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# Shorelines

*A Journal of Student Creativity*



**METROPOLITAN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
LONGVIEW



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Cover Image: **"Rain"** by Gabby Reynolds, Digital Media Design



**“Escape”** By Gabby Reynolds, Digital Media Design

## I Can't Sleep

By Kitrina Green, Poem

There's a monster under my bed,  
And background chatter in my head.

There's no blanket for my feet,  
And crumbs within my sheets.

There's a grumble outside my door,  
And things all over my floor.

There's talking in the next room,  
And a car outside goes vroom.

There's mice in my walls,  
And walking down the halls.

There's the noise of my parents getting in a spout,  
And the light bulb in my lamp is flickering out.

There's a soft hum in the air conditioner,  
And a breeze from my fan, it's sinister.

There's a scratching on my window pane,  
And my ceiling's got a large wet stain.

There's clouds about to drop some rain,  
And the leak in the roof is here to stay.

There's a chance I will get wet again,  
And it's because my walls are caving in.

There's a hope of falling asleep,  
And it tempts, I'm on the brink.

There's the quiet lull of a blank dream,  
And I awake in an hour because I screamed.

There's nightmares I don't recall,  
And I cannot fall asleep at all.



# When the Fig Tree Dies

By Danielle Omer, Short Story

It was a cool, crisp autumn morning. The birds were singing, and the leaves were descending quietly to the ground. As I sat on the front porch in front of my grandmother's house, I couldn't help but notice the dying old fig tree in the front lawn.

"Grandma! There's something wrong with your fig tree!" I yelled. I was only answered by the sounds of pots of pans clanging in the kitchen. Grandma had always been hard of hearing. I got up and entered the kitchen where Grandma was making the most delicious breakfast I'd ever seen. Sizzling bacon, fluffy biscuits and warm gravy lined the table. Grandma was a short lady, with curly gray hair and an old smoker's voice.

"Good morning, dear. Scrambled or sunny side up?" Grandma asked, but she knew the answer. Scrambled has always been my favorite.

"Scrambled please, and Grandma, your fig tree isn't looking too good," I replied.

Grandma opened the curtain and peered outside at the front lawn. "Oh yes... I haven't tended to that tree since your grandfather died... I planted that fig tree myself when I was just a little girl. It's been there for as long as I can remember, although it stopped producing figs a while ago."

It had been two years now since Grandpa passed away. The death had really taken a toll on our family. My mom worked a lot and she only came home late at night. On the weekends I always got sent to Grandma's house to stay. My dad was never really in the picture. When I was younger, I got to see him once a week but we stopped doing that. Grandma had never been the same since she lost Grandpa. I kept her busy though.

"I'll go out and water it today then if you want," I replied.

Grandma smiled and said, "That would be lovely dear."

We sat down together at the large wooden table in the middle of the kitchen. I gave myself a large helping of biscuits and gravy and filled up on scrambled eggs. Grandma ate the bacon and had one large buttered biscuit but no gravy.

She was silent for a few minutes. "Tell me about school. Getting your homework done?"

"Yeah." I liked to keep my answers about schoolwork short and sweet. School had always been hard for me, and Grandma knew that.

"You're still doing that artwork?" Grandma asked.

I had been creating art ever since I could pick up a crayon. I always hung up my drawings on Grandma's refrigerator so she could see them. Grandpa used to always tell me how talented I am.

"Yeah, we have a big project coming up, actually I might need your help," I responded. "We were assigned to draw an inanimate object that represents a person in our life. Do you have any ideas?"

"Oh no, no, I'm not nearly as creative as you, dear. I'm sure you'll find something if you look hard enough." Grandma smirked and winked, then lit a cigarette. The phone rang.

"I'll get it!" I yelled and ran to the phone. I'd been expecting a call. It all started at school last week. There was a new boy in my math class; his name was Bryan. He moved here all the way from across the country. I thought he was cute so I gave him my Grandma's home phone number and told him to call on the weekends if he wanted to talk. Mom still hadn't bought me my own phone yet. She said I was not allowed to have one until I turn 14.

"Hello?" the voice on the phone said. It was not Bryan. It sounded much too old to be Bryan. I was disappointed.

"It's for you," I told Grandma. She grabbed the phone from me. Her face dropped. Something was wrong.

There was a prolonged silence and then finally she said, "Okay, thank you Doctor. See you soon." The phone went to a dial tone. Her big brown eyes started to water up and she abruptly stood up and exited the kitchen.

I was concerned. I didn't know what to do. I followed her onto the porch and sat down beside her on the porch swing.

"I should have known it would come to this," she spoke, her voice soft and gentle.

I hugged her. "Grandma, who was on the phone?"

She let out a large sigh. "The man from the clinic. He says I got lung cancer. I smoked too much I suppose."

My jaw dropped. "Oh, Grandma..." I stuttered.

