



OUR OWN PRESSIONS

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2017 Winners

Pierce County Library System

2017 Winners

Congratulations to the nearly 1,000 talented students who participated in the 21st annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members, reviewed the entries. Writers Gloria Muhammad and Travis Prothro selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style, general presentation, grammar and spelling. Photographer Dominique Thomas-McCullum and artist Saiyare Refaei selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes, and the winning entries are published in this book.

Pierce County Library gratefully acknowledges the support of Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pacific Lutheran University, and Print NW to help fund the contest.



Poetry Winners

Grades 7 and 8

- 1st The Wind & Trees**
Zoie McCarter Other
- 2nd Why I March**
Angelo Acosta Hudtloff Middle School
- 3rd A Rose Comes Forth From Thorns**
Honor Tamminga Other

Grades 9 and 10

- 1st My struggles (Rap)**
G Alvarado Bellarmine Preparatory
- 2nd Ignored Dreams**
Quinn Sukhia Covenant High School
- 3rd Sleep**
Avery Welch Covenant High School

Grades 11 and 12

- 1st Someone**
Angie Le Covenant High School
- 2nd "Illegal" From a Foreign Land**
Keir Adamson Gig Harbor High School
- 3rd The Lies We Believe**
Will Lewellen Covenant High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 and 8

- 1st African Wild Dog**
Rory Jacobs Home School
- 2nd Old Timer**
Josiah Mellott Other
- 3rd In Asia**
Dylan Cho Curtis Junior High School

Grades 9 and 10

- 1st AESTHETE**
Seo Kim Rogers High School
- 2nd As a Child**
Ayat Alkadban Ballou Junior High School
- 3rd Wildfire**
Katherine Hunter White River High School

Grades 11 and 12

- 1st Manifest Glaciachine**
Grace Lee Curtis Senior High School
- 2nd Jellyfish Duo**
Damita Gomez Covenant High School
- 3rd Fingerprints**
Kayla Schunzel Peninsula High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 and 8

- 1st Water**
Caitlyn Higgenbottom Ford Middle School
- 2nd Autumn Canter**
Logan Foster Faith Lutheran/Wels
- 3rd awesome**
Trevor Drummond Ford Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

- 1st Lost**
Jacob Million Steilacoom High School
- 2nd LoveTrumpsHate**
R. M. Curtis Senior High School
- 3rd Autumn Reflections**
Aleah Haugen Washington Virtual Academy

Grades 11 and 12

- 1st Shadow Rocks**
Rian Kasner Puyallup Senior High School
- 2nd The Crumbling of Detroit**
Evelyn Yielding Other
- 3rd Reflections**
Sarah Hull Bethel High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 and 8

- 1st Glimmer of Darkness**
Tallin Rivers Saint Nicholas School
- 2nd Lincoln's Secret**
Josiah Mellott Other
- 3rd Crazy kids**
Manye Kwablah Gray Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

- 1st Ecliptic**
Alyssa Young Lakes High School
- 2nd A Letter to You**
Michelle Foster Annie Wright School
- 3rd The Daughter of Madina**
R. M. Curtis Senior High School

Grades 11 and 12

- 1st Abuelo**
Finlay Adamson Gig Harbor High School
- 2nd Fog Horn**
Keir Adamson Gig Harbor High School
- 3rd Begotten yet Broke**
Will Lewellen Covenant High School

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
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OUR OWN
PREFERENCES

The Wind & Trees

by Zoie McCarter

First Place

The sky was black,
The stars were none,
The Moon shined bright on Earth below.

The fog was as white as snow falling down,
And the wind howled, crashing all about.

The wind tore down houses,
And knocked over trees,
A tornado arose and swept up all kinds of things.

No one could sleep,
All were awake,
The howling noise kept them up late.

When the storm was over,
The people all cried,
For when they looked outside,
They saw trees were no longer alive.

Why I March

by Angelo Acosta

Second Place

Why I march, well I march for a reason.
This is a way to explain what I believe in.
Not by pressure by my peers or to please them,
but instead I stand up to make a difference,
to let you know there's a reason to my existence.
So I may scream and shout to get myself heard
but please hear me out so you don't think I'm absurd.
So then they would say he's only thirteen,
why should he even care to intervene,
with these political issues spread all about.
I tell you there's more to teens inside then out.
I care to what's going on in our country to,
like discrimination, gun control, and immigration to name a few.
It's my right, others rights, to correct what we feel is wrong,
when we march together we create an even stronger bond.
Whether your Gay, Straight, Black or White,
Transgender, Hispanic, get ready to fight.
Just remember one thing when hanging with your crew,
that when you encounter me,
I'll let you know I got a Voice too.

A Rose Comes Forth From Thorns

by Honor Tamminga

Third Place

A rose comes forth from thorns,
As a man comes from sorrow.
One day, he falls, he mourns.
He is lighten'd the morrow.

The Diamond comes from coal;
The crystal from roughest stone.
The ugly is not null,
But leaves beauty to be shown.

Tragedy leaves a mark
That will never be erased,
But light o'er-powers dark,
As joy sweetens a sad taste.

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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

My struggles (Rap)

by G Alvarado

First Place

Here I am Imma stand before thee
Yes I did make it outta minority
Got kicked outta the rental duplex we was stayin in
Through all the ups and downs I just wanted to win
Tryna keep my feet on the ground off the streets, no fights
However when I step up in the building I still be stereotyped
Judged by ethnicity stepped on like a door Matt
Judged by the name o' G or the logo be on my hat
People expect me as a rappa to have gang signs and swearing
But no, nope, nun o' dat no saggy pants that I be wearing
I'm just a teenager with a struggle ain't understood
And when I say I live in the city they expect me to be in the hood
Me and my mama not knowing when we'd get paid
Made it into a prep school offa financial aid
Sleeping in the car after school then going to ball
Constantly struggling tryna make sure my grades don't fall
Yes, and that repeats every single day
Then when I go to sleep asking God for strength, I pray
So yes I'm in a slump right now but wait four years you'll see
I ain't eva giving up capitalize on this opportunity

Ignored Dreams

by Quinn Sukhia

Second Place

On a boat a man sat thinking,
Thinking as the ship was sinking.
Is this the end? My time all done?
He felt his life had just begun.
The crack of metal, swish of sea,
Did wash away his dreams to be
A hero, builder, actor, king,
Looked up to, married, anything.
But there he sat, the boat still sinking.
There he sat, the poor man thinking.
His wretched life controlled by fate.
His time would end; it was too late.
But you, my friend, remember him,
While you sit idle, bored and dim.
It's not too late for you, so try
To follow your dreams before you die.

Sleep

by Avery Welch

Third Place

Why must I wake up early every day?
While asleep in bed I'd prefer to stay.
At six, I must rise, this always my fate.
For it would be shameful to school at eight.
One minute more I desperately plead,
But school schedule never seems to concede.
The clock mocks me mostly every morning,
But I press snooze ignoring its warning.
Though I can still not let the snores catch me.
It takes a dangerous amount of coffee.
Finally, my eye lids will part their ways.
Mornings I'll rise till ending of my days.
For every second wasted, in slack sleep.
Is a second I will no longer keep.

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Someone

by Angie Le

First Place

There's always someone standing in the back
Where they hope no one will see.
There's always someone who will walk behind
When they're in a group of three.
There's always someone who takes a step back
When they are told, "Take the lead!"
There's always someone who watches and wants
To put things where they should be.
There's always someone who sits and listens,
Whether there's sadness or glee.
There's always someone that nobody sees,
But that is just the someone people need.

"Illegal" From a Foreign Land

by Keir Adamson

Second Place

Desire
Stopped, by barbed wire, and gunfire.
What they require
The right to perspire, and retire.

Frightened
Our minds filled with spite and
Their plight, stays heightened
Our fears trite, and wholly, unenlightened.

