



NOWHERE
NEAR

SALT LAKE TEENS WRITE

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Dec

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Cover art created by Addelynn Hogan.

Salt Lake Teens Write: Nowhere Near
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The Salt Lake Teens Write (SLTW) program is a series of three comprehensive writing workshops throughout the year intended to help teens develop their skills and passion for creative writing, and to provide a platform for teen writers and artists to further develop their writerly voices and artistic endeavors. As a collaboration between the SLCC Community Writing Center (CWC) and The Salt Lake City Public Library, SLTW is facilitated by the CWC's Youth Programs Coordinator and Associate Director with support from librarians.

If you'd like to participate, the three separate writing workshops that encompass the 2022 program are as follows:

Making it Personal - March 8th-25th, 2022
Where in the World? Writing the Wire - Summer 2022
Fiercely Fictional - Fall 2022

All teens entering grades 9-12 this fall are eligible to participate in all three of the cohorts. At the end of the year, all the writing cohorts come together to collaborate on an anthology publication and public reading to celebrate the different texts they have created during the year. This current anthology is a representation of the works that several cohort members created over the course of 2020-2021 as well as works from other teen writers and artists across the Salt Lake Valley.



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SELF-PORTRAIT OF WORDS

by Addelynn Hogan



CLOUD OF NOSTALGIA

by Calvin Jeppesen

Brooding over things not done,
Now's a simpler day than you know;
It feels as though you have not won,
Mind set on things long ago.

Threw your body on the bike,
Cycled streaks of steel,
Arrived to pluck strings as you like,
But was it ever truly real?

The memory that you cling,
The possibilities you entertain;
Those summer nights you'd sing
Were never free from pain.

For a wet step through the door
Soaring countless states afar;
Lands in a place not seen before,
One to make sweet memories once more.

SPEAK YOUR MIND

by Ella Mallory

You'll never get your way this way
Unless you may
but either way
Speak your mind
they'll do what you say
At the very least
you'll be at peace
and them no longer blind

Don't regret the words
Instead think them through
Your goal isn't to hurt, it's to be heard
Be the one who pursues

The feeling of such distraught
Leaves at the door
You ought not fret at such thoughts
When those emotions can be left ashore

In the end, your words should be let free
Don't worry what others might say
Your confidence will show others to let it be
Never stop and just agree

WAKING UP

by Max Leetham

It starts with a thought
 One asking, "What am I doing?"
 Almost like I forgot
 There is more than just viewing

Flown to my feet
 I will sit no more
 Refusing to repeat
 Everyday like before

This must be real
 Life is alive again
 Knowing what I feel
 Is it too much to say "Amen"?

Moving forward without a true sense of direction
 Leaving what's passed in the past
 I look inside for a self reflection
 Happy that I am free from that boring suspension

LOVELY IS A FULFILLED LIFE

by Lauren Kessel

Live a life that is worth speaking of
 Words in your head are worth the breath
 When what you hold is filled with love
 You'll leave no regrets after death
 To gain joy is worth the complication
 Because love is the beauty from the rain
 For what blooms from a mere flirtation
 Brought flowers with washed-away pain
 We'll hear the words that were never spoken
 The worth in life is not in your pay
 The world will try to keep our spirits broken
 But time with you is a worthy day
 Lovely is the love spent time
 Which makes a life that's worthy to live
 Moments wasted is the crime
 Because you get out of life what you give

GO

by Anesha Jackson

When they run they go on
 So gracefully, yet so fast.
 Their legs move faster than air,
 Faster than grass.
 They remain on the track,
 On all fours, waiting for
 That loud, bright, beaming horn.

When it goes off and pierces their ears,
 They all take off letting go of their fears
 Sometimes when they run past us
 It feels like they are above
 Maybe they can fly
 Just like white doves.
 They are like speedy red cars
 That drive in the empty roads
 No matter how the sky is
 Their speed will always grow.
 The red lights never stop them,
 Maybe they can fly
 As high as the sun.

They turn the corner, running and breathing hard
 Like a rabbit running away from sound.
 But what bit the rabbits beak?
 What moved the runners' feet,
 So fast that they could think
 Of all the important things?
 Dark dim eyes and inflated lungs
 Running up the sky like a crazy thug
 Their feet gently hug the hard track.
 They are tired, but they can't run back.
 They need to finish this running race
 Like a rabbit running away from sound,
 Like a wild animal finishing its chase.

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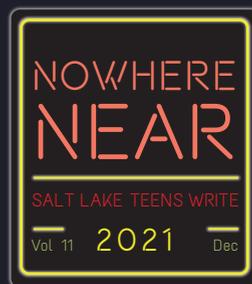
HEARTACHE

by Ashton Moench

I laid by the grave my precious mother lay
 All I could hear from the trees were the whispers and the sways
 Bittersweet moment with my mom filled my head
 Could it be? I thought. Could it really be the end?
 Despair and grief had begun to weigh me down
 Every time I closed my eyes, I saw my mother's face
 Face as bright as flowers, her hair silky and brown
 Even as our lives got worse, there was a smile I could trace

All she had worked for seemed to fade from my grasp
 The weight of my guilt seemed to stay forever before it passed
 I couldn't go and protect her; I failed
 Cutting through my heart and leaving me impaled
 Days had passed, where with my mother I stayed
 Everywhere I looked, all the color seemed to fade
 Fear had begun to crawl up my spine
 Even though she'd gone safely, I could not guarantee mine

All I could think of was leaving this world
 All I could feel was my body growing old
 But paranoia was slowly eating at my mind
 Could I be the next for Death to come find?
 Dreams at night had formed into nightmares
 Every dream that I dreamt was felt with despair
 Finally, my eyes were beginning to drop
 Eventually I rested as my heartbeat had stopped



TIME TICKS ON

By Rebecca Oehlerking

The sun appears as soft eyes crack
It's your day to decide.
Take that step, you can't go back
From this you cannot hide

In Path 1 lies clocks, so full of time,
Broke dripping on the floor.
Lost thoughts of long ago a prime,
Chance waits behind closed doors

Path 2 holds use, for all time's juice,
Won't waste a single drop.
Hard work in use, for all its fruits,
Open doors don't seem to stop.

Don't wait for stars to come your way,
Such time ticks ever fast.
Build wings today, and don't delay,
Once still, a clock falls fast.

