

The Silver Lining
Art & Creative Writing
Journal

2022



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Cloud County Community College

The Silver Lining
Spring 2022

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Editors' Note

The initial idea for a creative journal came out of a Creative Writing classroom during the Spring 2012 semester, and students' writing from that particular course was published in a number of issues. This year, however, we are excited to relaunch and reimagine *The Silver Lining*. Instead of being limited to one particular course, we have expanded it to include the entire Cloud community—students, faculty, and staff. We also wanted to highlight Cloud's artistic endeavors alongside the literary talent. What follows stands as testament to the creativity of Cloud County Community College.

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

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"Total Eclipse o the Art"
Painting by Amy Kern5

"Approach"
Thor Write-It Contest Winner: Holly Hagberg6

Field of Sunshine
Gracie Schell7

"The Tree's Silent Voice"
Kaitlyn Beikmann8

"Grim"
David Shirkey11

"Florida House"
Zoe Rincon-Charbonneau12

"Planet XB009"
Becca Kesselring15

"Dancing in the Moonlight"
Clarissa Koch19

"Childhood Trauma"
Sicely Jackson20

"What lies within, What lies beneath"
Sicely Jackson22

"Lack of Understanding"
Nicole Figueroa23

"Good for One Thing"
Natalie Goode24

"Devout Awareness"
Nicole Figueroa28

“Mystery School Series: Identity” Naomi Pouabou-Toumba.....	29
“Montana Peace” Kenzi Cooper	31
“Signs of the Times” Brenton Phillips.....	32
“Coffee” Nicole Turner.....	33
“Free Verse Sonnet: Chaos” Suzette Ghent.....	34
“Guitar” Jayson Kurschinski.....	35
“Sisters” Aubrey Barleen.....	36
“Roller Coaster” Asher Ross.....	37
“Elf King” Valeria Chavez	39
“Even the Parakeet Speaks” Dr. Brandon Galm.....	40
“One Winged Angel” Valeria Chavez	43
“The Sparrow’s Journey” Christopher Hester.....	44
“The Ties That Bind” Amy Kern	49

**“Total Eclipse of the Art”
Amy Kern**



Amy Kern is a graduate of Washington High School with a BFA from Fort Hays State University and a MFA in graphic design from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Amy has been teaching art and graphic design at Cloud County Community College for the last 3 years. In her spare time she enjoys traveling with her two children and making art.

**“Approach”
Holly Hagberg**

The sun rose, blank and bright, without expectation.
Appearing from the red city,
It drank the dyes poured into it, soaking them in and changing its hues.
Individual!

Young beliefs and perspectives;
Laughing, crying, seeking a vessel for its love;
Unable to stand alone in a city with a million windows.
No choice;
Blinded too soon from the dawn of existence.

Leaving a piece within the walls of an imaginary paradise;
Biting back bile as bricks of rain continue falling,
Harder,
 Faster,
Bells tolling, dong ding,
Tides of time rolling, rolling,
Pay no heed to the gasping radiance within the dark deep depths.
The structure of a paradise that doesn't exist
Shelters that which will never leave.

Praying to illusory ears, dancing for eyes that cannot see;
No need to pretend any longer.
Scornful laughter,
Story books were wrong.
Love cannot be poured into nothing;
Neither exists.

Truth has a bitter, unsavory flavor.
Light a fire to the useless wisdoms without meanings!
The books whose words are gentle falsehoods!
A pulsing blaze, whispering ceaselessly its silent, sonorous speech.
It drives one mad.
“Live.”

Holly Hagberg is a high school student attending her junior year at Smith Center Jr./Sr. High School in Smith Center, Kansas. She won first place in Thor's Annual "Write It!" Contest for the poetry category during the 2021-2022 school year. She currently does not have any definitive plans as to which college she will attend or what her major will be. Her interests include writing and literature, theater and performing arts, music, and animals.

**“Field of Sunshine”
Gracie Schell**



Gracie Schell is from Frankfort, Kansas. She is currently a sophomore at Cloud County Community College. She is on the cheer team, the dance team, and she is also a R.A.. Following graduation, Gracie plans to further her education in dental hygiene.

“The Tree’s Silent Voice”

Kaitlyn Beikmann

From the moment he was a little sprig in the ground, Tree has looked over the flowery field with great contentment and curiosity. From a small sapling to a mighty oak, with deep sturdy roots winding their way throughout the earth below, he has watched over the field, taking everything that happens around him deep within his memory. He has seen countless acts of both love and hate, and through that, has learned the steady balance that only a mind as long living as his would be able to comprehend.

At first glance, he seems unapproachable with his rough and scaly exterior, beaten and scarred all over, but with a closer look, he is exactly the opposite. Harsh scars and slashes that blemish his trunk connect into two initials carved sloppily inside of a heart from a first date that he witnessed turn into an engagement, and then a family filled with an abundance of love and happiness. Deep seated rings on his strongest branch are reminders of years surrounded by children’s laughter, seeing who could stay on the old recycled tire swing for the longest time. However, he has also seen countless moments of pain and betrayal.

When those same children inevitably fall off of the swing, or when one of those precious first dates ends in heartbreak he is absolutely crushed, but he knows that it is just the natural way of things. In those moments he wants nothing more than to wrap his strong branches around each and every broken soul and tell them that everything is going to be okay, that things will get better. He knows that it will. He’s seen it happen over and over again. Eventually things always work out in the way they were supposed to all along, even if it seems like that would be impossible. Every mistake has the potential to become a lesson, and every sad feeling fades slowly over time. He wishes every day that he had a voice to spread his message. He wishes that the sound of his leaves swooshing in the wind could somehow translate into coherent sentences so that he might be able to comfort all those who come to him searching for answers. Sticky brown sap falls from his bark like sickly sweet tears of frustration as he searches for some way to show the world that, though there are plenty of moments in life that feel unbearable, you will feel happiness

again someday. With no conceivable way of finding a solution to his problem, he eventually comes to the painful conclusion that he may never get to spread his message, and he tries to be content with his gift of being a strong and silent shoulder to cry on.

As another spring comes to a bitter end, he sees the yearly decline of visitors, and prepares for his annual hibernation. As it gets colder and the flowers around him start to wilt, he notices his favorite season fast approaching. Though he knows well that Autumn directly precedes harsh and lonely winters, he loves being able to add vibrant color to the world around him. When his luscious green leaves turn a million different shades of gold and crimson, he feels as though he can still silently spread his message of color and light. With each passing breeze, he turns into a shimmering disco ball of amber, and when people pass by, he feels completely content. Eventually though, each leaf falls one by one, exposing all of his branches until he feels like nothing more than an overgrown twig, and he starts his long wait for people to again come out of their warmly lit homes and for his branches to be filled with leaves and robin nests.