Dedication
A flirtation, with, a new nation.
An aspiration, merely for, education.
A fascination, with this location, our habitation.

Discriminated
Their culture, animated, now desecrated.
Appropriated, they are, "unsophisticated."
Segregated, separated, we should be nauseated.

The Lies We Believe

by Will Lewellen

Third Place

You say them again; those words that I fear:
"No matter the time I'll always be near."
For you see us in terms of forever;
Bracelets and bonds that time cannot sever.
I've heard it before. I know the danger,
Seeing your face turn into a stranger.
With each meeting, I feel our time has passed
Spending our moments alive in the past
I'll smile and say that I'm happy you came,
But we can't deny that things aren't the same.
So friend save your breath don't promise me years.
Your words are not worth the price of these tears.
I'll let you leave; I won't beg you to stay,
For you're not the friend I knew yesterday.

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**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

African Wild Dog

by Rory Jacobs

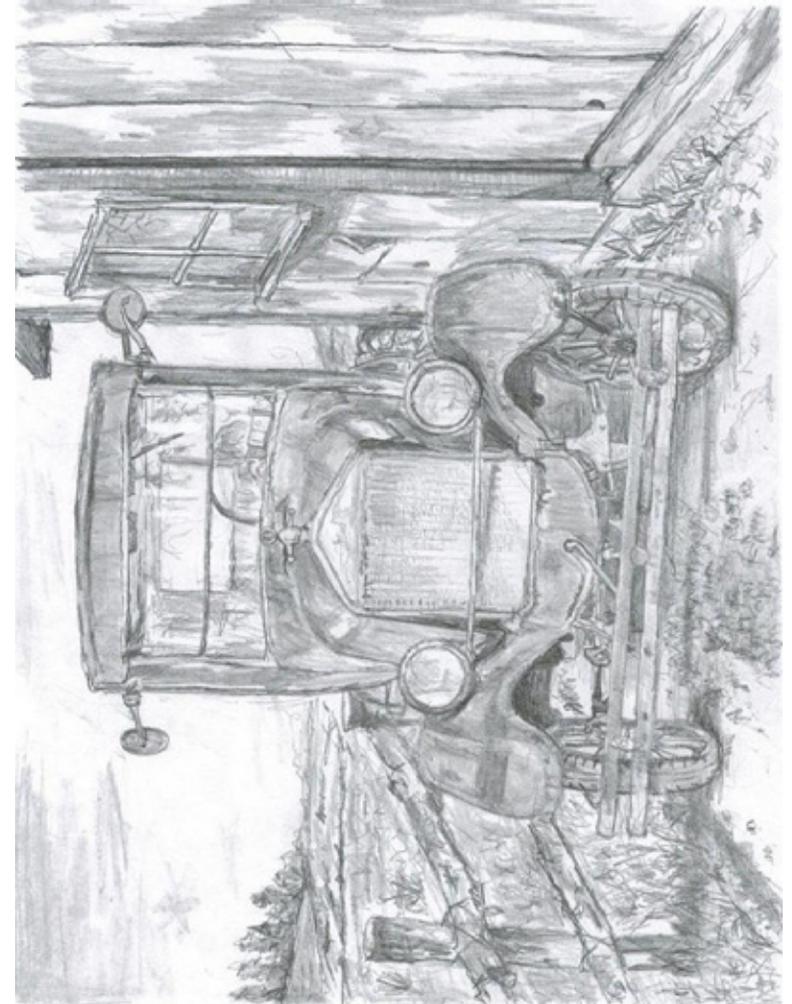
First Place



Old Timer

by Josiah Mellott

Second Place



In Asia

by Dylan Cho

Third Place



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AESTHETE

by Seo Kim

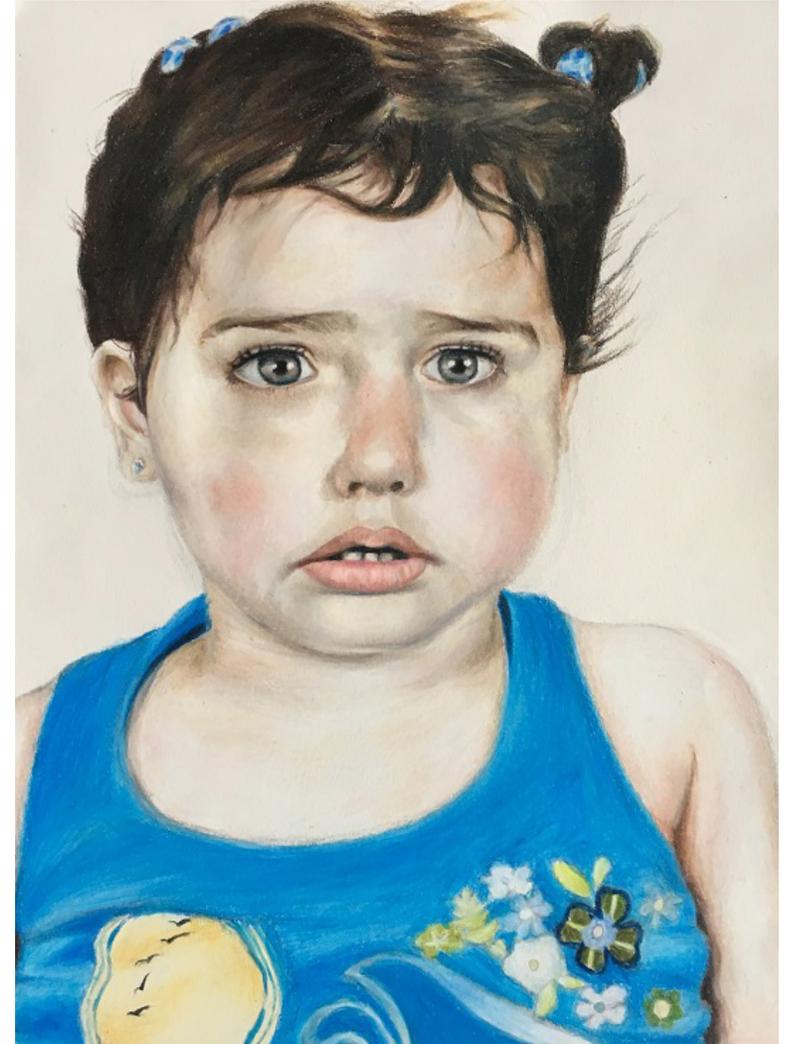
First Place



As a Child

by Ayat Alkadban

Second Place



Wildfire

by Katherine Hunter

Third Place



POETRY
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**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Manifest Glaciachine

by Grace Lee

First Place



Jellyfish Duo

by Damita Gomez

Second Place



Fingerprints

by Kayla Schunzel

Third Place



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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Water