THE BRAVEST HORSES NEVER DIE

by Lauryn Swanson

Down the stall doors I go
Your face does not show
No soft face for me to pet
Nor no neigh to be heard all around
Or any belly that can be filled with treats
The barn seems bare and cold
Four less hoofprints can be heard
You had a title no one could bare to hold

An empty stall
Almost makes me bawl
Soon to be replaced
You taught me my first lesson
And built me to be the rider I am today
When I felt like shutting down
When I felt like there was nothing I could do
You would smile like a clown

No more blue ribbons can be won
That ship has sailed, that job is done
Although we might not have won the gold cup
You won the prize of leadership and trust
The prize that can only be won by the bravest horses
The soft sound of Charisma's hoofprints
Strong and powerful
Can only be heard by heart imprints

SANDS OF TIME

by Season Wahlen

As the ancient clock ticks its ticks,
so do its cherished moments.
Nothing goes as brisk as an eclipse,
than the clocks' opponents.

There's no knowing when he's near,
to prepare for expiration.
All the sudden the last premier,
without anticipatory preparation.

Misinformed of one's prime,
until the curtains have been sealed.
No time for expressed sublime,
forever fondness concealed.

Escaping through openings in hands,
easily, foolishly letting go.
Uniting kin like bands,
for many a last breath shan't be slow.

NARUTO MINIMALIST ICHIRAKU RAMEN POSTERS

by Addelynn Hogan



ICHIRAKU
RAMEN
SHOP



ラーメン薬



TIMELESS

by Jack Desmond

I wish I had more time
 I have many things I want to do
 I'm given workloads like punishment for a crime
 I feel there is nowhere to run to
 I am learning to write
 I can draw very well
 But even with all my might
 By the time I'm done, I hear the toll of the bell
 I want to be free, but have no time
 I always trick myself and say "I will"
 To focus is a mountain to climb Hours pass by,
 I still have a hole to fulfill
 They come at the end of the day
 I only get these moments once in a while
 It feels like they are in a galaxy far, far away
 But when I have them, they give me a big smile

THE GENERAL IS DEAD

by Maren Dahle

The general is dead.
 The commander is grieving.
 Emptiness echoes through him.

The general is dead.
 The commander is lost.
 Blood no longer waters the ground.

The general is dead.
 The troops go home.
 There's no home waiting for the commander.

The general is dead.
 The commander sits by the sea.
 Letting the winds carve his face.

The general is dead.
 The commander is empty.
 His heart was taken a long time ago.

The general is dead.
 The commander is old.
 He doesn't know where the years have gone.

The general is dead.
 The commander is almost there.
 He wonders what it will feel like.

The general is dead.
 The commander is dead.
 He's no longer empty.

THE MASK

By Afton Garritson

Most people are fine
 But others step out of that line
 Most people are ok
 They have never seen gray
 Most people are great
 They don't dwell on mistakes
 Most people are fun
 They play under the sun

People like me
 From sea to sea
 That are good and fine
 But out of the line
 That are happy and glad
 But very sad
 Because they hide behind a mask

We hide our feelings behind this mask
 The mask that is very thick glass
 The mask that is laughs
 The mask that is smiles
 The mask that say that everything is worthwhile

This mask is our life
 This mask is hides our internal pain and strife
 This mask is our plan
 To be happy as we can
 This mask helps us see
 That we are really meant to be

Our mask is home
 Our mask is safe
 Our mask is our place
 Our mask hides our face
 Our mask hides our sadness
 So you only see gladness

Next time you feel alone
 Next time you are sad
 Next time you feel ok
 But are very mad
 Lift your mask and reveal your feelings
 And I promise you that
 You will do amazing things

Things that will astonish and amaze
 Things that will win someone's praise
 Things that are extraordinary
 Things that are unordinary
 Things that will help you see
 That you are an amazing human being.

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STEP FORWARD

by Teetad Govitviwat

You're arriving at heaven's gate
 And you hear bells a-ringing
 You should hope your heart has no hate
 Your life no longer in the making
 See through bashful times to the end
 Gather your love and never stop playing
 For through pain you'll see what it meant
 Not all familiar faces will be staying
 Rushing in racing in living
 Chasing towards the tunnel's light
 Fear what's unknown not of dying
 Foregoing youth won't prove you right
 To have loved and to have laughed
 The truest of prizes to keep
 This life is yours to go and craft
 This life there will be much for you to reap

BE KNOWN

by Teetad Govitviwat

From days to night I've seen it all the same
 Oh meaningless walks so lonely through crowds
 Darkness of street lights they can't keep me warm just yet
 Blaring silence of breaking bars blew cold
 Seasons set in stone to let me know
 From night to day I've been through it the same
 How lost a search must be what I seek
 Stay what you are, that you exist
 Let it be known, that this is a song to write

WAITING THROUGH TIME

by Micah Hiatt

Time is an illusion of living
And lives within the night
Lilies bloom with endless soaring,
An everlasting light.

Fragile is the skin we bare
Aging regardless of spirit
Until it meets heaven's air,
Waste no time to conquer it.

The water is warm until it's cold
Run ahead of the ice
For while we are young, we are also old

Counting the endless nights.
The sand is down to grains
Fly before you walk
For how the sky rains
Savor every drop.

FRUIT BOWL

by Addelynn Hogan



ADVICE TO SELF

by Ilaisa Folau

Don't waste your time with terrible friends
 When you know that they won't get you far
 Don't try to be what they want and instead,
 Try to figure out who you are

Even though things have gone way different than planned
 And it's easy to feel alone
 Everyone is in lockdown and they all understand
 Especially people at home

When it comes to journey's end
 I'll find my missing peace
 Then the puzzle will finally mend,
 A part of life's great masterpiece

Happiness is not in the past
 True joy is in the present
 This is the only thing that lasts
 Don't waste it because the time goes fast

DAYS

by Halle Fillmore-Hawkins

It is on days such as these
 That I wonder if other poets
 Are better at covering up
 The daily drudgery of life,

domesticity's endless tugging
 upon unironed shirt-sleeves
 as the unwashed mugs
 gather sadly in the sink.

Yes, I can imagine Larkin
 in some grim launderette
 his specs reflecting back
 in a washing machine door

But the others? Hard to think
 of Auden elbow-deep in soap suds
 or Betjeman wrestling
 with big bags.

But I could be wrong.

THE GODDESS

by Sem Chan

She whispers
the silver ghost
calling you to follow
to fall back into the pool of blood

ONE

by Sem Chan

One too deep
one too many
one jump
one shot
one decision can be permanent

A PERSON TO REMEMBER

by Quin Briggs

Losing anyone will always be difficult
 But there can always be a catapult
 Without them you may seem lost,
 Overfilled with emotion
 Not knowing where to turn to anymore
 Remembering the value of being your son
 Making your world shine anyway I could
 Hoping to be your sun

This deep feeling would always reach
 Just like the way you could teach
 Learning from all you taught
 Shaped me just the way I am
 Always learning in the big moments
 Being shown the ropes
 Pocketting off of your patience
 While we look at our hopes

Always looking ahead
 But also back with dread
 All that you wanted to accomplish
 But that time coming short
 Your importance still being present
 Your legacy living on
 But living the days without you
 While I'm hoping I was a good son.

