he wanted to find his dad, was to take a breath as he had a thousand times before.

"ARGHHHH!" A weight was lifted from Yondo's body. Oxygen rushed back into his lungs, breathing life back into his body. He had never taken such a deep breath in his life. Regaining his vision, he saw Jiraiya standing tall above him. He grabbed hold of Yondo's arm and lifted him from the deck.

"I told you not to get yourself killed," Jiraiya blurted out. "You'll live to drop another ramrod." Jiraiya avoided Yondo's gaze.

He looked around the deck. Dead bodies and limbs were strewn around, laying in grotesque positions on the deck. A thick, crimson soup soaked into the wood. A group of men, one dressed in uniform, kneeled before the captain.

"Listen up," he preached. "Join my crew or join your fallen brothers at the bottom of the sea. Men had already begun to throw the lifeless corpses overboard.

"Never." The uniformed man spit on the captain's boots. In response, the boot swiftly met his face, sending him rearing backward. Jiraiya stepped forward and righted the man, holding him by his brown hair.

"Is that how you treat a captain?" he asked, not expecting

an answer. Jiraiya picked up the man and drew back a fist. The man stared back in silent resolve. Halfway through the swing, a shot rang out. Jiraiya's body jerked sideways, and the man dropped to the deck.

The whole crew turned their attention to the galley door, which had just opened. A frail man limped out, smoking pistol in hand. The man's face was covered in cuts and bruises, and he looked as if he had not eaten in several days. His left eye was swollen to the size of a walnut.

Yondo stared. Just past the swollen, purple face, Yondo saw hazel eyes. The hazel eyes of his father. He rushed forward.

"Dad!" Yondo scooped his father up into his arms and embraced him.

The man stared back, and life flooded back into his face.

"Yondo..." he let out weakly. Through his battered cheeks and swollen eyes, a smile formed.

It didn't last long. His gaze shifted to Yondo's arm, and the smile melted away. Looking down, Yondo saw the eyes of a skull and crossbones staring back into his soul.

"No..." his father struggled out. "You didn't, you couldn't have."

Yondo began to realize the significance of the burn on his upper arm, which he had grown quite used to. The brand was given to pirates all across the vast sea that separated his homeland from the mainland. Every man in every coastal town could instantly recognize the man who wore it as a pirate. A thug.

His father's face strengthened with anger. "No son of mine wears that brand. No son of mine."

Yondo felt a rush of guilt, which quickly turned to despair, and then into anger. "I came to rescue you!" he shouted back. "I came to save you!"

His father was silent for a moment. Disappointment was projected out of his eyes. "You should have saved yourself." His father relaxed his body and fell out of Yondo's arms, onto the deck.

Tears that had just moments before been of joy flashed hot with anger. Yondo collapsed onto the deck and bawled.

"This is no time for tears." Yukoza picked up the boy and looked him in the eyes. The fire of the battle still raged on in his black pupils. "Look at what he did. Look!"

Yukoza turned Yondo's eyes to Jiraiya. He was laying on the deck, nursing his bleeding shoulder. A crewmate had rushed forward and pressed his own shirt in a bundle to Jiraiya's wound. Jiraiya clenched his jaw and tried to hold back the pain, but muffled grunts and moans escaped his lips.

Yondo felt his gun jammed into his hand. Yukoza had pulled it from Yondo's side and wrapped his fingers around it. He wrapped Yondo's pointer finger around the trigger.

"Listen up son. No one wants you. I sure as hell don't want you on my ship and your father doesn't either. He'd rather see you hanging from the mast. It wouldn't be the first time he hung a man. I'm going to kill him. I know your father, you see. Many pirates do. He's strung up more good men than you could count on your hands."

Yondo looked to Jiraiya for help, but none was to be found.

"Your dad was dead the moment we spotted his ship. We made light work of them." He looked to his crew for support, who responded with cheers and whoops. "Now I'm going to kill him. Or you are."