by Caitlyn Higgenbottom

First Place



Autumn Canter

by Logan Foster

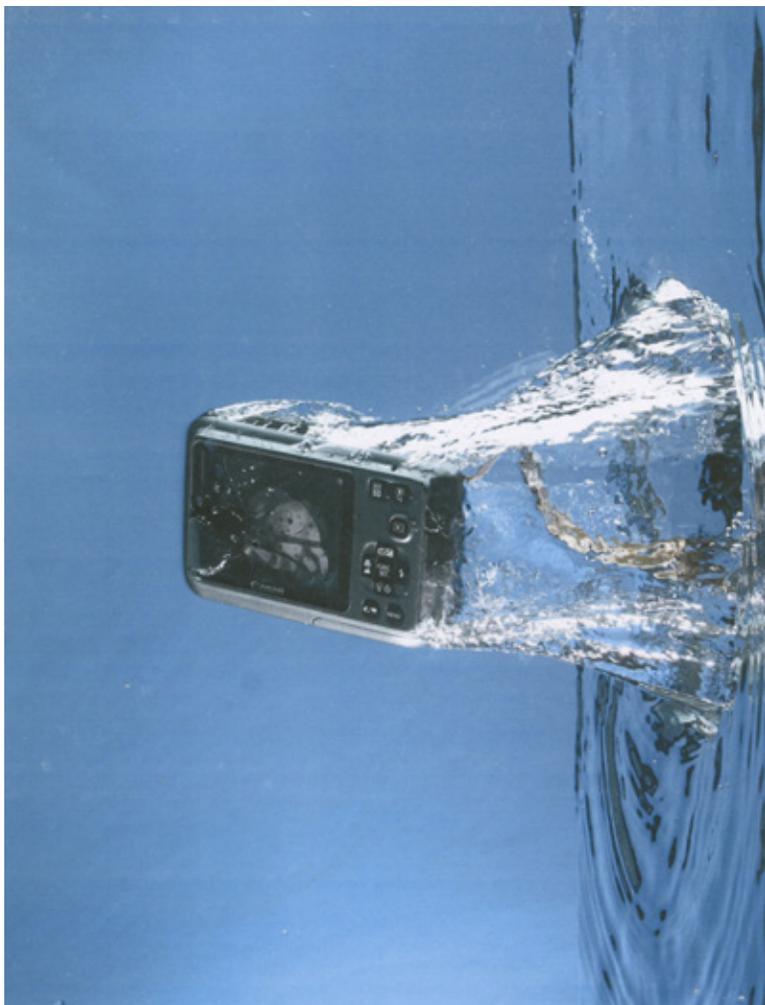
Second Place



awesome

by Trevor Drummond

Third Place



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**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**

Lost

by Jacob Million

First Place



LoveTrumpsHate

by R. M.

Second Place



Autumn Reflections

by Aleah Haugen

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Shadow Rocks

by Rian Kasner

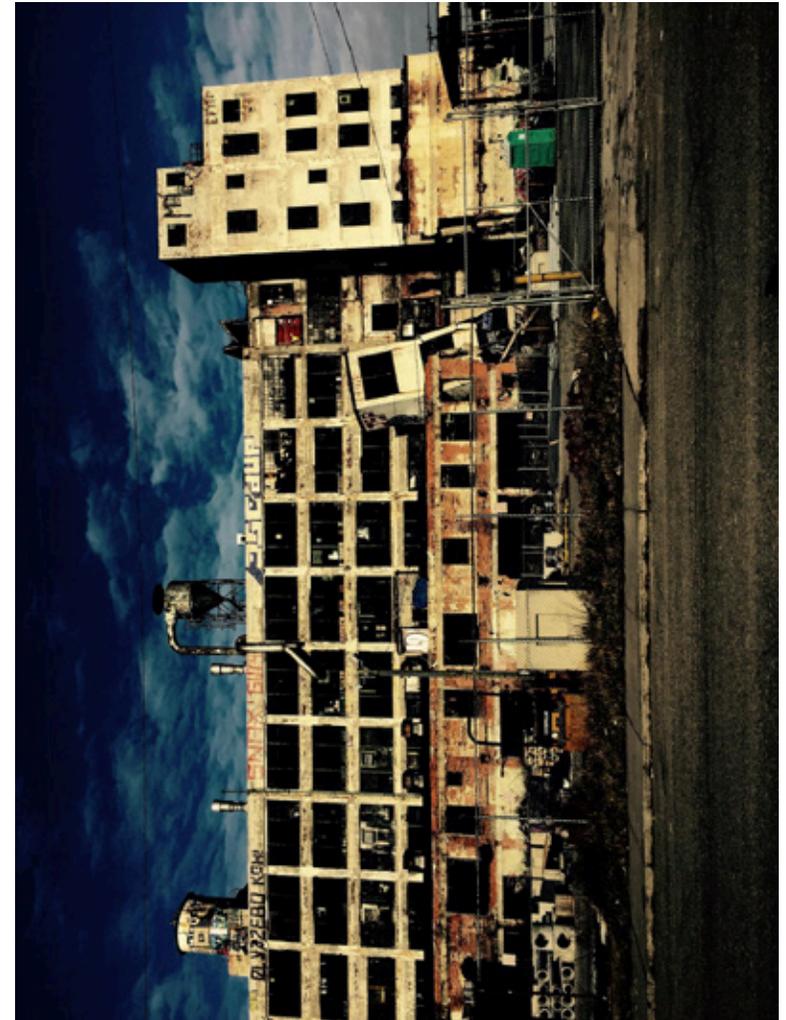
First Place



The Crumbling of Detroit

by Evelyn Yielding

Second Place



Reflections

by Sarah Hull

Third Place



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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Glimmer of Darkness

by Tallin Rivers

First Place

“This world is full of secrets, everything has one. The trees, the waters, the clouds, the animals. They are all hiding something. We tend to fear the dark secrets, the ones wreathed in shadow and mystery. But sometimes, the light is more dangerous than the dark.”

Those words were spoken by Sam’s grandmother about five years ago, when he was just a boy. He thought about it late at night sometimes, letting his thought swirl around it, searching for a meaning. Sam was never a superstitious man, but he could not seem to find a logical answer to his grandmother’s words. It didn’t matter to him really. All he cared about was getting food on his table.

Sam lived in the swamps, the southernmost land of his country, Latonia. Life was extremely different from the more populated areas of the north. There were no houses here, what little dry land there could be found was either too small or unstable to support structures. Instead, the inhabitants lived on rafts. Sam himself owned relatively little. His few possessions included a frying pan, a tea kettle, and an old iron spear.

Peering into the distance, Sam could see the sun just peeking over the horizon. Stuffing his bedroll into his weathered backpack, he grabbed a large oar and shoved off west.

After a few hours of navigating through weed-infested waters and nearly liquefied mud, Sam reached his destination. Amongst the plants and algae covering the marshlands rippling surface sat a patch of clear water. Some of the elderly folks thought the pond was a gift from the gods, a sacred place for believers to worship. Sam knew better. It had

been proved nearly a decade ago that a geyser rested at the bottom of the pond, constantly spewing boiling water into the swamp. The resulting hot spring was too high a temperature for plants to grow in, making it a perfect meeting place.

Residents of the swamp usually met in the early morning to trade and talk to each other about the usual goings-on. Already, three other rafts were anchored in the middle of the pond, the men busy attaching their homes together with rope and vines. Grunting with effort, Sam rowed out into the deep water to join the others. One of the men stopped to wave in greeting. “Sam!” he called. “Haven’t seen you ‘round here recently!”

Sam’s face broke into a grin. “Sorry to disappoint you, Eric.” He called back. “I’m still alive.”

Laughing, Eric tossed a line to Sam. He caught it one handed and, both men straining and wheezing, they pulled his raft into the mass of other floating homes, the wood connecting with a satisfying crack. Immediately, three more marshmen scrambled over to Sam’s raft, looping cords over the planks, tying them to small rings protruding from the edges of the platform.

With his raft firmly attached to the group, Sam was free to make his way across to the other swamp residents. Even with the rafts attached, it was easy to tell the difference between them. Eric’s raft portrayed his sloppiness. Half rotten and covered with moss, Sam was astonished it even stayed in one piece. Then there were the Adams twins. Skilled huntsmen, their raft was covered in dirt and grasses, easily mistakable for a small island. Sam spent the rest of his day relaxing with his friends. He traded with the Adams twins for one of their pelts, tried to guess what was in Eric’s beard, and otherwise enjoyed himself. He had no idea that when he went to sleep that night, everything would change.

