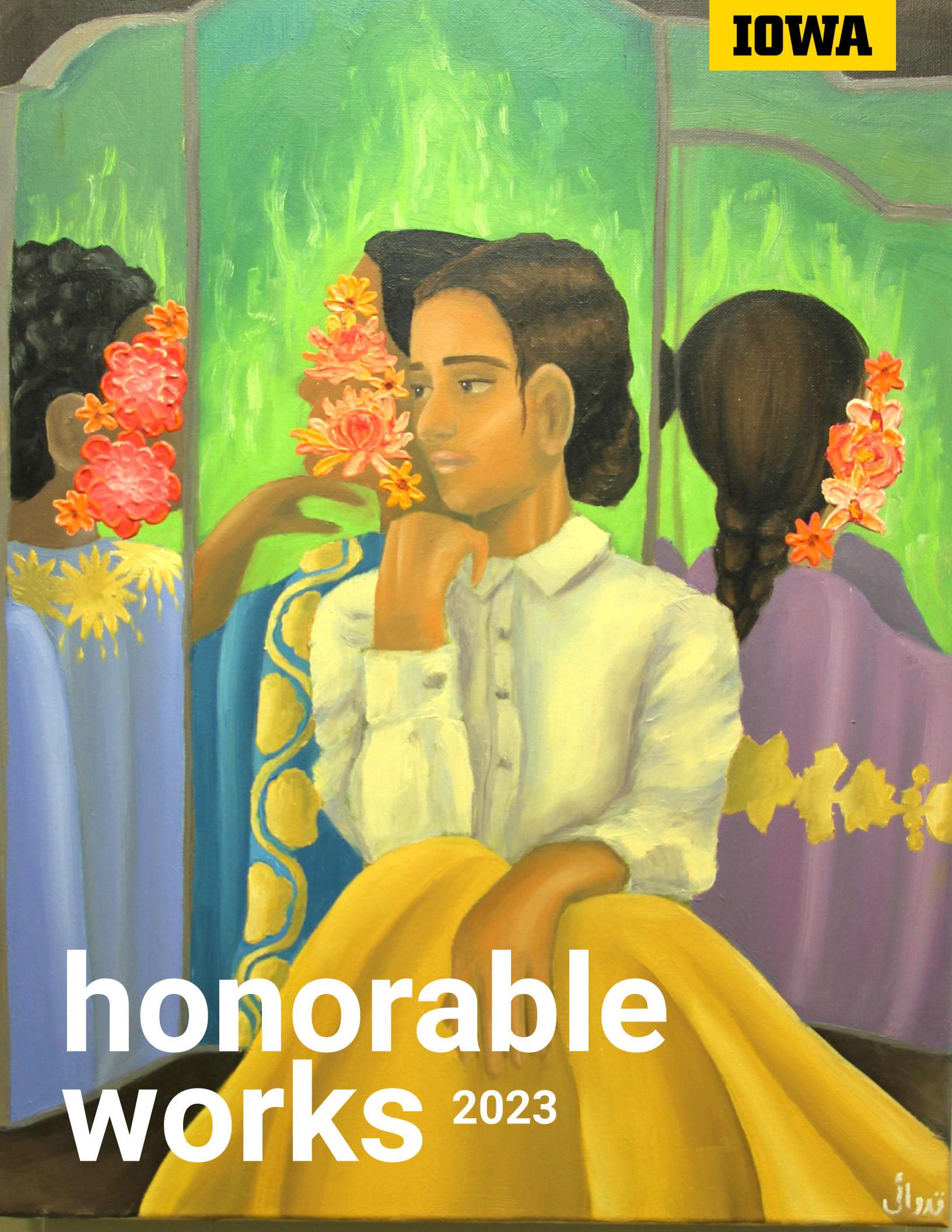


IOWA



**honorable
works** 2023

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Cover photo by Iris Peimann of *Developing Ideal of Beauty*, oil on canvas. The painting, by second year international relations major Amira Qidwai, is exhibited in the Blank Honors Center fourth floor gallery space. It investigates how western ideals of beauty impact societies around the world, changing their fundamental cultural values. Detail on back cover.

letter from the editors

By Hannah Cargo, Colin Votzmeyer, and Josephine Geiger-Lee



Honors students tend to be known for high achievement, rigorous courses, and academic excellence. While plenty receive recognition in the classroom and on the transcripts, it's important to note the value of achievement beyond just the grades.

We encourage you to think back to the elementary school joys of getting your latest drawing put on the fridge or the simple pride you might have felt after finishing a musical or athletic feat. Showing off accomplishments is an oft-forgotten part of the college experience, so Honorable Works strives to find projects that might otherwise have been forgotten. In this second issue, students and editors bring 11 worthy works back into the spotlight.

We start off with an excerpt from a short story by Maya Torrez. Originally submitted in an advanced writing seminar class, it has been edited by Berkley Barnett for this

issue. With spooky time loops, a take-no-crap narrator, endless night shifts at the rec, and an eternally looming emergency, this piece blends horror and humor with finesse.

Next, we see reporting by Emily Jordan exploring how Dungeons & Dragons impacts the people within the roleplaying community. Originally written for a magazine reporting class, this excerpt focuses on one Discord moderator's history with the game. Professional, informative, and incredibly heartfelt, this piece challenges stereotypes and is a treasure waiting to be discovered.

Leana Marti's carefully crafted origami Butterfly Wall is the first of two visual arts pieces featured in this issue. This beautiful display represents freedom and was created for a basic drawing class. It no longer exists in physical space but can be enjoyed in this magazine, thanks to Grace Hahn.

Sam Wilson Hoff dives into a statistical study entitled "Humor Me: An Observational Study," written by a third-year honors student, Michael May. Over the course of multiple years, May amassed over 700 out-of-context quotes from his friends. He then took 40 of the quotes to present to his current friends, asking them to rank them on a scale of 1-10. The piece examines the research and the methodology of such a task, showing the fusion of academia and humor.

Bri Brands introduces us to a short story written by Emma Hussin for a fiction writing class. The short story showcases a variety of genres: romance, fiction, and a hint of horror at the end. The story begins with the main character, Lou, suffering from a recent heartbreak and, as she walks down Silva Street, encountering a woman in the same position.

Calista Kapulos looks into a poem, "Mother Winter," by first-

year creative writing student Gianna Ceriotti. The poem kicks off with the strong, lethal imagery of the season, describing how the poem's speaker is both "elderberry and belladonna." As it continues, the poem's theme dips towards death and cruelty, all the while keeping its central metaphor of seasonal depression in mind.

Neely Goerlinger brings us back to a scientific focus with Annalisa Cinkay's "Listening Beyond What One Can Hear." Cinkay majors

protagonists Kriss and Là in a post-apocalyptic setting as we learn of Là's connection to the ocean and Kriss' desire to help.

Taking a break from the writing-intensive pieces, Colin Votzmeyer's contribution highlights Matthew Loes's clothing brand "MLMU Clothing." MLMU is short for "Momma's Little Mess Up" and his creations often display the slogan "Sorry Mom" as an expression Loes made for college students owning up to who they truly are –

cusses a flash fiction piece written by her friend Abby Kloha, entitled "Rising." The piece, written in first person, details a scene in which a young girl asks her parents if Jesus is a zombie, to which her mom laughs and says "At least we're raising our daughters well." Kloha's goal with the piece was to show a side of Christianity where church is an innocent, happy place that binds neighbors together.

A big thank you goes to our editorial advisor, Holly Yoder, the

We encourage you to think back to the elementary school joys of getting your latest drawing put on the fridge.

in speech and hearing sciences, and created this piece during an honors contract for her American Sign Language course. As the essay describes the importance of Deaf culture and the Deaf community, it pays special attention to parents choosing cochlear implants or other hearing aids for their children.

Gracie Harvey explores a science fiction short story written by Livvi DiCicco, a former Honors Publications editor and 2023 graduate who majored in English and creative writing. DiCicco enjoys crafting stories that blend the fantasy, sci-fi, and period romance genres into one, and she did just that with "Apparatus." The short story follows the relationship between

even if their parents don't approve. Loes prints his own clothing in his apartment, selling it through his website and social media with goals of making clothes he enjoys and seeing others enjoy it too.

Korbin Yauk offers an essay entitled "Andor: Something Real," written by honors student Noelle Franzone. The essay explores Andor, a Star Wars prequel show on Disney+ about thief-turned-spy Cassian Andor. Although the show is science fiction in nature, Franzone notes the modern social themes throughout its episodes that bring nuance to a modern take on the genre. Thus, Franzone argues the show has potential to be a cult classic.

To round us off, Katie Davis dis-

students of the Honors Publications class who prepared these pieces for publication, and other honors staff for their support. This magazine would not be complete without your help. Readers, sit back and relax. We hope to show you inspiring art pieces, fascinating studies, creative stories, and other honorable works to continue that spark of curiosity, discovery, and achievement that the University of Iowa Honors Program and its students pride themselves in.

–Hannah Cargo (BA25), Colin Votzmeyer (BA25), and Josephine Geiger-Lee (BA25), 2023-2024 Honors Publications Editing Team

it's enough to drive you crazy if you let it

Featured Honors Student: Maya Torrez

Edited by Berkely Barnett



Maya Torrez

Maya Torrez wrote this story to capture the humor and hardships of her facility supervisor job at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center (CRWC). She thought the sleek design of the building would be an ironic setting for a spooky yet comedic genre piece. Torrez originally submitted this story for an advanced writers seminar she took in her second year and is proud to have utilized her background as a campus employee and writer to craft this hilariously horrifying tale. While Torrez continues to gain inspiration from her coworkers at the CRWC, she is excited to use her background in writing with the University of Iowa Press and her English major to publish more stories in the future.

This piece has been excerpted from a longer work to fit the format of this publication. The following work contains strong language.

“Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living / Barely gettin’ by, it’s all taking and no giving.”

Goddammit Dolly, it gets old the second time. Now I really wish my shift was just 9 to 5.

Here we go again, every detail of yesterday on repeat. I walk in, take my AirPods out, put on my name tag, dismiss the current supervisor, and start to fix the credit card reader before my coworker even knows it’s broken.

“How did you...?” she asks with a quizzical look, but I wave away her question. Carol McIntyre approaches and she won’t get the best of me this time. What she doesn’t

know is that I’ve already had this conversation with her before, and I’m going to be the hero employee that prevents a 1-star review.

I’m as sweet as my mama’s lemonade on a sweltering summer day when interacting with Carol. Before she can start to yell when I tell her she isn’t allowed to come in without an ID, I offer her my Boss’s card along with a voucher for a free smoothie at our legendary smoothie bar. She brightens right up and goes on her way without so much as glancing at her phone.

I pump my fist in the air like some kind of 80’s movie protagonist. But I’m allowed this victory dance and

I disregard Delilah and Brandon’s judgmental stares.

The high of besting Carol doesn’t last long. Like Dolly’s familiar chorus, I know it’s not long until—EEEEEE! The door alarm on the second-floor court blares.

Confident that I am now well prepared for this next conflict, I stop at the ice machine to bundle up a bag of ice for Jeremiah’s soon-to-be torn Achilles tendon before bounding up the stairs. My queasy coworker Brandon stands up to offer his help, but I assure him, “I can handle it.” The last thing I need is to mop up his puke for the second time in the same night. Well, some

creepy version of the same night, anyhow.

I tell Delilah to call an ambulance before I even make it to the courts, shouting the instruction from the top stair and drawing the attention of the people running on the treadmills nearby. Delilah looks confused, but she picks up the receiver of the landline to do as I request nonetheless. God bless that girl, she does thrive when she's given direction.

I walk up to the now-injured Jeremiah to offer him the ice first. His shocked eyes reveal that he thinks I'm a prophetess of some kind, and I'm fine with that interpretation. It's the least I've earned for starring in my own twisted version of Groundhog Day. Then, Jeremiah's eyes switch to something behind me. I follow his gaze to see Brandon standing a couple of paces behind me holding a clenched fist over his mouth. Curse that helpful idiot.

"Noooo!" I shout in what feels like slow motion. But I'm too late. Brandon removes his fist, causing a torrent of vomit to erupt from his mouth. I watch in horror as it flies through the air, heading straight for the same spot it occupied yesterday—today?

I close my eyes to avoid any back-splash. My vision goes black for just a second.



"Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living / Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving."

Ok, ok, new plan. I've got it all down now. If Jeremiah never injures himself, Brandon never throws up at all. Win-win for them

and no throw-up for me.

I get in the front doors and stuff my AirPods in my pocket, sprinting up to the second-floor courts as fast as I can. The current supervisor gives me an exasperated look, yelling something about "Thirsty Thursday" at my retreating back. I ignore them. Nothing I haven't heard before.

I wave my hands frantically at the basketball players, trying to get them to stop the game. Not only am I entirely ignored, I watch as Jeremiah makes his way down the court, dribbling the ball. In contrast, he doesn't see me at all, so when the player defending him sticks his foot out, Jeremiah tumbles through the air and tackles me into the door. I have just enough time to hear the piercing wail of the alarm as I tumble backward before—



"Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living / Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving."

I'm never listening to this song again.

Airpods. Wave. Thirsty Thursday. Sit in my supervisor chair.

"Good evening, Mrs. McIntyre. Of course I know your name, you're a valued patron here at the rec." Unplug the card reader. "Can I see a photo ID?" Plug the card reader back in. "Yes, it's our policy." Press the power button. "Yes, it has to be a physical copy." Loading screen. "Sorry about that. Can I offer you a voucher for a free smoothie at the smoothie bar?" Power up chime. "Have a lovely day, ma'am."

Door alarm. Push Brandon back into his chair. Grab a large bag of

ice. Jeremiah's severed Achilles tendon. Second free smoothie voucher. Emergency services.

It's like a speedrun of the world's most mundane videogame. I've used up four attempts already and I'm familiar with the terrain. I'm going to make this time loop my bitch. The universe is messing with the wrong rec supervisor.

The final battle presents itself almost immediately as though I had summoned it. Honestly, I still don't know the rules of this time loop, so for all I know I did summon it. A bare-chested patron sprints down the stairs and practically runs into the desk with the momentum driving him toward me. I can see Delilah ogling his pecs while Brandon looks down at his own pecs in a self-conscious manner. I open my mouth to let the patron know he's required to wear a shirt around the facility, but he interrupts me.

"Someone stole my fucking stuff!" He shouts at the top of his lungs.

"Can I offer you a free smoothie voucher?" I ask. What? It had worked with the last two issues, hadn't it? There was no reason this logic would fail now.

"What? No. Why the fuck would I prefer a smoothie voucher over my hoodie? It has my car keys, my house keys, my wallet, and my phone in it. I need you to catch the thief that fucking stole it from me."

I raise my hands in a placating gesture to get him to take a couple of deep breaths. So much for the easy route. No matter how hard I tried, no matter how many times I relived it, this day was determined to kick my ass.

Maya Torrez is a third-year student majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track. Along with making both the Dean's and President's lists, Maya works as a faculty supervisor at the Campus Recreation Center. She is developing her publishing skills at Iowa through her involvement with the University of Iowa Press and looks forward to utilizing creative resources to grow as a writer.

dungeons, dragons, and community

Featured Honors Student: Emily Jordan
Edited by Mackenzie Becker



Emily Jordan

Could a game such as Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) spark great inspiration and a whole new outlook on life? Emily Jordan wants readers to know that there is more to D&D lovers than the nerdy stereotypes people make them out to be. Through the storytelling of Jordan's friend Alexis White and White's observations about how being a moderator for the game impacted her, Jordan demonstrates that D&D serves to provide connectedness and a safe place for creative minds to reunite. Emily Jordan initially started playing D&D in August 2022. An assignment for JMC:3410 Magazine Reporting and Writing prompted this love letter to the game.

“You are currently in America, the beginning of the Apocalypse, the end of days, dawn of a new and unstable world. A violent and hungry one, no longer focused on maintaining a balance, simply consuming endlessly,” pings the first message. As her five players wait anxiously, Alexis White stretches her hands.

“Following the boom, all semblances of infrastructure collapse, the sky falls—,” and the game has begun.

Oral storytelling is a mark of culture—for thousands of years, before any opportunity of record, we remembered values and lessons through complicated stories, told by campfire or moonlight.

Even now, in a dim basement, or

in quiet corners of the internet, people gather around tables full of maps and tiny figures, donning foreign accents, fantastical outfits with capes and intricate staffs, and characters of fantasy races and species—to catch a glimpse of a life of fantasy, and to escape for a brief moment.

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is a tabletop roleplaying game with dice, character building, and fantasy elements—but it is also a form of storytelling with a vibrant community. D&D is not just about fighting goblins and evil warlocks with friends—but about addressing real complexities of life, character, and values.

White, known by her online alias “Rhi,” isn't new to the realm of D&D. To her friends, she's a walking

encyclopedia with specific knowledge on spells, magic items, and the rules of the game. She's an admin on a Discord server for D&D, affectionately titled “Server Mom,” and with over 120 members, things are busy.

But on March 24th, 2023—almost three years since she first joined the server—White played the role of Dungeon Master for the first time. This meant she oversaw setting the scene, playing the non-player characters, and running the game entirely—a daunting task.

White was nervous. Pre-session jitters, she called it. More than that—there was a sense of fear. She worried that she might focus too much on a single player—neglecting to give all her players a balanced and deserved sense of

time and respect.

“Everyone should be having fun, and I hate the notion of dragging someone through hours of a slog,” she explained.

Hours is accurate as an average D&D game runs anywhere from four to five hours. White once played in a 12-hour session, a finale for a long-term campaign.

White understands that over those long hours, players will inevitably lose engagement. White herself described that even she sometimes got bored during sessions—opting to check her phone.

That wasn’t White’s only concern. White is mute, so she communicates primarily over text. Initially, she worried this method of running the game wouldn’t work—that her texts would be too slow for the game’s pace and she wouldn’t be able to replicate the same atmosphere and tone. “It has its ups and downs, and I feel like it performs much greater than what I’d even dreamt of considering my past experiences,” she said.

Past the mechanics, though, lies a story begging to be told. White, alongside many other experienced players, agrees that the essential part of D&D is storytelling. For White, the story was about human resilience. The meaning behind resistance, and the trials and tribulations of humanity desperately trying to bring balance to a world thrust so deeply beyond it.

According to the Dungeons and Dragons Player Handbook, since the Dungeon Master is reacting and improvising to the player’s actions, D&D is flexible—with no two adventures the same. It explains that there is no winning or

losing, only the goal of having fun and creating a memorable story. Collaboration is the foundation of D&D. “If you wanted to completely control a story beginning to end you shouldn’t play D&D, as you’re just writing a book,” she explained.

For White, the value of this collaboration was best shown in Morrigan, a character created by player Hihi, dying and being reborn as a god. It begins with her acceptance of death and abandonment of life.

“Light ruptures, and the world truly caves in and ends. As though on key, the second the pace hastens, it ruptures into a fine chorus, as does the world, basking in a blindingly beautiful light, only obscured by dirt covering it, [an] end to your life. A[n] end to your story, or so you’d think. [You] feel the dust almost immediately catch you, the friction tearing away your skin, as it burns away, with the dust.

An Eternal tendernesss, as a flame brighter than the boom itself catches, singing the area all around, another beacon rupturing with it, as one phoenix falls, so does another rise, here to claim [its] place.

“The sky turned blue, then brown, now sings in a deep red, a dying flame trying its best to resist the harsh flames, the wind cyclones, casing around Morrigan, fanning her now eternal flames, her devouring flames, consuming all it can, living or not, it [is] simply tinder for this budding flame; soon it was orange, then a deep blue again, before settling upon a white flame, an egg shaped pattern as it draws in every last bit of air from the surroundings, burning it all away before condensing, forming

this new phoenix. This new Morrigan, the center of all flow, the cause of more destruction.”

Morrigan’s scene revolves around a terminal cancer patient experiencing things she hasn’t been able to do in a long time—exemplified by a jovial, breathtaking sprint, without fatigue.

“Every deep breath, clearer than the last, never has it been so easy, so refreshing, so perfect.”

It’s a poignant, emotional scene—one that left the group silent with awe. Morrigan’s emotions are so intense, brimming with excitement, that she forgets she is even in a hospital gown.

Whether it is a fantasy of what we wish we were, or a part of ourselves we have fully repressed given rebirth, or it is the most subtle of all similarities, the connection exists. For White and her friends, every scene, every moment holds some value.

Beyond that, it forms genuine bonds. Some couples create characters meant to fall in love with one another—like White and her partner have done.

We take every chance to expose the innerworkings of our characters, their faults, their joys—to mend or break them. In the meantime, it may even heal ourselves.

White truly believes that the game has changed her life. It formed bonds she’ll hold for the rest of her life. I can only agree with her—as I met her and our other friends through the aforementioned server. And for that, she recommends that everyone try it—it only starts with the right group.

Emily Jordan is a third-year student from the south suburbs of Chicago, majoring in journalism and mass communication with a certificate in sustainability. While at the University of Iowa, she would like to experience opportunities in radio or magazine work.

andor: something real

Featured Honors Student: Noelle Franzone
Edited by Korbin Yauk



Noelle Franzone

Andor: Something Real is an interpretive essay on Andor, a Star Wars prequel show, written by Noelle Franzone. The essay delves into the social and modern themes the story portrays, explaining the nuance of modern science fiction. All these themes culminate in a series that has the potential to become a world-renowned cult classic. In her own words, Andor is a breath of real fresh air, and the audience is following.

Cult movies are typically thought of as the ugly stepsisters of the cinema world. Movies like *Reefer Madness* and *Night of Living Dead* give a bad name to movies with a cult following. However, on rare occasions, a movie can be named a cult film without being considered “bad” or universally hated. Examples of pop culture cult cinema movies— movies that are “good” and followed by both a cult audience and a general audience— would include *Fargo* and *Top Gun*. Typically with these movies, one or two aspects stand out as particularly culty— the homosexual subtext in *Top Gun*— and that cult audiences then latch onto. Lucasfilm’s *Andor* is currently a popular show and is widely regarded as one of the best pieces of Star Wars media written recently. Despite its modern popularity, I believe that *Andor* will become a cult classic because of its cultural relevance, intertextuality, and camp.

Andor is a show that layers complexities on complexities, and

addresses a thousand different issues throughout its runtime. There are hundreds of characters introduced. Despite this, it is also a show that manages to pull all of these moving elements into a coherent whole to communicate critical messages. A crucial element of cult films is often their political relevance. Movies like *Lord of the Rings* and *Planet of the Apes* gain cultural relevance because of the way they lend themselves to interpretation. *Andor* situates itself similarly in a global cultural context by “[managing] to elicit speculations about what times and locations stand for”, by allowing viewers to extract allegorical meaning from its fantasy scenarios (CFR, 9). *Andor* can be interpreted as an immigrant story— an integral story to tell in today’s America. In the very first scene of the show, *Andor* is asked by police officers if he “swam over,” a statement that mirrors many anti-immigrant sentiments. Later in the season, a character says that the Imperials have

“built a lot of cages,” a reference to the cages built by US border patrol.

In episode 6, the viewer gets a look into the Imperial mindset, where they believe that the native peoples of Aldhani— the Dhani— are genetically more vulnerable to manipulation and that they would “rather suffer than accept [invasion]”. The Imperials also express disdain for Dhani cultural traditions. All of these actions create an allegory for almost any imperialistic invasion but bring to mind most prominently the colonization of Native American peoples. White colonizers frequently used genetics as an excuse for slavery or invasion and also tended to look down on the cultural traditions of native people. *Andor* parallels these ideas and thought processes and presents them through a known villain— the Empire. This method is commonly used in cult films. The Cult Film Reader then argues that if “a film’s strangeness, allegorical powers or representations of cultural sensitivities

We know the sides we should be on, but Andor creates characters that evoke emotions beyond their basic descriptors. The rebels are the heroes, yes, but they are heroes that lie, cheat, and kill.

contain a strong ideological component”, it becomes a “politically inspired pamphlet” (CFR, 10). By filtering ideas about immigration and the struggles of Indigenous people through the lens of something familiarly evil, Andor and its showrunners express strong anti-fascist and anti-imperialist ideologies. A focus in the anti-imperialist dialogue is especially put on the “othering” of people, evident through the use of language.