Hot steel pressed up against Yondo's temple. The captain had drawn his own gun and leveled it with Yondo's skull. The pirate grabbed Yondo's wrist and pointed it at his dad, who was lying face down on the deck.

No one could make a decision like that, and Yondo was in no state to do so. Filled with emotions, a thousand thoughts whirled through his head. From the night his father went missing to his journey into the bar and on the pirate ship, all Yondo wanted was to find his dad. Every effort, every struggle, he had strived towards this moment. He wished he could die right there. He wanted to leap up and throw himself off the ship. Most of all he wanted to lie in his mother's arms and let the cloth of her soft blue gown soak up the tears that were flowing from his eyes.

"I'm going to count down from three," Yukoza snarled through yellowed teeth. "Three..." As he stared at his father his finger tightened, then loosened, and then tightened again. "Two..." The barrel of the pistol placed against his head had begun to burn him. He remembered the captain's words. *He was a dead man from the moment we laid eyes on his ship.* "One."



Contributor Bios

Adria Clines is a running start student at WCC and Sehome. After graduation, she'll be venturing to Rochester, New York, to observe the effect of extensive snow and dorm life on her creative flow.

Brennan Solen is a cybersecurity student at WCC aiming for graduating with the AAS-T degree in that field. They'll be taking a slower class schedule and focusing on getting certifications. This is with the aim of getting a good foot in the door to qualify for a IT related job. They appreciate time with nature, running, conversations, writing and drawing.

Gabriella St. Martin is from Whatcom County, and now lives in Lynden, Washington with her partner and two cats. She enjoys reading, writing, listening to nerdy comedy podcasts, and spending time with her loved ones. She plans to go to graduate school next fall to get a Masters in Creative Writing, which she hopes will lead to a career in book editing.

Jay Greenawalt is a WCC student finishing her Associates this quarter. She loves making art and writing poetry. Concluding this quarter, she will transfer to the University of Washington where she will pursue her Bachelors in Creative Writing.

Katerina Kravchenko is an avid reader and aspiring author. This is her first publication, hopefully with many more to come. When she isn't dreaming up stories or penning poems, she enjoys spending time outside in nature and attempting to birdwatch. She is majoring in the Physical Therapy Assistant Program at WCC.

Krystan Andreason is a business student at WCC, currently pursuing her bachelor's degree. She enjoys participating in and appreciating all kinds of creative outlets such as painting, music, and photography, and takes inspiration from anywhere she can get it. After college, Krystan plans to open a business for fostering creativity and allowing it to shine.

Lewis Paige uses visual art as a means of storytelling. He enjoys working in many different mediums, including acrylic paint, printmaking, and hand sewing. He is looking forward to beginning the Visual Communications program in the Fall.

Marley Krumpak moved to Bellingham from Vancouver, BC in 2015. She has found a great community here and continues to evolve her art as she grow up. Her main medium is using a mechanical pencil mixed with a blending stick. She takes the most inspiration from the music she listens to, nature in the PNW, and fantasy themes.

Matthew Waschke is a poet and writer who has lived in Bellingham his entire life. When not taking inspiration from the world and nature around him to use in his writing, they are often found planning their next D&D adventure set in their own homebrew world. They also proudly take part in areas of nerd culture such as video gaming.

Nettle Ada is an artist and transsexual living in Bellingham. She makes art as a part of the collective project to imagine and build a better world beyond the collapsing shell of the colonial-capitalist project that we are living within.

Summer Star is a first-year Cyber Security student at WCC. She enjoys taking macro photographs of flowers and insects. She also writes fantasy fiction in her spare time (Spare time? What's that?)

Sydney Coons is graduating with her General AA degree this Spring. She will be transferring to Ringling College of Art and Design in Florida this fall for a major in film production and a minor in creative writing. She hopes to pursue a director position in film and hopefully a future writer as well.

Violet Fowler is currently finishing up her last year at Bellingham High School. She enjoys writing and doing anything that involves being outside. After receiving her diploma she plans to spend part of the summer camping, traveling, and continuing to work.

Contributors

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