WHY?

by Lander Barton

Why, why do I feel as if my life is not mine at all?
 Why does it seem I walk a path that wasn't paved for me?
 Why can I not do any of this at the beat of my own drum?
 Why, all I ask is why?

Why, why must you always think my thoughts for me father?
 Why can I not speak the words I so desperately have to say?
 Why? All I ask is why?

Answer.

I know what is necessary for me to get done what must be done.
 I know all expectations, but what I don't know is trust.

MONSTER IN A JAR

by Miye Masters

I caught a monster in a jar

It fell from the heavens

I watched as it landed in my yard

It's eye stared at me

As if it knew I was what it was looking for

I went outside with a jar from the kitchen

I caught it with unusual ease

I fear it will escape, but it hasn't even tried

Because as I think I caught him

He caught me



THE FIGHTER OF MAJAME

by Audrey Schmachtenberger

The streets are packed as they always are on game nights. Tourists crowd the alleys and bridges, taking in the smells and sights and committing them to memory.

I maneuver through the crowds of people speaking in languages I could never hope to comprehend. The smell of spice assaults my nose making my eyes and mouth water. I can feel the dripping warmth emanating from a nearby food stand.

My stomach growls and grovels at my mind, hoping for even a bite of the spicy meat being sold. I tell myself I have other worries and to keep my mind on the upcoming fight.

Looking to distract myself from the mouthwatering smell of food, my eyes drift upward as I lean my head back. I stare at the dark sky above me. The only thing keeping everyone on this spaceport from drifting into the dark nothingness above is the golden barrier providing artificial oxygen and gravity to this broken planet.

Framing the scene are ships as they cut through the barrier and dock above the city. Some are trading ships, others intergalactic cruise lines, leaving us to choke in their exhaust. At one point in time I might have called Majame beautiful, but I was younger then and that was before the right side of my body was predominantly metal. Before I realized this kind of beauty is a facade.

A twinge of sadness washes over me as I look back down, resuming my walk to the stadium. Hunger is more manageable than grief.

As I walk across the bridge that spans over what we locals deem the “crack.” In all honesty, it’s an understatement seeing as it is in fact a massive ravine. But the name stuck, mostly as a metaphor. It was the one true, undeniable crack in this beautiful, awful facade.

The only sign of the decay the offworlders ignore and we locals know all too well. The only sign of a broken planet held together by human greed.

The bridge itself is long and stunningly lit. Floating lamps and lanterns are strung above forming a canopy of illumination. The bridge connects one layer of crust to the other, beneath it, the core thrums with energy, glowing a brilliant gold.

The stadium is in sight now. It’s domed ceiling, crafted out of shimmering glass, is alight with colorful beams dancing across the sky, bouncing off of the ships.

The entrance is crowded with people, trying to get tickets to see tonight’s sporting events. Above head are large flat screens broadcasting the game for the cruise lines full of people who deem themselves too rich to slum it with the people of the spaceport, but still want to watch and ogle above us. As if we are different from them because of class and rank. No, the true difference lies in the fact that Majame was a travel destination to them, a place to pass through, have fun and then leave. For us, it is our home and our lives.

As I make my way through the crowd to the door, a particularly angry voice shouts behind me, “Oy, Cyborg, get in the back of the line!”

I turn around, pulling down my hood, and give the man a deadpan stare.

All three of his eyes lift in shock. “I’m so sorry, he said. “If I’d known it was you...”

I give a curt nod in response and turn back the way I was going.

Once in the lobby, I head to the locker room door which is hidden beneath the stairs that lead toward the stadium seats. It is designed to keep rabid fans away.

Once inside, I strip off my clothes leaving only my undergarments. Grabbing my uniform from my locker I glance at the mirror and gaze at my body, and the flesh ending at my right arm and leg. I then look at my tired face, my one natural eye has a dark circle under it,

while the other glows red. My face looks gaunt, a small sheet of metal covering my right temple.

I look away and finish getting dressed. The first fight has already begun by the time I have my uniform on. The sound system above me is the only thing letting me know about the progression of the fight.

After three different rounds between various species, my name is announced along with that of my opponent, ushering me onto the field.

When I walk out of the cover of the overhang into the blinding lights of the stadium, cheers erupt from the stands.

A smile graces my face as I wave and saunter toward the ring.

Opposite of me, Raax struts out, bellowing a war cry from his tentacled mouth. His four arms wave in the air as the crowd scream praises.

I swallow the growing lump of anxiety in my throat.

Raax is infamous for leaving his opponents with injuries. You were lucky to get out with a broken bone.

I feign confidence as we approach each other to shake hands. It is customary to shake with your right hand.

He offers his bottom right hand and I reciprocate with my robotic one. His grip tightens as he leers at it. I try to pry my arm away but he holds it tightly as he speaks, "Humans are so easy to break. Don't think that because you're a cyborg you're gonna come out looking better than anyone else I've fought." He drops my hand.

I try not to think about the ominous threat as I lower my body into a fighting stance.

My style of fighting is and always has been defensive. I'm smaller than most of my opponents, but it tends to make me faster. Usually humans only fight with other humans, seeing as we have at the most two arms and two legs.

But not me. I needed the money won from the larger fights, so I pulled a few strings and the committee made an exception on the grounds that I was technically classified as a cyborg. The deal was if the committee wanted me to throw away a fight, I would acquiesce and throw the fight. Tonight, they wanted me to throw the fight against Raxx.

Raxx stares at me.

I stare back.

The bell chimes.

Raxx wastes no time sending two fists my way.

I dodge just in time and before he can right himself, I punch him in the stomach, and jump back just as he goes to hit me again.

The crowd above us goes wild, breaking into cheers and boos.

After a few more hits, Raxx lands a hard punch to my right shoulder, just above where the remaining tissue connects with the prosthetic.

On instinct, I hit back, hard. My metal arm making contact with his face with a resounding crack, sending him falling.

One.

Two.

Three.

The bell chimes, the first round is mine.

As he gets up, I catch his eye flickering towards my arm and then back as he gives me a cruel smile.

The bell chimes.

We dance back and forth awhile, him landing hits on me as I begin to throw the match, as I've been instructed to do.

As the second round carries on, Raxx gets more aggressive, overdoing it on the punches, finally throwing all four of his arms at me and then body slamming me onto the ground. He begins wailing on my face, which is an illegal move. I hear my nose break with a loud crack.

One.

Two.

Three.

Raxx stands up snarling, his chest heaving with anger. This round would go to me. Any use of "the death maneuver" would end the round immediately and the point being granted to the opponent. So much for me throwing the match.

I wait. Why aren't the refs calling it?

I look up in a mix of horror and confusion as the digital point box next to a frankly awful picture of Raxx goes up by one.