The languages used in Andor are designed to alienate an outside audience. The most prominent way this is displayed is through the show’s interactions with Kenari, Cassian Andor’s native language. None of the dialogue written in Kenari (a constructed language with roots in Portuguese, Spanish, and Hungarian) is subtitled, leaving viewers to guess what is being said. This is purposefully isolating. Emily Kavanagh explains that the audience is “introduced to Kenari as a total outsider, and thus we don’t get to know what their words actually mean” (Kavanagh). This intentional language isolation is also present in the Dhani language, as

it is only ever translated through a third-party interpreter. Language is a tool that “controls our perception of the world”, and Andor uses it purposefully to “otherize” the viewer, as so many non-English languages are otherized (Ross, 107). The rise in xenophobia in the last two years targeting Hispanic people and Spanish speakers makes this comment on language especially relevant to today’s culture, providing yet another allegory to society today.

Some may argue that Andor is too popular to become a true cult show. After all, it became one of the most-viewed Star Wars shows on Disney+ by the end of its first season, with an audience demand 31.3% higher than the demand for an average TV show (Fernandez). However, for audiences dedicated to Star Wars or George Lucas’ filmography, Andor takes on entirely other meanings. The use of intertextuality throughout the show deepens the understanding of Andor’s broader themes and creates a sub-audience within the audience of those who are “in the know.” Take, for example, the nu-

merous references to other Star Wars media. Throughout the series, Andor asks the question “who’s listening?” in various ways. The prison that Andor is imprisoned in uses sign language, which proves to be an unreliable method of communication when they have to consider “how many hands” it takes for a single idea to be communicated. One character is tortured through auditory input, as dying screams are played repeatedly through headphones— screams that drove the people listening insane, but not the killers, because they were not listening. This is a motif that is carried through to Rogue One, Andor’s parent story. Rogue One concludes with the characters wondering if anyone is listening to the transmission they sent as they sit on an exploding planet. Understanding the way these things connect provides a deeper understanding of why they matter, again separating the casual fans from the more involved viewership.

The audiences that make deeper connections are not casual viewers. They are audiences that are set apart by their in-depth anal-

ysis. The Cult Film Reader would call these “smart” fans or fans who “instantly [connect] tropes, motives and metaphors regardless of the film’s intentions” (CFR, 375). The connection to THX-1138, the analysis of film choices, and the endless articles and videos explaining Easter eggs prove that Andor fans are dedicated beyond the show and show “extreme attachment”, classic traits of a cult audience. These audiences are crucial to the making of a cult film—indeed, they are one of the “essential characteristics” of cult cinema (CFR 369). If Andor already boasts a cult audience, then it should follow that it will become, or perhaps already is, a cult show.

Andor also transgresses within its genre. As all Star Wars media is, Andor is science fiction. But beyond the typical generic conventions, Andor is a Star Wars story. Star Wars stories generally follow a typical framework—the first series is a by-the-book hero’s journey, with the 1999 - 2002 prequel series simply an inverse of the same journey. In the prequel, original, and sequel series, the di-

chotomy between good and evil is clear, as is required by the hero’s journey. The Empire, represented as a faceless, fascist machine with all-black uniforms, is evil. The Rebellion, fronted by real people in white clothing, is good. Andor takes this dichotomy and twists it. Andrew Gordon claims that the “good” characters in science fiction movies are “represented as clean” (Gordon 317). In Andor, the characters we are supposed to root for spend most of their time visibly dirty, or in dirty places, while the Imperial characters remain spotless. They even tailor their uniforms. Despite this, the lines between “good” and “evil” blur, disrupting the clear differentiation that should be evident between them (Gordon 316). The rebels, the people we are supposed to cheer for, loot a building while holding a child hostage. The audience fears for the Imperial officer when she is cornered by a male stalker. We know the sides we should be on, but Andor creates characters that evoke emotions beyond their basic descriptors. The rebels are the heroes, yes, but they are heroes

that lie, cheat, and kill. The Imperials are evil, but they are still human. This transgression shifts the expectations that viewers have when starting a Star Wars show, again setting Andor apart and creating ample space for a cult audience to follow.

Andor makes use of these transgressions, along with their cultural relevance and intertextuality to draw in dedicated and unique audiences. Despite its success, the show has all the makings of a cult show, and could easily become one in the next few years. It is a show that, despite streaming on Disney+, a platform designed to increase consumption of products at any cost, communicates a passionate political message with diverse and intriguing characters. It is a show that falls back to some of the things that made the original series so iconic—real settings and real people, grappling with real problems in real ways. In an entertainment world that feels increasingly reliant on artificial relationships, characters, and settings, Andor is a breath of real fresh air, and the audience is following.

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Noelle Franzone is a second-year student from Madison, Wisconsin majoring in English and creative writing and linguistics, with a certificate in nonprofit leadership and philanthropy. She hopes to one day write a story as great as the ones she grew up reading. Noelle’s piece was for an honors class discussing “cult classic” films.

butterfly wall

Featured Honors Student: Leana Marti
Written by Grace Hahn



Leana Marti

To celebrate the arrival of spring, Leana Marti created each of the butterflies and flowers exhibited in her art piece. Each butterfly was meticulously folded from colored printer paper and stuck to the wall. The whole process spanned three days to create and assemble. This project was inspired by the class Basic Drawing. While the exhibit was only shown for a short time, it was displayed on the third floor in the Visual Arts Building on the University of Iowa's campus. Marti enjoys her time outdoors and wanted to incorporate that into her piece. She chose butterflies because she "[sees] them as a symbol of freedom and beauty." She wants students to look at her piece and remember that "art can be anything. If you try, you can turn a bland and empty space into a bright and colorful environment."





Leana Marti is a first-year student from Puerto Rico. She is currently majoring in art and minoring in chemistry while also on a pre-med track. She is a member of two student organizations: Stanley Campus Council and Camp Kesem. In her free time, she enjoys reading, drawing, watching shows, and writing. A motto that she lives by is to "be you and be kind."

humor me: an observational study

Featured Honors Student: Michael May
Edited by Sam Wilson Hoff



Michael May

As an honors contract for his statistics and actuarial science class, third-year honors student Michael May created a statistical write-up titled "Humor Me: An Observational Study." This work utilized a compilation of over 700 humorous quotes recorded among his friend group to see if there are any notable factors that make some quotes funnier than others.

Abstract:

This study looked at the humor of my friends by looking at 40 randomly selected quotes from a quote list that I keep. The quotes were categorized by their content and the identity of their speaker. These quotes were read in a random order to a non-random selection of 20 of my friends, who gave a 1-10 humor score. The model overall found that not much of the humor score was explainable by content of the quote and identity of the speaker. That said, quotes containing profanity scored significantly higher than clean quotes, and more recent quotes were more likely to be perceived as humorous than older ones.

Introduction:

I like to surround myself with a colorful cast of characters, and as a by-product of that, I hear my friends say some truly wild things. Just over three years ago I decided that some of those things were too good to forget, so I began keeping a quote list of anything I

find notable or funny. The quote list is now a collection more than 700 strong and has been multiple years in the running. I've spent all this time collecting quotes, so I figured I could find a way to put all that data to use. The quote list embodies the wild, diverse set of people I have interacted with over the years and details the ways in which I found them funny. Because of that, it is a great source of inputs to discover what makes something funny, at least to myself and my friends. The quotes have a great variety of speaker and of content, so I decided to categorize them by several variables and collect some data to find out what my friends find funny.

Data Collection:

To begin, the individual quotes on the quote list (as of the date of categorization: February 8th, 2021). were numbered 1-735. From there, 40 quotes were selected from this list in a simple random sample using a random number generator. The quotes were then ordered

chronologically and given categorizations for the explanatory variables (gender of the speaker, sexuality of the speaker, medium of speech, use of profanity, and year spoken). From there, 20 of my friends were contacted (in a non-random fashion) to be surveyed for data collection. Each survey was conducted as follows: The quotes were placed in a randomly generated order, to minimize bias. From there, I read the instructions, which were:

“I am going to read you 40 quotes from my quote list. After I read one, I will ask you to rate it on a 1-10 scale of humor. 1 meaning ‘having no positive effect’ and 10 being ‘the funniest thing you could imagine hearing out of context.’ We will repeat this until every quote has been read.”

After that, the interviews were conducted as stated, and results were recorded.

Data Analysis:

For the analysis, I performed multiple regression and fit a mixed model. In both models, the response variable was rating value (1-10) and the predictor variables were gender of the speaker (male or female), sexuality of the speaker (straight or LGBTQ+), medium (in person or over voice call), binary profanity indicator (yes or no), and year spoken (2018-2021). To account for correlation among ratings by the same person, the mixed models also included a random intercept for rater. All analyses were performed using the SAS statistical software package (reference).

This allowed each data line to signify a unique quote-rater-rating combination, while also containing all of the explanatory variables. From there, the normal regression was done modeling the unique rating against each of the explanatory variables. Likewise, the mixed regression modeled the rating against each explanatory variable with a unique intercept for each individual rater. Within the regression procedure, a confidence interval was also generated for each point estimate of the explanatory and response variables. Finally, the year variable was also given a scatterplot using the plot procedure, to verify normality, as it was the only ordinal, non-binary variable.

Results:

The initial results included data for all the explanatory variables (gender of the speaker, sexuality of the speaker, medium of speech, use of profanity, and year spoken), however, it was immediately relevant that only the use of profanity and year spoken were possibly significant. So, in the name of parsimony, the other variables were removed one by one to ensure that they did not affect other results. The more simplistic model, with only use of profanity and year spoken as response variables, had a higher R² value for the regression, and a lower AIC for the mixed regression, so the more simplistic results will be used. For similar reasons, the regression model will be preferred to the mixed regression model, as their results are near-identical. It seems that the individual raters did not seem to affect results much, because for each rater that rated abnormally high, there was another that rated abnormally low. Since the regression model is more simplistic, its results will be used.

That leaves us with the simplified regression parameter estimates (see Figure 1):

Let us parse some of this by pointing out the main data points that matter and explaining them:

First, something important that is not listed in this table is the adjusted R² value: .0534. This tells us that the model of explanatory variables accounts for only 5.34% of the variation in humor ratings, which indicates that either there are other variables which account for more of the variation or that humor is simply random, which is certainly possible.

Moving on from that, we see the parameter estimates. These tell us what we would expect data values to look like given our model:

First, we see that the intercept parameter estimate is 4.02781.

This tells us that the predicted humor score for a standard quote (meaning a quote with all variables held at zero, or a non-profane quote said in the year 2018) would be 4.02781. To the right of that we have the P value, which is irrelevant in this case, and a 95% confidence interval, which shows some possible variability for this value.

Parameter Estimates							
Variable	DF	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t	95% Confidence Limits	
Intercept	1	4.02781	0.13741	29.31	<.0001	3.75808	4.29754
profanity	1	0.92336	0.19246	4.80	<.0001	0.54557	1.30114
year	1	0.44328	0.08202	5.40	<.0001	0.28227	0.60429

Figure 1: Parameter Estimates

I came into this study with the assumption that whether a quote is funny depends primarily on the quote. It's possible that instead the rater is what matters. Senses of humor vary, and that is evident in some of the data.

Moving to the next row, we have the parameter estimates for the profanity factor. Profanity was labeled as a binary variable, with a 0 being a non-profane quote and a 1 being a profane one. The parameter estimate .92336 means that we would expect the average profane quote to be .92336 humor score points higher than the average clean quote. The P value of this row, $P < .0001$, lets us know that this relationship is extremely unlikely to have occurred purely by chance. Likewise, we have our 95% confidence interval, which shows some possible variability of this value, and also helps us prove that profanity has a positive impact on humor score, as 0 is not in the interval.

This relationship can be seen in graphic form with this boxplot, charting rating by profanity (see Figure 1). (0 meaning none, 1 meaning some)

Although it's not the most obvious relationship, it's at least clear that the median and inner quartiles are higher in the profane quotes.

Finally, we have the year row. The parameter estimate here is .44328, which means that for every year passed since 2018, we would expect a quote from that year to have an average humor score .44328 higher than a quote from 2018. Like with profanity, this score has an incredibly low p value, meaning it is very unlikely to have occurred by chance, and I have included a confidence interval to show some possible variability.

One final note: we can be sure that these results are usable (even if not all that significant), because of this boxplot, charting rating by year, as it shows an approximately linear relationship, meaning additional analysis steps are not needed (see Figure 2). (Year 0 = 2018, 1 = 2019, etc.)