Sam woke with a jolt. He swore he heard something, yet had no idea what. He was about to fall back asleep when he heard it again. A

soft whisper, crooning softly in the wind, beckoning him forward. Sam stumbled to the edge of the combined rafts, searching for the source of the sound. Peering into the gloom, he could make out a small light. No, two lights, a pair of blue lights. Sam was transfixed by the small dots. He had never seen pure blue before, all the water in the swamp was brownish-green thanks to all the mud and plants. He was even more in awe when the lights moved closer, their intensity growing as they drew near.

The world seemed to slow down. The lights were warm, comforting, as if they were an old friend. Sam wanted to move closer to them, but he would fall into the boiling hot spring. *"Why would I care?"* He thought. *"It can't be as scalding as people say. Besides, the lights will protect me."* The lights were getting even closer now, their azure brilliance washing away all of Sam's hardships. He was overjoyed to see another pair of lights appear, then another, then another.

He heard Eric's voice behind him, asking what the lights were. He didn't care. He couldn't have the lights, they were his.

He did not bat an eye when the canoe slammed into the platform. He welcomed it when dark figures swarmed onto the rafts, their eyes ablaze with that wonderful sapphire light. What was it that his grandmother had said? She mentioned something about light. She said... she said they should be feared.

Reality came crashing down in Sam. His trance broken, he looked around frantically. His friends were in danger. The things with the blue eyes were merciless. They chased the marshmen around the rafts, shoving them off into the burning water, ripping their throats out, repeatedly slamming their heads into the wood planks. Sam's heart broke when he heard Eric scream. He had to help them. He had to-

Something crashed into Sam, sending him tumbling across the rafts. He tried to get up, but a kick to his ribs put him back on the floor. He struggled helplessly when strong arms wrapped around him, pulling him back to the very edge of the rafts. Flailing like a fish, Sam

flipped himself onto his back, staring at his snarling attacker in the eyes. The piercing, blue eyes.

The thing wore rags around its head, leaving the rest of its face to question. In a last ditch effort to escape, Sam grasped at the rags, wrenching them free from the thing's face, what he saw horrified him.

He did not have time to scream. The monster thrust Sam head into the water without a word. The people were wrong. It was much more scalding than they said it was.

Sometimes, we should fear the light even more than the dark.

Lincoln's Secret

by Josiah Mellott

Second Place

Lincoln unlatched the box he was holding and peered into it. The object inside, although it could fit in the palm of his hand, was called the “Secret” – the secret that would end the tyranny of the New Order. Passed down from father to son for decades, the Secret had been hidden in this miniature box, waiting for a chance to reveal itself. Waiting for a weak link in the New Order’s control.

A bang echoed down the street. Fumbling with the delicate silver latch, Lincoln stuffed the box back under the loose floorboard in his closet. He shuffled over to his window and peeked out into the road from behind the moth-eaten curtains. Although the first light of day was still yet to come, Lincoln could make out two figures on the opposite side of the street. Dressed in smart blue uniforms, the men were facing the doorway of an apartment across the lane. Another bang sounded down the street. The apartment door fell inwards and light flooded into the dark road. One of the men stepped inside the doorway, and emerged a few seconds later, grasping a struggling woman. Violently, the men shoved the woman forward and then marched away from her house, disappearing into the darkness.

A stab of fear ran through Lincoln’s body. This was not the first time he had seen this happen. The two men were Inquiry officers, which gave them full authority to charge anyone with rebellious actions. Lincoln knew that if so much as a single hint of the Secret got out, he would face certain death.

Clenching his sweaty hands, he turned away from the window.

* * *

Lincoln glanced up from the newspaper. The clock read 12:42 –

lunch break was almost over. As he swallowed the last bite of his ration bar, Lincoln stood up and fell into the line of people leaving the cafeteria.

He rubbed his eyes restlessly. The events of that morning were still fresh in his mind. Deep in thought, Lincoln rounded the corner. His thoughts suddenly turned. A group of workers was gathered around the notice board at the end of the hall. Treading quietly up to the rear of the group, Lincoln started reading the new post on the board.

‘On the second day of this week,’ the paper read, ‘it came to the notice of the Board of Inquiry that Mary Stewart violated the line twelve of the Code of Tolerated Actions-’

Mary Stewart. Lincoln racked his brains, trying to think of who that was. The name sounded familiar to him, but he couldn’t pinpoint in his mind to whom it might belong. He continued reading:

‘She has been removed for questioning from her living quarters on 12 A Street.’

That was Lincoln’s street! And then it dawned on him. Mary Stewart was the woman he had seen being dragged away by the officers that morning. He then read the last line of the notice:

‘All other residents on 12 A Street will be questioned tomorrow.’

Lincoln sucked in his breath. The thought that the Inquiry might know of the Secret entered him again. Running his fingers through his hair, Lincoln turned and walked down the hall into his office. He collapsed in his chair and stared up at the ceiling.

Why did the Inquiry want to question other residents?

Sighing deeply, Lincoln looked down at the stack of papers that needed to be organized on his desk. Then he grabbed the top few and distractedly began his work.

Could they know? Could they have possibly seen him? he pondered, they couldn’t have. It’s hidden really well.

As he worked, he began to calm down, assuring himself that there was nothing to worry about.

“Hey, Lincoln!”

Lincoln looked up from his work to see a beefy man with a smirk on face.

“Good afternoon, Wilson,” Lincoln replied, warily.

“Better be careful,” Wilson sneered, “Or you might get in trouble.” Then he shoved a paper into Lincoln’s hand. Slapping his hand hard on Lincoln’s back, Wilson grinned menacingly and then strutted off. Lincoln clenched his jaw angrily, glaring at Wilson as he left the room. Then he looked down at the paper that was given to him. It was the most recent flyer that the New Order had sent out. Lincoln scanned the flyer, looking for anything unusual. He found propaganda declaring how wonderful the New Order was, false statistics saying how much the economy was improving, and other useless junk, but nothing unusual. Confused why Wilson had given him the flyer, Lincoln shoved it aside. Then something caught his eye — his name. With a frown of confusion, he picked the pamphlet up again. His name was listed with several others. Turning the pamphlet over, he found the heading over the record of names. His heart froze. The title read, “Suspects for Rebellious Actions.”

And all his previous fear came crashing down on him again.

* * *

Eyes wide with terror, Lincoln sprinted down the street. I’ve been caught, he thought, they know about the Secret.

A beggar across the street yelled something at Lincoln as he ran past, and then guffawed rowdily. Hardly noticing, Lincoln rounded the corner onto 12 A Street. The sight before his eyes confirmed his fears.

Lincoln slowed his pace and walked up to his house, sweeping his gaze over the building. It was a disaster. The windows were shattered, leaving a glittering patch of shards across the street. The

door was hanging askew from one hinge. Shingles from the roof were scattered on the ground.

Moving forward, Lincoln crept up to the crooked door and peered inside. Seeing no one, he crept inside. Once again, disaster met his eyes. Stepping over a capsized drawer, Lincoln moved up his stairway towards his bedroom. He needed to make sure the Secret was safe. Without a second glance at the torn-up bed and scattered clothes inside his room, Lincoln began frantically pulling up the floorboards in the closet. Looking into the cavity, he sighed with relief. The box was still there.

Slumping backwards, Lincoln gazed upwards. He was safe. The Inquiry officers may have raided his house, but they hadn’t found the Secret. But no, he wasn’t safe. He was still on the list of suspects. The Inquiry was still on his tail. Coming to a conclusion quickly, Lincoln decided that he would have to leave the New Order’s land. As he jumped up to his feet, Lincoln started picking the clothes off his floor and stuffed them into a rucksack. Then, reaching inside his closet, he grabbed the box. Undoing the latch, he opened the lid.

The box was empty.

Crazed kids

by Manye Kwablah

Third Place

I was so young, I didn't know. How can someone be so evil? As I walked through the dim lighting in the hall I felt the eyes of the many before me. A feeling lured me into false comfort that I would soon regret falling into. Why was I so careless and naïve.