I feel the warmth of blood pouring from my nose as I go to get up. Before I can, Raxx walks over and offers me a hand. A display of good sportsmanship commonly used in the arena after a penalty move.

I take the offered hand with my right. Once I'm on my feet, I go to pull away but he pulls me back, wrapping his enormous hand around the arm of my prosthetic, squeezing until there is a barely noticeable pop.

I stare at my arm in horror, willing it to move. Why won't it move?

He'd broken it. I feel my eyes water. He'd broken it like it was nothing. The thing my parents died giving me. Like it was nothing.

I feel anger bubble in my chest and look around to see if anyone saw. I then make the idiotic decision that instead of tapping out and walking away in shame without enough money to repair my arm, I was going to win the match. If the committee tosses me out and I'm not allowed to fight again, then so be it.

I take a great deal of joy in Raxx's shocked expression as I get myself back into a fighting stance, my right arm hanging uselessly at my side.

The bell chimes and I rush forward, sending my left fist flying towards his jaw. One thing no one thinks about is that I went without a right arm and leg for three years, and my left hook might not be made of metal but it's just as powerful.

He retaliates as the crowd around us begins cheering harder, spurred on by the sight of blood and the frenzied euphoric feeling of mob mentality.

I punch him in the stomach again and before he can strike back, kick him in the face. Raxx eventually sends us both tumbling to the ground, with him on top ruthlessly punching my face, arms, stomach and anything else he can reach.

He is not going to let me walk out of here.

"One!" I heard the crowd scream.

I think of my mom and dad, watching the televised fights with them. Before the accident, before they died. My mother absolutely abhorred them. I recall her words as I lay there looking up at the glass ceiling and the ships beyond.

“It might be fake to the people watching, but those are real people, Hiraeth. It’s real to them.”

I feel my face tighten with emotion as I look at the crowd watching, cheering as Raxx beats me to a pulp.

“Two!” They scream above me

My body aches. I recall lying in the street with my parents above me trying to keep me conscious as they got help, my right side in so much pain.

I’m in so much pain.

I think about how they sacrificed too much for me to live like this. I think of all the people watching, how this is nothing but a game to them. A game played on a planet that to them is nothing but a vacation destination.

I think about how they will one day run Majame to the ground. Because it means nothing to them.

Because they are careless.

But this is my home.

And this is my life.

And I take back control.

Before they reach three, I’m on top of Raxx. Hand meets tentacle as I punch his face.

Over and over.

Using all my strength to keep him on the ground.

“One”

“Two”

“Three”

I hear the roar of the crowd in my ears.

The bell chimes.



KDA AKALI

by Addelynn Hogan



NECRONANCY

by Alexia Smith

In one girl's bookcase there are dozens of hardcover cheesy romance novels in alphabetical order, charming seashell bookends, and framed family photos, while Nancy's bookcase has books of ancient rituals once thought lost to time and dark talismans inscribed with curse-invoking runes. On one girl's desk there is a packet of yet unfinished math homework and her favorite sparkly novelty pencils, while on Nancy's desk there is the carcass of a raccoon which she had picked up off the highway with her latex gloves in the dead of night. And while one girl is lying in bed with her dark brown hair framing her sleeping face at 3 a.m., Nancy is hunched over her desk, her dry and damaged blue-green hair tied back in a messy ponytail, and her gray sleep-deprived eyes squinting at the forbidden tome laying open on her desk, her chapped lips reading the words aloud with surgical precision.

As you have undoubtedly deduced already, Nancy is not normal. Unless you consider early morning necromancy practice normal. And if so, lucky you. Speaking of Nancy's practice, it was going well. Red smoke curled from her mouth and snaked toward the currently deceased body of the raccoon. The smoke wrapped around the carcass, forming tendrils which wormed their way into its matted fur like maggots. Nancy clenched her fists with nervous anticipation, making her pale knuckles even paler.

For those readers not versed in dark arts and the macabre, necromancy is an ancient art, a form of enchantment that brings the dead back to life. As you know, necromancy isn't really practiced in modern times, and for the most part it is dismissed as stuff spoken of in demented fairytales. Like most magic, necromancy is brushed off as fictitious and most people never give it a second thought. Not Nancy Perkins, though.

With a shudder that shook the desk, the raccoon lifted itself up onto its four paws. Its eyes were still as glassy as they were moments before, but now they darted around in startled confusion. Nancy's lips parted, revealing a sinister grin, the light of the desk lamp reflecting off her dollar store safety goggles. She pumped her fists in the air and leaned back in her desk chair in triumph, which sent her chair spinning. Nancy was no longer paying attention to the reanimated roadkill on her desk.

“Third time’s the charm!” She bellowed to no one in particular, except maybe the stuffed animals on the bed across the room from her. And by “Third time’s the charm” she was, of course, referring to her past two attempts at necromancy, which now lay in the wastebasket next to her: a pigeon and a squirrel, respectively, both still dead and both reeking of decay. But Miss Nancy Perkins didn’t mind trivial things such as bothersome odors; some Febreeze could fix that, no sweat. Nancy was busy celebrating. 81 days, 17 hours, 42 minutes and 53 seconds of study combined with 7 hours, 12 minutes and 47 seconds of necromancy practice had finally paid off. She still owed the library \$20 in late fees, but it was all worth it.

Nancy squirmed around in her seat in the silence, softly snickering to herself, unaware of the looming force that had hunted her down, emerging from the shadows of her room. “Nancy Beatrice Perkins,” a voice said solemnly.

Nancy stopped, sighed, and turned to her bed, where sitting on the unmade mess was Dorian. He was enshrouded in a black cloak, his face was covered by a skull mask, and in his right hand he held a trowel. He seemed young, like he was ten years old — which would have made him five years younger than Nancy — but it was hard to tell with psychopomps. She assumed guides of the dead did not age like normal people.

“Hey, Dorian. Could you give me a moment?” Nancy greeted the psychopomp. She opened up the window next to her desk. She then picked up the raccoon, which hadn’t moved much on the desk. It just stood there, trembling, haunted with the incomprehensibility of being brought back from the dead.

“Wha- What are you doing?”

“Don’t worry,” Nancy reassured and then tossed the raccoon out the second story window, “squirrels can drop from high up places and survive unscathed.” She stretched and yawned.

“Nancy, that was a raccoon.”

“Hmm?” Nancy peered out the window, lifting up her safety goggles. “So it was.” Dorian stood up, straightening out the hood of his cloak, but Nancy still caught a glimpse of curly black hair. “You know what happens now.”

“Right...what happens now?” Nancy said, quickly pulling off her gloves, turning them inside out to keep the blood and such from making a mess. She did have some regard for hygiene despite what the disorder in her room might have implied.

