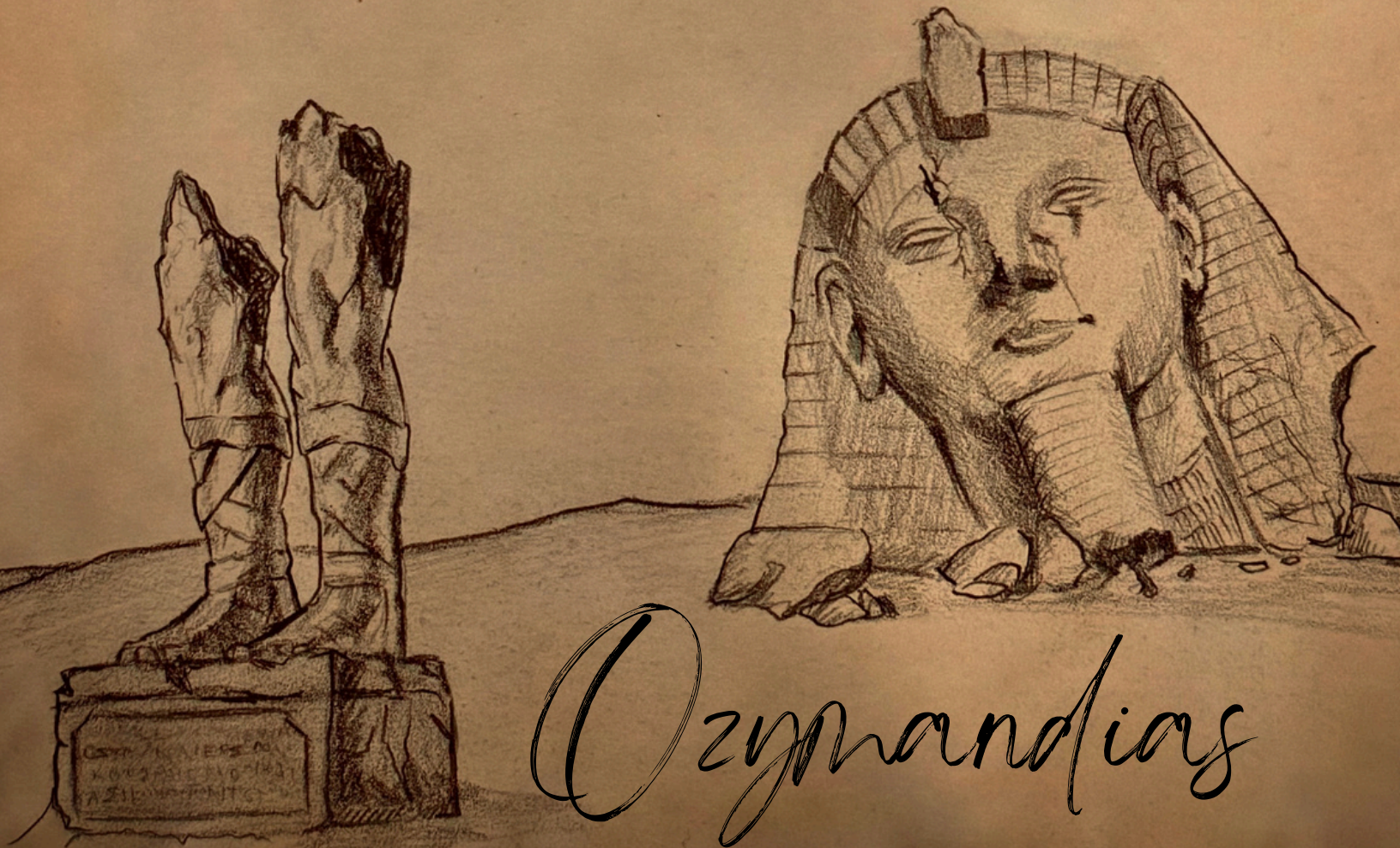


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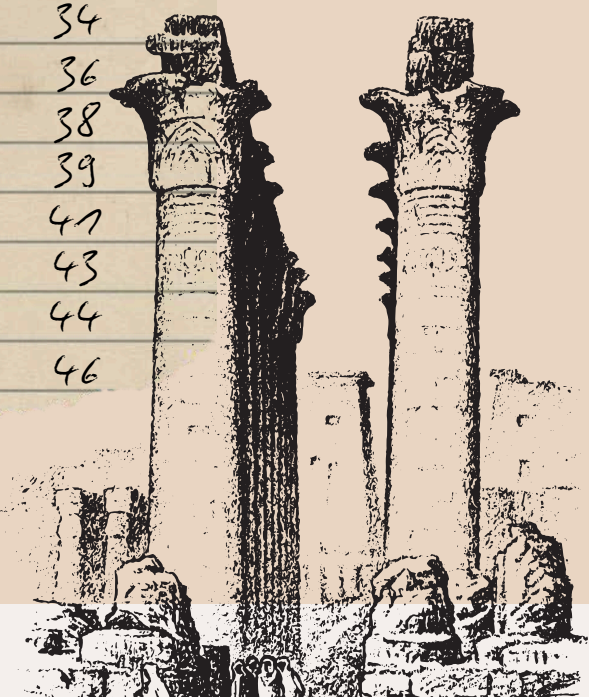
Volume 2 | Issue 1



Ozymandias

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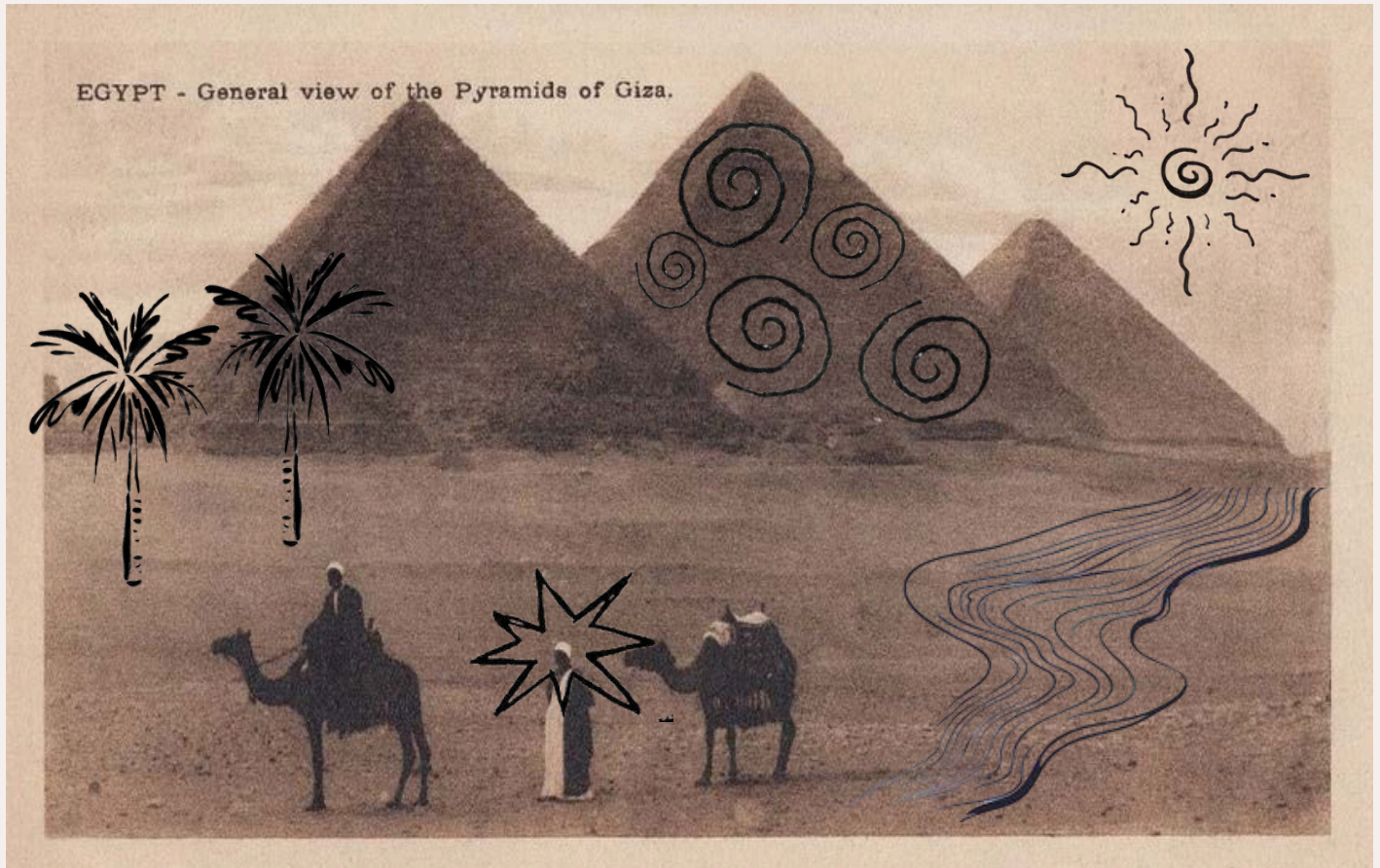
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EGYPT - General view of the Pyramids of Giza.