One day, deep into his winter rest, he is awoken by the sound of a child’s laughter. It gradually gets closer and closer, until the mother and little girl come over the hill and into his gaze. They walk hand in hand, both bundled up tightly in bright red coats and scarves. The little girl’s pigtails bounce frantically as she runs to stand right in front of him. She looks up as high as she can until she starts to fall backward into her mother’s arms.

“Wow Mommy! This is the biggest tree I’ve ever seen!”

Tree laughs to himself. He’s the biggest tree he’s ever seen too, not that he’s around much competition.

“Mommy, where are all of its leaves?”

“Well sweetie,” says the mother, “When it starts to get cold outside, all of the tree’s leaves start to fall to the ground, that’s why you get to make big leaf piles in the Fall, but then when it starts to warm back up in Spring, all of the leaves grow back.”

The little girl looks back at her mother with a puzzled look. “But, why?”

“Well,” the mother thought for a moment. “I guess it’s nature’s way of showing us that no matter how bitter life gets, and how much we lose, we’ll always have a chance to regrow.”

The little girl looks back up at the tree with a wide smile painted on her face. She runs over to him and tries her best to wrap her tiny arms in a hug around his strong trunk.

“Alright sweetie,” says the mother through soft laughter, “we have to start heading back now if we want to make it home before dark.”

The little girl once again grabs her mother’s hand as they venture back the way they came.

Tree is filled to the brim with happiness in his new found discovery. I do show them. Every time he sheds his leaves just to have them regrow in a few months, he unknowingly has shown the world the message he has been wanting to share all along. He doesn’t need a voice or branches that can bend into an embrace. He has all that he needs to show the people around him that things will get better already. Now, every Autumn, he cannot wait for his leaves to fall to the ground, because maybe someone will see his bare branches, and realize that things will always eventually get better.

Kaitlyn Beikmann is a graduate from Concordia High School, and is a Freshman at Cloud as a Humanities Major. After graduation, she plans to attend a 4-year University to major in English and hopes to one day become a successful author or work as a book editor. In her spare time, she enjoys singing and playing guitar, as well as reading and going on walks with her two dogs.

“Grim” David Shirkey



David Shirkey resides in Concorida, Kansas, and has taught Mathematics and Statistics at Cloud County Community College for over 19 years. He enjoys drawing, painting and woodworking.

“Florida House” Zoe Rincon-Charbonneau

The owner of the house faces you in his Florida man attire
His belly swings underneath a wife-beater
Both offer you a jolly hello
The heated sun hits the zambias, coreopsis, and palm trees as they
wave “hi-bye” to you
The handmade brick pathway, with diagonals, suns, and waves, lead
you to the viny, brick abode
As you open the freshly white painted Scottish Stained-glass door
it leaves a scattering array of colors on the French woman’s face
Her dark, blue bagged eyes spring to life and smile at you in a way
that makes you feel safe
She is covered in paint and folding laundry on the machines
To the left is the kitchen, the most prized possession and sacred
identity to the house
The owner put in the oak cabinets, flooring, tables, and chairs
The owner even made his vine’s weave through every corner of
the dusty yellow room and frame his antique one-of-a-kind Clint
Eastwood and Johnny cash posters
Ahead you will see an opened door, up against two windows is a boy
reading a John Wayne Biography on his fuzzy, blue checkered bed
Looking around the interior is the boy’s four jujitsu belts, awards,
and a fist sized hole in the wall
Everything else in the room is bare except for a dusty tv, a mangled
PlayStation, and a trash that holds a Halo book and COD posters
Stepping out and going to the left, is a small hall that leads you to the
unique living room
On top of the blue paint covers an array of masks, like Brazilian

Carnival, Filipino Dinagyang, and Japanese Shimokita Tengu
Matsuri
To the left is a angled Martin GPC-11E and a PRS S2 Standard
electric
They are sat on a Nazmiyal Antique rug and placed directly in front
of two windows that shine light on the soundboards and fades to
their heads
Outside you hear a sudden tinkling
Through the opened windows you notice the smell of damp freshness
emitting from the plants
Past the display is a white arch framing a red three body couch, a
mantled Samsung tv, and an antique green onyx floor lamp
Behind the setup is another hallway, there are three rooms: one in
front and two directly beside you
As you examine the one in front of you, there is a bathroom with
quarter sized white and black checkered pieces adorning the floors
and walls
All handmade, of course
To the left is a door slightly ajar
You peer in to see a white bed, white walls, and white bedside table
To the right, as you go in, there are two beds with three feet of space
between them
The twin bed to the right has a little girl with monster high dolls
scattered like a blanket along the bed and has two of them fistied in
her hands
Holt Hyde is yelling at Draculaura to “not yell at him when he’s sad”
Scanning to the left is a single window that shines onto a neatly
made, pink bed
On the covers, there is a black journal open with scriptures that read
“it’s okay, everyone is happy”

You turn around and explore an antique oak vanity
While glancing into the mirror, there is a girl in a school uniform
Realizing that you are the girl
your eyes well up in tears in
The reality sets in that that no one will understand what you see

Zoe Rincon-Charbonneau is originally from Puerto Rico, and a sophomore at Cloud within the Fine Arts department. After graduation, she plans on attending Wichita State University and hopes one day to travel the world and grow her skills in art. In her spare time, she enjoys reading about adventures that she will experience someday.

“Planet XB009” Becca Kesselring



Binkus

The binkus is a species of QWOP87 that lives in the deep in the oceans on planet XB009, usually around 18,000 feet below the surface. The bright, luminescent coloration of the binkus serves two primary purposes: to help in attracting mates, and to help the binkus see in its relatively low light ocean environment. The binkus's low light environment is also thought to be the reason for its large eyes. However, although the binkus's coloration is useful for attracting mates and for navigating its environment, its colors also attract predators. Fortunately for the binkus, its body secretes poisons that will kill any creature that tries to eat it, except for the sqwurp, which is unaffected by the binkus poison. Binkuses do not have any mouth parts, and die soon after reproducing. Binkuses can lay up to 900 eggs at a time.



Dalinonin

Dalinonin are a carnivorous, amphibious species of gnollakk. Dalinonin typically live for roughly 12-18 earth years, and are held in high regard for their bright, jewel-like eggs. The eggs of the female dalinonin grow from the side of its body, before detaching and floating to the surface of the water during the dalinonin's breeding season, where they are then either fertilized by male dalinonin, or are swept away by the ocean. Tourists that visit planet XB009 will often search the shores of the beaches in hopes of finding unfertilized dalinonin eggs that they can then take home as a souvenir. The segmented body of the dalinonin allows it to rotate its head and neck 270 degrees without suffering any tissue damage.