We looked out onto the lawn together in silence. My Grandma started to hum the tune of The Old Rugged Cross. "I'll pray for you Grandma, you know I will," I finally said.

"Oh sweet girl, I know you will," and she smiled.

Looking out with Grandma I could see the old fig tree far out in the distance. Then it hit me. That tree could be what I used for my art project. It represented my Grandma better than anything.

"Grandma, that fig tree sure is something special isn't it?" I said out loud.

And then. Just like that. The tree lost its last leaf. The final leaf fluttered to the ground and glazed the dew-covered grass.

"It's got more life than you would think," Grandma said with a wink. "Are you going to draw it now?"

I grabbed out my notebook and began the sketch. As I sketched, the sun began to set.

"Grandma, what's a sunset?" I asked, wondering how she would respond to this peculiar question.

"Well, I don't know, but your grandfather saw one once"

—————

Hours had gone by. The sun was beginning to set under the clouds. My mom's old black van

pulled into the gravel driveway. She rolled down the window and yelled, "Hey! Time to go girly. How was she Grandma?"

"Oh, she was a delight. Got your stuff, sweetheart?" Grandma asked.

I scrambled to put my art supplies away. "Yeah, I got it all." I grabbed my blue duffel bag and hopped in the passenger seat of the old van. As we pulled out of the driveway we waved goodbye to Grandma.

"What are you painting there?" Mom asked, glancing at my unfinished painting.

"The old fig tree," I responded.

"I thought that tree would be dead by now," Mom said with a laugh.

"Oh, no, Mom. It's got lots of life left in it."





**“Kumquats”** By Lydia Henze , Photograph



## Fading Away

By Giselle Lennard, Poem

I was praised for what I had done  
"You've lost so much weight," said everyone

A girl that was inching to two hundred  
Though I've always wondered

What would have happened to me  
If you hadn't said my body didn't give you glee

They turned their heads when I went to yak  
And eventually turned so I faced their back

I know it is not their fault  
Watching the assault

I was hurting from my own image  
Stuffing my face with just spinach

Somedays I feel so much anger that I was left  
But it was what was best

It was all I could talk about  
Not eating until I blacked out

I was okay with fading away  
I was okay without another birthday

I am just a skinny brunette  
Fighting the pounds with a cigarette





**“New World”** By Gabby Reynolds, Digital Media Design



**“Queen of Light”** By Jessie Nguyen, Mixed Media

## Elemental

By Sarah Park, Poem

My body lies by an old oak tree  
as summer's heat envelopes me,  
but I no longer feel my flesh.  
No breeze to swell within my chest.  
I am hidden in plain sight.

Summer falls to autumn's loom  
while small creatures nest and move  
within my hollowed breast.  
Soft leaves coat my bed of eternal rest.  
I am spilled amongst the forest floor.

Winter claws and howls and bites.  
Its gentle snow and starry nights  
freeze me still in my slumber.  
The chilling nights no longer comfort.  
I am barely human now.

Spring awakens fresh and lazy,  
its muddy fingers grasp my old tree  
to hide my sunken grave.  
Bright blooms thrive from what I gave.  
I am earth once more.





**“Skies on the Outskirts”** By Jessica Ross, Painting

## **Blocked**

By Sarah Park, Poem

That tingling sensation,  
a sweet celebration  
of inspiration filling my lungs.  
My heart pounding as I take the plunge  
shamelessly.  
Hands moving hastily,  
body shivering and aching.  
My mind buzzing and quaking with  
possibility.  
Such cracking fragility  
yielding to submission of  
my long-lost intuition,  
bursting through the window of my eye.  
Writer's block, forever die!





**“Up with Jellyfish”** By Jessie Nguyen, Painting

## The Drunkard's Song

By Antonio Waltermate, Poem

The chorus sang,  
To the tune of the old drunkard song,  
Their bootsteps rang  
Their march was endless,  
Their faces long,  
Young hopes sat crushed,  
Remnants lost somewhere in the valley brush,

They marched for noblest intent,  
Brother beside brother, weapons in hand,  
All knew fate would never relent  
Long distant memories of the lost marching band,  
Bonded by flesh and bone,  
beset on all sides by enemies unknown

Smoke plumed across the bleak sky,  
Bodies tumbled dead on all sides,  
Sanity deafened by the battle cry,  
Suffering was all fate would confide,

The shots cracked,  
The screams echoed,  
Cravens shot in the back,  
Bold faces blood-freckled,

The rhythm of the old drunkard song whistled,  
The beating of brother on brother set the beat,  
The voice of battle was soft and grizzled,  
The song played relentlessly on repeat,



The shrill bell rang,  
The bar came to a close,  
The empty cups fell with an empty clang,  
The men filled with their lethal dose,

The old drunkard song fell quiet,  
Brother laid upon brother atop the soft hill,  
To the old drunkard, the bloody scene was a riot,  
The old drunkard's red right hand fit the bill,