Discussion and future work:

I want to preface this by saying that this data is extremely difficult to generalize to larger populations, since it is so specific to my quote list. That's why I decided to only interview my friends as a population and to use a non-randomized sample of quote rates. That said, there are still results here and they are worth analyzing.

This data is overall somewhat inconclusive since the R^2 value tells us it does not account for much variation in the humor score. Taking that into account, there is still a definite positive relationship between humor score and profanity and a separate one between humor score and year of the quote.

The relationship with profanity indicates a positive correlation between the two, which makes sense as my friends are the type to swear often. This could indicate that we have a somewhat childish sense of humor, as profanity is often culturally associated with that.

The relationship between year and humor score is more difficult to parse. The easy to draw conclusion would be that the people on the quote list were literally getting funnier over time, but I highly doubt that is the case. Instead, I would argue that this is a flaw in the methods of the test: My population was my CURRENT friends, which means that they associate with me as I am now. This means that they are more likely to share my current sense of humor. Since I choose whether quotes are funny enough to be written down on the list at the time they are spoken, the quote list can fairly accurately follow my sense of humor. If my sense of humor has changed over time, it is possible that my current sense of humor aligns more with those of my current friends.

With that out of the way, it is prudent to ask where this research could be furthered. The low R^2 value of this model hints that this study's methods are the wrong way to think about humor. I came into this study with the assumption that whether a quote is funny depends primarily on the quote. It's possible that instead the rater is what matters. Senses of humor vary, and that is evident in some of the data. Much of the data is fraught with outliers or high variability in ratings. Different people found different things funny. Instead of assuming that my current friends can be lumped into a single category, it may prove useful to try separating quote rates based on a variety of factors, similar to what was done with the quotes. Even with that, it's possible that there are no models to adequately understand humor.

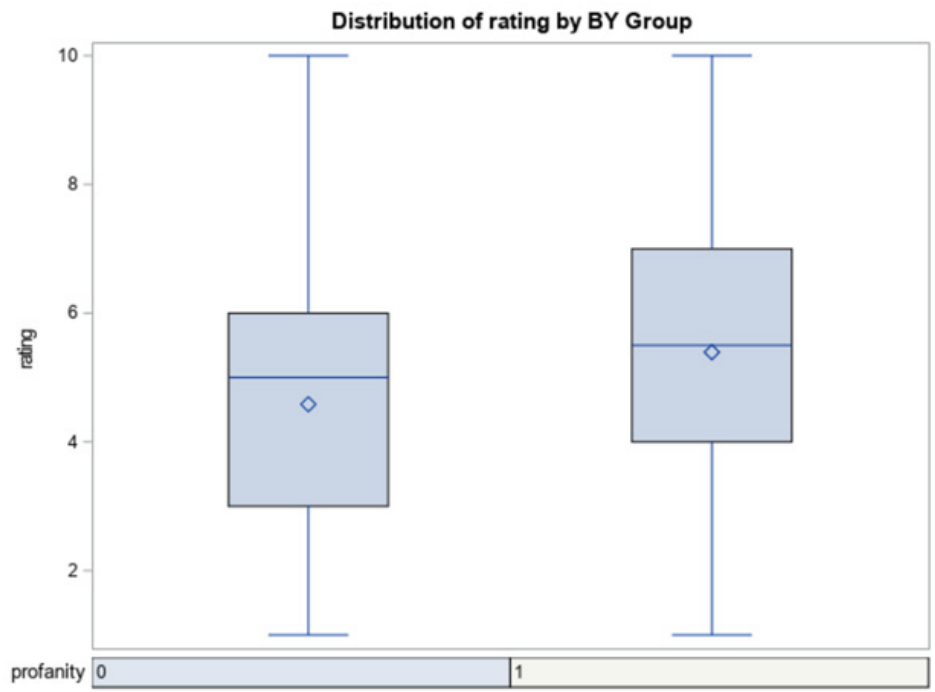


Figure 2: Distribution of Rating by Profanity

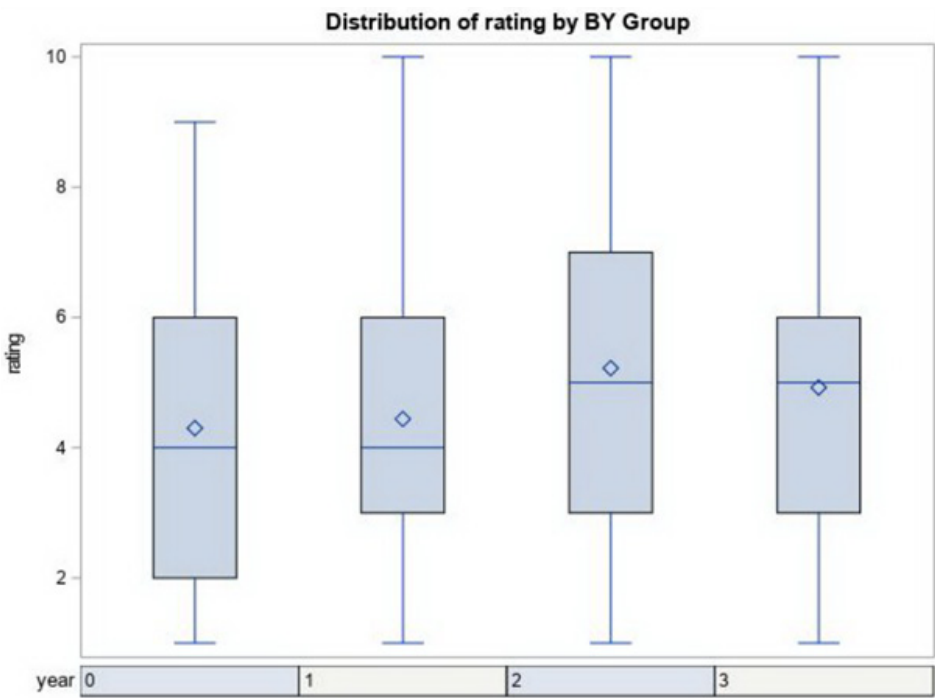


Figure 3: Distribution of Rating by Year

Michael May is a third-year student from Woodbury, Minnesota, double majoring in mathematics and statistics. While at the University of Iowa, he hopes to hone his statistical skills and prepare for the life and exams of an actuary.

something for yourself

Featured Honors Student: Emma Hussin
Edited by Bri Brands



Emma Hussin

“Something For Yourself” is a short story written by Emma Hussin for a fiction writing course. This story follows the main character, Lou, after a heartbreak. In the story, she meets another young woman, January, who is also recovering from a heartbreak. As the story goes on, January changes Lou and convinces her to finally do something for herself in the midst of her breakup.

The only sign of emotion Lou could muster after turning and walking away from the love of her life was a slight frown. They were out on the sidewalk in front of Ray’s, their favorite diner. The fluorescent lights of the neon sign blurred Lou’s green eyes as she took several long strides down the block; not because she was crying, though. It had been raining. The wet drops gave the illusion of tears, yet Lou only felt a dull ache persist where her heart was supposed to be. It was as if the emotion trapped in her chest had given up on trying to find a way out, and simply resigned to crushing her from within.

The clouds cast a dark blanket over the sky. Almost as dark as Lou’s mood.

She crossed her arms over her chest, which did little to calm the chill that ran through her body. Her best red dress couldn’t hold up against the thundering downpour, leaving Lou to shake like a leaf in

the wind. The tall, gray buildings surrounding her loomed dangerously over her head. Shop-owners scurried past under the safety of umbrellas, as if in an attempt to outrun the rain. Some slightly brushed her shoulders. Lou recoiled from their touch.

The drinks she’d had at dinner caught up with her as she walked home. All she could focus on was putting one cherry-colored, high heel-clad foot in front of the other. Lou wished she could twist the heel into the face of the man who’d broken her heart.

She really hated the man, and she really hated the rain. She hated how the watery drops that fell from the sky reminded her of the swimming blues of his eyes when he looked at her and told her there was someone else. That there had always been someone else. She hated how the thunder mocked the deep rumble of his chest where she lay her head at night.

She decided to let the rain wash

everything away.

Lou took a shortcut to her apartment, ducking in between a pair of quaint shops and onto Silva Street, muttering to herself. Shadows crept along the edges of the sidewalk and slithered away into the gutters. The rain continued its steady pitter-patter, yet Silva Street held its breath. The air was quiet. Not a soul lurked along the cracked and broken streets, save for a small figure that faced away from Lou.

Though it was on the other side of the street, Lou could faintly see the shoulders hunched and shaking, illuminated by the flickering lamp post. A black dress clung to the small figure with dark, wet hair cascading down the back.

She continued down the road, careful to avoid the cracks in the concrete and keeping a wary eye on the lone figure that held the appearance of a woman.

Sniffles and sobs broke the steady symphony of the rainfall. It

seemed entirely impossible to Lou that the woman's sounds of distress could reach her from such a distance. She kept her head down and brushed her dripping hair from her eyes in order to stare down at her shoes, at the street, at anywhere other than the crying girl. Heat crept up Lou's face—she was embarrassed to be intruding on such a personal moment.

As Lou crossed the sidewalk perpendicular to the woman, the thundering roar of rain ceased, and the silence lasted for only a moment before it was filled with Lou's clicking stilettos. Silva Street held its breath. She looked up at the still-dark sky with confusion, then mustered up enough courage to gaze across the street. The woman froze, as if sensing Lou's eyes on her. Her shoulders stiffened as she moved behind the flickering lamp post like a ghost. She peered at Lou through a mop of soaked hair, her eyes glassy, her cheeks smeared with black ink. Her mouth moved, but Lou could hear no words.

"What?" Lou called out, her voice echoing too loudly throughout empty Silva Street. Her words bounced back at her. The woman across the street remained unmoving and unresponsive. Lou took a steady breath and lowered one foot onto the road between them. "Are you alright?"

The woman's mouth moved again, but still, Lou heard nothing. She inched closer.

The sound of her footsteps filled the short street as Lou moved closer and closer to the woman. Anxiety swirled at her fingertips and ran up to her ears, yet she felt a persistent need to investigate.

The woman's arms were covered in tattoos, foreign words that Lou didn't understand. Her hands wrought viciously together the shorter the space between them grew. The half of her face that Lou could see was marred with streaks of mascara, lipstick, and eyeliner;

she looked too young to be so sad, more a girl than a woman. A pang of pity went through Lou's chest. She could only make out the intense green of the girl's downcast eyes.

Lou stood a breath away from the shaking girl.

"Are you alright?" Lou asked again, softer. She feared that her loud words might shatter her further. It felt like talking to a baby deer; at any sudden movement, she might burst away and run for the hills. Lou wanted her to stay. She wanted to comfort her.

The girl's lips moved again, stuttering out a jumbled mess of words that sounded a lot like "no." Her eyes remained on her shoes.

Lou frowned, her brows furrowing with concern. "What's your name?"

Finally meeting Lou's eyes, the girl sank further into the shadow of the lamppost. "January," she muttered. Her hand clutched the body of the post for support. The smell of cold, damp air filled Lou's nose as she took another deep breath to calm her racing heart. Why did she feel so on edge?

"Why are you crying, January?" January's face crinkled with sadness, and Lou instantly regretted the words.

January's lips trembled into a pout. "He left me," she sputtered out, once again turning her eyes away from Lou's questioning gaze. She seemed to shrink with every word that passed her lips. The lamppost dwarfed her, and she nearly faded away into the shadows of the night.

Lou needed to take care of this girl. She was young, younger than Lou for sure, cold, and out on the streets by herself. She couldn't leave her there. Not when she could be a shoulder to cry on, considering she'd been in the same position not too long ago. Lou reached forward, gently grasping January's elbow and pulling her out from the shadows.

"My place is just around the corner," said Lou, nodding her head toward a small, gray building that was slightly obstructed by a nearby shop. "Do you have anywhere to go? Do you need somewhere to stay?"

January's eyes met Lou's, her mouth quirking up into a shy smile as she nodded her head. Lou smiled back. Lou didn't really have the space for an extra body in her studio apartment, but she was willing to give January the comfort of a bed for one night. Lou could make a place on the floor for herself with what little blankets she had. She knew she would want someone to do the same for her, if she were in January's position.