editorial note

IN AN AGE WHERE OUR ACTIONS ARE RECORDED AND SHARED MORE THAN EVER, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT TO WHICH OUR LEGACIES WILL BE ARCHIVED. THIS HAS BEEN A QUESTION ASKED BY AUTHORS FOR CENTURIES. CONTRARY TO MOST, ONE POET RESPONDS TO THE IDEA OF LEGACY WITH VEHEMENT REJECTION. FOR OUR FIRST ISSUE OF 2026, THE PAW PRINT HAS CHOSEN PERCY SHELLEY'S 1818 POEM "OZYMANDIAS" AS ITS THEME. THE SONNET, DESCRIBING A TRAVELER VISITING THE STATUE OF EGYPTIAN RULER RAMESES II, TOUCHES ON THEMES OF LEGACY, VANITY, AND THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF EVEN THE GREATEST OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENTS. INSPIRED BY THESE IDEAS, THIS ISSUE'S PIECES FOCUS ON ALL THINGS FLEETING: FROM STORIES OF LOVE AND LOSS TO TALES OF WARMONGERING KINGS AND NEGLECTED PIZZA PARLORS, OUR MAGAZINE HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE TO ENJOY.

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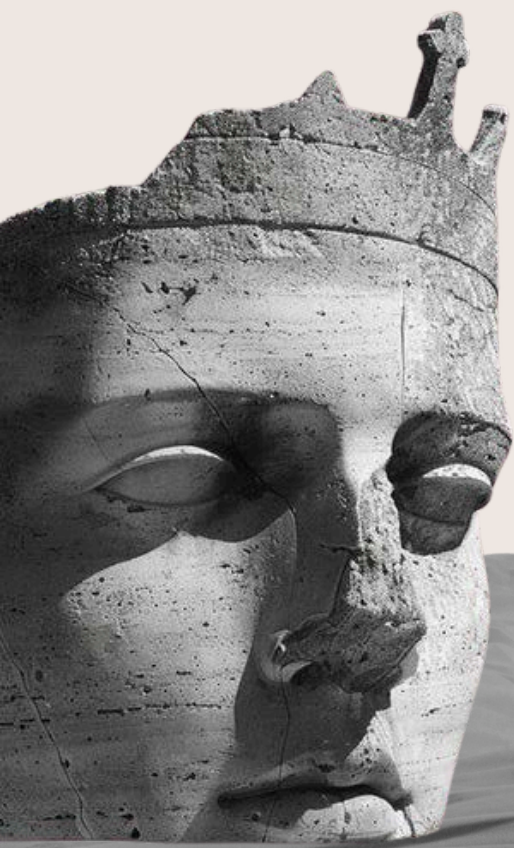
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August. Axel. Dylan. Eleanor. Sameer. & Stella

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless
things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that
fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.



Short Stories

FOOTPRINTS IN SAND — AXEL NGUYEN
THE FUTILITY OF AMBITION — ETHAN CORTEZ
THE PIE GUY — DYLAN HELLER
THE RINGING BELL — GRACIE SHILLACI
APRIL 15TH — SAMEER KHALIQ
THE PRESENT OUT OF HAND — SKYLIE ALTUGLE
NATURE'S EMBRACE — ETHAN CORTEZ
NOTHING BESIDE REMAINS. — STELLA ASHDOWN

Axel Nguyen

Footprints in Sand

Ennui. The word sits on his tongue like something polished and borrowed, something he hopes will finally name what has been pressing against his chest for months. It sounds refined, almost distant, but the feeling isn't. It's a stillness that doesn't rest.

His days move forward because days always do. He wakes, eats, and answers questions with careful syllables. He walks through familiar rooms as if he's following a script he never auditioned for. From the outside, nothing looks broken. From the inside, everything feels paused, like the world held up a hand and said, not yet.

At night, the house becomes a corridor of thought. Moonlight slips through the living room window and stretches across the hallway floor, a pale strip that makes the carpet glisten like water. He sits on the edge of his bed and listens. The quiet isn't empty, it's crowded with questions that won't settle into words, with pressure that refuses to confess what it wants. His mind circles the same ideas the way his thumb circles the frayed corner of his notebook cover: not to solve anything, just to keep from being still.

When he closes his eyes, he sees darkness. Most people fear it. He finds it almost merciful. Darkness doesn't demand that he become impressive. It doesn't ask him to prove he deserves tomorrow. It just covers him.

Still, even under that gentle blanket, the same unease returns: he wants to do something. Anything. And the wanting itself becomes heavy, because he can't decide what that something is.

In English class, the teacher reads "Ozymandias" aloud. The room smells faintly of dry-erase markers and old paper; the fluorescent lights buzz with a thin impatience. A traveler describes a ruined statue in a desert—legs without a body, a face half-buried, and an inscription boasting power. The king demanded permanence. Time answered by breaking his monument and letting sand finish the sentence.

When the teacher finishes, she looks up from the page. “So,” she says, tapping the poem with her finger, “what survives?”

A boy in the back mutters, “Not his ego.”

A few people laugh. Even the teacher’s mouth twitches.

The young man doesn’t laugh. He keeps his eyes on the desk, on the faint scratches left by generations of pencils. The poem lodges inside him anyway, like grit in a shoe. He tells himself it’s just a poem. He tells himself it’s just homework.

But the lines follow him beyond the bell.

He hears them in the pause before he opens his front door. He hears them when he walks past the older hallway near the auditorium, where a glass trophy case stands against the wall like a shrine no one visits anymore. It’s the kind of case people used to stop at in crowds—parents with cameras, students in team jackets, teachers beaming with pride. Now the hallway is mostly empty after school, and the case looks like an artifact from a long-gone era.

He slows down without meaning to.

Inside, trophies balance on their pedestals like they’re still waiting for applause. A row of metal cups catches the dim hallway light and throws it back in tired glints. Ribbons have faded to the color of old bruises. A banner droops at the back, its letters peeling as if exhausted from holding their shape. Dust collects in the corners of the shelves and in the grooves of engraved nameplates. Some of the names are still crisp. Some have worn down until the letters look softened, as if time has been rubbing them with a patient thumb.

He leans close to the glass. It smells faintly of cleaner and metal, and something older, like paper left too long in a closed drawer. His reflection swims over the trophies, his face layered over other people’s achievements.

He tries to imagine the hands that once lifted these awards, those palms sweaty with triumph, the way their trophy must have felt like a holy relic for a moment. He tries to picture the faces that believed this would matter forever. Maybe it did, then. Maybe it still does, somewhere in the memory of the one person who kept the newspaper tucked away in a box.

For a moment, he feels something like grief. Not only for the people who celebrated before being drawn back into ordinary life, but for the hunger underneath it: the desire to leave a mark that outlasts your own breath.

He has that hunger too, even if he pretends he doesn't.

