TeamSports

Volume 13: The Sports Anthology



Cover by Janyne Langlois


Word
Tonic

Table of Contents

Preface by Roos van der Velden.....4
Me, My Dad, and Karate - Sophie Wills.....5
The Unexpected Player - Hana Story.....8
Memory Player - Makyla Paquette.....10
A Thoroughbred Once More - Alina Alonzo.....14
Boundary - Kiera Hammersley.....16
Win - Aaliyah Dixon-Holiday.....29
How to Compete in Hobby Horsing from Scratch - Sasha Paris-Carter.....30
Head under for Silence - Rebekah Gawthorpe.....33
Courtside - Lindsay Brandt.....35
Author Biographies.....41

Preface by Roos

When I was thinking of new themes for the autumn anthology, the sports summer was in full swing; everyone was hyped for the World Cup, the Tour de France had a few unexpected turns. It seemed, like always, to bring people together. Around my corner, a group of neighbours had made a long train of flags out of Dutch, Turkish, Morrocan, and Frysian flags. So, we decided that there was no better thing to do than bring this unity and positivity into the next season with us. Unity is, after all, what WordTonic is build on. The result of that is currently in your hands: yet another anthology of great work by our authors and editors, who toiled together until the edges of the night to get their wonderful work done.

Of course, sports are not all fun and games; there are politics, fame and power woven into professional competitions. People can get religiously mad if their favorite team loses. We don't shy away from these highs and lows; some of these pieces sketch them out beautifully, shedding a light on the good, the bad, and the ugly sides of sports.

I am immensely proud of my authors, editors and designers, and of the WordTonic community! Please, take a moment in between your training or when you are on the bench to read our newest work.

Enjoy!

Me, my Dad, and Karate

Written by: Sophie Wills
Edited by: Rebeca Elgueta

I think I was seven when I first joined karate, all for a silly decision really, it was only to spend more time with my dad, since he was always away at either university or karate. Not his fault, of course, a seven year old can't exactly go to uni. So, karate it was! I remember the first session I joined, wearing Dora the Explorer shorts and a pink top. Of course, you don't get a gi on your first session, so everyone knows you're a newbie.

Stand in line. So I stood, expecting my dad to stand right next to me. He doesn't. The anxiety was real, I was standing alone with a bunch of random strangers who're much older than me waiting for the session to begin. Bow, Oss, someone comes up to do warm-ups. I'm only seven, so of course I try to do it to the best of my ability and attempt the stances these people have been practicing for years. It feels wholly unnatural, but I found if you pretend you know what you're doing, no one bats an eye. I wasn't really sure how my limbs should be positioned as we stretched, but I managed.

Onto the main session- my sensei taught me how to do front stance, zenkutsu dachi. I remember him constantly telling me to bend my front leg more, back up straight, my arm pushed back so you couldn't truly see it if you were looking head on. We moved on to punches, and the rest of the session blurred. I remember constantly looking towards my dad, who was almost at the top of the line, making sure I was copying him, instead of the sensei, or my peers next to me. The session finished, and we got into the car. I LOVED it. I remember arriving home and practicing. It became a core memory for me, and karate became a huge part of my life.

I took a large break from karate as a teenager. My dad became a car salesman, and time for karate got pushed to the backburner. I was a brown two stripe- just one grading away from black. But I didn't mind all that much- as a teenager it became 'cringe' to have hobbies like that, and my attention was more on high school and my friends, not hanging out with my dad on a Friday learning how to punch someone. Karate fell to the back of my mind, only thinking about it

when playfighting with friends or being asked if I actually did anything remotely sports related.

Fast forward to 2025- My dad had been going back to karate, and had kept nagging me.

"When are you going to come back?"

"Everyone's asking after you."

I gave in. My *Gi* no longer fit, my belt at the back of a wardrobe back in my childhood home. We drove to the sports centre, in my leggings and baggy black T-shirt. Feeling the same way I felt all those years ago. To the end of the line, my dad was at the top, doing it all over again. I hadn't forgotten as much as I thought. It's almost like muscle memory had kicked in. It wasn't long until I remembered all the katas, all of the moves, steps for fighting and was looking at the date for the black belt gradings.

I was so nervous. I felt sick as I did warmups whilst standing in line. I had no need to be nervous. I was confident I'd pass, my dad had told me I was the best he had seen going for this grading. Luckily, he was there to watch.

Step to the front. Bow, Oss, ready stance. Begin. The first of the grading began, beginning with sequences of moves I had practiced relentlessly for months. Easy.

Next- *Kata*. My focus was perfect. Moves sharp and strong, almost like a machine, as I carried it out. Then came sequenced fighting. Punch, block. Kick, block. I got through it, not the best I could have done, but the worst was to come.

The next stage was the one I feared the most. Actual sparring. No sequences, no known attacks. Just pure fighting. I'd trained with my dad for weeks, timing each battle, learning new sequences and techniques he had used in competitions (and receiving more bruises than I can count!). What I didn't know was that I would be fighting twice. First was an older woman, who I'd sparred with before. A flurry of kicks and punches between us, blocked, countered. It definitely wasn't the best fight. It was messy, both of us too close to each other trying to strike first. The graders stopped us a few times- too close, too far apart. I honestly thought I had failed at that point. There was too much stopping.

The next fight- a boy. I was nervous- he looked aggressive, but so

was I. Maybe too aggressive, I'd always been told I was. Begin. I went on. The next fight- a boy. I was nervous- he looked aggressive, but so was I. Maybe too aggressive, I'd always been told I was. Begin. I went on the offensive, trying not to give him an opening. And it worked. Then, the move I had been training, a kick that would easily catch the most skilled off guard. A feign to the left, then a kick square to the chest. It worked. I had been trying to perfect the move for weeks before with my dad. It had actually worked. I remember everyone watching and hearing him cheer me on.

All the sparring had finished, and we all sat, waiting for the results. I remember my heart pounding as I waited for the graders to call my name. Waiting, praying for good news. And it was. Before I knew it, they had called my name, gave me feedback and said congratulations. I had done it. One of the biggest achievements in my life; I had finally gotten my black belt.

The Unexpected Player

Written by: Hana Story

Football has a way of bringing everyone together.
I realised that on a warm afternoon,
sitting on a patch of grass overlooking the bay.
The sound of waves rolled gently behind me,
while the occasional cheer drifted across the field.
A family nearby were having a kickabout,
passing the football between themselves,
laughing whenever a touch went astray.
It wasn't a match.
There were no kits,
no referee,
no trophies waiting at the end.
Just a football,
a bit of grass
and people enjoying the game.
Then something caught my eye.
A seagull who had been watching from a distance
suddenly darted towards the loose ball.
It lowered its head, tapped it with its beak,
then chased after it as it rolled away.
Again.
And again.
It wasn't pecking for food.
It genuinely looked as though
it wanted to play.