I walked closer to the painting. The creaky floor boards didn't frighten me in the slightest. Crrrr was the sound I remember now, so deafeningly clear. "Mommy, Daddy, I'm home" I whispered through the stark silence, only being disrupted by the blatant creaking of the floor.

I was so stupid, calling their names like that. I continued walking though, now hearing soft, crazed giggles from the living room. I went inside, without hesitation. I saw a girl I once knew. S-she was covered in blood, from her porcelain colored scarf, to her black and magenta flats. I thought that she hurt herself, not knowing it was my mother's crimson blood on her now, almost pale, skin.

She looked at me, her eyes filled with the fiery blaze of hate I once had before. Now, she was normally calm and clumsy, yet now she was a remnant of her former self. She was a stone wall of a human, begging to escape from her cold exterior. No, it was worse, like she was out to kill me and my lineage.

"Hi, it's been awhile" I said, a glistening smile on my face. The one she hated o' so much. She only stared back, the fire never leaving her eyes, for even a moment. Then it happened. She charged at me, her knife in hand, and noose in other hand. I started to run, knowing what she would do.

Yet, she caught me in her cold grasp. "N-no" I yelled, trying to gasp for air in the same moment. She laughed like the crazy witch she

always was, around me at least. Before I knew it, she was holding me in her arms, yet I wasn't dead.

"N-now we can be together, Forever and Ever" is all I can remember. Never had I thought she would do this. She always seemed so nice and fun, not psychopathic at all! I, for nine days, screamed and cried for her to release me from the torture. She had my mom and dad's dead body in the room for two of them.

On those days, I saw exactly what happened to them. My mom was stabbed in the neck repeatedly and her left arm was ripped out of socket. My father was different. He had signs that I had seen in her room, carved All Over His Body. And me, forced to see their corpses, went insane.

Now I'm here. This hospital, for lunatics and psychopaths. But want to know a secret. He-he, sure you do. See that girl, that girl has seen you. You have seen her to. Oh goody, you're scared. Well that girl, she's me. See, I went insane as a young child, when I saw my first dead body.

It was covered in blood. I was covered in roses and glitter! I felt like a queen, in front of him. Now you see, going from queen to slave in a flash is hard. I wanted that feeling again. Of course that meant that people would die, but that is just fine, for me at least. W-wait, don't go, I have so much to tell you! Don't go! Don't go, I beg you!

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



Ecliptic

by Alyssa Young

First Place

There are many stories in the world. So many in fact, only one man could ever know them all. His heart was so big and his dreams so true that Mother Earth asked him to watch over her while she slept, and to protect all the wonders of the night. They called him the man in the moon. He stayed to his post, way in the sky, and watched over all the night creatures. He gave them all hope.

The moon was overhead, one winter's eve, when he looked down to see a little girl alone in the forest. Her eyes were bandaged and she carried a stick, as if to cut down the entirety of her foes, viciously swinging back and fourth, this way and that, decimating small trees and shrubs until she had cut a circle of carnage. She fell to her knees, scraping them on the harsh foliage, weeping. The girl was terribly lost and had no hope of finding home, for the young girl was blind.

The moon, being so high, saw the girl's father searching for her, not far off. The man took pity upon them both and took the circle of carnage and healed it, filling the space with luscious moss and never fading forget-me-nots and echinacea cone-flowers. The moss melted from the pool and dug through the forest underbrush to make the girl a path to her father. The moon whispered to the girl and told her where to find the moss and travel safely. So the girl rose, and with her stick gently bouncing on the spongy forest floor, the moon guided her home.

The moon returned one night, months after he first saw the girl, he again found himself over her grove. He saw her there, lying on her back, covered eyes facing him. Her hair glowed silver and gold in his light, and she twirled a wild bloom that he had given her. The warm glow shown brightly in the tears that not even bandaging could hide. She sat up and tore the cloth from her face. She felt the glow on her

lids and lashes, and when the tears fell, they looked like liquid light. The moon smiled down at her in hopes of consoling her sadness, but she could not see him.

Nights came and went, the moon racing to catch his brother, and the whole world gawked when he finally did. As he passed Mother Earth's other sun, he looked down in hopes the girl would be proud that he had again caught his brother, but she stood in the grove with a young man, not many years her senior. The moon saw the boy gently brush the not so little girl on the forehead with his lips. The moon gave them his blessing during his moment of triumph, and passed overhead in a great flurry of light.

Again the moon passed the grove, many moons later, and he saw the girl kneeling in the moss. The girl was no longer a girl but a beautiful young woman in a light cotton dress. She knelt in front of a babe swaddled in pink and white. The woman wanted the moon to share in her moment, so he smiled as he passed over her with a silvery bright warmth, and blessed her child, too.

The moon returned every month to the grove, when he was his brightest, to shine upon the woman and her daughter. She would smile upon feeling the quick silver dance on her skin and over her blind eyes, and her daughter squirmed and eventually the moon showed her the way home, too. The moon would whisper sweet nothings on the wind, to the woman and she loved him, too, though she never saw him.

The woman one night did not return, and the moon, not seeing her, assumed he was wrong about what day it must be. He came every night to see the woman, but she did not come.

Finally, eves later, he saw her in the grove, lying in a long box of dark wood lined with white satin and silk. Her hair was long and silver, her dress a soft white. A bouquet of sturdy forget-me-nots and echinacea cone-flowers lay upon her chest. Her eyes lay open and uncovered, looking forever at the open sky. The moon wept for his little ecliptic girl, whom he had saved from the forest so many, many moons ago.

A Letter to You

by Michelle Foster

Second Place

My dear human,

The lamp on my desk glares off the colorless paper. Looking down at this letter and the ink, still wet, reminds me of the glistening oil that runs down the streets when the clock strikes noon. I feel the gap in my mind, a blank spot where inspiration once dwelled. Behind me, the beginnings of worlds and plots litter the floor, voices of failed characters whisper through the folds of paper, reminding me of how I dragged myself into this mess. Then I remember how much I love this glorious torment. You are probably very confused. I'm making no sense, am I? That's something I've been doing lately, making no sense. It comes with being insane.

My world, on the surface, looks normal to the human eye, until you peel away the skin and realize that all the muscle, bone, and sinew are not the same at all. This world is full of skyscrapers and cobbled streets, but underneath, a large clock lurks beneath the stone. When the clock strikes noon, black oil wells up from the gutters and floods through the streets, the deafening alarm shaking the city and toppling buildings, only for the pieces to stack up again as if played backwards on a cassette. Once all the oil drains away, any wear on the cobblestone is gone, and the stones are smooth, as though none of it ever happened.

The sun decides where it comes from and where it goes, so sometimes it rises from the north and sometimes it hangs in the sky for days, scorching the streets, watching as the oil flows and recedes. At night, there are no stars or clouds. The moon rarely appears, and when it does, it switches on, like the old lamp on my desk. Sometimes it overlaps the sun, but the sun is the one in front, eclipsing the moon.

And yet, with all this chaos and movement, there is no life. The world isn't alive; I don't even know if I'm alive anymore. All I know is I am all alone in a world full of objects as rigid and lifeless and useless as children's toys in a dusty, unused nursery. This world, as full as it is, is more desolate than any desert found on Earth.

This world is ugly, warped, disproportionate, and twisted, like me. It is inelegant, rhythmless, like a story written by an amateur's hand. It makes no sense, and that is just the way it is. I hate it. But I love it at the same time, the kind of love one has for drugs, for alcohol.

Addiction is something I could have avoided. I used to be human a long time ago. Unaccomplished, uninspired, mediocre. I took the words around me and wove them into worlds wanting to be masterpieces. I took people, put them on paper, and gave them emotions no one could relate to. Into the night I went, writing everything, and yet I could never create something worth anyone's time. The characters were flat, the plot predictable; even my wife, my Eve, couldn't bring herself to relate to them. So I dug deep into my own mind, smashing into my foundations to find some kind of treasure or inspiration that would help me impact those who read my works. I opened my mind to any possibility, any thought at all.