“Oh, come on now.” Dorian said. Nancy couldn’t see his face, but she could almost hear him rolling his eyes. It was clearly taking every ounce of patience he had to keep it together. “It’s not like you haven’t seen the omens.”

“What omens?”

“The whispers haunting you in empty halls?”

“Oh, those? I thought that was just the other kids talking about me. I’m used to it.”

“Even when you were at home?”

“Yeah?” Nancy shrugged.

“But you must have seen the nightmares.” Dorian pleaded.

Nancy actually laughed. It was hoarse and shrill, but a laugh nonetheless. She pointed to the bags under her eyes. “Dorian, do I look like a person who sleeps?”

He pointed frantically, “There! You know who I am! You remember when I appeared here the first time! I literally told you, to your face, to stop! And you didn’t listen. This is no one’s fault but your own.”

Nancy was silent. She blinked slowly, thinking.

“What? What do you have to say for yourself?” Dorian threw his hands into the air in exasperation.

“What’s with the trowel?” Nancy pointed.

“I—It’s my reaping instrument.” Dorian stuttered, losing his steam.

“I thought it was supposed to be a scythe?”

“Shut up! They were out of scythes and pitchforks.” Dorian took a deep breath and continued, “Nancy Beatrice Perkins, you have committed an unforgivable crime against the order of life and death. Your punishment is—”

“Just one second, can I get something first?”

“What could you possibly need?” Dorian shouted.

“One second.” Nancy stood up and walked over to her backpack next to the bed. Dorian watched her as she crouched down next to him. She rummaged through it for a moment and pulled out a granola bar. The wrapper had been scratched away, letting the metallic lining show through. No one knew how long it had been in there, not even Nancy, but she didn’t seem bothered and she started unwrapping it.

“You do know that you can’t bring that with you, right? I’m taking your soul.”

“Mrph?” She said, oats falling out of her mouth.

“Ugh, you’re impossible.” Dorian said, lifting up his trowel.

“What are you going to do with that?”

This time Dorian laughed. And he smacked her square on the top of her head, knocking the soul out of her body with a loud metal bonk.



KDA AHRI

by Addelynn Hogan



GHOSTLY RELATIONS

by Valery Tomadakis

August 2, 2021

How fitting for a day like today, to wake up to the pouring rain outside and thunder off in the distance. I get up and put on my black dress. I feel completely mentally drained, but honestly, I'm just sick of everyone asking me, "Are you okay?" Or I get the "I'm so sorry about your loss." No one will listen that I am fine, it's not like he was in my life anyway. My dad walked out on me and my mom when I was, like, ten years old. I was never close with him, even when he tried to come back into my life when I was fourteen. Who would have guessed two years later I'd be seeing him six feet under?

I haven't gotten much sleep lately with my mom's hysterical crying every single night. Plus, we all know it's only going to get worse after this funeral. At least it gives me an excuse to dress up. I know I probably seem insensitive, but honestly I just feel kind of numb about the whole thing. I'm finally done getting ready and I head downstairs. My mother, of course, is at the table already with her mascara running. Honestly, I don't understand why she's so upset he walked out on her and hasn't been around for years. I sit down next to her and she angrily asks me, "Why aren't you more upset you just lost your father?" I try to explain how I feel to her, but of course she doesn't listen and thinks I'm just being insensitive.

On our way to the funeral we sat in silence, not a word said. All that you could hear was heavy breathing and sighs. We finally arrive and my dad's sister is the first to greet us. "I can't believe this happened. I knew he was a heavy drinker, but I would have never expected this to happen," she said near tears. I agreed with a simple nod and we headed in to greet the rest of the guests. As soon as I stepped in I felt this heavy presence and it wasn't leaving anytime soon. We got through the memorial and burial and then headed out to go grab some lunch. We grabbed a table at our favorite restaurant and then the

questions from my mother started, “Don’t you miss your father? Aren’t you upset about what happened? Don’t you wish you had spent more time with him?” Resisting the urge to scream and yell that he never wanted to be in my life, that’s why he walked out and never cared about me, so why on earth would I be upset. But as to not upset my mother anymore I simply replied “no.” As expected, my mother burst into tears. I headed to the bathroom. I splash some water on my face trying to ground myself when the heavy feeling gets stronger and I hear in an eerie tone, “Don’t you miss me, Jen? Aren’t you upset?” I look around and no one is there. It must have just been in my head. *smack* All the bathroom stalls slam shut. As I hurry to get out of there I hear, “You can’t pretend I just left again, you know I’m gone. It’s time to move on, Jen. IT’S TIME TO ACCEPT.” Shaken up I go back to the table and tell my mom we need to leave. Whether it was my shaky demeanor or the fact that I was pale as a ghost, she simply got up and walked out with me.

We get to the car and she asks, “What has gotten into you?” Barely able to speak, I mumbled, “He’s not gone.” “Who Jen?” asked my mom. “Him. Dad. He’s still here.” At this point, she looks at me like I’m crazy and trying to make a joke out of the situation just so she just ignores me and heads home. We are almost to our house when I hear, “She’s never going to believe you, you’re stuck with me now.” We pull into the driveway and I get out, heading straight to my room. I notice something is off. All of my blankets are on the floor and the TV is on. I know for a fact I made my bed this morning and that TV hasn’t been used in years. I turn it off and get ready for bed. I finally fell asleep around two in the morning.

continued on next page

August 3, 2021

I wake up to the sound of my mother calling me down to eat. So down the stairs, I drag my heavy, tired body and there’s my mother standing in the kitchen. Seemingly fine, “Mom, is everything alright”. “Perfectly fine Jen, why wouldn’t I be? ” she replied. “Because of dad?” She just looked puzzled. At this point I completely freaked out, so I ran outside and grabbed my bike. I rode faster than I ever have and finally I made it to the graveyard and searched frantically for my father’s grave. There it stood,

“Here lies Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs

March 3rd, 2015

Remembered by their daughter Jen

Gone but never forgotten”

As a cold breeze blows by, scaring away any birds that had been perched on the trees, I hear a gentle whistle as the wind goes through the trees. A few drops of rain start falling. I sit here dazed, confused, and cold. Yet I feel a sense of calm and safety, just as I hear in my mother’s voice, “It’s time to let go, Jen.” But something is off. The voice sounds so far away yet so close, I feel something touch my shoulder and when I turn back, there’s nothing.

JACOB'S DEATH SLIDE Content Warning: Strong language; mentions death and murder.

by Audrey Hall

When I first moved to New York City in 2019, it felt like the greatest decision of my life. Now, between living through the pandemic of 2020 and whatever the fuck is happening outside my window today, I'm not so sure.

I think that with the way last year went, we all assumed that the clock striking midnight on December 31st, 2020 would either be the worst thing or the best thing. There were plenty of pessimists that tried to predict the end of the world, and more than enough optimists who were sure things would start to look up.