It's there when adults ask what he wants to do "after high school," like the question is casual, like it isn't a countdown. It's there when he watches other people choose their paths with confidence—colleges, majors, internships, plans drawn in clean lines—while his own future looks like a blank page that refuses to accept ink.

He'd thought his problem was laziness. Then he named it fear. Then emptiness. But standing in front of the glass, he recognizes something quieter and more honest. He has been trying to choose a life that guarantees meaning.

He wants a purpose that won't crumble. A decision that won't embarrass him later. A direction that won't end in regret. He wants certainty the way Ozymandias wanted glory.

And the world, patiently, has refused.

That night he sits at his desk. His notebook lies open, clean in a way that feels accusing. The moon lays its pale strip across the floor again, and the room seems to hold its breath.

He thinks of stone in a desert. Of a face half-buried, still wearing a sneer. Of how something carved to be eternal can end up broken into anonymous pieces. Of how even the proudest monument becomes ordinary under the long pressure of time.

The thought should make him numb. Instead, it steadies him.

If even stone can't promise permanence, why has he demanded it from himself?

Why has he treated his next step like it must be the final one, as if the first choice has to contain the entire meaning of his life? Why has he been waiting to make a move until he can be sure it will last?

He looks again at the blank page. It's not a throne. It's not a test. It's not a pedestal that will elevate or shame him.

It's simply sand. Open, ordinary, forgiving.

So, he writes one sentence. Then another.

They aren't brilliant. They don't arrive like a miracle. But they exist, and that is enough. A thin flame touches the edge of his attention and holds. He realizes, slowly, that purpose is rarely something you discover fully formed, waiting like a signpost. More often, it's something you build by returning, by doing small, imperfect acts of care for what matters, even before you're certain it matters.

He keeps writing until the page isn't blank anymore.

The next day he walks differently. Not dramatically, no sudden revelation, no clean ending. His pace is still calm. His shoulders still carry the same backpack. But inside him, something has shifted the way a tide shifts: quietly, almost invisibly, yet undeniably.

He notices the sunlight on the sidewalk. He notices how people laugh without proving anything. He notices the trophy case again when he passes it, and this time the dust doesn't feel like an accusation. It feels like evidence. Time keeps moving, whether you're ready or not. It erodes what insists on being eternal, and in doing so, it makes room for what comes after.

That might be the real lesson. The desert doesn't argue with pride. Time doesn't negotiate with ambition. It simply continues.

And maybe that is enough. Not a purpose carved in stone, but the courage to live without demanding permanence from every step, to accept that some of what he builds will fade, and to still choose to build. To leave footprints in sand, knowing the wind will smooth them away, and to walk forward anyway.

Ethan Cortez

The Futility of Ambition

The king sat down on his throne, casting his staff aside as he plucked fruit from the hands of a servant. The king looked down the throne room, palm trees and his own personal river lining each side of the hall. Art and tapestries lined the far walls of the enormous place as eyes struggle to see its end. Common peasants could not begin to imagine the wealth and size of the king's lands, conquered and turned into a utopia for those permitted. Each of his servants held more luxury and wealth than any king beside him, for he was king to them all. Anywhere he turned his gaze, the desert turned from a wasteland to a haven. Any king from a distant land who dared to try to encroach on his land would despair at the might of his armies—for each soldier held enough might to take down ten of equal size. He held all the desert's potential and squeezed every ounce there was, multiplying it three-fold.

The king took in the sight of his glorious kingdom, visualizing the vast lands beyond the throne hall and saw that he was the greatest king of all. The tapestries which lined the room were from the most renowned artists, unrivaled in talent, even by those from the kingdoms who turned to machines. His eyes grew weary of the enormous view and the king fell into a slumber, resting against the head of the throne with complete trust in his men to do no harm to him, standing ever vigilant.

He dreamt of him and his men taking over the entire earthly plain, his banner raised high in mountain and jungle alike. He had all that one man could want yet he wanted more; he wanted everything to be under his rule, so recklessly ambitious he was. The others would buckle and yield against a might such as his. With unrelenting force his men would seize their enemies' walls no matter the cost. His realm basked in the light of the eternal sun, blessed by otherworldly powers. He rode the waves of those dreams with a vigor unrivaled, an ecstasy unknown to laborers. Alas, all dreams fade in the decaying mind of humans. The king's dream was no exception, giving rise to the light of day.

Bright, so bright the world seemed as he came back from his stupor, his dream of a kingdom unheard of. As his eyes adjusted, he saw that he could not see the palms in their normal place, nor could he see the tapestries or even the walls. He jolted up, fearing what could not be possible, hoping to find it all an illusion, the dream still presiding over him. But no, it was not so easy as that. There was nothing where there had been everything: desert sand blowing across the now-empty dune. All that remained was the throne upon which the king sat.

He was lost, his mind unable to make sense of what had happened. He looked down at himself, trying to hold onto what he knew, his once white toga now stained with blood. How could there be blood? How could his glorious kingdom have fallen in the span of a dream? It latched onto his mind then—he was dead. Dead, murdered by his own people, who had everything they could want under his rule. He did not think it to be possible, yet it was.

Seeing no other option, the king stood from his throne, finding the wound ailed him not. As he rose to his feet, the throne, the last semblance of the once mighty kingdom, crumbled unto the desert floor, washed away by the sand. He wandered away, his mind still riddled with fear and confusion, through the desert plains. Yet it was for naught, for the wind blew heaps of sand across the man's path, obstructing his view and pushing against him with a mighty force. It pummeled him for such a time that he grew weary, and his eyes blinded.

It seemed as if time had punished him, for he did not sleep nor feel hunger. He was cursed to walk the unseen ruins of his empire for what felt like eternity

Now the king stood before a man—the only other person that stepped foot in the desert. He told the stranger a wistful tale of all that remained of his great nation. When the story was concluded, the king could bear the suffering no more, and he collapsed into the embrace of the sand, and it consumed him in his entirety. No more remained of the unstoppable kingdom; time had withered it away to mere rubble. Time had spelled the fate of that empire, reducing it to sand after many long years. Time was a force that no man nor king could ever conquer. Dreams are left uncompleted; empires fall without a trace. So goes the way of time.

Dylan Heller

The Pie Guy

"I kinda thought it'd flash before your eyes, y'know? Or that I'd float up once, y'know, the deed was done; that I'd climb up—or down—a set of stairs or something. But it just sort of happened. I just sort of fell forward—and when I say 'I', I mean like ME, not my body or anything, like I was cut off from it. You'd know, wouldn't you? And when I slumped, I dropped the goddamned pizza too! Splattered it all over that poor lady's door while I fell face-first into a doormat that said, 'Welcome!' Isn't that ironic?"

"Sure..."

"And y'know, I feel bad for that woman and everything. She just wanted a pizza, and I got tomato sauce all over her door and made it look like a crime scene! I'd especially feel bad if she had kids. Man, I loved kids. Had two bambinos of my own. There's nothing they loved more than pizza, and THAT'S a service I could provide. Had a pizza store of my own, probably the only thing I ever bought and paid for, fair and square—down on 10th and—well, you wouldn't know where that is, would you?"

As I was saying, I LOVED making pizzas. There was nothing in the world I miss more than seeing those kids' smiles. As soon as I got the money, I bought drinks, ingredients to make desserts, and those little gumball dispensers, just so I could see more smiles. We were maximizing smiles, I'd say, not profits. If I had the choice to withhold employee payments for a new shipment of root beer, I'd gladly do it—and I often did!"

"Beer?"

"No, not that kind, you brute. I'm not giving alcohol to kids. Anyways, those were the happiest days of my life—and I lost it all. One day, the city came by for an inspection and found all sorts of food and safety violations. And y'know, after I started getting these heart issues—coronary artery disease, apparently—I couldn't stick around at the store to oversee that stuff. They told me I had to pay for all sorts of crap, or I'd lose my pizza place.

I had a reputation to uphold, y'know. They were callin' me 'The Pie Guy' all across town. I knew this was serious, so I took out a hefty loan to fix it all. Got new refrigerators, hired exterminators, got the walls repaired—y'know, all that boring stuff that doesn't make anyone smile."