The family stopped for a moment,
watching this feathery pitch invader
dribble the ball across the grass,
completely unaware
that it wasn't meant to be part of the game.
Everyone laughed.
For those few minutes,

it didn’t matter who you were:
a family,
a stranger watching from the grass
or even a curious seagull.
We were all captivated by the same
thing:
a football
rolling across the ground,
being chased by the most unexpected player on the pitch.

Memory Card

Written by: Makyla Paquette
Outside Editor

Who knew I would be the one inhaling smoke? The same smoke that ached in the stressed arches of my temples, the apartment walls trapping such sickly smells. Such a sweet taste caressing the air with a gentle tinge of ash and anxious skunk. My lips craved the rolls sensation, or an overly sweetened edible that made everything drift. Although my lungs hammered in my chest, their space suffocated with each breath. I crushed the blunt's flamed end, letting the smoke cake my clothes in something that felt more real than anything I could fathom; yet the aching in my chest made sitting back feel as if a stone blanket slumped over my body, forcing me further and further back.

Many days had I worried about my lungs, my mind drifting to what chemicals and fibres latched onto them like greedy parasites. I slipped into a memory of my tinier feet, dressed in sneakers barely the size of a phone case, running with fury; lungs pumping with inflamed momentum, targeted. Calculated. The two organs worked with a sailor's enthusiasm, heaving with each jump in my step. The ball was mere inches from my feet as my breathing hitched, watching as bodies far larger than mine came at me; a predator after its prey. I won't sit here and lie that I was a natural talent, 'nor someone' noticeable; rather, a fiend on a grassy field with a purpose: to score that goal and see them in the crowd—my family. They had probably sat there, expecting a little less than a grand show, with fumbling toddlers and flower pickers behind the goal line. Very few kids actually ran with a determined stride; most of their minds were dead set on the halftime popsicles and waving to their mother, who just wished they'd run in the right direction. It would be an understatement to call the whole ordeal a gigantic mess.

This year had felt like any other; all four years up to that point had been a foggy blur of mindless obligations, bending to whatever someone ordered, even if I initially fought it. A certain individual stood on the sidelines, a man marked by a destination that felt so far away to a child: lands beyond lands beyond lands; A grandfather,

whether biological blood or not.

He had arrived there with a purpose. The twinkle in his eyes when he thought about soccer, his home country of Portugal crying out in proud harmony with every season their team ran onto the field. He possessed a sort of pride in the sport, a deep-seated admiration for the connection, the thrill it brought to a room. Soccer was like a puff of this blunt, one game, one hit, a magical trigger that kept my mind going in the right direction.

Seeing him in the stands had spiralled my toddler mind into an explosion of excitement, making me lock in on the ball and run it up that grassy turf, over and over again. My little legs didn't want to stop running even after halftime was called, just jittering and shaking to get back on that field and hear them scream, hear them call out praises. That is intoxicating: the praise of hearing those you care about, knowing you take up even an inch of space in their minds.

I remember hugging his leg, my head barely near his waist after the match was won. I felt like a queen in that moment, soaking in the sweet attention of being a 'winner.' But that wasn't the day I learned what it truly meant to be a 'winner.' No, rather, I was far from someone who knew what it meant to 'win in life.' Nearly five years later, the day finally came, and Lord, was I not ready for it.

He wasn't well for a while; his bladder was laced with cells that his own body had betrayed him with. Cancerous cells transformed and spread, inch by inch, until there was nothing the most skilled surgeon could do. Machines hung out of him as if his lungs had been stretched and spread, the robotic hum of their engines now the symphony of his undoing.

He had breathed in the sweet air, but not the same sweet air as mine. No smoke, rather the fumes of fibreglass. Each day, each night, fibres that attacked his body with patient haste, as if they thrived in playing the waiting game. He breathed that toxic air until it became the only thing his lungs dared to breathe, betraying him from the waist up until it took everything.

When the machine's hum came to a bitter stop, I was fast asleep in my grandparents' bed, my parents waiting until the morning to hesitate with their words and deliver a blow so great that Invader Zim on the TV had never felt the same again. Everything moved fast; my

nine-year-old eyes were forced to watch as emotions ran high, then low and then settled into a grim silence despite what felt like hundreds of people crowded into one room. I ate the free frosted mints by a funeral bench, letting the motion and coolness numb the aches and confusion within my heart. I hadn't realized yet that I wouldn't get to hear him cheer my name when I kicked that soccer ball or when I slid, the mud and grass painting my shoes in a terribly deep mess, all of their concern rushing onto me in an instant. But now his attention was only on a long, deep and peaceful-seeming sleep.

I had walked up to his body for what felt like the hundredth time that day, leaning over something that would never change again. I scanned his face for any chance his eyebrows would raise in his typical amused gesture or if his smile would crack out from behind sealed lips. My father stood next to me, his eyes drooping with a weight heavier than Sisyphus's curse. My grandmother joined us, eyeing the man who had promised forever, now waiting for her beyond this realm. Who could know what lurked behind her eyes, or any widower, for that matter. Anger? Sadness? Confusion? A mix of everything under the sun? She had been left behind, and I felt that burden fall onto my shoulders: the pain of being left behind.

I take another puff of my sweet honeydew blunt, watching the smoke coil and turn, forming the last backdrop to my everlasting memories.

My grandmother patted his chest pocket, undoing the tightly knit button to pinch a piece of paper. This was no ordinary paper, not a will, nor a final goodbye. Instead, it held something that would cremate alongside him, rising in a mixture of ash and forever unspoken realities. Her neatly painted fingernails raised the card enough that I could see it: a tiny girl in her soccer uniform. Little League cards made for handing out like Pokémon cards with our actual names on them. I had placed the card in his hand, as he smiled with that usual, now-forgotten laugh, patting his chest pocket.

"I'll take this to heaven with me," he said with a gentle hum, his eyes pointed at the hidden stars. My mind didn't hint at how true his words were. He hadn't lied; he showed me what it felt like to truly win something. It was the profound experience of being loved so deeply that you felt like a cherished piece of Earth, something they would

take with them to heaven—as if smuggling a precious treasure. My little heart broke, but my aged heart cries with a distant yearning for someone who had made my feet run with a passionate need to get that goal. To kick the ball in the right direction, as this smoke fills now, a fleeting, simple joy amongst an overwhelming soccer game of life.

A Thoroughbred Once More

Written by: Alina Alonzo
Edited by: Roos van der Velden

A Unicorn shines through kicking dust
And smashing balls over diamonds of dirt
As the foal to an old Thoroughbred
Who works to thrust them toward old dreams

Grace dominates the mound
Marina frames every pitch
Aileen steals in a pinch
And Ili
Is anywhere she can dive

Until
A new Coach slides in
To break in the reins
Through a roster churn
And triple headers

A ball.
Ili shrinks at his voice
Avoiding a clipboard with wide eyes
Before swinging smoother

A strike.
Grace's elbow buckles
Her nerves burning against her pleas
To avoid Tommy John

A ball.
Ili gallops past third
Straining pink and purple bruises
For the bunt near the mound

A foul.