No one expected what followed, I don't think.

I mean, who would think that the first life we encountered on Mars would kill our entire crew of astronauts? If I went back in time and told 2000s me that someday that old saying "it's raining cats and dogs" would be a reality (except "cats and dogs" gets replaced with "human bodies" and "raining" gets replaced with "fucking torrent"), I think that I'd have brushed the whole thing off as a fever dream.

But here we are, of course. I walked outside this morning to sirens and screaming and dead bodies falling from the sky. I turned around and walked inside immediately.

The reporters were no help, being just as panicked as the rest of us. They called it "Jacob's Ladder", as if the dead were climbing back from the promised land to the earth to... I don't know, save us or something? Seemed like it was the opposite of Jacob's Ladder. Either way, I was intrigued. Despite the mayor's pleas to stay inside in his morning speech, I got in my car and took my time navigating the streets, attempting to keep my eyes on both the sky and on the people that darted across the street without warning.

They were falling so slowly. It reminded me of those stupid science experiments we used to do in elementary school where we'd drop oil into water. Drop by drop it would fall into the water and bob back to the surface. Sometimes we would put plastic beads in, because they were more dense than the oil but still less dense than water, and they'd float there; settling on the top of the water.

I hadn't even thought about where I was or where I was headed, but I had made my way out of the city and found myself in front of the state prison.

Hundreds of bodies were piled across the property. Some were strangled, others had their throat slit open. I could even see some random body parts lying about the recreation area that I could only assume were from some poor, mutilated soul. 50 police cars at the very least were sitting in front of the prison, and hundreds of officers were running around, some on the phone, others taking frantic notes on a notepad.

My heart began to pound in my chest, faster and faster against my ribcage. *There's no way that's what it is. It's clearly just a coincidence.*

I sped a little faster on the way home; not as afraid of hitting people as I was before. There were bodies every once in a while, some in the middle of the street and others directly on someone's front porch.

I couldn't help but notice that the houses with bodies in front of them were darkened with the blinds closed, and the owners of the house were nowhere to be seen.

Today wasn't supposed to be like this. I was going to go to work, come home and binge some stupid cooking show while I revelled in my success in life. *And my innocence*, I thought to myself. But no, here I was with a dead guy on my front lawn. There he was. Eyes rolled into the back of his head, bruises around his neck.

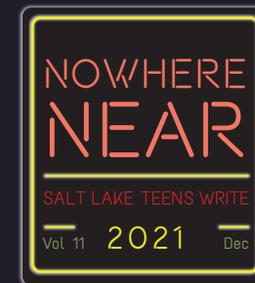
It's going to be okay, I told myself. *All that you have to do is hide it again. No one found it the first time, it can't be that hard. Besides, everyone's distracted and panicked. No big deal. How is it here? I got rid of it... I know I did.*

I made sure that no one was watching me as I dragged the body toward my car, praying that I had left it unlocked. As I was shoving the man into my trunk, however, another body - a woman this time - landed on the pavement beside me.

Then another,

And another,

And another...



Heather left, too.
 She walked
 right
 out
 the door
*she had never met someone so
 delusional in her entire life*
 She said

 We were together for
 four months,
 two weeks,

 five days,

 two hours,

 30 minutes,

 13 seconds

I never loved anyone like I loved her
 When I was around her, I could ignore the
 prying eyes. I could focus on something

other than the impending doom that was
 to come.
She knew about them,
She knew that I was being followed,
She helped me move apartments twice
 before she couldn't take it anymore.

 "Believe me,"
 I asked her.

 "You're insane,"
 She retorted

 It was a woman and two men.

 Why do you come for me?
 I plead, But
 they just

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 The men are always together.

They wear glasses that obscure their eyes,
 but I can feel their gaze darting about the
 room, following me.

The woman was always by herself
 Her eyes were a piercing blue that made

 my skin

 c r a w l.

The last straw was when all three
 of them stood outside my front window.
 They smiled widely with their *too-white*
 teeth and stared at me with their *too-blue*
 eyes or *too-dark* glasses. They knocked on
 the door.

*Open the door
 Please
 Let us in*

They hadn't moved by the time I had
 grabbed the butcher knife.

"911 what's your emergency?"
 the woman answered, her voice kind and
 comforting. It was a different woman than
 usual.

"I had to kill them. They wouldn't
 go away, they wouldn't stop following me,
 and no one would help. Please help me."

My hands were coated with a
 sticky wine-colored layer of grime. Their
 bodies lay on my front porch, mouths

 agape.

The sirens approached.

I looked down at my stalkers,
 and their faces morphed

By the time they arrived, I was
 crying over the bodies of my mother
 and Heather.

"Believe me,"
 I begged the judge

"Please."

READY TO CRASH AND BURN (OUT)

by Malia Hansen

It was 5am. I felt like a corpse who was forcibly resuscitated again. The windows held a sky so dark that the lights felt insecure about themselves, overheated and weary and wrong. I snapped out of my daze and nearly fell out of my chair from how hard my heart was banging and bruising my ribcage. I must've fallen asleep in the middle of an assignment. Again.

I couldn't tell you the last time I hadn't. When was the last time I'd slept in a bed without a pen in hand? When did I even start this? Why was I even doing this anymore?

5am isn't coherent enough for a crisis, and no one is awake for you to text your crisis to, so why have a crisis at all? 5am is only good for typing and inky scritch-scratches because your assignments are due. It's due so you have to keep going, right? If you don't...

At that thought, my mother's voice echoed out of my tired memory and she asked me, "You always get things done, you're our smartest kid; why did that change? What did I do wrong?" I felt the lazy glance from my father, eyes glued to a text conversation that never had my name on it. I heard his simple, "wow that's great," when I showed him my report card four months after it had been printed, creased and thinned.

I thought about not finishing this assignment, but a bone-deep sense of dread crept up. It tempered my racing heart, cooled the burn from my resuscitation, and put things into hazy focus like dull point-seven lead.

Suddenly, it was 8am: the sun rolled around and I had finished. Every 8am, I managed to finish with dark circles under my eyes and a whole lot of luck. There was no relief or joy, just awe that I had survived. I took a few breaths and closed my eyes for a few minutes, praying it wouldn't turn into the hours I'd lost. How could it though? Next thing I knew, I was at school.

My friends were chatting in a corner, laughing over some ten second video or getting mad about something petty from class. They asked me, "how's it going?" and I could only muster, "I don't get paid enough for this." You'd think the day would fly by when you're in and out of sleep, losing your grasp of your surroundings and straining to get your eyes to just open and focus damnit, but it's not. It's slow, like a 48-hour-day kind of slow, and now is the only moment I get outside of the blur.

"Can I go to the bathroom?" I ask my fourth period math teacher. "Sure thing," comes his easy reply. I'm home free.