Pictured above: the eggs of the dalinonin.



A sketch of the dalinonin's threat display.

Smullontophis

Smullontophis are a species of semi-aquatic boltons, primarily known for their acetink, which they shed thrice a year along with the outer layer of their skin. They live for an average of 27 - 32 earth years, with the oldest recorded specimen reaching 47 years of age. Smullontophis spend most of their life in water, but when shedding, they migrate to land until the shedding is complete. The outer layer of their skin gradually splits open across the line on it's belly over the course of a week. After shedding its skin and acetink, both are left behind as the smullontophis heads back into the ocean. The shed skin contains eggs which will eventually hatch into new smullontophis, and the newly hatched smullontophis will need the nutrients from the parent's shed acetink if they are to survive. Smullontophis are the only creatures that can safely consume the fruits of the acetink. After two weeks, the acetink stops producing fruit, then withers and dies.



Pictured above: an acetink and its fruits.



Smullontophis use the fluorescent light at the end of their tail to lure prey.

"Dancing In The Moonlight" Clarissa Koch



Becca is a student majoring in science from Omaha, Nebraska. She loves drawing and painting animals and nature scenery in her spare time, and would like to one day get into astrophotography but is sadly too poor to get into such an expensive hobby at the moment.

Clarissa Koch is a graduate of Centralia High School. She is a freshman at Cloud County Community College and plans on being an art teacher. Clarissa is involved in various clubs and activities at Cloud.

“Childhood Trauma” Sicely Jackson

I find myself here; torn between that which I was and who I am to become. The memories taunt me, their voices filling my ears. Don't abandon us, we've been nothing but good to you. I tried covering my ears once but their voice are inside my head, they have a hold of my mind, and the nails dig deep. **Good to me?** How I would have laughed if they allowed me. **You are the cause of my pain and anguish, how were you ever good to me?** They tug at me trying to keep me in the dark, covering my eyes so I can't see the light forcing me to walk aimlessly.

We provided for you, kept you alive, you should be grateful! They cling to my legs, making each step I take a struggle, making me feel as though they are made of lead. **You may have, but you also provided me with scars. Kept me alive, sure with sustenance and a place to hide. You also cut me deep enough I wanted to die.** My arms are slack at my sides swings with me as I wade through the thick darkness. I feel them try to caress my hands to draw me back.

What about us, we need you here, we need you. How selfish of you. No one will love your hateful heart. When will you grow up? Their voices ring through me and with each they slow me and slow me. Then inevitably, they stop me and I fall on my knees. I never have decided if I hate them for dragging me down or myself for allowing them. **I hate myself, I hate that everything I am is you, I am the embodiment of your hatred.** They only keep me because while they always talk about what they have done for me, it was I That gave them everything. Every bit of myself, I gave no matter the cost because of... love? Maybe at first but in the end, it was about surviving.

No you don't, don't say such things. Lies, you are a deceiver and nothing more. We raised you better than that. There it is. **You didn't raise me.** I begin to crawl. **I have pulled myself up again and again when all you do is crush me beneath your fist.** I begin to stand. **All you want is control over an extension of yourself and I refuse to allow you to manipulate me any longer.** I take a step. **I am not you.** Another. **You have no**

power here, not anymore.

A lie. I take another step. Of course, they have power over me, they are part of me regardless of what I would like to believe, but that doesn't mean it has to remain that way. I continue through the dark though slowly I can feel myself moving more freely, maybe someday I'll make it out.

**“What lies within, What lies beneath”
Sicely Jackson**



Sicely Jackson is a track athlete at cloud county community college where she is majoring in communications. After graduation she plans to pursue a psychology degree in no particular university, at the moment. Jackson hopes to use her education to become a therapist or a college professor. While in her free time writing a novel or two.

**“Lack of Understanding”
Nicole Figueroa**



Nicole Figueroa is native of Kansas and has plans to attend K-State in 2024. She is currently pursuing her Associate of Arts Degree and is planning to become a Secondary Art Education Teacher in the coming years. Afterward, she intends to enroll in Manhattan Area Technical College to become a Certified Welder. In her spare time, she experiments with different artistic mediums, writes poetry, and sings.

“Good For One Thing” Natalie Goode

“That’s fine, whatever.”

“Just do it, I might not see you again.”

“That’s all you want to do?”

She sat on her bed crying, replaying of all the things that have been said to her by men. It made her angry, and it made her mad at herself for giving in. Giving in all those times when she didn’t want to.

* * *

“That’s fine, whatever.”

May was in a neighboring town hanging out with a friend that night. They were having fun dancing and laughing. She felt pretty in the ripped jeans and crop top she picked out. She felt pretty. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a guy she had hung out with once standing in the crowd. She thought back to how she had met him through social media, he was an athlete from a school nearby and at first she thought he was really cute and sweet. He had stopped texting her after she met him that one night.. She looked up, her mind coming back to the present and began to hear the music vibrating again in her ears. She turned around and was suddenly facing him. “Hey you and your friend should come over later to hang out with us.” He was with some of his teammates, she was hesitant but didn’t want the night to be over yet, so she and her friend agreed. May and her friend had gone over later and talked to some of his friends. Although the guy who invited her over stayed quiet and even had gone to his room while they were still in the living room. A few minutes later she gets a text from him saying, “what do you wanna do?”. May instantly became annoyed because she realized he invited her over just for sex again, she started remembering the last time and got a sick feeling. May started to get ready to leave but he stops her and pulls her into his room. “You’re leaving?” he says with a sad look on his face and disappointed voice. “Yeah I’m really tired I better get home” “Please just stay I wanted to hang out with you” Something in his voice made her stay. She never saw him act like that before. Like he actually liked her, like he actually wanted her. She stayed and did not expect to do anything. But of course, he put on a movie from Netflix, which is how it all starts now a days, and he started to touch her. “I thought you

wanted to just hang out?” said May, “We are hanging out aren’t we?” He continued to touch her. Not 5 minutes later he kisses her and asks if she wants to have sex. At first she said no and you could see the utter disappointment and annoyance in his face. “Are you okay?” She asks, “Yeah its fine if you don’t want to I just really wanted to you’re really pretty.” He kept holding her and touching her. May didn’t know what to do. She had already done it before so what was the big deal if she gave in again. She could tell he was annoyed. So she gave in, and right after the mood had changed. It was like he got what he wanted and had no more use for her. He had laid down right next to her and acted like she wasn’t even there. “So is your friend gonna pick you up or.” He said, “Uh.. its really late I don’t think we will leave til the morning.. you said I could stay the night...” “Oh yeah whatever that’s fine I guess.” He turned around and went to sleep. May laid there regretting her decision and felt horrible that she had given in like that. She felt so stupid for believing that he wanted more than just sex. She stayed up almost all night just thinking and left in the morning still feeling used and disgusting. Once again, he never texted her back.