Marina spits red
Sitting out near Coach with bloody teeth
Before throwing her gear

A ball.
Ili hits the homestretch
Securing a mouthful of infield
And an out Coach misses

A foul.
Aileen snaps her bucked shin
Twisting under the catcher's weight
Quick to be carted off

A strike.
Ili is brought down
Holding the split ankle in her sock
While snarling in tears

As Coach applauds
His new Thoroughbred

Boundary

Written by: Kiera Hammersley
Outside Editor

Coffee is bitter here, and penitent on the tongue. You've got to swallow it with an ache. His text came through yesterday afternoon. It had been a while and he wanted to catch up. I felt embarrassment at first, but then shame at the embarrassment.

I can't believe that teammate of yours, Coleson, he's saying. You think someone would've pulled him up. Sauntering around after making the jump, the bellend.

He looks normal. Or presents as. No need to worry about potential injury, bankruptcy, disease. Not that it matters. I'd be the last to know. There's the bite of the snag but it doesn't matter. Now I'm here, it's all sour anyway. He's animated, was awkward before. That self-same discomfort past the greeting, where the mood is read, eyes desperately clinging so as to not look away, as if to dominate in normalcy. It was worse this time, though I feel that with every meeting. It's understood in that precise moment how little we know of each other now. We ask each other subconsciously *is this fine?* and there isn't an answer, can't be.

Coleson reminds me of Jack, I'm saying, and he's considering it with some abstractedness, fingers stroking idly over the back of his neck. Habit unchanged and maddening. Is he listening or feigning to? Remember, I'm saying, Back in primary, he used to do that peacocking thing before the run-up?

Oh, shit, yeah. Then Coleson is like if Jack grew up and developed backwards. No substance to either of them. Just soft everywhere.

He's proud of me for remembering Jack, indiscriminate nobody. He's leaning towards me over the polish-sticky table and how did he even find this place, so antonymous; ritzy extortionate gaff in Central London. Friend, family, girlfriend? He's saying, You think any of those primary kids did what we did?

Doubt it. You would've reached out to them already just so you can complain to me.

Am I making a jab? His little contact and talk without texture. Too late to dwell on it, too late to do much of anything. Like before the

landing and you're in flight, suspended mid-air. He's leaning back, arms spread behind his head, fingers winding into hair. Twenty-four-years-old and no hair transplant, unlike his dad. The joke is there, has been since last time, but the list of palatable topics is constrictive.

True, true. Man, where's the time gone?

Always back to that question. Stewing in it. Last time we met was five months back, and he asked me it then, just in another way. Careless, unthinking comment, the kind you'd give a stranger or intimate. What are we but housed in between. What's the point to this, I want to ask. But complacency breeds in the anger.

Where, indeed.

*

But just as every time he pulls me in and there's no resisting.

We're walking by the riverside, murky silver of London waste, and delving into the past diluted by time, too many ill-handlings. He was always taller, and a prick about it, wresting things from me and holding them over my head, laughing. Always taller, always a favourite, sweet-talker, while I never had the knack. You were too taciturn, he says now on the way up to the bridge, smile lines creasing, hand on my shoulder.

All the teachers thought I was their Oxford scholar, so were disappointed, those times on the field at lunch, chasing girls and spilling beetles in their water bottles. That was my idea, and he, the omnipotent enabler, should have stopped me, but where's the fun in that? The girls would always scream so loudly. A girl, Helen, beat him at long jump in P.E. once, and thanks to her, he couldn't back down, so neither could I. He's laughing as he says, That's how it went, isn't it, back then?

Copying my homework before school, paper pressed against a wall and then my back when the bricks annoyed him. Said I was a camel so I mooed like an idiot. Didn't make sense but it didn't have to, where's the fun? Never a need to slow down back then; we wanted to get faster so we'd run everywhere, out in front of cars. I told him it was a dumb idea and he'd drag me anyway, dickhead. But I still went

We went to the same secondary, too, and the teachers and kids were

all pricks. Wish they'd have run in front of cars, he says, But it was different for you, wasn't it? He's looking right at me, it feels, for the first time.

*

When we met, we were five-years-old, and he bit into me for his turn in the sandpit. A deep, sinking bite, bared on my forearm. He was missing three teeth. He spat at me whatever he took from my skin and said I tasted like sand, so I pushed him over the railing. Landing on his shoulder, he feigned laughter, though he couldn't move his left arm at all. The nurse told us we weren't to fight again; that we should talk things out instead. After, we agreed that the nurse was stupid. We had understood each other perfectly without words.

Competition was camaraderie. At six, he pressured me to take swimming lessons with him, where he would pinch the girls underwater and splash off, yelling my name, like I was the guilty one. We were punted when he challenged me to a race; loser got dunked. When he was pulled out the water there were indents around my wrist where he'd held on. Was I trying to kill him? his mum yelled at me in the medical room while he laughed and laughed. Next time, he said, smile leaking over his ashen face, yolk through the whites, I'll win next time.

At seven, we joined the school football team and promptly got booted, him forcing me into the dirt, grinding his shoe on my face, because the ball had gotten past the goal, and didn't I know how to use my legs? A classmate, maybe Jack, told me at home-time that no one could pull him off of me – he was so angry he was shaking.

You could be better, he said to me at age ten when marking my jump, You could have done better. Here, I'll show you.

He wanted, snatched, demanded, sparked a clamouring agitation in me, a smarting injustice, and then I shoved back, poured out acid, never asking to what end, never caring. It was just how it was. All snipes, jabs, and hits slipped from mind the following day, where he would grin at me in the playground and I would run to him, babbling about something on TV or in a magazine, something new to grasp at and to frenzy over. A greedy easefulness.

Sticking together, something a teacher once said to us later. *You're always sticking together*, aren't you boys? Like we were glue, sealing the cracks, seeping into the other. But we were fourteen and it was a disconcerting thing to be told, to be marked as.

At this point, a breach had rifted between us. He had launched ahead of my best in long jump and I had bested his time in cross country. When the P.E. teacher told him this, that I'd beaten him, he looked at me in abstract terms. Not happiness, not indifference, merely a vacancy. An answer existed and he wanted to either find it or bury it in me. Triumph seemed a very childish thing from then on.

He began to take things seriously, and then so did I. Contagion-like.

*

What do they see? I thought during the bus ride to school, us sitting together, sweating in Summer, Links spray-on cologne potent, tussling over what to listen to on his MP3, and the seniors telling us to get a room; in science, when I refused to let him copy my exam and he pinched the back of my hand for a timed five minutes, naked contact clammy and smothering, the girl opposite staring, how she pretended to have not been when she spied me looking; in the changing rooms after P.E., our friends jostling each other, shuffling out my way with a yell, laughing loudly about it being catching. What do they see? I thought this at twelve and didn't know why. Only sourness cloying and sticking, sticking.

*

There are many things we talk about when we meet, and these illuminate all that we don't.

We reminisce, mostly, since there's little to say about our lives now. His old injury playing up, a given, and too calamitous to mention. He always asks about my training, my teammates, the next competition. These are perfunctory necessities, and he delivers them exactly like that.