January perched on the rough carpet of Lou's home. Her black dress was soaked completely through, the once luxurious material ruined from the water and leaving a blossoming maroon stain on the red carpet. It cinched like a dark cloud around her crossed legs. Her crimson shoes were a rusty shade of brown. The skin of her face was dry and caked with the stains of her runny makeup. January gazed thoughtlessly at the floor as Lou flitted around the small apartment with ease.

Aside from a large window along the outer wall, the room was bare and forgettable. A small leather couch and a cracked glass coffee table surrounded the circular rug January sat on. There was no television or bed. The only light stemming from a bulb on the ceiling flickered.

"Anything to drink?" Lou asked, drawing her attention to the small kitchen space complete with a dingy fridge and microwave where Lou stood. January perked up at her question.

"Do you have anything...strong?" January asked. Lou let out a breezy laugh.

"I know just the thing."

Lou and January sat in a comfort-

able silence, trying to forget about the discomfort of their wet dresses and as they drank the honey-colored liquid. The cushions of Lou's beat-up leather couch were somewhat worn from years of constant use, but January didn't seem to mind. She sipped happily, seeming like a completely different girl than the one Lou had found out on Silva Street.

After finishing her glass and pouring another, January broke the long stretch of quiet. "So," she began, wiping her damp lips with the back of her hand. "What brought you to Silva Street tonight? I never see anyone around the area."

Lou was surprised at the young girl's willingness to talk, since she had seemed ready to fade into nothingness only a few minutes ago. The strangeness of meeting January had almost made Lou forget about her present romantic issues. She barked out a laugh, rolling her eyes. "Oh, same as you. Heartbreak. I couldn't stand to take the long way home and be alone with my thoughts any longer."

January looked at Lou with curious eyes. They seemed to peer deep into her soul. Lou looked away, feeling uncomfortable, and downed another glass. It burned from her lips to her chest. Lou hoped the alcohol erased the feeling of January's gaze within her. She didn't want anyone seeing the mess inside.

"I'm sorry," January replied, seeming not sorry at all. She had a weird gleam in her eyes that Lou didn't appreciate. Lou looked away, feeling uncomfortable, and downed another glass. The silence went on for a moment longer before January persisted.

"What did he do?"

"Oh," Lou mumbled, shocked at January's boldness. "He didn't do anything."

"Okay. What did you do?"

Lou turned to the young girl, be-

wildered. "Excuse me?"

"What did you do?" January repeated.

Lou looked away, feeling uncomfortable. She downed another glass.

"I didn't do anything," Lou replied after a few moments.

January hummed, deep in thought. She persisted.

"Well, you must've done something."

Lou wished the couch would open up and swallow her whole. She just didn't want to think about this now. She just wanted this girl to be safe for the night. She just wanted to drink herself into oblivion. Her discomfort amplified. So did her alcohol consumption. Lou's thoughts formed into a jumbled mess of words inside her head. She wanted them to come out.

"I've never really been the girlfriend type."

January offered her a puzzled look. "What does that mean?"

"I'm just there until people find someone better," Lou shrugged, noncommittal. She was indifferent, used to being alone by now. She'd always just wanted to make people happy, but January was anything but happy with her answer.

"And you're okay with that?" January snapped, suddenly an edge to her voice.

Lou was tired of the questions. "Not particularly," she muttered half-heartedly.

"Why don't you do something about it?"

Lou wanted to do something about January that involved throwing her out onto the street again, but she held her tongue and sighed. Kids.

"What am I supposed to do, January?"

There it was, again. That weird gleam in her eyes. "Get even."

Lou snorted in disbelief, almost choking on her drink. How childish it was, to seek revenge. Lou had always been the bigger person when relationships didn't work out.

She would leave without a word, send her well-wishes via email, and then forget about the men for the rest of her life. It was a lot more simple than vengeance. "No way. No, thanks. I'm not fourteen."

"Neither am I," January challenged. "But at least I don't let people walk all over me."

Lou started to object, then paused to ponder for a moment. Maybe it was the alcohol, or the fact that she hadn't had a normal conversation with someone who wasn't her mother in months, but Lou was beginning to think that January was right. She did feel like a doormat sometimes. Her mother insisted she was a pushover, but Lou had a hard time believing her. She didn't really think about how she behaved all that often. No one really seemed to care about her feelings; not even herself.

Lou hummed, deep in thought. Considering her words.

January seemed pleased with herself. "I told you."

"What do you suppose I do, then? Break his windows? Slash his tires?" Lou asked with a touch of sarcasm.

After a long moment, January said quietly, "Make him feel what you felt."

Lou took a sip of her drink. She was content to get lost in an alcoholic haze for the rest of the night and forget about men, but maybe getting even would fill the hole in her chest. "How?" she asked.

Maybe, for once, Lou could make someone care about the way she felt instead of idly sitting by. Alcohol had never made her like this before—so gusty and selfish and exhilarated. January's encouragement must be the reason Lou felt so inclined to take the reins of her own feelings.



She didn't know how she ended up back on Silva Street again. January was by her side, talking about

something Lou didn't care about with the excitement of a small child. Her words were a jumbled mess of consonants and vowels and sentences and phrases that Lou didn't have the energy to decipher.

The rain had stopped long ago, but the sky was still covered in a dark sheet. Lou could make out nothing in front of her own two feet, trusting January to guide her along the darkness of the road. What time was it? Maybe midnight by now. Her feet were sluggish. Her body was sluggish. Her tongue was sluggish. I must be in a dream, Lou thought. That's the only explanation.

Lou's dream felt a lot more real when January stopped beside a small metal staircase and gestured for Lou to go down. A staircase that looked a lot like the one that led to the small, dingy apartment of the man who'd broken Lou's heart mere hours ago. She'd been down that staircase countless times, and walked through the red door into the quaint living room that always smelled like burning wood. She'd once danced around that living room, drunk with love. How did she get here? This must be a dream.

Lou stared blankly down the staircase. A light illuminated the tiny corridor. Bugs swirled inside of it, clawing at the source that flickered every few seconds. January stood beside her like a shadow; motionless, silent, waiting. Lou didn't know what the girl was waiting for; her brain had crusted over with the fog of alcohol.

"I think I'd like to sit down," Lou said, swaying on her feet.

"You can sit when you go inside."

Lou turned her head to look at January, who was staring somewhere beyond the stairs. She must've washed all her old makeup off at some point. Lou could see a familiar array of features splattered across the girl's pale face.

"I don't want to go inside. I don't want to see him," Lou said.

January turned her head to look at Lou. "Yes, you do."

Something in the way she said those three words struck Lou in a way she had never felt before. Despite her undying need to shove her feelings back down into the depths of her mind, Lou did want to see him. She wanted to see him, and she wanted to tell him how much he had destroyed her that night. She wanted to be a bother. She wanted to yell and she wanted to scream and she wanted to drive home and tell her mother that she was not a pushover.

A wave of peace washed over her in an instant. It was refreshing; Lou couldn't remember the last time she had been so at ease. Her body tingled with newfound excitement and anticipation. Finally. Finally she would bring the countless years of being pushed aside to the surface. He couldn't treat her like this and think he could get away with it; he couldn't scream at her and pretend that it was all in her imagination. He couldn't leave her alone for hours only to return in a drunken stupor with another woman's perfume on him. He couldn't manipulate her and walk away unscathed.

He was probably inside, on his too-small bed with dirty sheets with another woman already on

top of him. Lou was the very last thought on his mind, and she knew it. She knew it and she had to do something about it. The rage was bubbling up inside of her like hot, molten lava, and she knew it would end up consuming her if she didn't act on it soon.

"I think I would like that," Lou said, turning once again to the shadowed cave beneath her and lowering one foot down onto the steps. January's approval radiated off of her like a subtle glow.

I deserve this, Lou thought as she looked to January, her first real friend.

I deserve this, Lou thought as she opened the red door.

I deserve this, Lou thought as she drowned out the shouts and the screams.

Lou was warm and safe. The world was finally giving her a hug as payment for what it had done to her. She had been sitting there for hours. January was nowhere to be seen, but she didn't know where or when she had gone. Lou's dress was covered in dark ash and soot, her face marred with hot, red streaks. They could only make out the intense green of her downcast eyes.

She didn't stir when the men came with hoses to douse her warmth, or when the men came with guns to ruin her. She sat atop him for as long as she was able, until they began to move her away from the carnage, from the gaping hole in his chest, clawed open by long nails—devoid of a heart.

Her mouth turned up into a soft smile.

Lou had finally done something for herself.

Emma is a second-year student from Tulsa, Oklahoma majoring in English and creative writing and journalism and mass communication. She hopes to learn more about literature while studying at the University of Iowa. Outside of school, she enjoys reading, writing, composing music, and playing the clarinet.

mother

winter

Featured Honors Student: Gianna Ceriotti
Edited by Calista Kopulos



Gianna Ceriotti

Gianna Ceriotti's "Mother Winter" is a poem about seasonal depression, as well as the dichotomy of change between seasons. While holding the seasons in opposition, the poem as a whole mainly focuses on winter, showcasing Mother Nature's coldness and brutality. Ceriotti states, "It's like the seasons nurse nature just to kill it off for a long three to four months."

Gianna Ceriotti is a first-year student from St. Louis, Missouri, studying English and Creative Writing. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to improve in her writing and in technical knowledge of the craft itself.

I am elderberry and belladonna,
yanking your lush head towards my breast,
to ingest melancholia's milk.
Revitalize and kill you
for the thrill of
teeth betwixt to bone,
bone betwixt to to teeth.
I nurse your hollowed corpse,
decayed and bittersweet.

Next I grab my frigid whip
and nip your goosfleshed back.
Hollies bloom in pairs of two,
upon the surface I attacked.
Kiss my snowdrop lips with
tenderness miss the spring's
lavender bushel knees climbing,
but you're stuck with me biting
at your frozen, leafless cheeks.
How I yearn to see you weep!

listening beyond what one can hear

Featured Honors Student: **Annalisa Cinkay**
Edited by Neely Goerlinger



Annalisa Cinkay

Growing up, Annalisa Cinkay always had an affinity for people who are looked at as lesser in the population. Dealing with hearing problems herself, she's had a strong interest in the capital "D" Deaf community. This piece was created as an honors contract for her American Sign Language (ASL) course. It focuses on the importance of parents properly educating themselves on deafness before making any decisions about cochlear implants or other hearing aids for their child. It discusses the impact these devices have on a child, both good and bad. Cinkay argues that having a deaf child does not always mean you have something to fix, and that the most important goal is to create equity through the ability to express yourself to your full capacity.

When discussing a marginalized group of individuals, people immediately navigate the conversation towards how people inaccurately stereotype and discriminate based on one of two main characteristics of a group: their color of skin and their personal ability, be it intellectual, financial, or physical. When it comes to the Deaf population, it is a harsh combination of both. Deafness as a whole is a lifestyle that is consistently misunderstood and pitied by those (typically hearing individuals) who do not understand a Deaf way of life. This paper will focus on the Deaf experience and how it has become so misconstrued by the majority members of society, building up to the consequences of pitying a Deaf life and viewing deafness solely as a negative and disability. This paper will delve into different avenues for children born without hearing, what a parent's process of deciding to

intervene with their child's hearing looks like, and overall what is best for a child who is born deaf.

In America, it is typical that a newborn child is screened for hearing no later than one month of age. If that child is to fail the screening, parents are urged to have a full hearing screening performed no later than three months of age (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). While the initial screening tests for any hearing deficiency, the secondary is performed as a full audiology evaluation. Initial screenings are used to determine whether the child experiences any scale of deafness. Additional testing is conducted to identify the source of the deafness, amount of deafness, and what type of hearing loss the child may have. The extensive secondary exam may consist of Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) testing, Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE) testing, Be-

havioral Audiometry Evaluations, discussing family history, and more if necessary. These all serve as a more in-depth search to locate the "problem," in hopes of developing a solution. Once some form of hearing loss has been confirmed based on this testing, parents are then met with treatment and intervention services from their health provider. Some suggested treatment options include: investing in a hearing device such as a hearing aid, cochlear implant (CI) consideration, and working with professionals such as speech-language pathologists and audiologists for communication development. One option that is also heavily urged by physicians during the diagnosis process is for parents to join a support group, because parents of children with a disability are at a significantly higher risk of developing parental depression. Close to 95% of deaf children are born to

hearing parents who view deafness as a disability and feel their child will struggle to overcome their hearing-loss in the world. However, it is important to recognize a significant fault within this conception. Deafness and hearing-loss have not always been, nor have ever been primarily considered a disability. Those who identify with Deaf culture and are Deaf do not view themselves or deafness as a disability at all. In fact, Deaf parents are more likely to suffer problems with mental wellness when birthing a hearing child. Why is it that hearing parents are so likely to view deafness as a deficiency?