"Refrigerator?"

"It keeps your food cold, would you quit interrupting me?"

As I was saying, fixing all of that stuff was incredibly expensive, and while I was paying for all of it, business tanked! Another wise guy put an article in the paper about how my restaurant was filled with mice and mold, and nobody came by anymore. After that, I couldn't pay off my loan, and the city snatched my business away. I was completely broke. At the same time, my wife filed for divorce, and she and the kids ditched me to go live at her mother's in Connecticut. Couldn't get any worse!"

"Right..."

"I had nothing. At the ripe age of 43, my restaurant closed down, and I had only pennies to my name. The pizza biz was all I knew! So, I took a job at the place across the street—who, by the way, had their grand opening the SAME DAY that article came out. If you ask me, there was definitely something fishy going on there, but I ain't a sore loser. Yep, I got a job as a pizza delivery 'boy.' I was the oldest one on that delivery crew by twenty years, but that didn't matter to me. Going door-to-door and handing pizzas over to hungry customers was almost as rewarding as running the shop.

Serving pizzas was my calling, even if it meant being a delivery boy. Most of the customers weren't as happy—not like they were at my restaurant—but it was still worth it, y'know?"

Those heart issues never went away either, supposedly from eating too much pizza. To be honest with you, though, it was pretty much all I ate: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I guess that caught up with me soon enough. A few weeks before all this, I sort of seized up. They strapped me to an ambulance, asked me a million questions, before putting me in even more debt with hospital fees.

Then the doctor had the nerve to tell me I had to go on a diet! Sorry, but there's no way I'd sacrifice pizza just to live a little longer. I dedicated my whole life to pizza; when my chest started to tighten on that poor lady's doormat, I was just thankful I had a pie in my hands.

And y'know, they always say 'gone too soon' when someone younger than eighty dies. If you ask me? I was getting too old for pizza delivery anyways.

So how about you? How'd you die?"

"I took an arrow to the neck in battle. They promised me I would fight for eternity with all of Odin's valiant warriors, and drink from an ever-flowing river of mead... But I still do not understand: what is 'pizza'?"

Gracie Shillaci

The Ringing Bell

The clouds rest above as my hair sinks to the floor. Falling in an intercity of patterns, displaying my resentfulness, loneliness, and regret. My eyes flash open as cold flakes of snow slowly fell on my warm, untouched skin. It felt as if my face began to be covered in them, getting colder by the second. I stared down at my body, maroon drips hitting the snowy concrete beneath me. Freezing air slowly conditions my heart to ice. The legacy I never left behind was nothing but an aspect of my frozen body. No one was there to go looking for me. They all had embedded their own sorrows along with a legacy, known only to them. Forgetfulness, all have been forgotten under the same bloody soil I had. The massacre in which steals one is legacy, in return of death. No one takes accountability for the death in which we will all face. Maybe it's the urge for power, yet it is still untouched, meeting everything and everyone at their fate. Creatures, unknown to societal norms, live freely, touched by the spirit of fate, able to see and hear what ends all life. Eventually, they will also find themselves meeting their legacy in ways none of us ever could. Slowly, I began to absorb the body I once controlled through lost memories, staring down at her. Interrupting my grief, a small bell rings in the distance. Lucky tribute to intelligent minds but an unlucky one to the selfish. A black cat rings a bell as she struts through the snow. The cat stared at my body, sensing its lifelessness, then up at me. Dull green eyes met mine as now I knew something conscious souls didn't. She observed my presence, my new form unseen by anyone before. In this moment I am unaware of what can truly see my presence and what cannot. I am not a ghost but rather an unseen spirit, lingering through the air of what was left behind, somehow visualized her. A cycle of rehabilitation within my efforts to receive a non-portrayed legacy. The ability to view what is not there, something humans struggle for their whole lives yet never achieve.

The snow fluttered down onto my dark black nose; I wandered, awaiting a spot to lay while the bell around my neck rang. I stare at the icy path, concrete below. My dark paws hover over the snow as I hesitate to step any further, but intuitively, I do. Gracefully, my tail swishes back and forth. Suddenly, I noticed something, my eyes dilate into a snake-like sculpture. My green eyes and black fur contrast the snow. The green stays hidden underneath the ice, waiting for warmth to bring it back to life. Although my greenery stays relevant, alive and ready, the legacy my eyes hold is not like any other. The representation of health, rebirth, and life. I slowly bow my head

towards the snow to show peace towards the creature up ahead. I pounce, only to not find a creature at all, but rather the aftermath of one. The dark maroon serum highlighted the snow. Long hair in a sequence of patterns and designs, an art style most frequently portrayed by humans. I look for the soul of the creature, but it has long been gone. My nose freezes as it meets the skin of the body. I glance up at the flakes, and see the essence of the deceased soul, flickering throughout the shimmering coldness. A presentation of the soul, once praised by lifeless outsiders, is now dead on the snow-covered land.

Sameer Khaliq

April 15th

I tried; I promise I tried. I dreamed of growing old, but I just couldn't hold on any longer. After losing Dad and Noah last year, I wanted to prove them wrong; I wanted to live a long, happy life. It was all too much. Mom broke down, and I had to take care of Oliva and Liam all by myself, all while I was in school. I didn't tell any of my teachers. I didn't want them to worry, but I think one of them noticed.

I never had time to make my own lunch after making my siblings', so she started bringing me lunch every day. She gave me extensions on assignments when I couldn't get them in on time. I think she's one of the few reasons I lasted that long. Well, that and I didn't want anything to happen to Oliva and Liam.

When Mom started getting better, she started packing us lunches again and driving us to school so we didn't have to walk. I had hoped that we could be a family again, but it would never be the same; something was missing. We ate dinners in silence, we never watched movies together or played board games, and the house was completely quiet, eerily so. I remember always getting mad at Dad and Noah for being too loud, but since they'd been gone, I found myself longing for the noise. I wanted someone to yell from down the hall, to come banging on my door at 7 A.M. for school, but deep down I knew that it was never going to happen.

April 15th. I circled it in red on my wall calendar; that would be my last day. I kept going to school, and made sure everyone got their homework done on time every night. I wanted to know that even if I wasn't here anymore, their lives would keep going. Even so, my favorite part of the day was looking at the calendar, reminding myself I wouldn't have to keep up the act much longer.

I would trade anything for another day to spend with Oliva and Liam, to get to pack their lunchboxes one last time.

I wish I didn't have to see Oliva cry herself to sleep every night, or watch Liam refuse to eat. Most of all, I wish I didn't know that Mom still packs three lunches every day out of habit, or that she still waits for me in the car until Liam reminds her, only to cry softly while driving them to school.

I tried; I really did. I just wish I tried a little bit longer.

Skylie Altugle

The Present Out of Hand

“The past is now part of my future. The present is well out of hand.”

By the time my name began to travel without me, it no longer felt like something I owned. It moved ahead of the body, attached to a voice people thought they understood, to a stage presence they mistook for certainty. Ian Curtis became less a person and more a symbol, something fixed in black and white. My name fused to Joy Division until it sounded indivisible, as if the band could explain the man, as if the songs were a confession instead of fragments.

There was a rhythm to it. Days repeating themselves. Movements learned by habit. I got good at holding things together long enough for other people not to notice when they were coming apart. Control became something I practiced, not something I had. Only now, with nothing left to add or correct, do I see what stayed behind.

I didn't know I was building something that would last this way for so long.

I thought what I made would disappear after it was felt. That it would burn off. A sound in a room. A line said once. I thought time would do its job and take it away. I never thought it would stick.

Now people hold it up like proof. Proof that this was inevitable. Proof that I meant to become what they remember. Proof that the story was complete.

Words, sounds, moments. I thought they would pass through people and then let me go. I didn't expect them to solidify. I didn't expect people to stand around them and explain who I was like I couldn't speak for myself anymore.

They talk about me like I'm finished. Like I'm a story with an ending they already know. They pick one version and repeat it until it becomes the only one. They keep what fits the myth and erase what complicates it.