He's still invested in my current livelihood, athleticism an unbudging fixation of his past, but he doesn't feel the need to ask

about my wins, rather he tells me about others: the latest jumps in Turkey, Latvia, Jamaica, a scrappy boy who cleared five metres in some remote town in Wales. The more erudite the knowledge he holds, the more diminished I am. The more successful other athletes, the less relevant my achievements. He cheapens me. He degrades and blames me in a desultory manner, like he didn't think of it all, like it's an accident he's saying these things.

We talk about how sensitive I am. The childhood tussles over some indiscernible slight; that one time he launched his palm up against my chin so that my teeth swallowed lip and blood sputtered, how it was my fault for getting upset in the first place. Three stitches maketh the man, he said to the boys in secondary when he told them, arm over my shoulder, ferocious aura of pride. My wound, his medal, slung round both our necks.

Primary school is easier to traverse, though it was worse for me. The swot with bad teeth and ugly shins, rope-thin, and always on display because of mum's 'taking up' of our school trousers, mine and my brother's. You look a right div, Harry said to me once, and I kicked him right in the gulf of sock and trouser. It's like a flea breathing on me, Harry said, I'll show you a proper hit. This is where the boundary lies. When we meet, family is off the table.

Friends then. Friends were never a problem for him, both in primary and for the majority of secondary. This means that there's plenty to grip onto, fat chunks of elation, betrayal, and boredom – the building blocks of adolescence. Friends were both ephemeral and constant, interchanging between these states for the seven-year stretch before university. I have to fill him in those latter years that he missed, but this isn't much of a problem since he never asks.

There's always something to prise open before Year Twelve, like that milestone in cross country when we emerged as victorious; the only boys who completed the five-kilometre circuit, beetroot red and ready to go again.

Those times in joint detention where talking was prohibited, and he would press his foot against mine, tapping morse code without knowing it, just expecting me to comprehend.

His first crush, Amelia, who sat next to him in French and berated him half-heartedly for not knowing his conjugations. In our later

reenactments, she's performed as unbearably French, and that's all of her we've retained. I don't know why I liked her, he told me when sleeping over, She's not even pretty. This was before the breach, in Year Eight. That night we tried making pancakes, my parents and brother sleeping upstairs, but the batter was too viscous to flip, molten mess everywhere, soldering through the skin of his hand, my forearm, and he laughed into my shoulder, like he didn't want to face it; just clung and shuddered.

It was easier to laugh at pain when it didn't feel like mine alone – but that's something we don't talk about.

*

We don't talk about it but I think about it a lot, every day, at least once. Before his accident, the years leading to it, all the insignificant days, stretches of idle time spent just living, getting by. Like a lump of cancer, the days are marked before and after. The days are numbered.

In Year Nine, we stuck together less. An easing of the glue. He started dating, got his first girlfriend, Aisha, and they went everywhere together. For Boxing Day dinner, he sat beside her, and his family acted the same. Aisha was nice, witty, too witty for him. I pushed my turkey around my plate and thought that she could do better. I was used to being the spare part anywhere but here, in his house. I left early, and it didn't matter.

That was a lonely year for me, but for the first time in my life, I didn't much mind. I had a goal, and in that, I was never alone. He was always there, a step ahead, behind, or beside me. We joined a local athletics club, and on the bus journey there he'd talk about looking for a personal coach. Really, he was bragging, letting me know how far ahead he'd thought things through. County championships, nationals, the Olympics, even. When I told him he was big-headed and he'd never make it, he looked at me with an indeterminable intensity, so encompassing it was like hate.

You're not dropping out before you get ahead, he said to me. Don't be fucking boring. What are you, scared?

He was beside me every step of the way because that was how he fixed it. But he didn't need me; he made that clear. In Year Ten, I slid

on an icy patch leading up to the runway, and he laughed from the sidelines. That's gotta sting, my new friends said, and when club ended, he crumpled his face at the plaster, like he was the one in pain. It wasn't that bad, he said. You've gotta save the hurt for stuff that really matters.

Strength was never a quality innate in me. Perseverance, my coach says, is my speciality, an unblemished kind. Looking back at it now, those years were nothing but perseverance. I got a girlfriend in Year Eleven, Steph, and I hadn't spoken properly to him in months. He was furious with me, or he was entirely indifferent.

We had both placed well in school district meets, and were on track to advance to open county championships. He'd told me I better make it since he definitely was going to. His friendship was a tightly held fist, pummelling down until the world distorted, but loosened before everything snapped, a bare, cool palm over the ache. He held me there, at that ache.

Are any of them lot gay? Steph asked one day when she met me after practice. There was a new boy, and he'd looked at me, half-smiled, guessed something. I hadn't showered with everyone else, so I smelt. She wouldn't hug me.

What? Hell no, I said. Why the hell'd you think that?

'Cause all sports are gay, Steph shrugged. Especially the manly ones. I think men like that just want to lose themselves in women, and find themselves in men.

I didn't know why she was saying this to me, what she meant by it, if she meant anything, so I didn't think about it at all, and life idled on. Yawning stretch of time swallowing the next. Then Summer.

His accident was bathos, just one of those things. And so was what came after, or that's what he wanted me to believe. I knew something was wrong before I heard, an absence in my periphery the entire club hour; he'd never skipped before. At the hospital, the nurse told me he'd have to stay there a while until his knee healed, that he didn't want to see any friends. How come? He'll see me, just tell him I'm here. How long is a while? Tell him it's me, it's me, he'll let me in, he'll

Three weeks spent dawdling, life stagnant, future a blurred, meaningless burden. I waited and, eventually, he let me in. But he

didn't want to see me, even when he was looking right at me. Stupid the way it happened, he said, talking to the wall, the muted TV. I turned to get the ball, twisted my leg, and that was it.

It'll heal, I wanted to say, but couldn't. It felt cruel. And this, too, he knew, along with my sweating palms, shaking knees. Supine in a hospital bed, he seemed to know everything, his face lined with weariness, a cumbersome perspicacity. He laughed when I said nothing. Do I really look that pathetic to you?

No, I said. In that moment, I knew that I was the pathetic one, that some part of me longed to be in that bed instead, leg confined in a cast.

It was him that felt sorry for me, so he just sighed. It's so boring here.

Should I have brought something?

No, he said, and looked at me, really looked at me. Just help me up. And get my phone.

Shouldn't I get a nurse?

No. I'm sick of being fussed over.

He wanted to go to the bathroom, that's what I thought, and thought it still when he told me to stay, to lock the door. I'd never been a carer before, so dithered in making any kind of move. It was natural to wait by his side, for him to move first, but when he did, I was motionless, couldn't process what was happening as it unfurled, the video on his phone, his hand beneath his hospital gown.

Three weeks, his voice had strained. Thought I was going crazy. What was he doing, what was he, half-fledged thoughts as I watched, but wasn't watching, was seeing the blank sprawl of sky above, that day in January where I'd slipped on an ice patch, was hearing a burst of echoing laughter, and I'd stayed completely still.