Perhaps I opened it too much.

The cracks in my mind grew larger, revealing a pulsing monster under the logical grid in my head. Instead of running away, I prodded it, thinking this was my divine inspiration sent from a higher power. It woke, and was friendly to me... for a while. I wrote about it, and it helped me, pushed me to keep writing, keep writing. I wrote even more than before, and my wife couldn't stop me. No matter how much she pleaded for me to come back, to talk to her, I couldn't. I wouldn't let her read anything; I kept thinking, "It's not her time, not yet." I dove deeper into the chaos that grew the more I wrote. It overtook me, swallowing any logic I tried to apply to my work, and eventually I was a part of it as I am to my own heart.

I am not human, and yet I still am, a demonic reflection of what I was back then. I am what lies deep in your mind, the evil festering beneath humanity, under all ethical reason, the dark nest of snakes that never goes away, that will always wait for the moment to burst forth and consume you. This letter to you is an invitation to join me in this insubstantial black hole of reality. I admit it is an invitation you should not accept, though I know you will, because you are just like me. Because you are human.

Temptation is so easy to succumb to, no matter how determined you are to refuse it, no matter how ugly you know the consequences will be. However long it takes, you will eventually pick the apple, submit to the snake, and fall from purity. Even now, with each word you read, I can feel you letting go of sanity, appearing piece by piece right here, in this room, by this desk I am writing at, accepting this twisted hell that is my world.

When you begin to fade from one version of reality to another, you might not realize it at first, although there are signs. Everything looks a little too bright, like an overexposed photograph, like light from a desk lamp glaring off paper. Sounds will be a little too loud, with a ringing quality to them, like a bell being struck in a space too small for the noise. But you will continue going about your daily life, unperturbed by the slight changes, until you realize you're talking to people who aren't there, or you think you hear someone calling your name when no one is. You will remember doing things others say you didn't, or the other way around. None of this is certain, of course, and is probably going to be different than my experience. But no matter what path you take to get here, you will one day reflect on trivial things in your life, little dramas that mean nothing and yet seem so magnificently important, when you realize you don't exist anymore. Not like before. Looking down at yourself, you seem a little twisted, a little off, or possibly like you are trying to be something you're not... like you're trying to be human. Then you look up, and the clock strikes twelve and the buildings collapse and the gutters run black.

However, you're the one who has to finish the final step. But no matter what you feel, consider this: I was like you a long time ago, and you could easily become like me, for this darkness is an incurable sickness that comes with being human. And that is why I am so certain you will join me, and not because I force you to. So, when you decide to come, I'll be waiting.

With love,
Adam

The Daughter of Madina

by R. M.

Third Place

September 11th, 2001

I was watching TV with my dad and it seems that a plane crashed into a really tall building. Thousands died. I'm shocked that the pilot of the airplane didn't see the huge building. I'm also confused on why someone would take their own life as well as other people's.

Aug 14th, 2007

I'm doubtful of my religion. How could all these terrorists be Muslim? Does my religion encourage terrorism? I know I cannot announce my doubts to my family but I cannot live with not knowing anything.

July 3rd, 2016

It's finally Ramadan and I'm so excited! I can't wait for the delicious foods and festive atmosphere.

ISIS just attacked a Shia town in Iraq and killed hundreds of people, on Ramadan. I desperately want to know how they can justify to themselves killing people on the holiest days of all.

November 15th, 2016

I'm displeased with the way my home is being destroyed from the inside out. Civil wars, terrorism, and corrupted politics are killing thousands of people every day. Although, I'm from Saudi Arabia, and there is no war there, I'm terrified of the future given the conditions around the region. My family is an extreme Wahabi Sunni Muslim, as is the government of Saudi Arabia. I'm not sure if I agree with everything they believe in. I desperately want to change my world and the way religion is used as a cause for every terrible thing around the world.

November 22nd, 2016

A terrorist attack occurred today on a Shia mosque, the most hated sect in Saudi Arabia. The police probably looked the other way when it came to killing Shias. "They absolutely deserve it!" said Father, and I could not dare contradict him. I felt utterly miserable after this attack, since 20 people died while praying to the same God as me. I also felt intrigued about this sect that according to my father, deserves to be killed and slaughtered. . .

December 13th, 2016

I'm so scared and confused. My whole world is flipped upside down by my discoveries. Am I ready to act upon my new revelations? For the past weeks I have been trying to ignore what I read and saw, but I don't think I can pretend like I don't know anything. I can't possibly follow a religion which its greatest leaders are one of the biggest terrorists in Islam. I remember when I was younger how confused I was over the cause of terrorism. I finally found out the reason and I cannot believe how much my parents praised these leaders. My own curiosity is going to lead to my failure. I knew I should've listened to my father when he said not to read about these Shias, and how they could trick people easily. But I do NOT feel tricked. I feel like they are completely right, and they should not be killed like animals.

December 20th, 2016

I'm so terrified, yet I know that I made the right decision. I feel like a new, better person. Shi'ism feels so right to me. It was so hard for me to find resources to better my understanding of the situation. However, I met a Shia girl in school and she gave me one of her parents' books to read. I know that I will have to hide it from my family, and be very careful when it comes to praying and religious activities. I will also have to stifle the rage within me against my previous terrorist religion.

January 1st, 2017

My father walked in the room in which I was praying the Shia way of praying.

“What is this?” asked he. I got a sudden surge of courage so I confessed, “Father, please listen to me with an open mind. I have come to believe that the Shia religion has the best interpretation of Islam. They are so peaceful and kind, and most importantly they do not encourage terrorism”

Ponderingly he responded with, “I see,” and left the room.

January 5th, 2017

I feel so content and happy. I believe that I may have a chance at openly being a Shia and even be accepted by my family. Hopefully, they will see the truth and change their ways.

January 20th 2017,

I’m in the car with my family. The atmosphere of the car feels anxious and tense. They said they have a surprise for me. I’m nervous to see what their big surprise is.

I leave the car blindfolded, read for the surprise. Then I’m suddenly being held down by my sister and mother. My father is getting something from the car’s trunk. I’m screaming but I know no one will hear me. I feel a rope tighten around my neck. I’m begging, crying, kicking. “You are a disgrace to our family” Said Father. Darkness is closing in. I cannot breathe. “Father please I’m your daughter”, “Mother I know you love me, please help!” I said through the wheezing. I feel the rope tighten. I hear the car’s engine start. Everyone gets in the car. The rope is cutting through my neck. I distinctly hear the tires hiss. My father hits the gas pedal as hard as he can.

And then there is darkness...

Author’s Note:

This story is based on a true story that occurred two years ago in Madina, Saudi Arabia. The family of the girl did not receive any form of punishment. The girl’s death was reported by her Shia friend, and the family was very proud to have killed their "disgusting", "foolish" Shia daughter. Shias around the world are making donations on her behalf.

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Abuelo

by Finlay Adamson

First Place

Abuelo arrived two days before he left, with a suitcase and thin layer of blond hair on top of his elderly head.

When Matías Ruiz spotted his grandfather, he rushed upstairs and alerted his mother that a stranger was at the door. This, of course, was because in his decade of life, he had never met Abuelo.

Matías's mother approached the door and embraced her father, shaking all the while with disbelief. Julieta Ruiz certainly had memories of Abuelo, but it had still been years since she had seen the man.

Abuelo was invited inside, offered lunch, and quickly accosted with the stories and happenings of the Ruiz family. He offered none of his own, but laughed and smiled. Matías took a quick liking to his broad smile, crinkled face, and slight accent, which was foreign to Argentina. The three sat in the kitchen until evening, when Abuelo quietly excused himself to the attic, which Julieta had graciously offered as lodging.