The old drunkard sneered and came upon the scene  
He collected the fresh souls of young men,  
Whistling the tune, his pleasure obscene,  
His tune echoed across the lands, calling forth war like a siren,

The bar rang open,  
The chorus sang,  
Like mosquitoes,  
The men were drew  
The marching bootsteps rang,  
The whole cycle began anew





**“Picasso”** By Lisa Jennings, Charcoal Drawing

## Bar Stool

By Antonio Waltermate, Fiction

David took another long swig from his cup, grimacing as the burning liquid slid down the back of his throat and warmed his chest. The liquor was hard and cheap, spared of anything sweet to dilute the toxic blend of courage. Were it not for the low drone of conversation and the repetitive boom of the trashy beat in the cramped dining hall, he may have allowed himself a moment of rest before ordering his next round, but the option didn't exist with the threat of a pounding headache born from the inescapable chatter. Beside him, a trio of rowdy men laughed and chattered without pause, their words formed at a maddening pace that could only be fueled by a half dozen hits of Prince Glitter, the newest line of illegal narcotics that had made their way through the scrappy star system David had found himself in.

David didn't even need to order his next round as he finished his drink. The bartender knew his type and knew his drink. Before his cup even touched the rough rock counter, another slid before him, fizz bubbling to the top with low sickly pops. David slid his empty cup forward into the bartender's waiting hand and moved to get up just as another man moved to sit beside him.

"Leaving your drink, mister?" the man asked, weakly grabbing at David's wrist so as to stop his exit.

David pulled from the man's grip and continued towards the door, shoving past one of the local working girls before she could offer her services to keep away the long, lonely night. David made his way past the small, populated dance floor that lay just before the doors, the flashing lights and chorus of drunken laughs sting David's senses. Just as he was met with the exit, he once again found the familiar grip on his wrist. He wasted no time in pulling the unknown assailant forward and shoving him headfirst to the floor while moving his outstretched hand into an armbar, threatening with a single pull to dislocate the man's shoulders.

No one paid the two a single bit of mind. The only reaction from the crowd was that of the seasoned bouncer, who now moved for the pistol at his side and was no doubt all too familiar with the troubles of such a fine establishment, and all the less interested in dealing with the dramas of the drunken patrons. Within two seconds the bouncer was upon them, pistol leveled to David's head. His voice was graveled by years of drinking and smoking no doubt. "Is there a problem gentlemen?"

“No problem, sir, just caught my friend here by surprise. Let me buy you a drink, mister.” The man David held in his grip called, his voice pitched higher to the point of annoyance. David wanted to leave, but from the look the bouncer gave, he wasn’t going to until the two had made their peace. David released the man and found himself being led back through the crowded hall to the bar where he was seated just as before; his cup was where he had left it save that its contents had been plundered, no doubt, by one of the neighboring degenerates.

“Another round here, keep. Whatever he’s having, I’m having,” the man called. The bartender turned to face them with drinks already in hand. The keep’s speed sparked a nerve in David - something told him that something was up - he held no interest in another spout of trouble, especially if he wasn’t being paid for it.

David took his drink and quickly downed it, moving once again to get to his feet and return to the cramped apartment two blocks down the street where he could find a handful of hours of sleep before making his move to leave the system for the next scummy hive of addiction and work.

Just as he got to his feet the man spoke again, his voice still at its annoying peak. “Say, you look like you can handle yourself.”

David ignored the man’s comment. Whatever it was the man wanted, it was troublesome, a business David had just barely escaped with his life only weeks before.

“You aren’t going to thank a man for his generosity?” the man asked as a sharp point pressed against David’s side.

David glared down at the man, the threat to his life sent anger boiling in his veins, getting his first look at the man who had so greatly inconvenienced his night. The man held no special build; in most every way, he was unremarkable. He wore a grey cloth beanie and long clumps of brunette hair slipped out to cast a sly shadow over his small-slit eyes. The urge to beat the man senseless was immense. Even with the weapon prodded into his side, David was confident that he would emerge victorious; the urge was only suppressed by the need to know why he was being targeted. If Black Watch was on the hunt for old mercs, then he would need to get evasive and quickly. His survival would depend on gathering as much information as possible while keeping his aggressor in a sense of power and security.

David returned to his seat slowly, keeping his eyes locked with the man’s and answering in a low voice, “What do you want?”

The man chuckled and slapped a hand on David's shoulder, pulling himself closer with the move and speaking without the abstract pitch he had utilized previously. "I have a job that needs done and you look the kind of man who can do it. Do you see that man over there in the corner?" he asked, throwing a glance across the room to a man who danced with the agility of a drowning fish on the floor.

"I'm not in that kind of business anymore; find someone else," David huffed, getting to his feet having wasted his time with the low life job, almost disappointed to find that Blacklist had in fact given up looking for him and the others. At least that would be a challenge and promise some real action.