They remember only one version of me. One moment. One feeling.

People say my name with confidence, like they know exactly who I was. They repeat what I said when I was struggling. They call it beautiful. They call it meaningful. They don't hear the fear or the frustration behind it. They don't see that I never meant for those words to last forever.

That's what legacy is. A decision made by strangers.

They take the worst parts and call them honest. They take the damage and call it art. They take what was falling apart and frame it. They hang it up and say it mattered. They say it helped them. They don't see what it took.

I don't blame them for looking.

I blame them for staring.

A monument can't move.

A monument can't change its mind.

A monument can't ask to be left alone.

I could. Sometimes. Not often enough.

I was never steady. I was never simple. I was never the thing they turned me into. But that doesn't matter now. The statue is what survives, not the person. So, I walk through what's left of my name.

And it feels wrong, like walking into your childhood house after it's been remodeled by someone who only had photographs. The wallpaper is close but not right. The hallway is narrower. The light falls in the wrong place. People point at the cracks like they understand them.

They don't.

They don't know how small it was at first. How quiet it was. How normal. One thought you cannot shake. One day you can't finish. One night that won't end. Then it adds up. It becomes a shape. It becomes you.

And the world likes shapes. The world likes a clean outline it can recognize. So, it takes you, smooths you down, and sets you in stone.

They say I meant it.

They say I chose it.

They say I knew.

But no. I didn't know how long it would follow me. I didn't know the words would outlive the body. I didn't know people would treat the ruin like a shrine.

The strange part is watching the past become the only version people allow you to have. The past is a cage, but they decorate it and call it history.

“The past is now part of my future.”

And the present, the present doesn't behave. The present doesn't stay still long enough to be understood.

“The present is well out of hand.”

From far away, everything looks deliberate; collapse even passes for style. From far away, you can still pretend it's controlled.

Up close, it wasn't controlled. It was not noble. It was not romantic.

It was just weight.

I regret the way they froze me. I regret the way one moment swallowed the rest: the ordinary days, the softer voice, the parts that weren't made to be performed.

And I regret becoming untouchable. People don't reach monuments. They circle them. They take pictures. They talk. They leave. The monument stays alone.

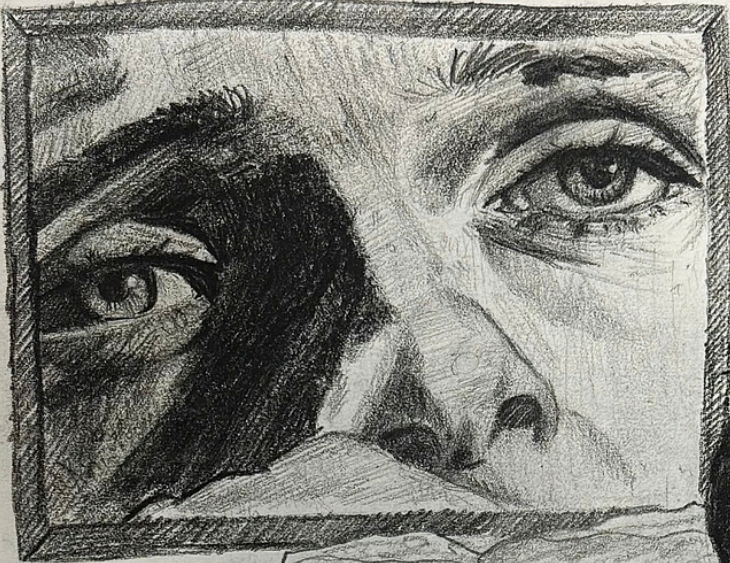
If anything I made is still alive, let it live in someone else with its rough edges intact. Don't sand it down. Don't smooth it into something clean or comfortable. Don't turn the sharp parts into something beautiful just so it's easier to look at. It was never meant to be polished. It was meant to be felt. Let it stay uneven, let it change in their hands, let it be misheard, let it wear down.

Because stone doesn't feel anything.

And I was trying to feel something.

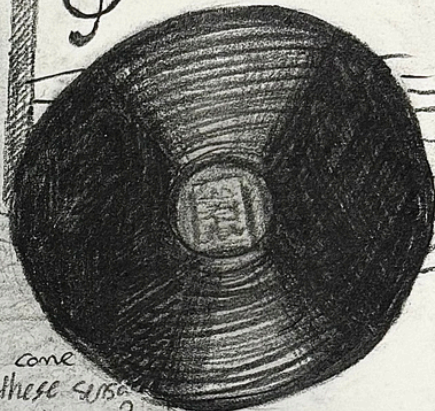
Even at the end.

SUBS-T-LOVE-M



"The past is now part of my future. The present is well out of hand."

- Ian Curtis



• CLOSER •

DISORDER

I've been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand. Could these senses make me feel the pleasures of a normal man? Less sensations, spare the insults, leave them for another day. I've got the spirit, lose the feelings take the shock away.

It's getting faster, moving faster now. It's getting out of hand on the tenth floor, down the stairs.



LOVE WILL TEAR US APART AGAIN



Original Artwork by Skylie Altugle

Ethan Cortez

Nature's Embrace

The branches engulfed the fleeing soldier, trapping him in the trunk's hidden hollows. Hollows that hid unknown horrors where none lived to tell the tale. The yells and cracks of gun fire filled the air; the birds had long since fled. Dusk fell upon the forest which rebelled against its invaders; the sky filled with the same fire orange as the burning trees. Trees fell and crushed the men with guns, blocking the escape of those fleeing nature's wrath. Vines snaked towards the men now trapped from the fallen might of the tree. They enveloped them, dragging them back to the trees. To be caught in the might of the vines meant to never be seen again.

So it was across the globe, the planet of men had become a hunting ground, no longer was man the dominant force. Nature decided to retaliate. Humans had done too much, become too ambitious and so they must be exterminated, just as they had exterminated untold amounts of the environment. They thought that they could shackle the environment, that they could turn it into their slaves, but Mother Nature tolerated for far too long. Previously thought to have no mind, it ravaged mankind, for who would expect the very world they settled on to rise and show its rage?

Man was not prepared, although they might have had the firepower to rid the world of Mother Nature, they could not withstand its pure force. Their economy crumbled, and their civilians were made homeless and massacred. The skyscrapers crumbled under the weight of nature's embrace, and factories were destroyed and overrun. The military had only its current resources; they could not make more weapons, and soon their stores ran dry. All humanity could do was wait for nature to take its course, wait for its rampage of revenge to end.

Yet it did not end. The next extinction event had occurred; humans were to be no more, besides the one who fled. They would hide in the bunkers for decades to come. Humans were foolish to think that they would prevail. They are a mere second in the grand plans of the universe. However, a second is enough time to make an imprint on the universe, and once mighty Earth had become ruined in that second. Atomic hellfire had ravaged that planet. Extraterrestrials, guided by a survivor, would look upon that planet in the centuries and millennia to come. They would see the ruins of a mighty empire for such a primitive species. No more remained, only a ghastly remanent, overtaken and laid to waste. Who knows if they would uncover the truth of the scorched planet, to decipher what happened, would know what fell upon the men who thought their kind were immortal.

Humankind had left its mark, had achieved what it sought to do in the end, for the ruin would last for all of time. Humans had resorted to the worst of their weapons, the most dreadful bombs, and poisons they could muster. In doing so, they destroyed themselves, but Mother Nature persisted; it was the true master of that world. Time had infinite patience and allied with Mother Nature. So, they outlasted humans and allowed the world to slowly grow over the nuclear fallout.

The people who hid in the bunkers fared no better than those on the surface; they were scared that their power could be so easily erased. That fear led them to fight one another, and so they dragged each other down, towards the ever-approaching end. Even after their ambition had failed them, they continued searching for dominion. Still, they thought they were immortal. Even with the outside world decimated the humans still clashed with each other. They would rather end humanity than let go of their ambition.