I walk with a quick desperation and shakily put my earbuds in. My breath gets uneven and my eyes start to burn. Down the hallways with queasy fluorescent lighting, I walk and walk to the quietest bathroom with the coziest stall. The floor isn't flooded, it only mildly smells like shit, and it's empty. I don't even have my homework on me, which is good for once because I'd definitely get cheap mascara all over it.

I guess I've started crying already. Lorde is already blaring in my ears; things get worse as tears spill harder and my thoughts bang around in my head. God this sucks, why do I do this? Why can't everything just let me breathe? Why can't I just keep up with everything like a regular person? What kind of idiot cries in the school bathrooms? Are you gonna do this forever? How are you gonna fix this? How are you going to fix yourself? Get it together. Pull yourself together. Stop being dramatic. When is that essay due again?

A congestion headache sets in. Everything feels so big, but I'm nothing. I'm smaller than a speck of dust that could disappear and no one would notice, so why do I even try? Why do I try to take on responsibilities, ground myself, give myself value, when I'll never be enough? It's so pointless. I'm so useless.

My chest aches from how badly I'm crying. It's a cry that feels ugly as it bubbles up and runs down your face, like a snot-nosed kid crying for their mom who's grown into a snot-nosed teen crying for a nap. And just like kids cry themselves out of it, after ten more minutes of suffocating sobbing I'm too tired to keep going.

I desperately need some tissues and water and fresh air. Instead I get toilet paper, the lukewarm water fountain, and a waft of someone's poorly hidden vape in the halls on my way back to class. Just like that, I'm in limbo again--half-asleep but stubborn, desperate to make something of myself before I completely crash and burn.

COVID SCHOOL: AS TOLD BY A SERIES OF DIRECT MESSAGES TO THE ABYSS

by Hannah Zoulek

It's a quarter of the way through my freshman year of high school, and you know how many times I've been to the building??

Once.

Twice, if you count the time my father drove me through the parking lot so I could see where it was.

I'm going crazy.

Do you know how long it's been since I've left the house?

No?

Good.

Neither do I.

I have had no real conversations today.

Actually, scratch that, maybe one.

Possibly.

Unless you count talking with myself.

We've had lots of good talks today.

I scared Mom.

She said it sounded like there were two people in my room.

Speaking of that, I think I'll take a field trip to the living room tomorrow.

Then I can look at things that are twenty feet away at the farthest instead of ten feet away.

And increasing the average distance looked all day by two feet.

Believe me.

I did the math.

During all that time I wasn't talking to anybody.

Because there was no one to talk to.





So.
 Anyway.
 I'm serious about my number of conversations.
 Mom was in meetings all day.
 I had two classes.
 Neither conducive to conversations.
 So I talked with myself.
 But that doesn't always cut it.
 Can you tell?
 Hmm?



Maybe I'm a little...
 Attention-deprived?
 Bored?
 Chaotic?
 Mythological?
 Take your pick.
 I am it.
 Ha!
 But.
 Anyway.



My hand is tired.
 Why is my hand tired?
 Meh.
 I don't think I really care.

Anyway.
 Now the dog is barking.
 Why is the dog barking?
 Why is the dog ALWAYS barking?
 It drives me nuts.
 It's like he doesn't understand the concept of silence. Anyway.
 He was at my grandparents' house today.
 All day.
 Maybe that contributed to my...
 Current state?
 Which is funny.
 Usually he drives me crazy.
 Because he squeaks at my door no matter which side he's on. And he barks.
 And barks.
 And barks.
 And BARKS.
 And barks.
 And licks and barks.
 And whenever mom or I is on a call you know what he does?
 He barks.
 And you know what he does when one of us is talking?
 He barks even more!!
 It drives me batty!!
 And then he just sits there and stares at me.
 He's pathetic.
 It's sad.
 And I hate it.
 But I think it makes me feel wanted.
 I guess.
 Sometimes.
 Maybe.
 But if you tell anyone I said that, I will deny it and claim you have gone mad.
 So.

I'm stumped.
 Also, do you know where I can find mini hinges?
 Like for jewelry?
 I have no idea on that either.
 And I'm still waiting for a package that shipped two weeks ago and hasn't arrived yet.
 It was supposed to be here last week.
 But it's not.
 I'm starting to get worried.
 But.
 Anyway.
 I should go finish staring at Zoom.
 But I'm really tired of it.
 I keep getting distracted shouting random Christmas carols.
 It's kind of fun.



I've broken myself.
 And my computer.
 I hate it.
 It hates me.
 We both just say "too bad" and get on with our lives.
 Why do computers hate me?
 Is it because I'm overly clumsy and tend to whack them unnecessarily?
 Or because I'm boring?
 And how do they all know to hate me?
 It's like they have some sort of invisible network connecting them. So they can gossip.
 And tell each other to avoid me.
 Oh wait.
 They do have an invisible network that connects them.
 It's called the internet.
 Duh.
 I hate the internet.
 Can I go throw a snowball at something?

Please?
 I have way too much energy.
 My brain won't slow down.
 I can't type fast enough to keep up with it.
 Especially because it's a bit hacked off.
 It doesn't like to spend all morning staring at faces in boxes when it's like this.
 Which is probably why it's getting sidetracked.
 I like side-tracks.
 Especially when they have nothing to do with computers.
 I hate computers.
 I'm very good at them too.
 Side-tracks like me.
 And I like them.
 A whole lot more than computers.
 Which doesn't say much.
 I hate computers.
 But anyway.
 So maybe I should focus.
 Except I would rather not.
 Ugh.
 I don't want to.
 I don't have to.
 You can't make me.

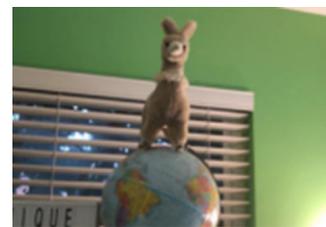


So there.
 Now I can go get side-tracked.
 Instead of doing useful stuff.
 But maybe I'll do the useful stuff anyway.
 Dunno.
 We'll see.

I'm tired.
 Can I go hide under a rock now?
 Please?
 It's probably safer for everyone involved?
 No?
 Oh well.
 I tried.
 I may also be getting a bit punchy.
 Between moments of being very tired.
 Just thought you should know.
 AKA it's only fair I warn you.
 But it might be too late, so...
 Because I could just sit here and send you messages for the rest of the day and be quite happy about it. And there's nothing you can do to stop me!!!!
 insert evil cackle
 and maybe a little more cackling
 Ah heh.
 Okay.
 We're all good now.
 Maybe.
 Supposedly.
 Okay, fine.
 We are nowhere near okay. But that's beside the point.
 My classes are all done.
 Mom is at the store.
 The dog is... you know what, I have no clue where he is, but he is mysteriously absent from my room. The above are stipulated as facts in this case, and neither party may object to their accuracy. The following are facts as we see them.
 There is a candle in the kitchen.
 There is a lighter in the kitchen.
 Hannah has, after many years, finally figured out how to work the lighter.
 Hannah is also bored.
 Very bored.