* * *

“Just do it, I might not see you again.”

Natasha and her friend were hanging out in a college town and her friend suggested to go to a frat house her friend lived in. Natasha was excited because she had never been in one before.

Okay just to give some context here, frat houses, at least this one, are disappointing, they are not that glorious at all trust me. The bathrooms are dirty, its big but there’s stuff laying around everywhere, and for some reason there are random girls in pajamas walking round everywhere. Anyways,

Natasha and her friend are greeted by the guy and he was nice, he gave them a little tour and then they hung out in his living room. Natasha met one of his friends Alex. He wasn’t in the frat but he was a close friend. Natasha had talked to him for a bit but did not flirt with him at all. She wasn’t interested. Not that it mattered but she was wearing bootcut jeans with a mint green top that showed her midriff, although she wore a dark blue jacket that had been zipped up. So she was fully covered, again not that that should matter. Natasha

was sitting on the couch next to him with some space inbetween, so she felt comfortable. Her friend was on the other couch catching up with her friend in the frat. Natasha asked her if she wanted to leave soon because it was getting late, but she said she wanted to stay a bit longer. Alex caught wind of this conversation and scooted closer to Natasha. "You're leaving? So soon?" Natasha started feeling a little uncomfortable. "Uh. Yeah soon." All of a sudden he gets Natasha on his lap and moves his face even closer. "Well you can't leave yet. I haven't gotten a kiss." Natasha tried getting up but she physically couldn't. He was stronger than her. She had never been in a physically restrained situation like this before. "No I really don't want to.." "But please you might never see me again" He leaned in and pulled her closer to try to kiss her. Natasha tried to back up but she couldn't and she didn't want to make a scene. She gave him a quick peck then said, "Okay okay that it only one" You could hear the nervousness in her voice. "That's it? You gotta give more more than that" He pulled her closer again then Natasha threw a piece of trash at her friend to get her attention then he finally loosed her grip. She immediately got up, her friend turned around and quickly realized something was wrong and said, "Okay I think we should go." Her friend walked them out and before they left he said, "Hey Natasha I'm sorry about Alex he gets like that sometimes." Natasha said nothing. Why would he let that happen or stand up for his friend's actions like that? Like it was okay? She quietly walked to the car and was silent the whole way home.

* * *

"That's all you want to do?"

Evelyn was very intoxicated at a party, she had been flirting with this guy she just met at the party and he went back home with her. Evelyn was very drunk, so she let him come back to her room. She had put on a movie and then realized the room was spinning and she didn't feel too great. She also started to realize that it may have been a bad decision. The guy she invited back to her room started to try to touch her. He kissed her and then he tried taking her pants off. "No.. no.. I'm too drunk." Evelyn mumbled, "Me too its fine" He kept going. "No like, I'm too drunk I don't want to do this" Evelyn was slurring her words, "Is that all you want to do is kiss?" He kept going and she felt like she couldn't do anything. She kept saying no. He finally stopped and when she looked at him he seemed disappointed and

defiantly not as drunk as Evelyn. He sat on the bed for a second then said, "Okay I'm just going to leave. Goodnight." Evelyn laid there as the room spined and tried to go to sleep and forget what happened.

* * *

This may seem like a touchy subject not many people want to talk about but, I like many women have experienced this. No one really likes to talk about sexual harassment or sexual assault. As a woman, I feel like it's almost been normalized to the point where no one feels comfortable talking about this. It can make an individual fill with anger or guilt for letting those things happen.

For me and many other girls, it fills you with hate and distrust towards men. I have been used repeatedly. Except I somehow always partly blame myself. Many girls may think that sexual actions will make a boy like them. That it will make them stay. But why? What programmed our brains to think such a thing? It's all around us. Women are constantly sexualized. Many girls will constantly compare their bodies to models or people on social media. Wishing their nose looked like someone else's, that their breasts were bigger, that their waist was smaller or their butt was bigger. All to please the male gaze. So when you experience a boy having interest in you, for your looks or your body, you feel validated. And some may give up parts of their body for that validation. And sometimes, not all the time, many men you come across will use you just for that. Your body. It doesn't matter how many times they tell you how pretty you are or how many times they ask you come over late at night, it all ends the same way.

Natalie Goode is a Sophomore at Cloud County Community College majoring in Communications. Since her father is in the military, she has moved around a lot of her life but has spent most of it in South Korea. Natalie is an RA, Vice president of Student Senate, a cheerleader, President of BSU, and Community Sports Manager at KVCO Thunderbird Media. In her free time she likes to hang out with friends and feed her shopping addiction.

“Devout Awareness”
Nicole Figueroa



Nicole Figueroa is native of Kansas and has plans to attend K-State in 2024. She is currently pursuing her Associate of Arts Degree and is planning to become a Secondary Art Education Teacher in the coming years. Afterward, she intends to enroll in Manhattan Area Technical College to become a Certified Welder. In her spare time, she experiments with different artistic mediums, writes poetry, and sings.

“Mystery School series: Identity”
Naomi Pouabou-Toumba

Who am I?

My name is Naomi, before I was born, my mother planned on naming me “Noemi”; on my birth date, a friend of hers suggested she name me Naomi instead, so she did. But, if I was named Noemi, would I be the same person as Naomi? Do our names define us? I do know that they influence us, but defining our identity? I don’t think so. It’s just another random selection.

But what about our age? If I was born a year earlier to my actual birth date, would I still be me? Does my age define me? I also don’t think so. What about my ethnicity, belief system, and culture? Everything is influenced by my environment, but does it define who I am as a person?

Let’s talk about occupation; I’m a student, but I’m also a writer. To my parents, I’m their daughter. To my siblings, I’m their sister. To my classmates, I am someone they know from school. To the person I walked past the street, I am nobody but a stranger. To people I have a strong relationship with, I am their friend, to those I don’t get along with, I’m their enemy. To you, I am a writer. Everyone who “knows” me only knows me based on what they’ve seen me do or the kind of relationship I have with them. So who is the real me?

What defines us?

We would still be who we are even without these labels, simply because we’ve been us before even being aware of our existence. It wasn’t until we were told who we are that we ended up naturally accepting that piece as our identity.

Our real identity is not tied to a label. It’s subjective; labels that we use to define each other are the results of unfounded assumptions and stereotypes. We stick these labels on people setting each other in boxes! It limits true potential, for once set, we expect that kind of behaviour to suit these labels.

So, who are we really?