Their bunkers were as deserted as the outside world; no more did they remain; the last of the humans on Earth were now gone. There was an artistic beauty that stayed, the hollowed-out towers of man, entangled with greenery, allowed the visions of architects to endure. Even after death the beauty of Earth stayed, intertwined with Mother Nature. The art of humanity was still there to be visible to all; not all the destruction and devastation were in vain. That was what the extraterrestrials cared about most when they arrived on Earth. They saw a race capable of such terrible power and of beautiful art. Artistry remained where weapons and ambition did not. Power was not what was left, it was the beauty of humanity, for all of man's might have led them to their own ruin.

However, there was one human that had left Earth in the battle against Mother Nature; it was he who led the extraterrestrials to Earth. It was he who showed them that antique land, and swayed them away from such foolish ambition, to teach them to appreciate their environment even more. He showed them the desolate plains, so little was left of that once prosperous world. Now, only Mother Nature is still on Earth, ever-commanding, for it had shown mercy on the last human, the one who fled. It was Mother Nature that guided him to the extraterrestrials, to spread the story of failed ambition, of how time and nature ruled supreme. The traveler knew not of the mercy he was shown, nor did anyone in the universe. Mother Nature's methods remained a mystery. Now, merely a residue remains, reminding travelers that ambition is futile against the tides of time and Mother Nature.

Stella Ashdown

Nothing Beside Remains.

Old things make you think of her.

There's an antique dresser on the curb of 32nd, and though you passed it going five-over, your mind's lost none of its character as you lie in bed that night.

You're imagining its pattern: the trim that rolled in great florid tides down the legs of the armoire, rolling now, too, across your ceiling as your eyes cut through the dark. Each wave is shelled like the ones off Kanagawa, crashing and expanding into one another. Lacey frills foam, briefly alive, at the edge of collision. With every strike of waves they grow, stretching out to one another. They're reaching out, and it's a motion that's all too familiar. Your fingers spread involuntarily—an aching grip that wrinkles your sheets; still, as quickly as they come, the frills disappear. Leaving ripples of memory that chill your empty fingers.

Lying cold, the room seems starker—blackier. The dark is thick and hard to breathe, unyieldingly rich like the dresser's deep stain. This night reminds you how the sun hit the timber. How its rays had disappeared as the wood soaked them in. You've seen how skin can eat the sun thus too, and the afterimages of a different life burn across your mind—a dark-skinned sun and shining limbs. A week you can taste and it's sweet, and it's empty. How perfectly was that covered by the faces of these drawers. How perfectly does its hickory finish hide the splintered wood. How perfectly and easily the past is devoured.

The cabinet faces were of intricate design, with a carved swirling border that teased their diamond handles. Handles that shone like eyes—met across a room. Like the glimmer in a wink that you couldn't afford. The ghost of a touch traces down your back as your eyes trace the frame of the cabinets. Your mind dips and spins and swells as it swims the flow of the trim. It is an endless swirling intricacy, and you could stay here comfortably forever.

But you've gone too far out, and the ocean is dark and disquiet beneath you. Remember the point of fine trim and pretty faces: to distract you from the hunger that's been festering inside. To distract you from how the drawers are begging to be opened. There's a void calling out to you, from behind the cabinet's shell. You'd forgotten, only for an instant, how badly you've wanted to meet it. You'd forgotten how you can't stand the view from outside. You'd forgotten that you starved—that she never let you in. Put your hand to the handle and pull.

For a moment you'd forgotten exactly why we fell apart.

ESSAYS



“Wanderer Above the Sea of
Fog” by David Friedrich
Jackson Lindsey

A Screen Between Us
Ally De Jesuz

What Will Our Generation
Be Remembered For?
Riley Sweeney

“Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog” by David Friedrich



This is life. A life of a man knowing no greater purpose than to pursue the unknown in the hopes of accomplishing his dreams. We can't see the face of the man standing upon the rock, no identity or emotion is portrayed to the viewer, yet somehow, we can sense his curiosity and appreciation for what lies ahead. We see and know nothing more than that of the man. He sees the fog, therefore we see the fog. He sees the mountains; we see the mountains. What stands before us is unknown to us, as well as the man. The man may seem minimal compared to his environment, but he stands strong. He longs for adventure, for the pursuit of today, not the destination of tomorrow.

He is “The Übermensch.” He represents an individual who transcends traditional morality to create their own values, embodying strength, creativity, and independence. The Übermensch is characterized as a fiercely independent archetype who is brave, resilient, and self-defining, one who is willing to pursue their own vision beyond societal norms. A person who has evolved into a transcendent form of humanity by overcoming human flaws and societal influences. That is what we all must be. However, in order to have people that do, you must have people that do not. There is no good without bad. How is one supposed to know the soothing sonnet that peace sings and harmonizes, if he has not yet known the wretched screams of torment and regret? You cannot achieve the success of the highest mountain top without trekking alongside the rocks in the cold crevice of a valley that lay below. You must act with passion and joy throughout your day. Act as if it is your first time seeing the world anew.

If I were to choose a painting, it would be this one. It is beyond inspiring. It is filled with different interpretations. To be the man who left his cabin on the lake, to venture off into the unknown. I find it quite poetic. There are times I've sat and thought of doing such a thing. I love the thought of leaving everything, leaving my cabin on the lake, hiking the mountains for the greater good. I believe that chasing dreams is the best thing that anyone could do.

The pursuit is what gives us meaning. To chase is to live. With constant evolution in our desires, the path is never ending. Sometimes people see this and simply yield to their own doubts. They see the never-ending path leading towards the horizon and think, 'that's going to take too long,' but I have a question for you my friend. What else is there to do? When you take the time to ignore your desires and convince yourself otherwise, you could have achieved just a little bit more towards your dreams. There truly is nothing stopping you from getting what it is that you want—nothing at all—except your own mind. When you realize that you truly are in control of your choices and emotions, you begin to move about life with a skip of joy within. All you have to do is try. All you have to do is move.

You could be among the smartest in the world and still refuse to move, and others that you believe to be littler than you will excel you. Your perception is your reality. Control your perception, and you shall control your reality. You must believe that you already have what it is you desire; you must act, walk, and talk like the person you want to become. Allow yourself to be free within, no conflict exists within or without oneself, you control how you react and feel as a human being. In fact, you can choose to be happy every single day: to be kind, to be caring. You don't need to contribute your entire life to being kind and serving others, but doing so every so often will make you realize that everything you are working towards is worth it. It's not about being remembered, it's about becoming aligned with your inner self. Not the selfish and the greedy, no, the you who inspires others. The you who gives, the you who marches forward, the you who cares, the you with no regrets, the you with all the progress, the you that gave it your all. To live is to suffer, to grow is to become.

Dream so big that people think you're crazy. Do so much, people think you to be mad. Become something in pursuit of your dream. I believe that I shall accomplish all there is desired on my own. I believe that everyone is capable of doing so. I want to become more, I want to excel myself, and in doing so I hope to inspire others. I want to show you what is possible. I want to know what is possible. I want to see more than what I was designed for. I want to be the person that people look at in awe, not for glory and praise of my own self accomplishment, but rather to show others that it is very much possible for anyone to do what it is that they seek. What an opportunity it is

that we must live and explore. We must evolve to a higher state of mind as a group. To drive oneself mad with all the thoughts of joy and agony. What a gift it is to attempt the impossible. What a truly amazing gift it is to try, to suffer, to grow, to become, to live and to die. We create our own meanings. Through passion I gain pursuit, through pursuit I gain life, through life I gain suffering, through suffering I gain meaning.

Dream big, seize it, evolve, and become.

Ally De Jesuz

A Screen Between Us

A few months ago, I was constantly on my phone, letting hours and moments with my family pass, unaware that time was silently slipping away. I was physically close to my family, but emotionally distant, blocking my ears from the noise. Whether breakfast, lunch, or dinner, I would scroll on my phone, believing I was spending meaningful time with them. I'd convinced myself that my presence was just enough, not realizing or even considering how they felt when I was on my phone. I found it difficult to be away from my screen; it always found a way to draw my attention away from my surroundings. Later, I'd learn that phones trigger dopamine release in the brain, creating a cycle of constant checking to see if you might've missed a message. This insight made me realize just how easily time can be wasted without us even noticing, until all that remains are memories of moments we never truly lived.