"The job is easy, no need to kill anyone. He has information and he's dumb enough to try and sell it to the wrong people. He just needs a quick nudge back into his work and away from his *Habits*," the man insisted, adding quickly while he rushed to keep up with David, "My employer is willing to give fair compensation, something to keep the booze flowing or whatever rocks your boat."

David stopped. "How much?" The job would no doubt be dirty, but he needed to make his money last and a shot at a quick job was at least worth considering.

"Four hundred creds. Quick and easy, real nice like."

"Five fifty or you can find someone else," David answered quickly

"Four hundred," the man repeated, glee touching his lips at his success.

"Five fifty and I don't show you how to use the knife you threatened me with and talk to your boss myself," David insisted, growing tired of the bartering; he had never been a man for many words.

"Five fifty," he answered finally, quickly pulling a pouch from his pocket adding, "Half upfront, half on completion."

David nodded, shoving the pouch into his coat and making his way onto the dance floor, trying to ignore the bright flashes of light that made pain flare through his head with thermobaric implications for the night's rest he had hoped for. The hangover tomorrow morning would be intense. He would regret taking the late-night but creds were creds and a man had to get his pay somehow or another.

David approached the man he had been pointed to, the target as it were, quickly, readying a low tone to begin their dialogue; it always seemed to get the low life's going when they felt that what

they were doing was exciting. It got rid of the extra questions a professional would ask. "You the guy?"

The target quickly turned to face David, jumping in place; he was nervous and also extremely liquored up, easily shown by the sweat that beaded down his brow. "Maybe I am." He answered with a grin, butchering the words with a dense slur built up with the fountain of drinks the man had no doubt gone through.

David pulled the pouch of creds and flashed them to the target adding only, "You the guy or not?"

"I got the information man. I was told I'd be paid in Glitter. What's up with the creds."

The target was starting to become panicked at the change of plans. His eyes widened and he had distanced himself a couple of steps back; he was an addict and now he had reason to fall into paranoia. The narcotics were bad enough but when mixed with fear things got unglamorous. David adjusted quickly and closed the distance between the two, shoving the creds into the man's jacket. "Just an advance. Hand off the information out back in five minutes. Don't be late."

David quickly made his way outside and walked across the quiet street untouched by the air speeders that rushed overhead. It had taken a

while to get used to the existence of the roads at all. Most worlds had adapted to speeder craft that could fill the skies, but it seemed not everyone had given the time or effort to the innovations. Regardless, he entered a small shop parallel to the bar and sat down at a booth, waiting for the target to arrive for the drop-off. As he had expected, David's quick leave had encouraged the target that all was well, handing off the creds likely helped quell the fear, so much so that he had rushed out back immediately, a move that showed the level of maturity at work.

David returned to the other side of the road, making his way past and into the dark alley that led behind the bar, ignoring the watchful eyes of a small group of hoodlums that looked for weak prey. They were cowardly; surely they knew all too well most everyone in a backwater world like this was armed, especially a David whose large size had always granted him an air of respect and authority over the street-level crooks. It seemed these weren't as bright for they began to move towards them, an action corrected easily by simply patting his hip and shaking his head; less a warning and more a promise of what would come.

The hoodlums walked past without incident; they would circle around and return to the alley once David was done. They wanted nothing to

do with his business; like scavengers, they were more concerned with what would be left behind. It had been no more than three minutes. He had arranged the target to be there in five, so he leaned against the corner into the path behind the bar and waited, counting down the seconds. It would make the target nervous and make him desperate to get through their business quickly but it would also give the crooks enough time to make their way back around. They would help in their own way to get the job done.

Once the required time had passed, David pushed off of the wall and briskly walked into the dark and utterly disgusting alleyway - finding the target standing in the middle of the way - obviously nervous and out of place.

David couldn't help but smile inside as he spoke, slapping urgency into his words. "We need to hurry, looks like I'm not the only one looking for what you've got. I'll take the information and then we-" he paused, looking over his shoulder "see to your compensation."

The ploy had the desired effect and, like a disease, the fear spread like wildfire. It was pathetic to see the man visibly shake like a fearful child. The man reached into his jacket and pulled a file from within, just beginning to offer it with an outstretched hand when footsteps sounded from around the corner.

Playtime was over, but the fun was just getting started... for David at least. He snatched the file from the target's hand and shoved him forwards while yelling loudly, "GO, GET OUT NOW!"

In the chaos, the target didn't question the move. The fear took control and he bolted to escape while figures began to emerge from around the corner; the hoodlums blocked him before he could get away. They all were scrappy looking; most holding pipes or bats with aged clothing that looked like it had been plucked from the overflowing garbage dumpsters that had made the entire city a fire hazard. David stepped forward, pushing the target behind him while he analyzed the men before them. With a closer eye, he began to notice the smaller details: there were five of them, all small builds likely the result of poor dieting, two of which obviously were intoxicated by the way they held themselves lazily up on their feet.