You too, he said, must have said, lips moving, and a hand outreaching. But his eyes held me so I couldn't move, didn't move as it happened. His eyes had a dark, searching intensity, a demanding in them, the same look he'd flash at me when we'd cross the finishing line in a race, breathing fast, and our times were read out. Triumph or defeat, victor or loser.

We breathed fast together in that moment, though we went nowhere, but still I was running, the momentum stockpiling before

the spring, and then nothing but a breath.

He looked at me after with a sneer. Of course, he seemed to say, my hand, underwear, wet. Of course you'd like this. There was nothing to feel then, not even after, in the shared hospital room again, the old woman opposite his bed blinking drowsily at us through an oxygen mask. He talked about nothing in particular, told me to visit another time. He'd been glad to see me; he could say that openly now he'd won.

I felt only when the numbness allayed a month or so after, and by then, it was too late to look back, had been the very moment I'd arrived in that hospital room and he'd seen me, seen into me. I let him happen to me the same way I always did, and I realised then that he hated me for it, had always done.

His leg healed badly and he couldn't jump again. After that, I was unfettered. The glue dissolved.

*

Here's what I want to say,

The first time it happened for me I didn't consider it the first. Drinks with friends in university, overpriced club, where I stuck with cola. You and your training, they laughed, patted me on the back. Meandering, nothing conversation which became noise when I saw it across the counter, a smile meant for me. A secret enclosed in the tight pulling of lips. A secret I had disclosed by, what?

Imminent, the approach. The man, the stranger, went off to the dance floor, and I was to follow. But I couldn't, so he found me instead. Hey you, the man said to me, an hour, two hours, whenever, later, mouth to my ear but somehow also looking at me, in my eyes. I was thinking I'd have to leave alone.

My mates are here, I said, and I could taste the salt of his neck through my nose.

That's good. Bring them with you, the man laughed, and he wouldn't touch me then because he knew, had to know, the fear, the revulsion, the shame. Unless you're shy?

Childish taunt, shouldn't have worked, and it in itself didn't, but I didn't know that then, had the pulp of fear lodged in my throat; I had been seen for the first time, inexplicably. Something was happening

to me that happened to other people and I was playing my part as someone else. So I said, Come back with me.

All tension and shaking hands. He was experienced, the stranger, had done this before, liked the effect he had on me. It's your first time, right? he said. Don't be nervous. It's like doing it to yourself.

I didn't think to correct him then, tell him about what we did together. I couldn't tell him, and then I was touching him.

His skin, face, was smooth, and when pressed close, I could smell cologne, light enough that it was dainty, perfume. He wasn't muscular, nor lean, nor chubby. He wasn't the same type of man as me. He was other. To be with him like this was catching, but I did it anyway.

When it happened, I pictured him as a woman, his arch, the tenor in which he sighed, Amelia, Aisha, Steph, but the reality of it gripped me, came over me as a bludgeon, again and again. You'd never been with me like this, and yet it was the same as when you reached out and touched me, the same dark, desperate searching in your eyes, and you breathed as he breathed, in, out out out, a breath that never seemed to end, seeping into and dying in me.

Then it was over, and he wanted me to stay. He held me there, his head on my thigh, and I felt violent. What was it about me? I wanted to ask him. What had he seen in me? Instead, I called him names, stuff Harry used to say to me, and then I left. But that didn't matter. It didn't change anything.

Men want to lose themselves in women, and find themselves in men. I found myself there, buried in the stranger. No matter where I went, the time that passed, the girls I dated, then gave up dating, shunned every guy who might be interested, I was stuck there, always inside myself. Do you know what that's like? I figure you must do. Stuck all that time in a hospital bed, but it's not really the same thing, is it? That's not what I'm talking about.

Like in the locker rooms after practice where we'd laugh with all the other guys, about the girls they'd been with, or wanted to be with, and you'd say something about a girl you were talking to, and you'd be lying. I'm sure you were even if there was no way for me to know; you never told me about any girl, waited for me to find out by myself. You did the thing with your wrist – you scratched it, so you were lying.

But maybe they all were. Maybe that was the trick of it, not to stand in the corner, making sure not to get dressed too fast or too slow, making sure not to look at anyone for too long, to only look them in the eye, feeling weird about making them feel weird, not knowing why.

Like when Tom from athletics said he was sure a guy on the bus had been eyeing him up and he'd wanted to vomit, felt like the guy may as well just have molested him in front of everyone. He was so oily, Tom said, And that's how the creep looked at me. It was greasy. After he said it, you didn't laugh like the others, like me. You said nothing and went out to practice. Do you remember that?

Like the pictures you had saved on your old brick phone, your inspirations, paragons of fitness, the runners you favoured, the jumpers you wanted to be like, be better than – all men. The childhood posters of Dean Karnazes and Iván Pedroso replaced with GTA posters and swimsuit models. Every boy's room. Boys pretending to be boys, liking all things boys should like, taught to them by no one, by other boys. Why were you pretending to be a boy who doesn't exist?

It's rich of me to say that, I know. For the longest time I couldn't tell if I wanted to be you or wanted you to be me. I wanted you to suffer, mostly. Wanted it so badly that I buzzed with it, and it made me want to beat you – and I did beat you. I beat you before it happened, your knee twisting out your skin. Your goal was nothing and no one. You thought you were beyond me, beyond everything, so you were nowhere. There was no joy in it for you. If you were me now, you couldn't take it, the unpredictability, the reliance on your body, always strengthening, always weakening, each day closer to the boundary line, until you've committed a foul without realising you've jumped, and that'll be your last. But you're not me, so you watch me getting older and you're happy about it. You watch me make the landing on TV and you think, that could've been better, he could've done that smoother, a few more years and he'll be done for. All along, you've wanted me to be like you. Motionless.

It's been years, all our lives, and I think about you all the time. You know what's in me now and you say you're fine with it, that it must be hard for me, working in the environment I do, with the way all those

guys are. It is hard, I told you once, you know what it's like, and you nodded, as if commiserating, but really you were distant, weren't listening, weren't thinking about me at all. You know what's in me now, who I am and what, but you don't really know; the right kind of look and wrong kind of look, how it feels when a man presses up against you, the fact you want him to, and nothing can stop that feeling, not the shame, not the fear, always there even when you think it's not. Do you know what's in you, and what can we do about it? What can be done? I think you'd like to have touched me again after that time in the hospital bathroom, for me to touch you properly, to hold you, even, to make it all alright.

So, no, it wasn't the first time for me, back at university, that man with the perfume-smelling cologne. I went through with it because his, Unless you're shy? was your, What are you, scared?

It was you. I wanted it to be you, but that was only after.

*

Well, he's saying, looking to his watch, new and expensive. I've gotta run. I'll text you at some point.

The ache subsists on that alone. Not tonight, not later, but at some point. Curated, perfunctory distance. Still, he wants to do this again. His loyalty to me is boundless and constricting all at once. I want him to be proud of me just as I don't care at all.