A few days later, something changed in me. I began using my phone a lot less, especially when I was with my family. For the first time, I started noticing the small things I had ignored before. Special things. I noticed how my sister opens the window with closed eyes and a relaxed smile, letting the breeze blow through her gorgeous white hair while my dad drives. She looks so free, tranquil, and calm despite everything that's happened in our lives. Or when my dad and mom put a smile on their faces when they greet us despite having a rough day at work; these things matter. I realized that there are people in the world who have no family, no loved ones, and no one to share special moments with. They would give anything to have what I was so carelessly overlooking. That thought opened my eyes and made me confront how fragile time truly is. Time with family is limited, and once it is gone, you cannot go back. I felt so disappointed that I wasted my time on something useless, just like the ruined statue in Ozymandias. Moments lose their meaning when time has already destroyed them, leaving behind only absence and regret.

The thought of losing my family while knowing I wasted so much time on my phone fills me with fear and resentment. If that were to happen to me, I would live with lifelong regret, knowing I chose distraction over presence when I could have chosen differently. Time does not pause for comfort or convenience, and it does not forgive neglect. I now choose to be fully present in the moments that matter, especially with my dear ones. When my family and I go out to dinner, my phone stays in my pocket, and I make a conscious effort to listen, speak, and engage with them. Because that is all they want, what your family wants. I even started encouraging my sister to do the same, reminding her that these moments may seem ordinary now, but one day they will be irreplaceable. Even if conversations become awkward or silence fills the room, I would rather sit in that discomfort than hide behind a screen, sometimes even enjoying the silence between us. As teenagers, we often use our phones to escape awkwardness or avoid meaningful interaction, but avoiding discomfort also means avoiding connection. Time moves forward relentlessly, and there is no way to stop it; it leaves no room for second chances. By choosing presence over distraction, I ensure that when time moves on, it leaves behind nostalgia instead of regret.

I encourage every one of you reading this to engage with the people around you instead of hiding behind the screen when you feel the awkwardness creeping up your neck. You never know if this will be the last moment you share with that person. Don't let a glowing screen become the main reason for your wasted hours. Put the phone away; the silence of a shared room is far more precious than the noise of a screen between us.

Riley Sweeney

What Will Our Generation Be Remembered For?

A lot of people think Generation Z is unlike so many others before us. New social media has affected our mental health and thoughts. But is modern technology necessarily a bad thing?

First, the obvious difference about our generation is our mass access to social media and mobile phones. It does have a lot of negative effects; that has been mostly proven. It can have a severe negative impact on mental health, and we should not ignore that issue, but it has positive impacts as well. Social media makes communicating with friends a lot easier and it can help you discover new hobbies and foster creativity from an early age. Inspiring content is quite common on social media. The negative effects of social media are discussed far more often than the positive aspects.

On the other hand, the negatives do tend to outweigh the positives. Quick paced videos on social media makes our attention spans shorter. This is encouraged by short form video apps like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. If videos don't catch our attention in a few seconds, we tend to scroll past them quickly. This affects us in school the most. Personally, I am a victim of the short attention span mindset. I find it difficult to focus on things I'm not interested in for extended periods of time, and I am always fidgeting or moving.

I think we will be remembered for growing up mostly online. Along with millennials, we advocate for social issues and mental health, and it's more normalized to talk about your issues rather than suffering in silence. We will also be remembered for having louder opinions. In older generations, the common belief was that "children were seen and not heard," but we tend to speak our opinions openly instead of remaining silent.

Overall, legacy is a tough subject to talk about because you'll never really know what people will think of you. Your biggest achievements could be forgotten while something you did offhandedly could end up being all people know about. Social media shows this perfectly. People can spend years building a brand and they end up getting popular from a random video or post. Generation Z is no different from other generations in that we are imperfect, learning, and constantly evolving. Technology has shaped us, but it does not define us. What truly matters is how we use our voices, treat others, and balance the digital world with real life. In the end, our everyday choices will determine what we are remembered for.



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**At the Same Time
August Leinart**

**Escolere
Jackson Lindsey**

**The Mind of Theseus
Eleanor Carver-Ball**

**Sueta
Dylan Heller**

**Washington
Zavien Roberson**

**Growing Older,
Growing Fainter
Riley Sweeney**

August Leínart

At the Same Time

Time is nature's greatest creation:
A motivator to grow,
the foundation of every plan ever made,
a lie so bold that we forced the universe to conform
to it.

If we were to copy the universe down to the last
particle
and paste it to another dimension—one that had not
existed before,
everything would remain unchanged;
the world would continue from a past that never
happened.

We can't chart our course through time—
we can only float through it at a constant speed like
debris through space.
If something can't be seen, heard, touched, smelled,
or tasted,
and if it can't be stopped or moved,

Does it exist?

The earth couldn't care less that it takes 365 days to
revolve around the sun,
yet it still follows the schedule humanity drafted for
it with no mistakes.
There is no such thing as the past or the future,
only an everlasting now.

Time can't exist without life to witness it;
a rock doesn't keep track of yesterday or tomorrow.
The second that life began to perceive time,
time became the foundation of our universe.

Time is life's imaginary king that rules with a
corporeal iron grip.
Time is a tool that we use as it uses us.
Time is life's most beloved, despised, essential,
worthless companion.
And at the same time, it isn't.

Jackson Lindsey

Escolere

The end is nigh!
Everyone shall plead and cry.
Blinded by the smudge upon their eyes
Consuming comfort as a sick wretched lie

To all who believe that time flies
Your soul a foul hue of a dye.
Have you ever begun to stand, or to try?
All you attempt is to pass time and get by.

Look forth not ahead of you.
To do so shall set your dreams askew.
Focus only on today, with its new morning dew.
And your mind shall be reborn and brought anew.

To believe is to know.
Question your will, how far ye shall go.
Whether through sand, sludge or snow
No matter the obstacles, no matter the blow
Whether it be family, friend or foe

The ones with the passion of a raging fire
Shall accomplish all dreams and desires
They will march forward and aspire.
They listen and accept that life is in fact dire.

All praise thee my glorious sire!
A true pioneer! Shall sing the choir
Our time here is not dire.
Learn to accept and you will transpire.

Believe yourself to live forever.
Act upon your will as if tis your last.
Achieve all there is to achieve, and endeavor
Love thy suffering and suffering shall love thee; tis
rather clever.
The glory of lords and kings, be the successor.

I beg of thou.
Kindle ye passion, a raging fire.
And you, my friend
Shall inspire.

Eleanor Carver-Ball

The Mind of Theseus

Wool trickles through winding hallways like a lean
river—

Snagging on corners and tailing behind every
footstep.

Nestled in a coat pocket, it dwindles.

From a brain, to a fist, to a wisp of smoke

Its tail flutters to the floor when it's spent—

Silent as a fading candle flame.

Only when another set of footsteps approaches
from behind does the dark fall.

The trail of yarn withers in the grip of another.

A creature of flesh and fur and fangs—

Of blood and sweat and smoke

A mirror staring back with your eyes.

The path is severed, a heap of collective
sluggishness.

Nothing left but the hallway where they stood—

Crumbling stone walls and soil murky as the Lethe.

Youth and growth naught but a long-lost lullaby—

Face to face.

Truth fading into suggestion.

The maze crumbles.

Dylan Heller

Sueta

Sueta admires herself in the mirror,
It rests on her wardrobe, held by the wooden trident
of bright red lacquer, the Devil's shade,
brighter than the billowing flags in the square.

Her scarlet dress, a gift
from the far-reaches of Japan,
drapes her in silk worth more than a year's wages
of every man in the mob crowding below.

Sueta does not know the mob's fathers fell
fighting the country that wove her dress:
their Russian blood soaked the snows of Mukden,
charging into machine guns at the Tsar's command.

She does not know her rose-scented perfume seeps
through the mahogany boards, into the noses of her servants.
It makes them dream of a life like hers,
only to wake to the crack of the whip.