David thought out his approach. Quickly ruling out using his gun and diplomacy, he needed to beat the men broken, but didn't need bodies on his hands to deal with. There was little point in getting the local law enforcement's attention when he was still probably being searched for by Blacklist. He briefly considered resorting to hand-to-hand combat but found that the possibility

of injury was likely. That wasn't acceptable when on the clock and so he raised his hands over his head and addressed the newcomers with a flare of disgust in his tone. "Come to beat up on us, you degenerates?"

The men snickered at him, relaxing their stances and closing in with pipes held at their sides. Their eyes held a cruel disregard for the both of them. They saw nothing more than another victim. It seemed they remembered his promise of trouble earlier, displayed when one poked ahead of the others asking snarkily, "You gon' pull your gun, big man?"

They felt powerful. That was what David wanted but it was now time to flip the tables, to challenge them when they felt strongest. "You aren't worth the bullets or the trouble." He answered simply, putting on a frown as the lead man approached with newfound anger now gleaming in his eyes.

Holding eye contact, the man threw his pipe aside and tossed off his jacket, revealing a scrawny chest lined with the thinnest layer of muscle. The stab at the crook's pride had the intended effect. Now the playing field had been effectively evened.

David made the first move, taking two steps forward and grabbing his enemy around the waist, lifting him off his feet and slamming him to the floor

with practiced speed and thoughtless cruelty. The assault didn't end there, letting off in a moment of strength was borderline stupid. Instead, David held the criminal down under his combined weight while unleashing a flurry of heavy fists into the sides of the scrawny thug's head. Within moments, the man crumpled and went still, likely concussed into unconsciousness. David got up calmly and looked to the thugs who now looked at him in a mix of fear and anger. The two closest moved to retreat but the drunken pair held firm; they would be a challenge.

The two staggered forward with haste, the one closest lazily lifting his pipe over his head to strike hard but he was slow and David made little work of him with a well-placed hit to the stomach that doubled the man over out of breath. David, however, didn't account for the second's speed; his miscalculation confirmed by the battering pain in the back of his head that stunned him and blurred his vision briefly. He jumped forward just as another strike whooshed past his ears. David tried to blink away the white-hot pain that emitted from his battered skull but found doing so impossible, the pipe while blunt had done its damage. David focused his efforts and turned to face his cheap-shotting enemy who stood there with a sniveling smirk on his drooped face. Any professional air to David's approach was replaced by the anger that fueled him a renewed strength; he was going to make this hurt.



There was no hesitation; David simply attacked, making the distance between the two opponents in the blink of an eye with little more than a yell. The move had been unexpected to which the thug never even got the chance to raise his weapon before he found himself in a most dire position; pressed against the ground while David did his work. The movements came naturally to David. A hundred scenes of back alley visits like this one came to him where he worked slowly and carefully down the target's good arms, breaking every bone he could find with a burning calm. The drunken fool was lucky. The pain had been dulled for the first two wet snaps, but his luck ran out for the next two scream-filled minutes that ended with a low whimper and silence as he finally passed out. The other thugs were gone, leaving the few beaten stragglers battered and broken, a sight that had left David's original target a terrified mess leaning against the wall of the alley. *Perfect.*

"Are-are they dead," the target asked in as low a voice as if God himself stared him down with biblical menace.

"They are disposed of. Now show me your hand," David said simply, stepping to pull the man up only for him to shrink away against the wall and find no escape. David grew tired of the man's pathetic nature and pulled him up gruffly, snapping an iron

grip around the target's wrist while maintaining a steady stare into his petrified eyes.

"I wanna go. Let me go," the man cried. His eyes teared up while he tugged for freedom, finding little more than the empty stare David provided in full.

"You wanted to sell secrets; welcome to the business. Funny thing is you don't seem in a position to bargain. You give me the data and the creds and I let you live your miserable little life," David answered in a voice sharper than a dagger.

"Whatever man, take it. Just-just don't kill me." The target whimpered, quickly tossing the creds and a folder to the ground along with a small baggie of Prince Glitter.

The target tried to pull away, but David wasn't finished. "Step on it."

"Wh-what?" The man stuttered.

"The drugs, step on it. I want it soddened and ruined."

The man complied quickly, stomping the drugs into nothing useful; it seemed his fear was stronger than even his drug needs. Wordlessly, David placed his second hand around the target's throat, squeezing only hard enough to leave a red ring around the base while adding slowly with a

deliberate pace. "I catch you out here again and you'll be eating through a tube for the rest of your days. Understand?"

"Yeah whatever, just let me go, man," the man insisted, pulling away again and this time finding freedom. David watched him sprint to freedom in disgust, at least glad to have the job done and over with. He bent to collect his creds and the folder when he heard a lone set of footsteps approaching.