Good luck for the next competition, he's saying now. I'd tell you break a leg, but…

I want him to hurt because he knows he's hurting me. He'd be thrilled with it, this sentiment, how it would crush beneath him in a few blows of the tongue. *Is this fine, is this fine?* We're asking each other now, have been the entire day. All those withered hours closing over me, thinking of him, of us, of our unfathomability, how he cautions out his limits with staggering ease, and how the impale of our closeness, him pushing me away by drawing me closer, horrifies me makes me ashamed makes me acrid, why is it so different for me, why can't I be like him, like other men, where distance is so seamless, so necessary

I'll win, I say, and he laughs, reaches out to touch my shoulder, only

my shoulder, the boundary line. And that's enough for the both of us, because it's all that's left.

Win

Written by: Aaliyah Dixon-Holiday

We love to win
It gives us joy
But winning isn't easy...
unless you're a boy

Whether it's sports, politics or more
Boys always are on top
They love the taste of winning
And they never stop

What happens when their winning cups get too full?
What happens when they focus on winning so much that they lose their souls?
Winning isn't always everything

How to Compete in Hobby Horsing from Scratch

Written by: Sasha Paris-Carter
Edited by: Jolanda Zweers

Hobby horsing is a whimsical gymnastic art, which originated in sunny, sub-arctic Finland. It may seem bizarre and hilarious to the outsider: combining precise physical skill with a universally beloved children's toy-

But Hobby Horsing is not something you fuck around with. Competitions are held across the globe, and if you win, you can become mega-famous like world champion Rosie Mulari. She's an early-20s Finnish goth who KILLS in dressage.

Since the sport is hailed as being more accessible and humane than riding a real horse, I believe everybody should give it a try. Here's my amateur advice for getting started:

1: Secure your horse

This is the most important, and most exciting step into hobby horsing. Anybody can save up and buy a real, living horse that already fucking exists, but you are not *just anybody*. You are not limited to the normal horse colors. You might want a firetruck red horse, or a horse fully covered in hello kitty stickers. Let's make it happen!

You will need:

- Hot Glue
- An old coffee tin
- A Big stick, the lenght of your feet to your hips
- Yarn in your chosen colour
- Paint
- 2 Medium-large googly eyes
- Other crafty decorations (glitter, blood, piss, stickers, pressed flowers)
- Optional: ribbons

The coffee tin is the Horse's head. Flatten it to a more ovular, horse

shape, and then decorate with paint & other decorations to your liking.

Do not forget to add googly eyes at the very end of the decorating process. Use hot glue to stick them on..

The next touch is the horse's mane. Cut your yarn into long strips, at least 30 cm (about 1 foot). Long enough to fly in the wind as you approach the final hurdle. Glue the strips to the top rim of the coffee tin (the horse's head). Give it some texture! Fluff the hair, layer the strips, or try making coily hair with wire.

Hot glue the head to your big stick. Add ribbons to the stick as desired. MAKE SURE YOU NAME YOUR HORSE!

2: Tame your horse, learn the moves

Good manners are essential to winning competitions.

If your horse is a complete fuckknuckle, you WILL lose.

This depends on the horse's posturing, and showing that you've really taken the time to build a relationship with your horse. The two of you must be locked in together.

This requires a lot of imagination (and some DIY puppetry skills), but the best way to get a good groove with your horse is to just ride it, little kid style, around the neighborhood. Feel its balance, its posture, its velocity. Experiment with different pacing.

According to the United States Hobby Horsing Championships website, there are a few universal categories riders can compete in: jumping, dressage, and barrel racing. There are many subcategories, including Puissance, where you try to jump over a rail that gets higher and higher every round. Note that regulations on sportsmanship and technique differ from country to country.

Learning to compete in these categories requires two important resources: an outdoor space and YouTube. USHHC has lots of videos which explain event criteria and demonstrate basic techniques for beginners. This adorable video on the hunter-jumper category is a good place to start while you are still figuring out your horse's behavior.

Eventually, if you really mean business, you'll want to find a private teacher or coach to give you feedback. Hobby Horsing coaches are not

easy to find, but if you join Facebook groups and online communities, somebody will likely point you in the right direction.

3: Find and enter competitions

Aside from teachers and other riders, the National Hobby Horsing website in your country is your friend when it comes to finding competitions. Reddit and Facebook are always helpful resources, if you're feeling especially lost. Like any sport, you're going to want to start competing locally, and work your way up to winning regional titles.

The big competitions, with the real audiences, are in Finland, the US, and Australia, each with around 400 riders competing. You might be the only one with a coffee tin hobby horse, but if they have a problem with that. Fuck em.

I wish you all the best of luck. Go forth and earn fame and fortune in your Hobby Horsing pursuits!

Head under for silence

Written by: Rebekah Gawthorpe
Edited by: Rebeca Elgueta

Growing up disabled, swimming was always encouraged. Hydrotherapy was a weekly occurrence from the age of 1 to 5. Then, I did weekly swimming lessons throughout school,but there was one thing I was never able to do- go underwater.

All the other kids could do it so easily, they all had a key to a secret world that seemed so close to me, yet impossible to enter. For years, my parents tried bribery. “Put your head underwater and we will get you a Nintendo Wii!” Great temptation indeed and I would wrestle with my mind every week. “Come on Becky it’s right there. You get so close. You’re centimeters away!” Holding my nose, I would dip my head down. My ears, so close to the water’s surface, but never underwater. One swim teacher tried to force me under, that of course made things infinitely worse. In the end, I left Junior school never being able to put my head underwater.

Fast forward a few years and I’m 13 years old and I went swimming with a friend. She encouraged me to try again and said that I was so close to being underwater. All my friends could swim, and had done for years, while my own anxiety held me back. I didn’t even know what I was so afraid of.

I tried again, on my own in the bath tub of all places, that night repeating in my head over and over. I was so close, almost begging my own fears to let me try, just this once.

Somehow I did it...

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.
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Was that what I was so afraid of all this time!?

I was so excited, I tried again, but this time I stayed longer, taking in the sensations of this new world, the tension of the water on my face, and most of all the silence.

I wanted to go swimming again as soon as possible, I wanted to

indulge in my new discovery, but this time I had goggles and a nose clip. In an instant, the sounds of the world disappeared and the water carried my weight. I was finally on the same level as those children at my swimming club.

I wanted to learn to swim again with this new found ability, but as a teenager I was too old to swim with an after school club, so I joined lessons for adults where I was the youngest by a long long way. I couldn't even drive myself there and back yet, but I liked being treated like an adult. I also had a brilliant teacher who was kind and encouraging, but the best part of all was nobody from school was there.

After a difficult day at school, full of noise, smells, and bullies, I could spend an hour with people who supported me; I was participating in a sport that I enjoyed and could see myself improving in.

I could put my head underwater and I did not hear the boys from school. Instead, I could focus on my stroke count and breath, as well as the exact technicalities of my movement through the water. Every milestone felt like an achievement, every second less time spent catching my breath at the end. Every length more in a lesson felt like a bigger deal to me than any grade at school. Having my weekly swimming lesson was the best part of my week, it helped me through difficult times and meant I stayed healthier for longer.