Hannah is also very broken.
 There is a bag of robot guts on the floor.
 The desk is a mess.
 The mess on the desk is rather irritating.
 The mess on the desk is also mainly paper.
 Paper is flammable.
 There is also a binder clip on the desk.
 Hannah is sitting at a computer.
 Hannah is getting very good at computering.
 The computer has access to the internet.
 The internet has access to instructions on how to build robots.
 The internet also has access to instructions on how to build robots that carry stuff. Robots that carry stuff can carry paper.
 Robots that carry stuff can carry flaming paper.
 The dog is barking again.
 The dog has a bushy tail.
 The dog has no sense of self-preservation.
 The dog should get a sense of self-preservation.
 insert evil grin
 I rest my case.

My Kleenex box has llamas on it.
 I think it's fun.
 I think llamas in general are fun.
 They've got spunk.
 I like things with spunk.
 Maybe that's why I named my llama on my shelf Spunk.



Spunk is getting more done than I am.
Side-track or otherwise.
Is that bad?
It might be.
Oh well.
Too bad.

Though that is kind of a sad state of affairs when you think about it.
"My llama is getting more done than I am."
Maybe I just won't think about it then.
See?
Problem solved.

ARTIST'S STATEMENTS

by Addelynn Hogan

SELF PORTRAIT OF WORDS (P. 9)

This is a self portrait of me that I made with words. This piece is special to me because it made me think about my values and how I think about myself. It was a lot harder to think of words than I thought it should be. It really opened my eyes to how much I need to work on my self image.

ICHIRAKU RAMEN POSTERS (P. 21)

These are my minimalistic Ichiraku Ramen Posters. They symbolize that distinct pieces can say the same thing. All of these posters look totally different, but they all say "go eat at Ichiraku Ramen." Creating this really reminded me that people can have different ideas that still have the same end goal.

FRUIT BOWL (P. 31)

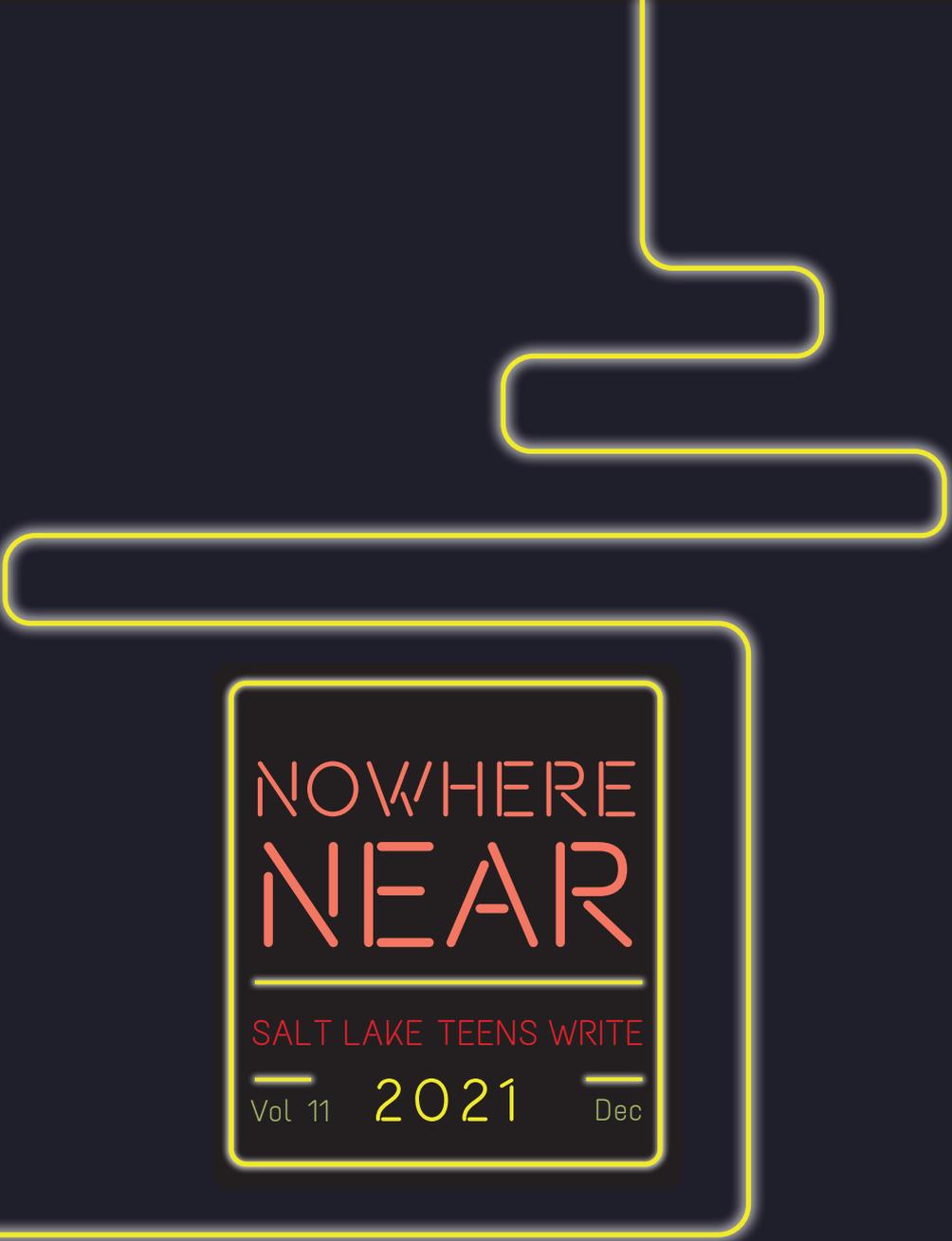
This is a fruit bowl that I made using poly art. It symbolizes that we can all be different, but still have something sweet inside of us. Just like how fruit all looks different, and still tastes good! This is important to me because I think the world already has enough bad in it, but looking for the good in people makes life a bit easier.

KDA AKALI THE BADDEST (P. 48)

This is my take on Akali from KDA's The Baddest. This piece is special to me because this character inspires me to be more confident. Akali is sassy, fun, and confident. I want to take on some of her traits, so creating an art piece of her really helped me think about that more.

KDA AHRI THE BADDEST (P. 54)

This is my take on Ahri from KDA's The Baddest. The techniques I successfully used to create this piece gave me a sense of hope because I realized that people can create art for a living. I have a lot of fun creating art, so being reminded that I am capable and can do it for a living is exciting.



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