David turned in place, reaching his right hand to his hip ready to draw his weapon should the newcomer prove a threat. The man from the bar rounded the corner; a briefcase in hand and a long trench coat obscuring his figure. His heavy-set eyes locked with David's and he stopped in place, gleaming every detail of what had occurred with a practiced manner.

"The job's done I presume?" he asked, looking over the fallen thugs.

"Your guy will think twice before trying to sell secrets again, might just find the strength to get off the glitter," David answered, throwing a glance at the ruined mound of the drug that laid before his feet.

"Not bad work" the man began, tossing the briefcase to the floor. "Money is inside, a phone too. I know your face and I know your record with

blacklist, my employer may find a need of a man of your skills."

David shook his head, picking up the briefcase and moving to leave. "I'm out of the game, can't chance them finding me again."

The man gestured to the beaten men laid out on the ground. "Doesn't look like you're out of the game." Seeing David leave sight the man called, "When you change your mind, we'll be waiting!"

David did his best to ignore the man's desperate plea. He hated the feeling that had stricken him. He felt a sense of happiness, of contention, following another job well done. David knew all too well that the feeling would pull at him now for as long as he withheld from the business he had grown so fond of. The soreness in his unused muscles joined by the steady throb that filled the back of his head reminded him of the dangers of the life he had left. Still, it did little to dull the voice in his mind that begged him to action. David buried the voice as he approached the trashy two-story apartment he had taken refuge in. He pushed open the thin, cheap door, dragged himself inside the weary little dorm area, pushed himself up the short cracked steps, and finally managed his way into his dingy little apartment. He ignored the smell of filth as he always did and plopped down on his shitty little bed, cringing at

the squeak of the old bed springs. David closed his eyes, took a deep weary breath, and fell asleep with the briefcase still clutched in his hand.

He dreamed of the thrill he had known, of the men whom he had trusted, and the betrayal he had found. It all seemed distant to him now even though it'd only been weeks since he had taken to evasion since his simple life had been flipped upside down by his previous employers. Most of all, he dreamed of home. For all the hell that it had been and all the hardships he had endured, there was a small part of him that still missed it. It was the little boy in him, his one last remaining shard of innocence desiring to feel the warm touch of his mother. The boy was mistaken. His mother had been dead since he was three and his father was never known. But all the same, the boy pestered to return to search fruitlessly for what couldn't be found. David allowed the boy his dream and watched the fantasy of an easy life governed by a kinder fate play out with a somber glance, seeing the life he could never have.

David snapped awake only minutes later; the boy's dream leading to little more than a shameless slaughter marked by unmistakable blood and gore. The boy retreated somewhere deep inside David's bleak little heart while David found himself firmly in the path he was going to choose. He took a deep breath, finding the boy curled up somewhere within. He gripped the last piece of home and crushed it, all the while opening the briefcase and glaring down at the phone that laid atop the rolls of creds. He sighed, picked it up, powered it on and dialed the phantom contact that stared back at him. The phone only toned once before a deep distorted voice answered, "Good to see you came to your senses; you know the bar. Be there in ten minutes."

David answered simply, "Understood." And just like that he was back in the game, throwing himself into the danger he had fought so hard to escape. It felt good, and that was exactly what once concerned him. There was no time for concern, however. Not now. *He was on the job.*





**“Arcade”** By Lydia Henze, Photograph



**“City Line”** By Logan Hutchison, Photograph

## The Siege

By Antonio Waltermate, Fiction

Hunt hunkered behind the still flaming remains of the AC-21 armored personnel carrier, careful not to cut himself on the sharp bits of wrecked steel jutting from the two rocket impact points. He glanced down at his weapon and replaced the ion charge quickly. The luck that he hadn't needed to fire with the nearly empty charge was not lost on him. In the moment of calm, while both sides regrouped and prepared for the final push, Hunt looked over the battlefield. The AC-21 had gotten stuck in a ditch surrounded by low crater-filled hills, which obstructed much of what lay ahead, the perfect place for an ambush. The sun, like a ghost of days past, danced just beyond the lip of the hill to his west, barely visible through the choking plumes of smoke that filled the horizon, every naked breath was chock-full of ash and cinder. If it hadn't been for his tactical helmet, he likely would have suffocated by now, to the ash or otherwise with the popularity of phosphorus gas among the Insurgent forces that had been duking it out with the IST garrison for almost a week now.

A loud whoosh sounded in the distance, along with the boom of artillery beginning their bombardments from both opposing forces. The rockets would land first, releasing another wave

of phosphorus gas followed by the incendiary shells, a deadly combination that often created an engulfing inferno all across no man's land. Unable to do anything else, Hunt got low and prayed that he was spared the impending doom coming down from above. He clenched his teeth as projectiles whistled exponentially closer. Within a moment, the ground shook and the air shattered with screams along with the cackles of flame. Hunt opened his eyes and found his little gully untouched by the opening bombardment, so he trudged quickly up the hill to escape the death that would sink into the lower ground. Ignoring the stabbing pain in his right leg where had been hit before, he reached the lip of the hill and looked out onto a flaming pasture filled with the broken hulks of tanks in the distance. Writhing bodies collapsed to the ground until the chorus of pained screams was replaced by short bursts of distant laser fire, adding to the drumline of initial firefights that would continue until the enemy was ready to charge.