A short while later, Matías's father entered the house after a long day of work. Greeting him excitedly, Matías and his family then sat down to dinner.

"How was your day, Santino?" Mrs. Ruiz asked.

"Could have gone better. What about you?"

Matías, eager to announce the presence of their new guest, shouted through a mouthful of pasta. He had meant to say "Abuelo is here!", but ended up closer to "Abubu ith hurr!"

Julieta, sensing the topic of her son's mumbling, shot him a glare.

"Chew with your mouth closed!" she said, with more force than necessary.

Too young to understand subtlety, Matías swallowed his food and continued.

"Papa, Abuelo is here! He's upstairs right now!"

For a moment, Matías's comment did not register on Mr. Ruiz's face. Then, slowly and deliberately, he responded.

"What do you mean, Matías?"

"He showed up-"

"That's enough. It's time to go to bed." Mrs. Ruiz quickly rose from her chair. Clearing Matías's plate from the table, she gestured for him to leave.

"But I don't want-"

"Go to your room and sleep." Issued as a command, Matías felt compelled to follow her directions. The table fell into a strained silence as he left, with both parents carefully waiting until he was gone.

Later, when the sky was dark, Matías awoke from his sleep. The angered voices of his parents seeped through his door. Arising from his bed and sneaking through the hallway, the small boy put his ear to his parent's wall and began to listen.

"-and I don't want him in our house!" Santino's deep voice echoed through the drywall.

"He's my father! I'm not going to turn him away!" Juliet responded, with uncharacteristic desperation.

"Do you realize who he is? I'm not having this on my conscious."

"He's my father, for God's sake! I know who he was, but that's not him anymore. I'm not letting him get taken away."

“Julie, I can’t let you do this. I’m not hiding a war criminal in our attic.”

“You haven’t seen him, Santino. He’s dying. He’s only here to say goodbye.”

“He doesn’t deserve that! He’s a coward!” Matías’s father flared up. “I should have done something about this a long time ago.”

The conversation briefly ceased as Mrs. Ruiz broke into tears. Santino, perhaps realizing the power of his comments, spoke softer.

“I’m sorry, Julie. I’m calling the police in the morning.”

Julieta began to speak rapidly, her hysterical tears muffling her speech. Matías snuck back into his room, understanding less than before. Nevertheless, the boy felt a creeping sense of fear in his stomach as he fell into an uneasy slumber.

Only a few hours later, while the sky was still dark and the sun was nowhere to be seen, Matías was shaken awake. Only moonlight shone on Mrs. Ruiz’s frantic expression as she implored her son to rise.

“Matí, we need to go.”

“Wh... What?” An extremely groggy Matías rubbed his eyes.

“You need to get up now.” The urgency in his mother’s voice stirred the young boy awake.

“Where are we going?”

Either Julieta didn’t hear him, or chose to ignore him, because the woman failed to respond. Passing him a small suitcase, she quickly instructed him to fill it with several days worth of clothes and toiletries.

“Mama, what’s happening?” Speaking louder now, Matías tried to get an answer out of his mother.

“You want to spend time with your grandpa, right?” The desperation in Mrs. Ruiz’s eyes caused Matías to realize there was only one

correct answer.

“Of course! But... but, it’s late...”

“You have to get up now, Matías.”

Still not understanding what his mother meant, Matías left his bed and stuffed his necessities into the bag. Mrs Ruiz stood at the doorway, silently waiting for him to finish. The two then crept silently through the hallway. Beyond the front door, the family’s minivan sat parked in the driveway. Abuelo was sitting in the passenger’s seat.

The first thing Matías noticed when he entered the car was that it was much colder than his room. The second thing he noticed was that his father was absent.

“Where’s Papa?”

Julieta grimaced slightly as she turned on the ignition.

“Matí, Papa is staying behind.”

“Why?”

“We’re...going away. For a few days. And we’ll see him when we get back.” Julieta chose her words very carefully, frustrating Matías to no end.

“Where? Where are we going? Why can’t he come?”

The boy received no further answers. The car lurched forward as Mrs. Ruiz pressed firmly on the accelerator. As the sun began to rise, its rays illuminated Julieta’s and Abuelo’s faces. In the backseat, Matías quietly observed his mother and her father. Both were silent. Gripping the wheel with full force, Matías saw an intensity on his Mrs. Ruiz’s face that he had never before viewed. Abuelo, on the other hand, looked much less sure of himself. The elderly man’s pale complexion had become even whiter, and he sunk into his seat with an expression of abject misery.

“Abuelo, what’s wrong?” Matías felt it necessary to ask.

The old man stuttered quietly.

“I’m. . . I’m sorry. I can’t do this. I can’t run anymore.” Looking weaker by the second, he glanced at his daughter. “Turn the car around. I’m turning myself in.”

Mrs. Ruiz did nothing of the sort. Tightly holding the wheel, she looked at her father.

“They will kill you if they find you.”

This statement, while shocking to Matías, did little to change Abuelo’s mind.

“I know. I should have turned myself in a long time ago.”

Julieta pulled to the side of the road. There, her composure broke down.

“You’re not a monster,” she spoke through her tears. “I know you. You’re not.”

“You need to go back. Please.” There was a hiccup in Abuelo’s voice.

Looking at the frail stranger talking to his mother in the front seat, Matías understood little. He did not know why his father hated Abuelo, or why Abuelo would die if they went back, or why Abuelo thought he deserved that. Nevertheless, in the pale morning sunlight, the young boy looked at his mother, and began to weep.

Julieta turned the car around, and headed back.

Fog Horn

by Keir Adamson

Second Place

In the immortal words of David Bowie, *“Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming.”*

And Harrison Deckard, a pathetic, paranoid little man, could have sworn that he heard something.

Operation Fog Horn had been prepared as a solution to a variety of worldwide calamities for which survival did not seem to be an option, and was prepared by the government of the United States of the Western Hemisphere. Building squadrons of gargantuan sea vessels may have seemed like a drastic precaution to take against a threat that hadn’t yet materialized, but in the year of 2363, the risk of a global catastrophe was high. The sea level crept higher, nuclear war always seemed a day away, and horrific sanitation conditions had left the world dangerously susceptible to a serious virus.

It was just a matter of time before Operation Fog Horn would be required. It was just a matter of time before the United States would be shuttled onto ships and whisked into the sea, sailing tantalizingly close to the land that they had once known so well.

News outlets had begun reporting that the spread of the virus to the USWH from Europe was a certainty just a week before the operation was put into action. Supposedly beginning with profuse coughing and vomiting, H1N4 would progress into a deadly pneumonia, transforming victims from living, breathing human beings into corpses with the speed and regularity of the five o’clock train.

And so, mammoth ships began to carry millions of Westerners into the oceans, each futuristic craft carrying tens of thousands

of people, crammed together in unbearable conditions. Even so, they had no right to complain – it was life in a cramped, cold, steel compartment, or no life at all.

It was November of 2362, and Operation Fog Horn had just been announced. Before the country left for the seas, Harrison Deckard had worked as a civil servant for the government of the USWH. His clerical work afforded him a very modest lifestyle, and while he was by no means in a healthy financial situation, he made enough to rent a small grey apartment in the slums.

Harrison sat in the tremendous and impeccable alabaster structure where he toiled. The pristine and achromatic building contrasted sharply with the glorified shacks that Harrison and his co-workers lived in side-by-side.

Harrison was not a brilliant man, but he did enjoy thinking of himself as one. While he was not particularly smart or athletic, or especially wise or kind, it was men like him, in his humble opinion that kept the world running. This attitude was not particularly encouraged by Harrison's working environment, as most of his coworkers tended to get on with their work and ignore his behavior. This didn't affect Harrison, however, as he needed no one but himself to affirm his importance.