I still swim to this day. It's a massive part of my physical therapy. Even though I cannot swim lengths like I used to, I still enjoy the peace of being underwater. I've even tried snorkelling and SCUBA diving, which is something younger me could only ever have dreamed of.

Courtside

Written by: Lindsay Brandt
Outside Editor

Yesterday I told a guy at the office that I high-fived Arkell Ford back in ’24, right before he scored that game-winning basket for the Pumas. He didn’t believe me.

It’s funny, I didn’t think it was that special back then. We were right up in the middle of things, and I still remember being just twenty feet away as he shot that three-pointer that night. The cameras didn’t catch it, but he was nervous. You could see it in his eyes, darting back and forth as he caught his breath with those two Cascade guards right on top of him. Then something just clicked, and all of a sudden he relaxed, like someone blew a tropical-scented candle right across his nose and his brain took a trip to Tahiti, leaving all those nerves somewhere in the ocean. It was a beautiful shot. I caught the replay of that game a few weeks ago on the 5, and it took me right back to that season, back when we had hope.

Your view was probably even better than mine in those magic moments—you were even closer to the action than I was.

Remember how the whole city suddenly became Pumas fans overnight? No one really gave the team a second thought until Arkell won that game. I think we were thirty-to-one underdogs or something, and the arena had more of their fans than ours. Then all of a sudden, black and gold flags were flying from every window downtown. Billboards went up. They almost sold out of number 27 jerseys. The mayor even got involved—that was funny. He went on TV to personally thank the team for getting good. You laughed, said he was just pandering, but I could tell you were over the moon about it.

It was strange because basketball was always our thing, our little secret, and then all of a sudden it was mainstream and everyone wanted a piece of the action. In a half-empty arena, it didn’t feel quite as bad to sneak in without tickets at the eleventh hour. But with twenty thousand fans standing on the bleachers holding signs and foam fingers, I did start to get a little guilty about it. Call me a rule follower.

Man, that was such a weird year. I had just gotten laid off from my

job, flipping burgers, because I broke my hand. Three days later, I met you for the first time at the mall when you helped me pick out a new winter hat. Two days later, you asked me out. When you said we were going to the Pumas game, I thought you meant somewhere up in the nosebleeds. I didn't have the money for a good view—I still don't, in case you were wondering. So then you showed up five hours before the game in your rusty steel-gray Accord wearing that fancy white-collared shirt, and I had absolutely no idea what to expect. Imagine my surprise when we rolled up to the service doors at the back of the arena, where those two security guards with their batons stared at us like we were Martians. You probably didn't notice how I reached for my car keys and held them like a blade between my fingers, because I thought we might have to fight our way out of there. I was scared out of my mind.

You showed the guards your ID and made up some bullshit about me being a VIP, and then they let us go without a second glance. We walked right past the team's lockers and the coach's office and sat down courtside, where those polished wood floorboards squeaked beneath our sneakers. At that point, I was freaking out because I thought you were secretly the billionaire who owned the team. I didn't learn you were actually an usher until later. Though, you always *did* act like you owned every room you walked into. That was one of the most attractive things about you.

So there was me with my hand in a cast, and you in your uniform pretending like you were doing very important work. Ostensibly you were watching the crowd to make sure they didn't jump onto the arena floor or break into a riot or anything stupid like that. Pumas fans never did any of that stuff. Even after the whole bandwagon jumped on, they were still pretty mild-mannered.

That was November, close to the start of the season. The coach said this was going to be our year, but coaches always say that. My friends and family didn't know you existed until a couple of weeks later, when my mom spotted us in the corner of a shot on the TV broadcast. That was an awkward conversation. She knows I don't usually go for blond guys who wear button-down white shirts and sit in courtside seats, and I had to try and explain what we were doing without giving away that we were breaking the rules.

She still doesn't know how well you knew me. I don't think anyone knows that. I mean, we only knew each other two weeks before you passed out drunk in the back of my car and started talking in your sleep about your shitty home life and how I was the best thing that ever happened to you. What was I supposed to do about that? Kind of Heart Stealing 101, when you think about it, how unfair that is.

I think we watched every Friday home game that winter. The games didn't take a break for the holidays, so we didn't either. Remember New Year's Eve? The Pumas were playing the Vipers, and nobody expected the game to be exciting, but I guess when you match up two teams equally down on their luck, you get a great show. Went to double overtime, ended around ten-thirty, and then you had to stay for an hour afterward to make sure everybody was gone so they could close the arena down for the night. Well, everybody except me. Sitting up there with you on those little catwalks high above the arena floor, with the lights sparkling down on us for that midnight kiss… that was so good. Nobody could tell us what to do, because no one knew we were there. You held my broken hand in yours, and for a couple hours I forgot everything else about my life—how my car antifreeze was out, how I still didn't have a job and my roommates were getting tired of covering my rent.

Why didn't you ever let me move in with you? You covered for me everywhere else. It wasn't because I didn't ask.

I know, I know, I shouldn't ask questions like that. It wasn't just us who loved the Pumas. The whole city was on the team's side after the Cascade game. Normal people started learning the players' names, which no one does unless it gets serious. One time those guys from the boy band came to a game, way up there in the glass boxes, with your usher friends serving them wine and overpriced snacks. But their view didn't hold a candle to ours, right there in the middle of the action.

The players didn't know who we were, obviously, but they knew us—they fist-bumped and high-fived us when they ran into the arena at the start of every game, they nodded when we gave them thumbs-up after free throws. I got a "get well soon" card from one of their wives. got invited to golf with Darion Sutton. I don't think you ever went, though, because you don't own a golf club and you can't play golf. It

would've been hard to show up to a country club in an Accord wearing a basketball usher uniform. But you probably could have pulled it off.

Then the playoffs. If you told me in December that we were going to seven games against the Rovers in the semifinals, I would've laughed in your face. But that team was something special in a way that not even their coach predicted. They shared a mind, you said in April, as we watched them blow out some East Coast team 105-92. And then it was all those talking heads on ESPN, saying we were a lock for the conference. I was at the gym that spring and walking on the treadmill when I saw it for the first time. It didn't sink in at first. I just mindlessly watched the scrolling words go by and when that Pumas logo flashed on the screen, I thought it was for something else. Then I saw the word "playoffs" on the scroll and I almost fell off the treadmill, I was so surprised. And the first coherent thought I had? *That means we'll get to keep watching basketball together after the regular season ends.*

By that time, the city was boiling over. We didn't have anything to root for before this. Everybody really came together to support our team, and I don't just mean flying flags. I don't think the team had to pay for a single meal at a restaurant during those weeks.

Then Game 6 of the semifinals. The Pumas won that game and tied the series. Great vibes at the bars and after-parties downtown. Not so great vibes for us. Sorry, bad attempt to lighten the mood. You would never.

This is the hard part to talk about, so I'm really sorry, but I have to bring it up if I'm going to talk about us. We scammed our way into the arena for six months. Really, I'm surprised our little con lasted as long as it did.