Hunt's radio crackled to life; his platoon commander asked shakely, "*Headcount?*" Hunt waited for the voices of his brothers in arms to answer but felt his heart sink when none did. There had been nearly forty of them; the

others had been pinned down by rocket fire, so Hunt had advanced to scout for better cover. It seemed it was the only reason he lived. His platoon commander asked again, his voice on the edge of breaking, "*HEADCOUNT!*"

"Looks like it's me and you sir," Hunt answered somberly.

"Understood, Command has assigned us to hill 23. I'm sure you're familiar."

Hunt didn't bother answering. Instead, he continued forward, scurrying across open fields covered so greatly by debris that the ground beneath was almost a forgotten memory, one Hunt had the misfortune of remembering. He wished he hadn't been one of the first into what had become the hellscape he now wandered. It made him think of what the crushed concrete and shattered glass beneath his feet had once held before the war left nothing. The thought of innocent families trying to console each other as the gunfire grew ever closer brought overwhelming dread to the growing pit in his stomach. Hunt hastily advanced while his thoughts occupied his tired mind. He knew full well the Insurgents would begin their assault soon with another artillery bombardment to suppress the defensive positions that lay barely

manned by a handful of scruffy survivors behind Hunt's approach.

Hunt's radio crackled again, although it wasn't the familiar voice of his platoon leader; instead, it was the graveled voice of Phantom Actual, the command element assigned to the disaster at hand. "All callsigns, our enemy's plot to push us back, to crush this defensive line and force us to the final option. We cannot allow these troops. Ready yourselves. The final wave is coming and they will fight with everything they have." The transmission paused while Hunt sprinted across a battered street corner, trying to ignore the half-collapsed structures on both sides and the wounded soldiers calling from within. There was nothing he could do for them alone; there was no reason to give them a false sense of hope, no rescue that would ever come for them in time. Phantom Actual continued while Hunt carefully sidestepped voices somewhere to his west, "I know you're tired soldiers. I know the previous days have been trying, but we are this close. Hold your positions and fight, if not for yourselves then for whoever is back home praying for you. Good Luck."

Hunt could almost laugh at the message and the nobility that the man tried to put on the soldiers who still dared to fight back the Insurgents. It was

a weakly veiled way of keeping the men at their posts for the slaughter. It had never fooled anyone, just as the promises of reinforcements hadn't. All the same, the men held their ground, gritted their teeth, and dug in. They didn't do it for honor or glory, but for the fear of what happened if the insurgents won. There wouldn't be a safe place for an IST soldier anywhere in the system, and most certainly no way out of enemy-controlled territory. Hunt paused as the road before him dipped into a small valley whose floor was lined with cracked asphalt from the street that had previously laid above. Without hesitation, he dropped down into the valley, getting to his feet only to dive back to the ground as another monstrous barrage sounded from behind. He laid there with clenched teeth until he heard the shells land somewhere distant. Just another mercy from Lady Luck that he hadn't found his painful end. Hunt knew that the enemy would return fire momentarily. The battle had largely become a game of cat and mouse for the artillery forces, both sides hoping to silence the big guns opposite of them. Hunt neared the end of the valley, carefully sweeping the rounded corners of the sunken terrain looking for any sign of the enemy.

Hunt approached the familiar base of Hill 23. It had been only days since he and his first unit had squatted in small tattered bunkers, fighting

off relentless Insurgent raiding parties. Now, he returned alone. His only company was the distant sounds of war that would seem a lifetime away, were it not for the occasional fireball that lit up the gloomy day just over the crests of slight hills that surrounded the valley he had advanced through. It was this very valley that had become a death trap that killed his original unit during their retreat. The bodies were gone, but looking closer Hunt could still see bloodstains that had come from the splintered entrails of his comrades. Hunt tightened his grip on his rifle and clenched his jaw so as to not let it quiver in disgust at the sadness that sunk his heart like iron.

Just as Hunt began up the hill, the ground shuddered and the air split with the thunderous cries of artillery fire. The flashes of cannons blinded Hunt as he fell back for cover, landing roughly on a pile of broken concrete and shattered rock. Hunt didn't bother moving; he knew only one caliber of weapon could produce that kind of flash. He quickly fumbled his radio open and yelled "ENEMY COUNTER BATTERY ON HILL 23!"

Hunt's platoon commander answered quickly, "Confirm, you said counter-battery that close to our front line?"