Government employees tended to ear slightly more than average, and though these wages were nowhere near the amount needed to move out of the slums, they were occasionally able to buy an extra shirt or a decent meal. The main thing they bought Harrison, however, was a strong sense of superiority.

It was with this mindset that Harrison joined his co-workers for their fifteen minute midday-break. Taking a lunch tray that subsisted of a dubious stew and a hunk of dry, brown bread, the man sat at his usual table.

Alone, and shoveling copious amounts of stock into his mouth,

Harrison overheard the news channel that was playing from a screen overhead.

“..likely to spread to the eastern seaboard from Europe, and from there to the midland within several weeks, despite roadblocks and other travel precautions. In related news, the newly announced Operation Fog Horn has been put into full effect, as ships are making their ways into their strategic coastal positions around the continent, readying for their deployment in six days. Stay tuned to...”

And it was those words that planted a single seed of doubt in Harrison's brain. A seed so quickly nourished by paranoia and self importance, that in a matter of minutes, an infallible theory had come to fruition in the man's hyperactive brain. A theory so brilliant, that he dared not doubt it for a moment.

The entire continent had been fooled, except for one, single, superior soul.

Food shortages, water shortages, energy shortages. All problems that would be solved if the poor were just sent to sea. Hell, even the pollution would stop!

Eyeing the lunch room, as if worried someone was listening to his musings, Harrison continued thinking.

So I suppose they spread rumors about H1 N4 until the media picked up on it, or they just paid off the newscasters themselves. Doesn't really matter, as long as the 'disease' was picking up traction.

Twirling his spoon in the dregs of his meager meal, Harrison began formulating a plan.

That day was Harrison's last at work. The sooner he retreated into hiding, he reasoned, the better. Less chance for someone to realize that he had uncovered the government's vast and dangerous conspiracy. At his apartment would be the first place his employers searched for him, Harrison returned only once, to gather his scant belongings, which he then quickly sold. Subsiding on this money would be difficult, but since he only need to survive for less than a week, the

man felt confident that he would be able to endure.

Harrison felt no need to convince or warn his co-workers about the gargantuan slight that was soon to occur. They had never respected his intellect (or himself for that matter), and if the price to pay for their failures was spending the rest of their miserable lives on those godforsaken ships, then so be it.

It didn't take long for Harrison to realize that either the police, army, or government officials would be searching high and low for any suspected stragglers who hadn't registered for their compartments on the vessels. After all, the elites' plan to save the planet for themselves would only work if the poor were separated from the Earth. And, he surmised, there was no doubt that the government realized the security risk that Harrison posed to their nefarious plan, given his exceptional intellect. In fact, search parties were probably being deployed in the hundreds to find such an astute man as himself.

But to Harrison's surprise, nobody went looking for him.

Throughout the course of his week long preparation, the man carefully followed the news. But Harrison was not scared when he turned on the television, and discovered that the virus had wiped out most of New Africa. He was not frightened when he turned on the television, and saw reporters eluding the public into thinking that the fake disease had reached the United States of the Western Hemisphere. He was not panicked when they turned on the television, and there was nothing to see at all.

And so, on one inauspicious December morning, an entire country ended their lives on the ground, and began their lives on the sea.

An entire country, except for just one brilliant man.

And Harrison Deckard could have sworn he felt a cough coming on.

Begotten yet Broke

by Will Lewellen

Third Place

"And they, since they

Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs."

Storm clouds rumbled overhead as rain poured down upon the funeral procession and everything was as it was supposed to be. The black umbrellas were in great abundance and the family wore suitably grim expressions for the occasion, while still assuring themselves that their clothes were of a sufficiently new style so as to not be cause for embarrassment. The hearse even arrived late, giving everyone ample opportunity to expound on the qualities of the deceased and their close relationship with him.

Said deceased was one Richard Parker, a man of fabulous wealth, and blessed with an even more fabulous ability to hold onto that wealth. It was said among the townspeople that Mr. Parker had planned for his demise to occur on the 2nd Thursday of the month, simply to give him an excuse to avoid paying his servants the next day. Indeed Mrs. Fisher, the maid, in the greatest confidentiality, had assured everyone that Old Mr. Parker had purposely choked on his own oatmeal giving him the delightful opportunity to terminate the cook's contract with his last breath.

At any rate it was no secret that the ancient curmudgeon had left an enormous inheritance and the great gossip and topic of the funeral was which of his three children would receive it. Mrs. Violet Bloomingthal was the eldest and the self-described perfect daughter. In Mr. Parker's final days she had begun to grow very attentive to his needs hiring a cook (this was the one who preceded the one nearly posthumously fired) for his health and a magician for his amusement. Mr. Parker had promptly threatened to bake the cook into a pie and

stuff the magician into his own top hat. At this point the magician left, leaving behind a peculiar white rabbit which Mr. Parker had taken a particular affection too and which roamed the house doing as it pleased, shuffling cards and making itself disappear.

The second child was Lionel. However Mr. Parker had rather forgotten that Lionel existed, and the last time they had been in the same room had been the boy's ninth birthday party where Mr. Parker had raged and fired several of his servants for the extra expense of having a party for a "nasty little common boy."

Now the 3rd child was Alice Walker, a precocious young woman who had had the nerve to go off and marry a Catholic. Of course it was assumed after this development that Mr. Parker would have struck her from his will, and yet you could never tell with the eccentric old blighter.

The funeral continued to be a dismal affair as both the children and the pastor were called upon to give eulogies. Dismal mainly because this task was so difficult and many a soul had to be prodded quite violently to ensure they stood up for the prayer from the priest. However the speeches of the children promised to be the main entertainment of the evening and everyone sat in rapt attention as Violet told of her father's ever considerate and kind spirit as if asking his spirit to bless them from the afterlife with some kind of inheritance. Lionel- well no one really could remember what Lionel said, but it was praised as being heartwarming and to his credit. Alice, meanwhile, refused outright to speak at all and a tense situation was only resolved by Lionel promising to give two eulogies, and everyone applauded and cheered his second just as much as the first.

As the service was ending the rabbit formerly belonging to Mr. Parker managed to appear inside the reverend's top hat and created quite the stir. All those in attendance gave the excuse of wishing to help the family resolve any difficulties so that they could remain at the residence for the reading of the will. Mr. Wright, Mr. Parker's lawyer and his greatest friend called the children into their father's office for the reading of the will, which proceedeth as such:

To my children

If you are reading this, then I assume that I am dead. If not then remove yourself from my office at once! I can see you all now, barely waiting till I was entombed to open this will and see which of you this insufferable government would allow to steal my hard earned money. Very well, I won't beat around the bush. Here are my final wishes and I trust they will be carried out. First I wish my house to be turned into one of those deliciously inexpensive Mexican restaurants; you know the ones, where you gorge yourselves on an endless sea of chips and salsa before even ordering. Anyway I've already sold the property so I suggest you get out soon and allow Dominic to get started creating the best restaurant this side of Mexico. At least this allows me to banish the endless supply of cooks you pot of oysters manage to find. My fortune will be split evenly between the three of you and is now lying up in my room inside of that enormous wooden chest in the corner. It is in the form of bearer bonds, for simplicity's sake and though I know you are disappointed I assure you there is plenty to go around. Now let me remind you...

At this point the lawyer was completely cut off as the children rushed up the main stairs and into Mr. Parker's bedroom. They took the rusty old skeleton key from his bedside table and eagerly thrust it into the lock. Violet threw open the chest and they all fell back in astonishment as the saw what remained of Mr. Parker's fortune. Inside the chest was an old black hat. Lionel gingerly stuck his hand inside and removed the contents... an old King of hearts and a carrot.

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