The primary reason hearing parents may view deafness as a disability (initially) is due to their experience in their own personal cultures. Megan Jones, Ph.D. in Special Education at the University of California Berkeley points out that most, if not all hearing persons, belong to a mainstream culture in which “the inability to hear interferes with a person’s ability to respond to environmental cues, to communicate, and to enjoy aspects of [their] culture such as music” (Jones, 2002). For many parents, there is an inherent threat that the world has an upper hand on their child. When analyzing this perspective, the only time hearing individuals experience an “advantage” is when their abilities and lives are assessed in a hearing culture. In today’s day and age and with today’s resources, there is an alternative option to raising a child solely in a hearing culture. While culture can be defined differently based on history, beliefs, and more, Deaf Culture Center CA offers this all-encompassing explanation of the Deaf community and Deaf culture, “The heart of the Deaf community everywhere in the world[...] is comprised of culturally Deaf people in the core of the community who use a sign language (e.g. American Sign Language or

Langue des Signes Quebecois) and appreciate their heritage, history, literature, and culture. The Deaf community is also comprised of other individuals who use the language and have an attitude that makes them an accepted part of the community though they may not be in the core of the community” (Cripps, 2022). One deciphering note to make exclusive to Deaf culture is that one must not be part of a specific region or even be Deaf themselves to partake in Deaf culture. Instead, there must be an appreciation, respect, and involvement of an individual that decides whether or not they can associate with the culture. This is something that is very possible for hearing parents of deaf children, and inversely for hearing children of deaf parents.

Circling back to an initial diagnosis, keep in mind there are hundreds of variables when it comes to assessing sources of hearing loss. Regarding the cause itself, certain events during pregnancy or geneticism can be flagged as a root problem. The more important variable however is what anatomical location is affected by the root cause, and how it is directly altering a child’s auditory functioning. Note not all types of treatment forms are applicable to all forms of hearing loss, as there are hundreds of different explanations behind hearing loss at birth. While sensorineural hearing loss is typically associated with damage of the inner ear or auditory nerve, conductive hearing loss can be traced to malfunctioning of the outer or middle ear, preventing sound waves from reaching the inner ear for processing. This again is why the second hearing evaluation is vital for parents who wish to interfere with their child’s hearing. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) states, “Hearing aids are primarily useful in improving the hearing and speech comprehension of people

who have [...] sensorineural hearing loss” as they work to amplify sound vibrations entering the ear, assisting surviving hair cells to recognize these vibrations, and convert them to neural signals later processed in the brain (NIDCD 2022). There are five main styles of hearing aids that support a range of individual needs: from specialized fitting to function and style preference. On the other hand, Cochlear Implants (CIs) are electronic devices that aim to restore sensorineural hearing-loss by literally “cutting out the middleman,” or middle ear, and directly stimulating sound signals picked up on a microphone to the auditory nerve via a transmitter.

Hearing aids and CIs have had high success rates in adults that have only increased in the last decade. A 2017 study concluded that of a sampled 1,600 patient participants, 71.2% of patients were satisfied after their initial hearing aid fitting, and 28.8% were satisfied after new fittings, leaving a miniscule dissatisfaction rate of 2.6%. Similarly, CIs have an impressively large success rate since their invention in 1961. Boys Town National Research Hospital reported that the Cumulative Survival Rate (CSR) of internal devices is greater than 99% after one year and more than 98% after five years. With success rates for both devices being so high, one would think it is a pretty seamless decision to go with some sort of modification process of a deaf child’s hearing. This decision, however, is only obvious to those who view hearing as a necessity. These “success” rates are defined by how well these devices “solve the problem” of deafness; but how successful are they to those who do not view Deafness as the problem at all? While being lowercase “d” deaf refers to the audiological condition of not hearing, the capital “D” Deaf defines individuals who take pride in their culture: in their sign language, in their community, and

in their belonging to larger Deaf society. The decision to be involved in the Deaf community is one that does not come without much consideration and devotion. Although there are no written requirements to join this community, there are many socially enforced expectations. This may sound intimidating, but in reality, this is common with most cultures around the world. These mutually respected standards are what keep the community as tight knit and meaningful as it is. Indulging in Deaf culture

‘Deaf Person Hears for the First Time’ Videos,” Lilit Marcus, a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA) and member of the Deaf activist community, expresses her disdain for the YouTube trend of cochlear implant activation videos. She claims that they “sensationalize and romanticize cochlear implants while whitewashing the struggles recipients face” (Cooper, 2019). The article then continues to address the issue of sensationalizing cochlear implants and some implications of CI for the Deaf community. The main argument about

never restore full, organic hearing. This then ties back into how hearing parents to deaf children may believe if their child has a CI, then they can learn to depend on spoken language. Unfortunately, deaf children who do not begin their communicational journey with sign language will most likely delay their child’s language acquisition, as “According to the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), cochlear implants do not provide recipients with ‘clear and unambiguous access’ to linguistic input in the same way sign

Those who identify with Deaf culture and are Deaf do not view themselves or deafness as a disability at all.

allows one to have understanding and be understood in relationships that would not be possible without these set principles of involvement. This depthful experience is one that cannot fully be acquired once one relies on machinery to alter their hearing.

Although being a part of the community and its practices is a large side of the argument to leave a child’s deafness be, it is not the only argument. As mentioned, the success rate of hearing aids that is documented is a scientific calculation of how much the aid is capable of restoring one’s hearing. From an alternative standpoint, it is important to consider the success of a deaf individual’s life with these hearing aids. In 2019, Missouri Medicine produced a research article entitled Hear Me Out, which delves into the problematic phenomenon of deaf children or individuals hearing for the first time with hearing aids. What started as a discussion about a controversial comment section turned into an insightful opportunity for proper education. In her 2014 article “Why You Shouldn’t Share Those Emotional

harmful videos such as these is that they provide a false propagation of what altering a deaf person’s hearing does for them, rather than to them. Author Amelia Cooper goes on to describe this harmful sugar coating by describing the common theme of shock and horror that many patients face during first time activation. She states, “When the implant is first activated, some recipients often sob convulsively in a fearful response to the sudden flood of sensory inputs...Titles such as ‘Hearing My Husband Say I Love You for the First Time!’ may downplay the recipient’s recovery while glamorizing the activation experience, as they suggest that recipients can process and comprehend speech immediately. It takes months, sometimes even years, before cochlear implants can function fully. The brain needs time to “rewire itself before it can even comprehend the new sensory input” (Cooper, 2019). Her final argument resides in the true functional abilities of the CI. She confirms that although CI’s are a wonderful tool in hearing recovery, it is not a cure, as even the best CI surgeries

language does... ‘reliance on only spoken language input via cochlear implants may result in linguistic deprivation if sign language is excluded from [their] environment” (Cooper, 2019). This then leads from the scientific perspective over to the cultural argument against CI implantation. Over 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, thus usually relying on Deaf schooling for the child to take part in Deaf culture and the Deaf community. Some have gone as far to argue cochlear implants should be considered minority oppression, and that the attempt to “cure” deafness can be considered a form of cultural genocide.

It is important to recognize that deafness is a feature that truly is in the eye of the beholder. As it has been shown, deafness is perceived by many as a deficit which needs to be resolved, and to others, seen as a sole piece of identity which is to be treasured and celebrated. Originally presented by Dr. Jerome Schein, the 90% formula suggests that there has been a large overall trend in data regarding multiple facets of Deaf people’s lives being

associated with 90%. One applicable statistic being that 90% of deaf adults have hearing children. The inverse is also true, as a little over 90% of hearing adults have deaf children. From birth, these parents begin a tumultuous journey on how they are to best raise their child who has been born into a different world than themselves. It is clear and natural that individuals from both hearing culture or Deaf culture feel innate biases in their own ways which weigh heavily in the decision of whether or not to intervene with their child's deafness. Perhaps the most important statistic one can rely on for objectivity is one regarding any individual's ability to acquire and thrive in a language, regardless of hearing status. In language acquisition there is a "critical period" that serves as a window of opportunity during which input, oral or visual, must be received in order for normal development to take place. The first theory regarding the critical acquisition period was suggested by Penfield and Roberts, but further developed by linguist and neurologist, Eric Lenneberg. Lenneberg proposes that this critical time for language input begins at age two and ends once puberty takes

place. As time has passed, the time frame has undergone much debate and now is most popularly believed to start at just a few days of life and can end as early as four years old. Returning to Dr. Schein's formula, "90% of hearing parents are unable to communicate efficiently with their deaf child (Greenberg, 1980; Swisher & Thompson, 1985), and 90% of deaf children are unable to achieve intelligible speech in spite of years of intensive therapy (Neisser, 1983)" (Holcomb, Thomas K. Introduction to American Deaf Culture. Oxford University Press, 2013). This is most likely attributed to the reality that no matter how functional the hearing aid, it will never fully replace the function of organic hearing. It is because of this fact that it is inarguable: deaf children must be raised with sign language.

This does not necessarily mean that deaf children should be raised Deaf, nor that they should never attempt oral speech. What this means is the only equitable decision for the early years of development of a deaf child, based on the highly referenced critical period theory, is to start primary communication with sign language. Because deaf

babies cannot receive verbal input at an equal capacity that hearing children can, hearing aids or not, it is imperative that they receive a language input without any possible obstruction to acquisition. The only form of this input is visual, or sign language. Once a child has surpassed the threshold of five years old, it is expected they have established a sufficient phonemic stabilization of systems, to which flawless input of any language is not as much a necessity for equal development. It is after this point that it is arguably best for parents to begin considering the options of raising a deaf child as Deaf, or integrating them into a hearing world with supplemental devices. Bringing up a deaf child with the primary communication of sign language grants them equal access to a healthy neurological and social development, regardless of future cultural involvement. It is the equal access to expression and communication which gives parents to deaf children the potential to make the correct decision for their child, by giving them the opportunity to be truly heard.

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apparatus

Featured Honors Student: Livvi DiCicco
Edited by Gracie Harvey



Livvi DiCicco

DiCicco submitted this piece to her honors fiction workshop which is part of departmental honors. Apparatus is a part of a collection of other short stories all set in the same universe with overlapping characters. DiCicco hopes to publish it someday as part of a collection she is working on. The collection deals with themes of identity and relationships in a post-apocalyptic setting, using both science fiction and fantasy elements. For this piece, she added a touch of environmentalism when it comes to the pollution of oceans, but the main focus is on the rapport between Kriss and Là, Là's fantastical and mysterious connection to the ocean, and Kriss's desire to help them.

*to be worthy of red
seas – of your touch so
sweet, hydrogen laced armor sheen
it cannot breach your skin
like my fingertips, gold machine
encasing your slippery wanton need*

*beauty exiled, monster by myth
siren song lured along strings
of fate, cogs of steel
binding rites undone by fear
my hypothesis proven: this sea
enacts tolls beyond the body*



There is something to be said about the unyielding nature of humanity. It will push and pull against anything given, hoping to dismantle and rebuild anew. The earth is a brick of soft clay molding to greasy palms. It will work, these naïve potters insist, over and over, even as it cracks in the kiln.

This is how Kriss feels now, sealing the final compartment. The machine sputters in protest as she fills it with water, its color murky despite its source. It's the only

inlet full of saltwater that remains accessible for the trial, sectioned off from the rest of the coast but still considered the sea. Ripples on its surface reveal the tinge of oil-soaked molecules, reflecting the sun back in shades of greenish blue-gray, its pallor only eased by the richness of a cloudless sky.

The mechanism is a vaguely human form: an armor of brass-plated jelly-like metal—her own design. Set to fit Là's measurements, it stands nearly six and a half feet tall, lopsided from the sand's uneven plateau, a lanky exoskeleton. It occasionally puffs a burst of steam or lets out a soft hum that rattles each of its segments in a bodily shudder.