Naomi is a student at CCCC. She's passionate about writing. Her biggest dream is to work in the film industry as a scriptwriter. She has written about twelve screenplays and self published four books. On her spare time, Naomi loves to watch hispanic soap operas which she finds really inspiring and entertaining due to the fact that it helps her explore her imagination; she's a story teller. After Cloud, Naomi is hoping to transfer to a bigger university to pursue her career in film or journalism.

"Montana Peace" **Kenzie Cooper**



Kenzie Cooper is a Wamego, KS native. She is currently a freshman at Cloud County Community College, majoring in secondary education. She is on the volleyball team and is also a student ambassador at CCCC. After graduating from Cloud County, she plans to continue her education at a four-year university where she hopes to become a high school art teacher. In addition to doing art, she also loves to fish and bake.

“Signs of the Times”
Brenton Phillips

There’s a rest area NEXT RIGHT the sign says.
Another soothes, MODERN REST AREA 47 MILES AHEAD.
This whole grassland, I guess,
was a rest area if you were
a pioneer looking for somewhere to sleep
or go to the bathroom.
You wouldn’t find a SOFT SHOULDER to rest your head on
if your wife died of cholera
two hundred miles ago.
The only SLIPPERY WHEN WET occurred
when your sweat-slick palm gripped
the Navy revolver at your side as you awoke,
wondering what that rustling was fifty yards off.
MERGE was merging of land and sky,
And a horizon
 you didn’t know
 and didn’t know you’d
 even reach.

Brenton Phillips, a native of Dodge City, began teaching at Cloud County Community College in 2002 after teaching high school English, drama, yearbook, and forensics for sixteen years. Currently, Phillips serves as the Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business. Phillips has won writing awards in poetry, short story, and essay writing from the Kansas Authors Club and Kansas Voices. In his spare time, he enjoys playing his guitars, reading, camping, and watching classic films.

“Coffee”
Nicole Turner



Nicole Turner is from Concordia, KS and a Sophomore at Cloud in the education department. After graduation she plans on attending Emporia or Hays to get a degree in secondary education in art and technology.

“Free Verse Sonnet - Chaos”

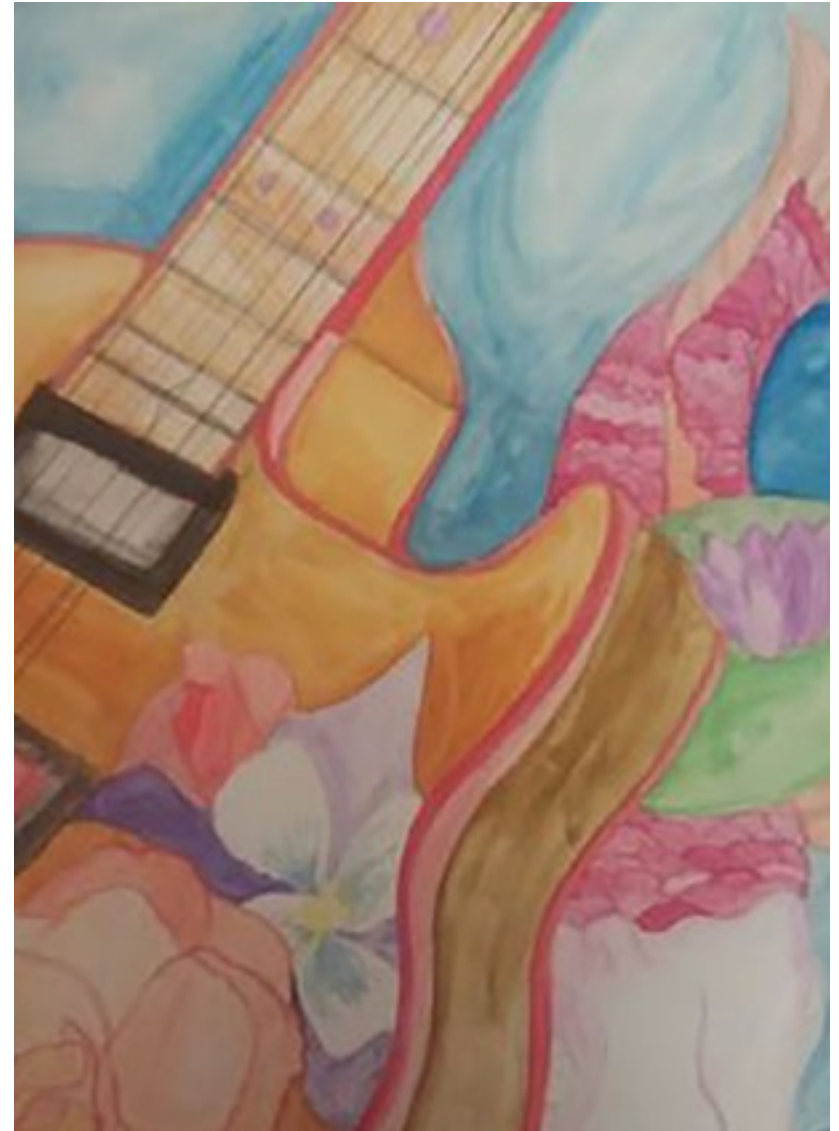
Suzette Ghent

Are the blue badges of fear our letter A? Are we being punished?
Venturing out to gain sustenance can mean death from the invisible.
I hear a sneeze; I scramble. – Panic!
Who are you? Are you smiling in comfort or are you mocking me in
disdain?
Have the eyes become trained to be soulless?
I only see half of everyone – Anxiety.
I touch a doorknob – Panic!
Home, now, is where the entire being is trapped – Isolation.
Familial ties voluntarily separated – Loneliness.
Half-knowledges bestowed upon us -- Darkness.
Am I positive? – Panic!
Fearing death and being woke at the same time
Which feeling is victorious in consumption? – Confusion
Is this the new norm? – Life.

Suzette Ghent was raised in the South and has lived in Kansas for the past twenty years. She joined the faculty of Cloud in 2007. Suzette has been the lead English and Communications instructor on the Geary County Campus since 2015. In 1996, she received her Masters of Fine Arts degree from Florida State University. She has been an avid Barbie collector for nearly fifty years and loves to travel and spend time with her husband, children, Archie (her bratty Corgi), and Oliver (her perfect cat).

“Guitar”

Jayson Kurschinski



Jayson Kurschinski is a Colorado native and is currently a freshman at Cloud working to obtain a degree in nursing. Jayson plans to one day work as a nurse for a Childrens hospital in the cardiology department. In his spare time, he enjoys fishing, playing video games, writing new music, and drawing.