We did that for so long that people stopped questioning it. We had "fake it till you make it" down to a science. You were always pretty good about doing the bare minimum amount of work so your manager wouldn't get suspicious. But there was a substitute manager that day, and I think she was really stressed about making sure the finals went right, so she pushed harder on our cover story. By that point, you had gotten me a fake VIP pass and everything, but she had a list of names and she knew I wasn't on it.

A few hours later: both banned for life.

Talk about a gut punch. Breathing hurt for the next hour.

Maybe you remember the rest of that night better than I do. I just remember it as a blur, crying and screaming in the car listening to your Spotify until we stopped at the liquor store and got wasted in the parking lot.

See, the worst part isn't that we lost our Friday night date spot. I'm not choosy like that, I promise. It was nice while it lasted, but I would have gone anywhere else with you. We could have watched movies or gone to the park, like regular people who aren't pathological liars. We could have stayed in at my crappy apartment with my crappy roommates and eaten pasta. My hand was better by then, I was sending my resume all over, I could have finally paid you back for all those drinks you bought me. God knows you deserved it. Our relationship was never going to be the same after that night, but that didn't mean it had to be over.

But you just had to go and blame me for everything. Spitting some shit about how I was the one who made you do this, like you weren't the one who asked me out to the Pumas game and came up with this plan in the first place. Saying I corrupted you somehow, led you to do things you didn't want to do because I was just too pretty and sweet to resist. Sorry for being too pretty, I guess.

Couples fight all the time. I didn't think immediately that we were going to break up, even after we watched Game 7 of the series on TV and the Pumas lost by eight. I promise, I didn't want to leave you, but you got so angry when I tried to cut through the tension that I wondered if it was even worth fighting for us. And then *you* walked out on *me* a couple weeks later.

I've still got the cast with Arkell Ford's signature on it, and all the '24 Pumas starters. I'll probably be able to sell it one day, make a whole bunch of money, but I can't really bring myself to do that now. I can't stop wondering how much it would be worth if we had actually won that national title. Half those players are gone now, traded to teams all over the league. Nobody outside of this state is gonna remember that run in five, ten years, when they all retire. But we'll remember.

Sometimes I'm out at the bar these days when there's a game on. All these young kids in their black and gold jerseys, hooting and

hollering at the TVs, and then the real fans, old-timers sitting back in the booths, who don't wear gear because they don't need to prove themselves to anyone. Sometimes I sit down next to someone over beer and tater tots, and we get to talking about basketball, and I say, "I miss when the Pumas were good."

But I know, and you know, that what I'm really saying is, "I miss when you loved me."

Author Biographies



Roos van der Velden
Editor-in-chief

Roos van der Velden is a young writer from the Netherlands with a degree in Literature studies and a job at a bookstore. In her home country, she has been published in Fantastische Vertellingen and Vonk fantasy. Across the pond, she has gotten published in Talk Vomit and Sinister Wisdom. In this anthology, she hasn't written herself, yet just like with the previous issues she is still the editor-in-chief.



Janyne Langlois
Cover Designer

Janyne Langlois is a Florida based writer known for art, literature and having an enormous imagination that runs on overdrive. Her love of writing was fostered by her college English professor, who always encouraged her to keep going. When she isn't writing she's watching anime, listening to cinematic music, or screaming with her friends about characters they love.



Sophie Wills
Author

Sophie Wills is an eclectic writer and blogger who writes about her interests and hobbies, which could be just about anything, when you think about it. Her main interests (at the moment) include gaming, D&D and anime. Whatever she talks about, she talks about passionately and wishes to share it with her readers.

Author Biographies



Hana Story
Author

Hana Story is a writer with a love for horror, morally questionable characters and stories that leave a mark. Her work spans fiction, cultural commentary and copywriting, but she is happiest exploring the darker corners of human nature. Whether writing haunting fiction or sharp cultural commentary, she approaches every piece with honesty, curiosity and a distinctive voice.



Makyla Paquette
Author

Makyla Paquette is a recent university graduate who is more than ready to burst into the entertainment and media industries. With a fascination for horror, gothic and really anything that makes your skin crawl, she aspires to curate new nightmares for you with her psychological thrillers.



Alina Alonzo
Author

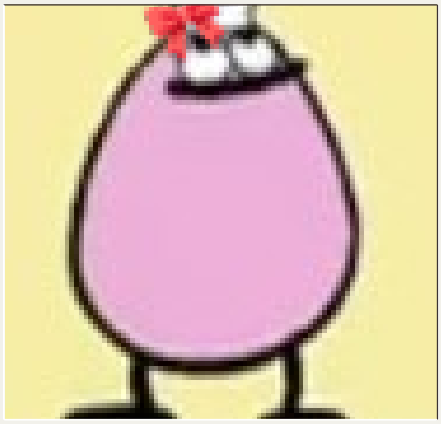
Alina Alonzo is a recent university graduate who writes about the complexities of familial relationships, Mexican-American identity pulls, and more lighthearted interests as they come along. Alongside her dedication to community work within California's Central Valley, she devotes precious bits of time to her growing passion for writing while also desperately trying to improve her gaming and D&D skills.

Author Biographies



Kiera Hammersley
Author

Kiera Hammersley is a UK-based writer who indulges in the dark, gritty, and morally grey. She is particularly interested in strange, off-putting characters, gothic fiction, and stories about the queer experience. A Royal Holloway Creative Writing graduate, she dabbles in creative fiction, copywriting, freeform essays, and screenplays.



Aaliyah Dixon-Holiday
Author

Aaliyah Dixon-Holiday is a writer, an illustrator, a YouTuber, and a Thingsbook creator. She loves poems and she loves to draw. She may not be good but she's trying all the time. She also hates AI. She had heart surgery at 5, and back surgery back in 2023. She also didn't know that a biography had to be 60 words, but, she's just gonna keep talking! She loves giraffes!



Sasha Paris-Carter
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Sasha Paris-Carter (they/them) is a musician and music writer.
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Author Biographies



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Rebekah Gawthrope is a writer, photographer and videographer with her own blog writing about the natural world, living with disabilities and life with her dog. She also loves video games and animation.



Lindsay Brandt
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Lindsay Brandt (she/her) has been writing all manner of creative works since she could barely talk. She's a Dixiefied Hoosier who loves country music, and you can find her songs and lyrical work at @lindsayvirginiamusic on Instagram. Recently she won a Sandra Hutchins Award for creative nonfiction for her personal essay "Fighting Falcon."



Rebeca Elgueta
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Rebeca Elgueta is a writer and lover of fantasy and sci-fi. After completing her MA in Creative Writing, she is shaping a career that blends creative writing with growing copywriting experience. Feel free to connect with her via her Linkedin: www.linkedin.com/in/rebeca-e.

Author Biographies



Jolanda Zweers
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Jolanda Zweers is a Dutch freelance writer and journalist. She completed her BA in Media Studies at the University of Groningen, and has not stopped rambling about books, movies, and games ever since. Jolanda loves to write fantasy fiction, but also likes to express her strong opinion in a juicy column. Check out her work on her website: jolandazweers.com


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