“Confirmed. Get me a strike on the hill and we can cripple the enemy’s counter-battery effort. I’ll keep them from trying to run off,” Hunt answered, scrambling to his feet and beginning up the hill with adrenaline pumping through his system. He paused just before the lip of the hill and primed his last grenade, pounding it against his helmet. He then tossed it and charged, yelling away the fear that continued to tug at his thoughts. Hunt caught sight of the enemy cannon crews just across the way, obscured by the half-collapsed frame that had been his bunker long ago. Just as he had anticipated, the grenade had found its mark. A clot of reddened smoke and concrete chunks shot out of the open-roofed bunker while screams cried out from within. Ignoring the debris that now pelted his battered armor, Hunt raised his weapon and let loose a hail of pop shots at the retreating gun crews, just enough to force them into cover.

“Artillery has you dialed in, get clear and they’ll fire,” Platoon command barked in Hunt’s radio as he approached the pinned gun crew with his weapon raised.

Not taking his eyes off his enemy, Hunt answered, “Negative. Adjust fire on x-axis by 20 off-center of target and fire at will. I’ve got them right where I want them.” The order was suicide

and Hunt knew it. He couldn’t help thinking that living to lose the battle would be worse. Better to die a hero than live a criminal under Insurgent law.

“You sure about this, Hunt?”

“Positive, open fire,” he replied quickly before cutting off his radio and firing another burst in the general direction of his enemy. With his enemy suppressed, Hunt quickly pulled off his helmet, lowered his weapon, and slid a hand through his unkempt hair. The air was thick and almost unbearable, but the recycled air in his helmet was sickening after weeks of exposure. In his mind, what was a little phosphorus poisoning to a dead man?

He heard the boom of artillery behind him, but he didn’t run for cover this time. Lady Luck was far from a miracle worker and what was about to come down before him was indiscriminate, total death from above. The pinned crews knew it too. Half a dozen of them rushed from cover, running quickly to escape what was coming, but Hunt was ready, putting all those who didn’t return straight to cover to a quick and merciful death.

“No! We all go together you rats!” He called, laughing a grim laugh as the whistle of shells sounded from above. He threw his weapon aside

and yelled to his enemy, "Come on! Shoot me, put me down like the IST rat that I am!" continuing his laugh as the world disappeared in a blurred moment of anarchy and an eternity of silence.

When the dust settled, the conflict had cost nearly 400,000 casualties. The city of New Damascus on Athena IV was destroyed and surrounding cities flattened by the intensive artillery campaigns from both sides. Of the 400,000 dead, civilians made up nearly half, with the low military casualty rate thanks to the extremely lax garrison that was on the planet at the time. It was due to the valiant efforts of the

IST forces that won the day and struck down the insurgency whose intentions have yet to be released at this time.

Tensions were suspected to have flashed up in the Capital city following a series of deaths during dangerous riots. Insurgents grouped with the protesters and stormed the local armory, gaining access to HP-23 120 caliber cannons and numerous weapon stockades. Order has now been restored as of yesterday by reinforcements from the New Roma Garrisons belonging to the twenty-first and thirty-third battalions.



## 2022 Shorelines Judges

**Angela Bahner** is a psychology professor on the MCC-Longview campus. She holds a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology and loves how art and literature help us understand more about the joys and challenges of human experience. She is an avid reader and enjoys a wide variety of genres. Recently, audiobooks have provided a great way to get more reading done, although curling up with a good book is still a favorite hobby.

**Dr. Robyn McGee** has been a full-time faculty member at Metropolitan Community College for over 20 years. She teaches a wide range of courses, including composition, introductory courses in literature and fiction, and African-American and early American literature. She has published works on African-American literature for The University of Cambridge Press, Rutgers University Press and Documentary Editing. She also served as interim faculty sponsor for “Shorelines” in the past and very much enjoys reading student submissions.

**Keith W. Townsend** is a Speech Instructor and the MCC-Longview Theater Director. He has been acting since he was 5 years old and has been a theater educator for 38 years at both the high school and college level. Keith’s theater career includes professional touring shows and regional theater experience as an actor, director and designer. He has been a production director of over 120 stage plays and musicals including “Spring Awakening,” “Rent,” “Next to Normal,” “The Fantasticks” and “Avenue Q.” Keith has organized set design for many theater productions including “Evita,” “Godspell,” “Guys and Dolls,” “Once on this Island” and “Bonnie and Clyde.”

## Student Editors

**Mikayla Pray** is a student at Metropolitan Community College and is getting her associate degree in art. She enjoys reading, art and watching Hallmark movies.

**River Rentie** is a current student at Metropolitan Community College. He is studying to obtain a bachelor’s degree in film. He enjoys watching movies as well as writing screenplays and editing videos.

## Faculty Advisor

**Aisha Sharif** is an English instructor whose book of poetry “To Keep from Undressing” was published in 2019. She enjoys reading poetry and Agatha Christie mystery novels.



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