“Sisters”

Aubrey Barleen

Little bits of sunlight peaking through the branches and the leaves. One of the branches is making a creaking sound from the rope tugging on it. The rope is being pulled tight from the weight of the tire attached to it, along with the young girl sitting inside. There are two girls, spinning each other in the tire swing. One forcing the tire to spin in one direction causing the rope to coil. When the tire refuses to turn anymore, she lets go. The tire spins so fast it's almost impossible to make out the face of the girl inside the tornado of rubber and laughter. As the tire slows, the girl stops the swing to look into the eyes of the girl who was spinning. She laughs as she watches her sister's eyes move across the horizon, frantic to grasp onto something more still. She misses her sister, misses when they were close like that. She wants that back. The laughter, the simplicity, all of it. But like the branches of the tree they once played on, they grew apart.

Aubrey Barleen is native to Kansas. This is her first year as a student here at Cloud County Community College and she is very interested in Psychology. As long as her interest grows, she plans to transfer to Fort Hays University in hopes of becoming a mental health therapist. In her free time, she enjoys reading, but her buying pace is a little too fast for her reading pace.

“Roller Coaster”

Ascher Ross

Look at my phone
Mom texts
Asking “are you okay?”

Ignore her for an hour
Then say
“yeah, just a rough day”

How do I tell her
I don't wanna be alive
I'm tired of living
But I don't wanna die

Day to day
In and out
Feels like
I'm getting closer

Losing my mind
Trying to get off
Trying to get off this roller coaster

My brain is killing me
Can't sleep can't breathe
I don't remember buying tickets
For this roller coaster

Skipping class
Taking naps
Ignoring friends
Shit's going too fast

How can I
Hold on
When I
Wanna be done

Why should I
Keep living like this
Dirty room, old trash
Is this my midlife crisis

Day to day
In and out
Feels like
I'm getting closer

Losing my mind
Trying To get off
Trying to get off this roller coaster

My brain is killing me
Can't sleep can't breathe
I don't remember buying tickets
For this roller coaster

Scars on my body
Match what's inside
Try to escape it
but I can't hide

Buckles broken
Strapped so tight
Just wanna get
Off this ride

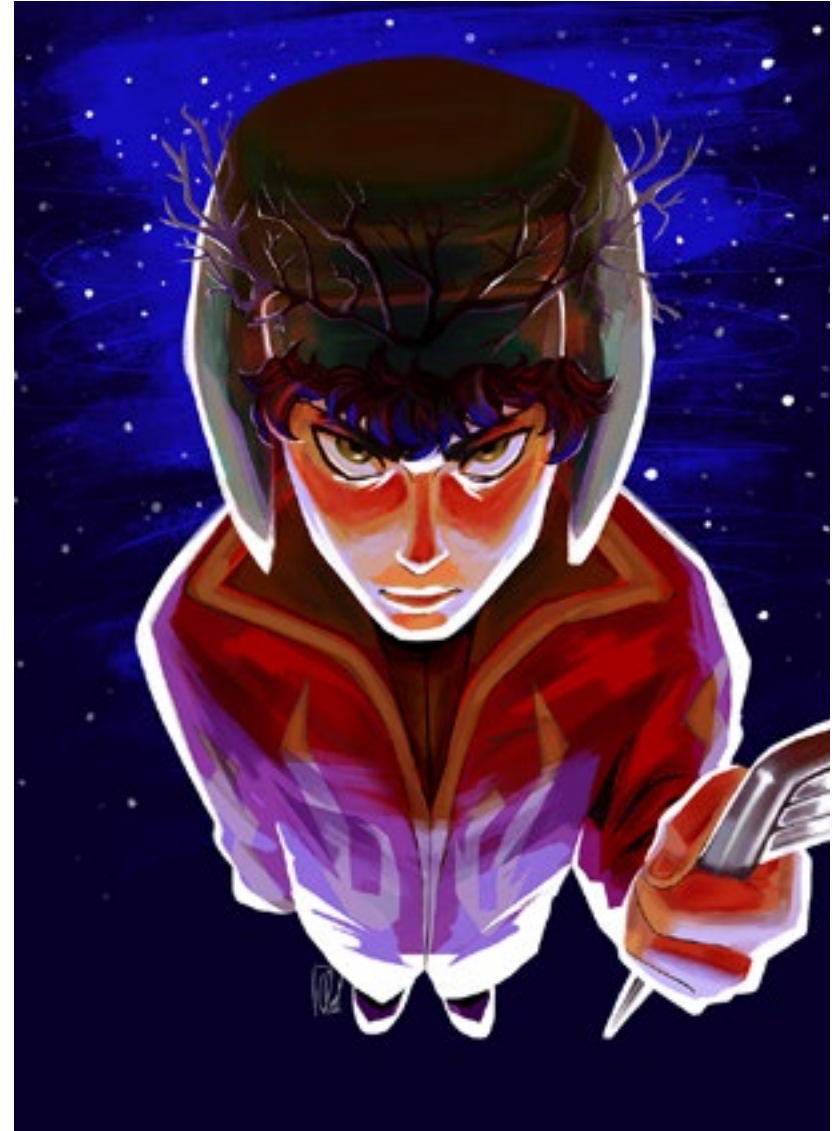
Day to day
In and out
Feels like
I'm getting closer

Losing my mind
Trying To get off
Trying to get off this roller coaster

My brain is killing me
Can't sleep can't breathe
I don't remember buying tickets
For this roller coaster

Asher Ross is originally from Onaga, Kansas and is currently a freshman at Cloud in the music department. While they are not completely sure of their plans after Cloud, Ash knows they would like to perform music, either on their own or as part of a band. When they are not in class or working, Ash enjoys watching horror movies or musicals, playing bass guitar, and spending time with his friends. He is hoping to release Rollercoaster as a song by the time they graduate from Cloud.

"Elf King" Valeria Chavez



Valeria Chavez is completing her associate's degree on Cloud and plans to be transferred to a university soon and study filmmaking. She loves all kinds of art, especially cinematography, and enjoys painting and playing video games in her spare time.

“Even The Parakeet Speaks”

Brandon Galm

The students eat their pens today. As they often do. Bite after bite like mice on cheese. Ink-drinking straws; black-dripped, dribble cheeks. Some swallow quickly, but others savor every moment, licking black, blue, the occasional pink, green, or purple, and for those rarefied few, a Skittles-packed pen (Taste the rainbow, as the saying goes). The blacks, pinks, blues, and purples stare in envy. The greens do not. Sometimes life is funny that way.

One student goes so far as to first draw a full-course meal on four pages of college-ruled notebook sheets (Drawing 1: chorizo and olive skewered with manchego; Drawing 2: carrot ginger soup, topped with black sesame; Drawing 3: tuscan spinach and eggplant lasagna, shaved mozzarella and parmesan to finish; Drawing 4: The point has been made, but a dessert for the curious), then proceeds to lick each course until the paper grows sheer, then inhales sharply through pursed lips the remaining fibers, a salivic mass of pulp and pigment. An A for effort (rubric attached), Gold Star for the artwork, design, and originality (all subjective), but no more than Satisfactory can be awarded for the performance itself (distracting to other students).