"It won't work," comes Là's voice. It's mesmerizing in its duality, both soft-spoken and strong, sad and lilting, soprano and alto, like their vocal cords are passing over the crest of a wave. "Kriss," they say again, knitting their delicate brow.

She turns to look at them, tapping her galvanic wrench against her

lips, each point of contact producing a benign jolt. "Do you doubt me that much?"

"Not you. Anyone could do this—gods could do this and would be unsuccessful."

Kriss smirks and tosses her tool aside. "Not goddesses, though?"

Là sighs, shaking their head with a half-laugh. "It can be a gender-neutral term."

"Yes, but how rooted in patriarchy is that? That it only recognizes the male-presenting immortals when referring to the whole?"

"English is not my first language."

And that is the end of that debate, Kriss feeling a bit sheepish as she laughs off the silent lull. She adjusts the final lever, the water fizzling briefly before settling once more. The machine clicks before spreading apart, blossoming metal petals like a ghost exiting a suit of armor. Or Iron Man.

"You are certain this is safe?" Là asks, worry evident. They take two steps closer, each of their movements languid and graceful. They

always move like they're dancing—floating through invisible waves. It's helped by the cream-colored blanket they always wrap around themselves, a cocooning cape of security.

Kriss nods. "Believe me, I tested every failsafe. If the internal pressure rises to unmanageable levels, the body will unhinge and let you out."

Là gives her a withering look. "That doesn't sound like it'll work."

"Well, that's because I'm describing what'll happen if it doesn't. But we don't know that yet, so there's no point in unnecessary misery." Kriss takes their hand, squeezing it in what she hopes is reassurance. "I'm here, alright? If anything goes wrong, which it won't, I'll be here to fix it."

"But can you fix me?"

Her breath catches in her throat. They sound so forlorn, their tinkly voice catching on the final syllable. "There is nothing about you we have to fix. You're perfect. But if I can give you back something you've lost, I won't hesitate to try my best."

Kriss starts to lead them closer to the machine. Là continues speaking, "I didn't lose it, it was taken from me. Surely, that means something. Surely—it means I wasn't meant to have it."

"Who says?"

Là looks upward. "The gods you so despise."

"Whatever. You're the only deity that matters to me."

"I am no such thing."

With a dramatic flourish, Kriss pulls aside their blanket, the tarp billowing before collapsing onto the beach. As if disrobed, Là brings their arms over their clothed chest, winding them tighter in a protective stance. They look like that picture of Venus: pale as the seafoam she was born of, adopting a semi-modest pose atop an opening shell. If Venus wore a ratty turquoise

sweater with too-short sleeves.

"Sorry. The thing won't work if you're covered in a shit ton of wool." Kriss picks up the discarded fabric and shakes the grains from it before folding it—gently, since she knows that Là values it. "You can keep the rest of your clothes on, though." She sets the blanket down atop a sand-free rock.

They watch Kriss's movements before nodding, stumbling on the sand, and urging their feet toward the contraption. It feels like watching molasses crawl up a hill, but Là makes it. They step into the machine, sealing themselves inside. It engulfs them entirely. Patches of pale skin peek out from the translucent canisters, the largest displaying Là's face, which remains fixed toward the horizon.

Kriss waits, watching Là before turning to the sea, which stares back at them both—tantalizing, taunting. A hiss brings her eyes back to the machine, which has begun to empty its water into the cavity Là now inhabits. She watches their face twist up in fear, an emotion unnatural and unbecoming on their usually ethereal expression.

"It will work," Kriss says, over the engine's drone, trying to convince herself more than Là.

For a moment, it seems that it will. Liquid cascades down the planes of Là's arms. Their eyes roll backward in euphoria at the feeling of water against their skin, ever-so-briefly, before twitching closed in pain. The metal framework begins to balloon as the water pushes outward, desperate to escape its confines. A few screws pop loose and sprout leaks through the holes left behind, drawing Kriss's attention to the severity of the situation. But even before she can make a move to free Là, the machine shudders and bursts, ejecting its contents onto the sand—which includes Là and

the now boiling seawater. It makes an unhappy beeping noise before shutting down, indicating that the failsafe did indeed do its job properly.

"Okay, maybe one more try—!"

Là lets out a wail of agony, craning their long neck toward the heavens until the plea dies in their bobbing throat. Their mouth remains slack as their body crumples back forward in defeat. Then, Kriss can see not a drop of moisture on their person, as if the water had never even touched them. As if this had all been for naught.

"I... am a fool," they croak, groping around for their blanket.

Kriss rushes to their side. "No, no—I must've fucked something up. I'll do another mock-up—I'll check my math and—"

"Stop." Là cuts off her rambling with a dangerous air of finality. "I have tried prayer, I have tried magic, and now... even your science has failed me." They spit the word as if it were fouler than rotting flesh. "Clearly, I'm not meant to return to the sea."

Kriss's mouth feels drier than the sand. She swallows heavily, placing a gentle hand in Là's sea-green curls—the first indication that they had been something otherworldly, closer to Venus than Eve—and threads her fingers through the locks. As she has done many times before. She whispers, "Là, we'll find a way." As she has said many times before.

"You... you foolish human!" Là rises shakily to their feet, pulling off their sneakers with unsteady hands and tossing them aside. The blanket shrouds their form once more, whipping angrily in the wind. Kriss steps back, eerily aware of her smallness—both physical and mortal—as her gaze struggles to meet Là's. "You foolish human," they repeat, quieter, more resigned, "pretending to know the will of nature."

The mechanism is a vaguely human form: an armor of brass-plated jelly-like metal—her own design. Set to fit La’s measurements, it stands nearly six and a half feet tall, lopsided from the sand’s uneven plateau, a lanky exoskeleton.

Kriss can’t find any suitable words. “Là...”

Là looks down at their hands. “I... am frustrated,” they say, sounding surprised—like it’s an unfamiliar observation. “I’m becoming more and more like you.” Like humans, they mean.

Shaking away some of her apprehension, Kriss manages a soft laugh. “Is that really so bad?”

“It takes me further away from home.” They stare out at the waves, cresting in an incessant heartbeat.

Kriss watches them, her chest hitching in sympathy. She searches for anything to possibly uplift Là’s spirits. Visions of the last get-together flood her mind. She fled her own home to escape the pressures of her parents, the encouragement that felt more like force—to make something of herself in this broken world, otherwise she would fade to nothingness, to ash. She’d been accepted with open arms by the others, the group of misfits also trying to discern the meaning of this new world order.

“You have a home here, though!” she cries out suddenly, making Là jump. “Think of your brother—I’m sure Ici wouldn’t want to be without you. After all the trouble he went through to take you in. And Prince! He still needs you for his protection. I’m here, too. All of our friends—aren’t they a bit like a family?”

After blinking in disbelief, Là finally looks back to Kriss, the fires once igniting their irises dulled to tranquil green. “At least... they didn’t banish me.”

Kriss feels a pang at the reminder of Là’s troublesome past—what little they had divulged, at least—but brightens up at the possible acceptance. “Nope. And I don’t think we ever will.” She stretches her arms overhead with a somewhat devious grin. “We’re too annoying, like that. Sticky like glue, so you’re not getting rid of us anytime soon!”

Almost imperceptibly, Là’s lips quirk upward. It could’ve been a twitch if Kriss hadn’t been pouring over their countenance so intent-

ly. With a soft shake of the head, they take a step toward the shore, sinking into the grains beneath their feet. Kriss reaches out reflexively to stop them.

“What are you doing?” she asks, not expecting them to venture close to the water after their outburst.

“Do you like the ocean, Kriss?”

“Do I—?” Her face twists up at the non sequitur. “Yeah, I guess. I mean, I can’t swim, so I like to look at it.”

Frowning, Là makes some kind of scoffing sound. “Well, it’s not so beautiful from above. Your kind has spent millennia tainting it in your greed.”

“Yeah,” Kriss sighs. “Can’t argue there.”

The sun gives the water’s surface an unnatural kaleidoscopic sheen, spotlighting the polluted film that encases a once-blue basin. Even though this reservoir is cut off from the much more putrid expanse of the greater ocean and therefore protected from some of human-

ity's sins, the damage is evident. Kriss tries to imagine what it might have looked like centuries ago, before her time. Then, even further back—before complex life set foot upon this special sphere. It's impossible. The only thing she can conjure is a smear of phthalo blue on a snow-white canvas.

She's so lost in thought that she doesn't notice Là's outstretched hand until it brushes against her arm.

"I'll use my curse for your benefit, then," Là explains, and at the same time, doesn't at all. Nonetheless, Kriss takes their hand anyway, enraptured, and lets them lead her to the water's edge.

"Wait!" she gasps, not knowing exactly why she wants to protest, but it dies in her throat. The seafoam has split, receding abnormally. It fights against gravity to avoid kissing Là's feet, and by extension, Kriss's own, and remains stationary in a never-completed wave.

Là waits, as per instruction, until Kriss nods once more. They pull her further into the water—and she braces herself for the rush of cold liquid, but none comes. The sea curls to make way for them both. Though it gives them both a wide berth, Kriss cannot help but cling protectively closer to Là, especially as they go deeper. The air bubble surrounds their forms faithfully, even as the space above their heads fills with the foul fluid. Bits of plastic and refuse drift along in the suspended stream. The roar of its sheer force rushes past Kriss's ears. It's a ferocity she has only ever heard from machines, and

usually when they were overheating. Her lips part in awe, and the sound of her gasping breaths is lost to the elements.

"Look," Là says, drawing Kriss's line of sight downward.

Beneath the piles of waste, beneath the black-tinged flow, a speck of green wiggles in the undertow. A lock of seaweed springs up from the seabed, flopping over limply when it enters their air bubble. Là stops to allow Kriss to touch it. The surface is slimy but still more verdant than some of the trees on land. When she glances up again, she finds herself face-to-face with a cluster of bug-eyed fish in the water ahead. She jumps with a graceless yelp as their silvery bodies dart away in practiced evasive maneuvers, encircling them both before disappearing back into the deep. Là laughs—a full-bodied laugh that Kriss hasn't heard in weeks. It makes her grin like a madman.

The two continue their walk across the seafloor, passing flora and fauna alike. Their colors range from muddy neutrals to downright garish pops of tropical hues. Their forms vary; some are thin and lithe, others stout and slow-moving, sometimes adorned with fins, crests, or tentacles. They seem unaware of their predicament, pushing against the current, searching for spots of sunlight bleeding through the oil-soaked surface. Maybe they aren't so different from us, Kriss thinks, wanting to find that small patch of light in the darkness. The pressure beating down on their fishy bodies might not be so hard to under-

stand.

She looks at Là, wondering what they must have looked like before they were banished to the land as a human. Maybe they aren't like those tall tales of merpeople or sirens that Carson claimed stalked his ship—maybe they had been an octopus, a stingray, or an entire school of fish. Maybe they had been the exact same as they are now: a ghostly, uncanny humanoid image of beauty.

They both come to the opposite edge of the basin, now facing a steady uphill climb toward the shore. Là tugs Kriss along with an elegance that she feels ripple through her own body. It becomes like a dance to move in tandem with their feet, each step practiced until landing on dry sand.

"Thank you," she whispers once they emerge. The sea splashes behind her, returning to its natural state. Foam sprays against her back, flecking her clothes and hair. Là looks almost pained, jealous, before bowing their head.

"Of course. It was nice... to see it again." Là manages a small smile. "With you there, I didn't feel so alone."

"And you won't have to. Ever again."

Kriss takes Là's hand once more, guiding them up the cliffside that led to civilization. To their friends, who await their return like prodigal children.

The apparatus sits, abandoned, on the shoals. Come moon tide, the ocean opens her lips and engulfs the offending metal, dragging it deeper into her ever-churning stomach.

Livvi DiCicco is a third-year student from Philadelphia, majoring in English & creative writing with minors in philosophy and French. Her preferred genres of writing are fantasy, sci-fi, and period romance. She also enjoys making digital art of the characters she writes about.