She does not know the life of a single man in the mob;
To kill, she thinks, the well-dressed and pleasant-smelling
mindlessly! Barbarians, driven only by rage—
What had she done to offend them?

Sueta steps outside, cracking a smile,
with embracing arms to receive those
who know not what they do. Yet her arms
are tugged on by the crowd as they drag her.

Her cries are drowned out in the square,
and her scarlet dress ripped to shreds,
petals that line the bridal path to her marriage
with the one who held the mirror steady.

Zavien Roberson

Washington

As Washington stands tall overlooking
The memories left in the pool out front,
Looking out to a beautiful America.

America—
Where the ideals of life, liberty, and
The pursuit of happiness stand tall like
The monument that rules over the nation

As the overgrown vines and leaves reach out
And grow onto him,
America becomes blurry to Washington.
He cannot recognize the country that he
Fought so bravely to set free.

America—
Once she was the land of the
Free and the home of the brave.

But are we truly free when her citizens
Are swept away in vans and dissidence is
forbidden?

But are we truly brave when her leaders
Refuse to end injustice, hate, and violence?

As more and more vines spiral and choke
Washington, the less he can recognize himself,
and the less we can recognize America.
Land of the free, and the home of the brave.

America—
Do we not live by the pledge,
With liberty and justice for all?
Was it not Washington who
Warned us against division?

Divided we stand. United we fall.
How could our leaders turn a
Blind eye to us?

Why America...
Have we gone blind to Washington?

Riley Sweeney

Growing Older, Growing Fainter

I always thought things would be bright,
Shiny and new, colorful and light.
Moments would pop and glow, spark and flow,
Back then it all felt like a blooming meadow.

But further on, the light starts to dim.
Making friends begins to feel grim.
Reality crashes in; smashed glass, harsh and mean.
Growing up isn't how it seemed.

They always said, "When you're older, you'll get it."
Now I'm older.
What's the big secret?
As I get taller, I just end up feeling colder.
Colors I remember from way back when
All just feels like a dream, an illusion.
I can only wait and hope the shine will come again.
Until that day, I'm stuck in confusion.

Things may shine once more.
Things may calm; I may soar.
But I'll never know just where or when
The spark will start its heart again.

For now, getting up feels like a chore.
Exhaustion seeps through my every pore.
Only for now, everything is hazy and slow.
I guess that's what happens when you start to grow.

Yahya Tyane

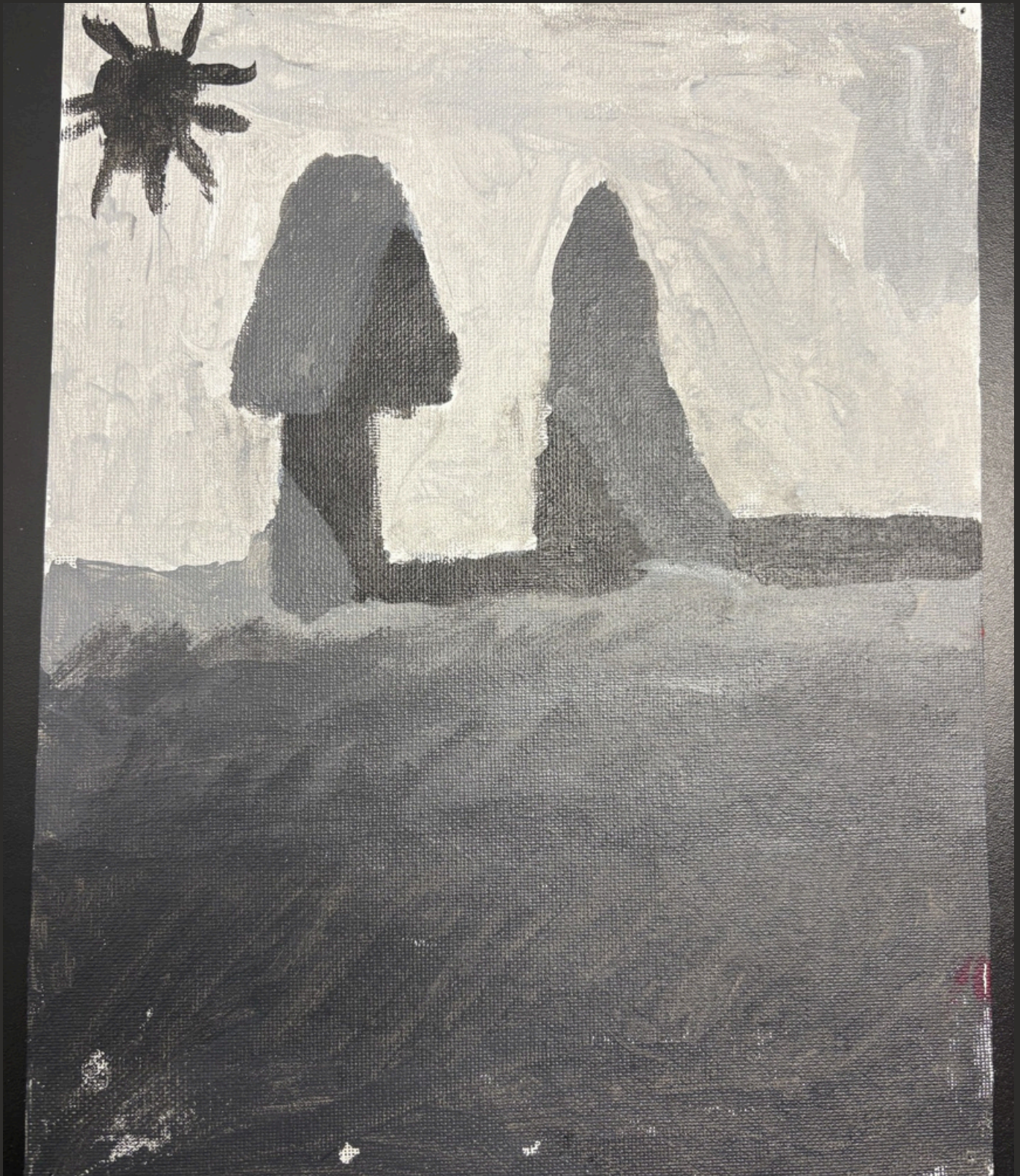
The Silent Watchers

A long time ago, the sun in the corner was alive and curious. It looked over travelers who crossed the gray fields. One day it stopped moving, frozen after seeing something it wasn't meant to see. Since then, it has stayed dark.

The two shapes were not rocks. They were watchers, once people who chose to stay when everyone else flew away. The left one was known as the Listener, wide and still, absorbing every lost voice buried under the ground. The right one was the Guardian, taller and sharper, standing between the past and whatever tried to return.

The land turned darker each year like memories. Anyone who walked too far forward would feel heavier, as if the ground remembered them and refused to let go.

Some people say that when the sun finally moves again, the watchers will step down from the hill, and the plain will speak for the first time in centuries. Alas, until then, the painting captures the moment just before everything changes: silent, tense, and waiting.



Original Artwork by Yahiya Tyane

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Skylie Altugle



Ms. Durango

The artist behind this issue's beautiful cover, contributing to both face and body of this semester's literary magazine. She captured the shifting sand and crumbling figure behind our theme, visualizing the scene described by our inspiration and giving unfamiliar readers a glimpse of understanding.

The driving force behind this and the previous magazine, giving order and direction to her novice publishers. Without the patient direction of our beloved Editor-in-Chief, our staff's vision could not have come to fruition. This marks her second-to-last magazine with The Paw Print, and while readers grew accustomed to the sneer of cold command on the shattered visage of Ozymandias, we hope Ms. Durango's legacy captures her warm-hearted guidance and the esteem in which she held her students instead.

Meet The Staff



Sameer Khaliq



Ethan Cortez



Axel Nguyen



Gracie Shillaci



Riley Sweeney



Zavien Roberson



Eleanor Carver-Ball



Skylic Altugle



August Leinart



Jackson Lindsey



Ally De Jesus



Dylan Heller



Stella Ashdown