A Dialogue:

I don't understand.

That's why you're here. To start to.

No, I don't understand why you won't let us bring our pets.

I told you I'm allergic.

But you have a parakeet on your shoulder.

That's different.

That's why we're here.

If fire entertains, dance in the flames. The very famous person-poet Poet von Poetesshuman once said, Every person reads to read, but not every reader persons to person. Connecting together is an amazing experience. They did it once, when they cared less. They stand proud now; they learn language. The students, obviously. Protoposcedent pronouns that they are. Adorable little dangling modifiers. Cutie wootie wittle cherubic gerunds, always -ing-ing everything up (but not everything; that's different. No one points to an everyth).

B Dialogue:

Everyth U. says, Mrs. Rofi, did you know that if you capitalize the “i” in your name, it looks like it means something really funny?

I don't understand. No one, stop pointing. It's not polite.

Everyth S. says, Are you using the same font as us?

I think so?

That's why you're here. To begin to.

That's not what I said.

What you said when?

Before.

At the start?

Yeah, that's what I said.

When?

Earlier.

Yesterday, a similar occurrence pan-fired. Smoke filled the windowless room, but sun snuck in. Always and every-ways. The class commented on the light, traced fingers through it--the smoke--through their own crackling breath. They spelled out dirty words newly learned--from where one only imagines. In the chaos, bodies bumped into walls and each other. Hands waved away ghosts taking shape from BALLS, BOOBS, and FARTS, spirits trying to possess lungs. Re-spiritation. Respir-itation. Take them, not me! several shouted, teacher included. Stop, drop, and roll on the floor, laughing.

See? Dialogue:

Okay, class. It's time to do our read out loud exercises. Everyone together.

Down with the system, down with the magic, up with the dictum, up with the tragic.

Wait, you're not reading out loud. I said everyone needs to do this, together. Try again. From the top.

Down with the system, down with the ma--.

Why aren't you reading out loud, when I explicitly asked you to? You are the problem with this lesson, not me. I don't know what else to do to get you to participate. Are you ready? Nod if you're ready. Nod if you're ready. Nod. Can you even hear me? Are you even listening? I am literarily waving my hands at you right now!

Down with the system, down with the magic, up with the dictum, up with the tragic. (This is happening behind you, beside you, in front of you.)

Down with the system, down with the magic, up with the dictum, up with the tragic. (This is happening, but you refuse to join in. Why?)
Down with the system, down with the magic, up with the dictum, up with the tragic. (These songs are a part of us, a part of you. *You* are making things difficult.)

You.

Try saying *this* out loud instead: I am not an active participant. I just sit here and observe this chaos but leave it behind when I am finished with my amusement. I am more privileged than these words. I taste what I lick from the page but refuse to digest.

The class will look at each other in the daily haze of hollow days. The class will peer at you and judge. The class will silently stare.

Even the parakeet speaks.

Brandon Galm originally hails from Northeast Ohio, where he first developed his love for silliness and words. His first work--a Choose Your Own Adventure story called "The Case of the Missing Quartz," written and illustrated for an elementary school class--made his friends laugh, and he liked the feeling. He's been writing off and on ever since, seeking the approval of anyone who will read what he's done. His most recent publication is *Cosmic Microwave*, published by Red Flag Press. He currently resides in the windy city of Concordia, KS with his wife and their cat, Sancho and Julia, respectively.

"One Winged Angel" Valeria Chavez



Valeria Chavez is completing her associate's degree on Cloud and plans to be transferred to a university soon and study filmmaking. She loves all kinds of art, especially cinematography, and enjoys painting and playing video games in her spare time.

“The Sparrow’s Journey”

Christopher Hester

Two gnarled tan tusk. One broken close to the jaw line but still formidable in battle, a crimson orc standing roughly 6’4” tall with hands like globes and a physic similar to mountains. Sparrow, an outlandish orc who was outcasted from his tribe at birth, has trained his whole life for the opportunity to prove himself to the tribe. Unknowingly to him, he seeks answers as to why he was sent out to begin with. His whole life he lived in isolation with his caretaker, Yuokul. A pine green orc with scars to show his many years of battle, Yuokul spoke little to him. He never treated him unfairly. In fact, he treated him better than most who crossed his path, giving him the necessary tools to survive and showing him how to thrive in an unforgiving world.

Sparrow’s adolescent years were spent honing his ability to wield his trusty saber tooth axe. At birth, orcs are set in front a set of weapons and allowed the opportunity to choose their creators of carnage. Sparrow chose the axe, and overtime built his weapon into a tool of both terror and protection. This would be the same tool used on his quest for recognition in the Proving. This was a great gathering of the horde and other neighboring clans who would all cheer on the contestants of the Proving. The winner of the Proving would become apart of the horde, while the losers would lose their life.

On the day of the Proving, Sparrow awoke to an empty campsite. He knew where he needed to go but was confused as to why he was alone. He stretched away the sleep from his

bones, put on his leather armor and wool boots then made his way to the location of the Proving which was a few days west by foot near the Sulken Mountains. His entire life he was shunned and even beaten by the bigger orcs of the tribe. However, this gave him the strength to push his training that took place over years of his life.

After the travel to the Sulken Mountains, Sparrow had set up camp and rested with Yuokul for the evening. When he awoke, he started towards the tribe. On his way there his stomach began to growl. He had not yet had breakfast, and a warrior should never do anything on an empty stomach.

He ignored his cravings with the thought of his bow in his hands. He started to look around his camp. Where is my bow? Sparrow thought to himself. He searched the camp for a few minutes when he realized that everything, but his axe and armor had been taken. What is this nonsense? Where are my things? Sparrow noticed that not only was his equipment gone, but Yuokul as well. “Yuokul,” Sparrow said through his teeth, “you fool.” Ridden with anger, Sparrow stormed to the nearby tribe and decided his morning meal would have to wait. And Yuokul would need to be dealt with in due time. His knuckles were white as he fisted his axe and stomped to the gates of the Black Tooth Clan, where the Proving was being held. Tribal law allowed every forsaken and outcasted orc child to be permitted in the Proving. For this was an opportunity to prove oneself and join the horde. However rare, Sparrow felt like he would thrive in this environment. He was meant to be a part of the pact. He was meant to lead. He was meant for carnage. The two sluggish orcs fat with meat and mead lazily threw there spears down in front of him, blocking him from going in. The one to the right of Sparrow had a sloppy mohawk that has some mold growing in the ends. His spear is chipped, and he seems careless in his movements.