MLMU clothing

Featured Honors Student: Matthew Loes
Edited by Colin Votzmeyer



Matthew Loes

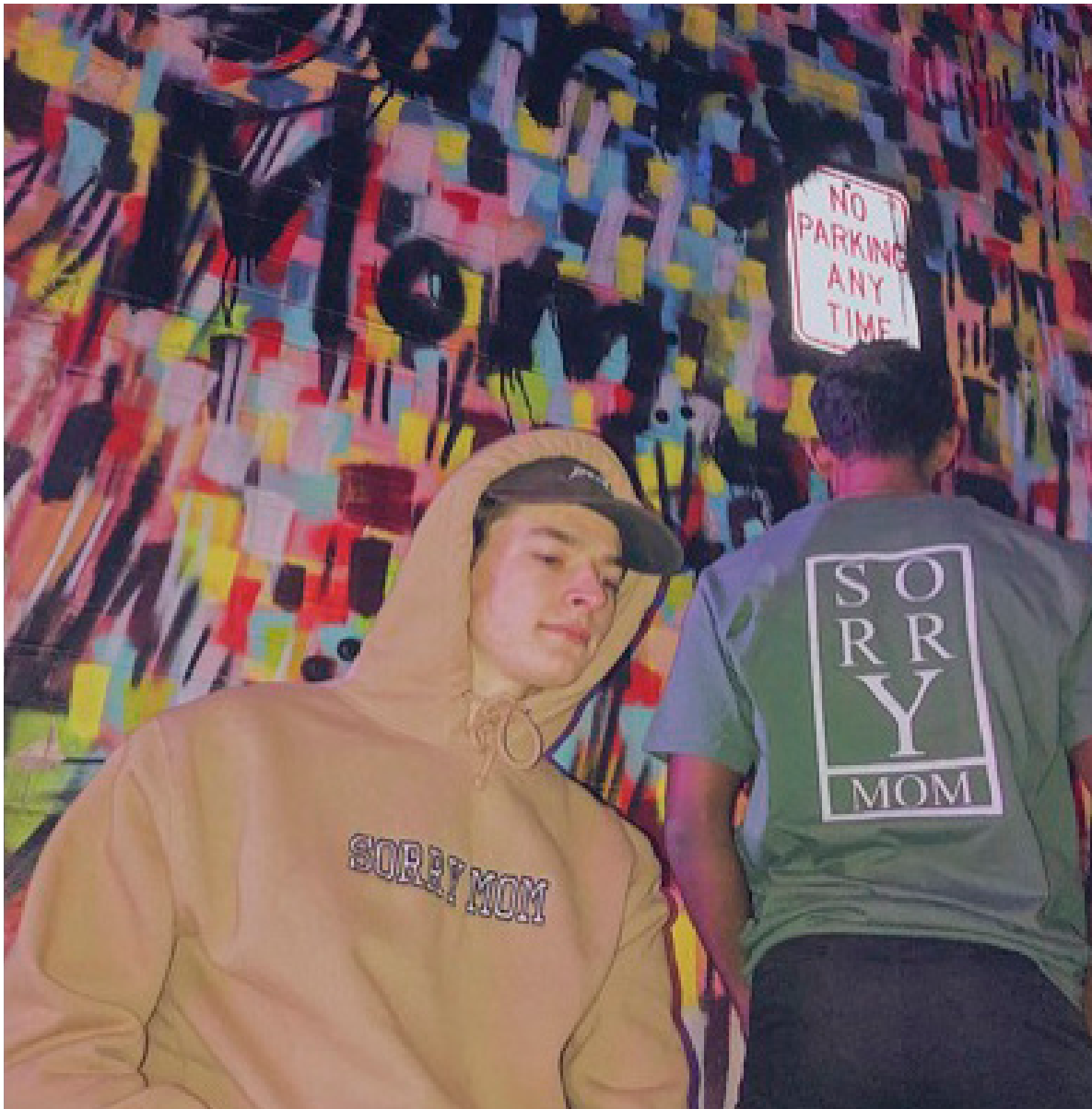
Matthew Loes is a second-year honors student from Waterloo, Iowa, studying business and art. In his time at the University of Iowa, he has cultivated his “Momma’s Little Mess Up” clothing brand into a collection of artistic pieces he can wear every day. He hopes to expand the brand’s impact so more people are aware of it, thus bringing in regular revenue.



A



B



C, D

A. Imprinted with a crossword version of “SORRY MOM” over the heart, the dark brown hoodie is the designer’s latest. The print on the right sleeve reads “It’s okay to feel the way you do, it’s not a crime to feel, it’s not a crime to be yourself, the true crime is covering away from the person you want to become.” The message on the back reads, “We’re only human,” to inspire its wearers to embrace what makes them who they are.

B. Loes spent much of his free time scrimmaging with the Iowa water polo team when one of the players approached him in need of a 2022 team shirt. He wanted to give the shirt a unique look that was not a typical polo shirt but not too branded, hence the upwards arrow design and subtle “MLMU” in the polo ball. He really enjoys the design, look, and fit of the shirt, wearing it himself occasionally.

C. Loes draws inspiration from clothes that he likes and wears all the time. One of his own favorite hoodies was tan, so he asked himself, “Why don’t I have my own tan hoodie?” Thus, the first hoodie Loes made for “Momma’s Little Mess Up” was the tan “Sorry Mom” hoodie, the slogan embroidered across the chest. It is the only piece that he has embroidered, having abandoned the style to play around with other options, but he hopes to incorporate embroidery more into future designs because he believes art is always changing.

D. Loes designed the green shirt because green is his favorite color. He designed the shirt early in his career, having drawn multiple variations of the box design before settling on this one. His style continues to change — it is onto the next design when the last one is finished.

rising

Featured Honors Student: Abby Kloha
Edited by Katie Davis



Abby Kloha

Abby Kloha's flash fiction piece, "Rising," details a quick scene of a young girl's life when she asks her parents if Jesus is a zombie. Kloha states that the purpose of her piece was to show a side of Christianity where church is a happy and safe place. Kloha doesn't want this piece to undermine attention to the terrible things that the church has done or the ways people have suffered because of it, but rather illuminate the happiness that's possible in Christian communities that take loving their neighbors seriously.

Listen to my pastor's Easter service sermon as I lay between the wooden pews, scribbling yellow into my color-by-number and wondering if Jesus is a zombie. I roll this curiosity around my mouth like the Easter chocolate I'll soon be munching on. Tossing a turquoise crayon to my little sister, I wonder if this means I've passed the first eight years of my life worshipping a zombie.

I glance at the tapestries rising around my pastor. Jesus is woven over them, and He certainly doesn't look like a zombie—I've seen enough of them in videogames and board games to know that they're always green and scary.

The sermon ends and I get to sing songs and recite prayers with Mom and Dad and all the other adults. My eyes drift past the various Jesuses—the stained glass Jesus planting rainbows onto the red carpet, the painted Jesus swaddled in warm browns and wooly whites, my church busy-bag's cartoon Jesus that's smiling under a halo of neon orange. All of the

Jesuses are lacking in zombie-like features.

But looks can be deceiving. Jesus made it look like He was dead and then He strolled out of His tomb—and that rising from the dead is exactly what makes a zombie a zombie.

I'm not particularly worried, because even if Jesus is a zombie, He's still very nice—and there's nothing wrong with being a very nice zombie. So as the church secretary does the announcements, my mind drifts between chocolate and how fun my dress is—a puff of sleepy green with a pink ribbon hugging my waist—and our lunch plans, everything safely held with the knowledge that it doesn't matter if Jesus is a zombie, especially because I can just ask someone about it right after service.

The service ends and a gentle babble fills our church. Old ladies in willowy yellows mingle over the pews and other kids in dewdrop denims and rosy reds wiggle towards the narthex. I waddle after

my parents, taking baby-steps in the crowd of baby-room-colored people—each one a friend, each one a perfectly good option to ask about Jesus's zombieness. Maybe it exists on a scale. Maybe He's only part zombie.

We drift towards the coat racks—slowly, because Mom and Dad get caught in conversations. I twirl and untwirl the fabric of my dress around my hands, my question hopping towards my throat until only my shyness keeps it down.

I catch sight of Jesus on the cross—now that, with all the blood and the hair tangled in thorns, is more zombie-like. I wonder if this means that God is a zombie, if the zombiness could spread up to Him even though He wasn't the one who died. Maybe?

Pastor Ham would probably know about the spread of zombiness, but I can't distinguish his white robes through the sea of soft skirts and wrinkled pant legs.

I linger at my parents' side and my little sister lingers at my side and together we are a little, lin-

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gering, leering unit using our big brown eyes to beg our parents' friends, "how is this conversation related to chocolate?" or, as in my case, "good morning, is Jesus a zombie?"

God blesses us with a quick escape to the coat racks.

I wonder if Jesus minds my question. My feelings would be a little hurt if someone asked if I was a type of monster. Would Jesus...?

No, He wouldn't mind. Jesus is very kind and understanding. He heals people and gives people bread and washes their feet—all of which I realize are very un-zombie-like since zombies are usually preoccupied with eating people.

"Hey, Mom?" I ask.

Mom gives me a hum of permission as she digs through her chocolate-brown purse to find where the car keys are buried.

"Is Jesus a zombie?"

The old church couples near

me are suddenly stony, their blue coat buttons half-done and poppy red scarves half-wrapped around them. My sister—usually my shadow—seems unconnected from me. Mom and Dad stare at me.

"Cause Jesus died and then He came back and that's exactly what zombies do!" I explain, speaking a little louder—they probably didn't hear me the first time. "And people always say that He rose from the dead, and that's how we describe zombies too!"

And a laughing snort bursts from Mom and my sister follows her lead and Mom leans on Dad and gasps between her laughter: "At least we're raising our daughters well," and that makes me laugh and the old church couples wrap my name in nice words like "cute" and "clever" that are like warm sun shining on my face and they coax happy red blooms from my cheeks.

As Mom and my sister laugh with the old church couples, Dad crouches beside me and softly explains that Jesus isn't a zombie. I nod hurriedly. From my knowledge of second grade lessons, fantasy movie magic systems, and the belief that Mom and Dad are always right, I cannot fathom Dad's explanation not making sense.

So we leave church and tumble into our mud-powdered car. Everything is and was okay. Jesus isn't a zombie, my booster seat is comfy, I'm going to get chocolate, I'm going to see my grandparents at Easter dinner, I can ask as many questions as I want and none of the answers or reactions will ever be scary—because the world is blossoming with soft colors and kind laughter and growing wonders like the tree buds waving at me over the freeway interpass that Mom flies us through.

Abby Kloha is a first-year student majoring in translation along with English and creative writing. She loves learning Spanish and Japanese, doodling, and admiring pastel colors.

meet the team

honors student writers and editors



Berkley Barnett

Berkley is from Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She is majoring in international studies, with a minor in Arabic studies, and pursuing a certificate in writing. Berkley hopes to develop her communication skills while exploring interdisciplinary coursework across campus.



Mackenzie Becker

Mackenzie is from Maple Grove, Minnesota, majoring in psychology with a minor in rhetoric and persuasion. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to continue exploring opportunities in both psychology and within the honors program.



Bri Brands

Bri is from Spirit Lake, Iowa, majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track. While at University of Iowa, she hopes to become a stronger, more confident writer.



Katie Davis

Katie is a first-year student from Bluffton, South Carolina, majoring in English and creative writing. While at the university she hopes to read, write, and get her masters in Library Science.



Neely Goerlinger

Neely is from Clintonville, Wisconsin. She is majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track, with a minor in ancient civilizations and certificate in nonprofit leadership and philanthropy. She loves writing and came to the University of Iowa to become the best writer she can be.



Grace Hahn

Grace is from Orange County, California, double majoring in speech and hearing sciences and disorders and psychology. Through the honors program, she hopes to dive deeper into her classes to get the most out of her time at the University of Iowa.



Gracie Harvey

Gracie is from Fort Dodge, Iowa, majoring in journalism and mass communications. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to gain experience in the realm of strategic communication.



Sam Wilson Hoff

Sam is from Des Moines, Iowa, majoring in art with a focus in 3D design along with a minor in cinema. Sam hopes to further develop his passion for form, function, and storytelling in art.



Calista Kapulos

Calista is from Arlington Heights, IL, and is studying radiation science on the RT/CT track.



Colin Votzemeyer

Colin is a student from Mount Prospect, Illinois, majoring in journalism and mass communications with minors in history and sports studies. In his time at the University of Iowa, he hopes to perfect his writing skills for a career in sports writing.



Korbin Yauk

Korbin is from Fayette, Iowa, majoring in anthropology. While at the University of Iowa, he hopes to learn more about human behavior and culture before applying to law school.

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