“Wha are you doin ere little bird. Members of the clan only.” Said the one to the left of Sparrow. This orc was a bit more brutish and seemed to move with a purpose. He had a ghastly stare that would put the fear of death in any human. But Sparrow was no human, and he was no stranger to fear.

“Here for the Proving. Step aside.” Sparrow said sternly.

“Not a chance.” Said the one to his right. Saliva dripped from his chin as he spoke.

“The rules state that children of the orc who were forsaken or outcasted at birth may have the right to participate in the proving to regain their honor and become a part of the clan.”

“Perhaps... but you’re not even from this area you red skin.” Said the brute.

Sparrow said nothing else. Instead, he pulled his axe from his hip and lunged towards the brute. The drunken orc next to the brute began to

walk backwards once he noticed what Sparrow was doing but tripped over himself. The brute went to ready his spear, but he was too late. Sparrow had already embedded the teeth of his axe deep within his shoulder. When he ripped out his axe, the brute desperately tried covering the fatal gash, falling to the ground without making a sound. Sparrow looked over towards the drunken orc who left his jaw hanging open. Sparrow took one step towards him, and he began to plead.

“Please! Spare me! You may enter... you may enter!”

Sparrow stopped and stared at him for a moment before entering the gates. That was the last time he saw the drunken orc. Inside, the tribe was bustling with other clans who were all here to take their title and become one with the herd. Human slaves were being traded off to other orcs who would later use them for labor work around the lands. Cattle and other livestock were also being used as currency for other goods that the neighboring tribes brought to the festival before the Proving. Sparrow was the only crimson colored orc as far as the eye could see.

Everyone else were a different variations of green; all eyes were on him. Sparrow did not care. For he was there to prove himself and become one with the rest. The other orcs seemed to keep their distance but had no trouble whispering loud enough that Sparrow could hear them insulting him as he walked the trails of the tribe. Red skin; blood walker; orc enslaver; betrayer. His heart was cold, but after this, it was even colder. He had lived his life in isolation, so ignoring orcs came naturally, but he couldn't help but wonder why the others hated him so much. All the more reason to win Sparrow thought to himself.

He had found the tent that he was meant to stay at. It was where all the other contestants went to gather and rest. He did not participate in any of the festivities that were going on, and once they were over, he had no conversation with anyone that evening. He laid his head on a pile of hay and envisioned himself winning the proving over and over again.

Sparrow had awoken to the horns of the Proving going off around him and the crowds cheering for their tribesman. He quickly bolted

out of his blanket of hide and went to grab his axe. He searched everywhere, but it was nowhere to be seen. He had no choice but to go to the arena without it. He pushed his way through the crowd and made it to the platform where the announcer was going over the contestants. Nobody seemed to notice he was gone, but a few orcs were laughing with each other when they saw him appear on the stage next to them. Sparrow took note of this. A cold sweat was beginning to form on the back of his neck. He felt nervous without his blood rusted axe. He scanned the crowd to see if he could spot Yuukul or anyone who may have taken it. When he saw no one, he felt himself shut down. Before it got out of control, he shook his head vigorously and roared. The crowd seemed to get excited at this, and cheered even louder, drowning out the end of his battle cry. The announcer continued on with his introductions and explanation of the Proving.

“Welcome, all who dared step into this arena today. Our brothers and sisters have come to prove themselves and get an opportunity to join the herd. This will be no easy task! For only a handful will survive and be chosen. The best of the best. The heard is only as strong as its weakest link. And we will be damned if we have any weak links.” The crowd seemed to cheer and roar at this statement. A small fight even broke out in the distance. Energies were high. Sparrow could feel his sense of confidence reignite with the crowds chaotic energy. So much so that he almost forgot that he didn't have his axe by his side to back him up.

The announcer went on. “Today, these mighty orcs shall take part in a 3-day event that will challenge their ability to survive, fight, and test their resourcefulness.” He paused. “These competitors are allowed one weapon of their choosing. Their very own choice of carnage. Creators of chaos. Weapons of honed ability and prowess.” To this, the orcs in the crowd with their weapons all raised them in unison and screamed 3 times in sync, “Ja-kul, Ja-kul, Ja-kul.” Which meant “Carnage” in orcish. The sun reflected off of a weapon nearby that happened to catch Sparrows eye. He looked over to see the orc who was laughing at him wielding his axe. The orc grinned an ugly grin, showing to Sparrow his rotting teeth which still seemed to hold the rotting flesh of some sort of carcass he had obviously indulged in the night before. Sparrow felt the hairs on his neck rise as his blood began to boil.

“You,” Sparrow said allowed to him, “you have my axe.”

“Wha? This ol’ thing? No, its just my toothpick I found lying around.” He said with a horish laugh.

“Then you shall die first with these hands wrapped around your neck.” Sparrow took both of his hands and clenched them in the hair at neck level, visually showing the thief what to

expect. The thief simply chuckled and put the axe on his side, tied down onto his sash. The announcer went on to lay out the rules.

“Rule number one: there are no rules to the Proving.” All the orcs laughed and howled at this statement. “The contestants must traverse the barren lands with their said weapon and survive 3 days deep within the caverns and valleys. While traveling through, they will need to make their own shelter, collect their own resources, find their own food, and... if it permits, destroy each other. The first 5 contestants to get through the barren lands and enter the Dragonmaw village, will win. However, there is a time limit. If no one finishes in 3 days, then everyone will be slaughtered. Oh, and there’s a catch.” The crowd got silent while they waited for the announcer to speak. “Some of the herd will be joining this year. We wanted to spice things up and see if some of our veterans could slow down the contestants and... have a little fun.” The crowd once again howled with excitement and filled the arena with enough noise to be heard from 100 miles away. Sparrow was ready. He had been surviving of the barren lands for well over two decades. He could easily survive another 3. The announcer ordered everyone to line up. Here he began counting down, “When I say go, you will all begin the race. May the best orc win.” The contestants lined up—side by side. None looking forward, but at each other. All weapons were ready, except Sparrows. He never took his eyes off of the one who took his axe. The thief paid no attention to Sparrow, which angered him more.

“On your marks... Get set... GO!”

Christopher Hester. is a nomadic drifter, and freshman at Cloud with a focus on a Communications degree. After graduation, he plans on going to UNT (University of North Texas) in hopes of one day traveling to Japan to teach English. He often writes creatively in his spare time with the goal of becoming a world-renowned author.

“The Ties That Bind Us”

Amy Kern



Amy Kern is a graduate of Washington High School with a BFA from Fort Hays State University and a MFA in graphic design from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Amy has been teaching art and graphic design at Cloud County Community College for the last 3 years. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling with her two children and making art.