

# Young Minds Short Story Competition 2021

Category: Year 7-9 – SHORTLIST

## Karthiga Vijayakumares

Rashta stared at the letter, thoroughly examining every single letter on the page. She read it over and over, uncertain whether she'd read it right. As she read it once more, she realised she had, and a jittery feeling sparked inside her like fireworks. Could what be written on this letter be true? The only way to prove it now was to ask her mother, Harpyr, herself. Rashta hurried out of the dimly lit attic, rushed down the stairs and raced through the hallway. "Mother!" Rashta shouted as she zoomed into the brewery room, where Harpyr was mixing a glowing cauldron. "Do I have a father?" Harpyr stared at Rashta with a ghastly expression, her entire body rigid. "Baba, you must be starving! Come and eat lunch." Harpyr said hurriedly. Harpyr avoided Rashta's question. "So, it's true. I do have a father," Rashta concluded.

Rashta hurried into the attic once more, passing shelves lined with potion ingredients, spell books, and several open boxes, its contents strewn on the dusty floor. Rashta hurried to a box in the back corner of the room. It was the only box Rashta hadn't checked. "Come on..." she muttered, determined to find anything that could give her a clue to where her father was. She found old books, pattered pieces of paper, and all sorts of random junk, until one thing caught her eye. Rashta pulled out a small, worn-out photo. There was her mother, except much younger. Next to her was a gangly man with jet-black hair and almond-shaped eyes. And there, cradled in their arms, was baby Rashta. Father, she thought, circling her finger around the man. She looked back at the box she found the picture in, only to find a blue, origami butterfly. That was all that there was of her father. A vague letter acknowledging the existence of her father, and a picture of him. Yet, she still didn't know where he was.

Rashta sighed defeatedly, limbering towards the trapdoor, when suddenly she heard a quiet tapping on the window in the attic. At first, Rashta ignored it, but then the tapping became more vigorous, simply too hard to ignore. Rashta twirled around to find a paper aeroplane tapping against the window. Rashta hurried towards it, pushed the window open and grabbed the paper plane. On its wing, it read: Follow my trail of petals And your wish will come true The letter was signed with a drawing of a blue butterfly. Rashta stumbled back, grabbing the origami butterfly she found earlier. They looked exactly the same. Could it be her father?



Rashta jumped with excitement. She was getting somewhere! She dashed out of the attic and bolted towards the door.

Rashta opened the door to find a dense path made of cherry blossom petals, spiralling through the town roads and into the hills. Seeing this, Rashta ran, her eyes glued on the petals. Finally, she'd see her father! She'd be able to tell him all that happened while he was gone, show him all of the wonderful things she could conjure, and maybe give him a ride on her broom! Before she knew it, Rashta was at the peak of a hill. A huge cherry blossom tree loomed over her; its great branches filled with pink cherry blossoms. Underneath it, Rashta found a familiar gangly man with jet-black hair. Without even realising, Rashta bounded towards him. The man smiled at her, his arms out wide. But, just as Rashta was about to wrap her arms around him, her father was gone, leaving a whirlwind of pink petals in its place. In the distance, Rashta noticed her mother watching the scene in tears. Seeing Harpyr, Rashta scampered towards her, gushing with tears. "Why did he leave, mother?" Rashta moaned. "What you saw wasn't real. Your father is gone and always will be," she said, wiping away Rashta's tears. "My baba, you must learn to let go. Stop clinging onto what is already gone, and start looking to the future that lies ahead, waiting to be formed." Rashta looked out into the setting sun, watching as the world around her got dimmer, and the origami butterfly on her palm disappeared.



## Jia Ern Chong

If you ever hear about different worlds, there is always the mention of the Multiverse, or different realms with fantasy creatures and equally supernatural tales to come with them. These worlds are ones that you can enter and exit with magical objects, time portals and other mysterious ways. These worlds always have problems associated with them, strangely enough, like the rumour of some mystical lost princess, the conspiracies of assassins planning to overthrow a pope, or the adventure of an evil figure trying to possess an exquisite object. Our society is coated with these stories of sorcery and fairy tales, though, all these thrills and adventures are inaccessible to us. They are just out of reach, leaving us staring at them from a distance and longing to experience something that can compare to these wonders in just the slightest way.

What if, I told you that you could enter one of these incredible worlds, by opening sheets bound together? Covered with a heavy red binding, I open a world and engross myself in its marvels. Trees with spiky, outspread arms are covered with leaves of warm, assorted colours and they flutter against the brush of the wind. Soft and bristle bark covers the trunks as the thick, sturdy roots reach out and placates other dancing plants. The grass flows side to side, synchronising with the breeze as it carries along the smell of sweet flowers and fresh crops and the whisper of time spent here by people before. Various dots of coloured flowers bloom from the top of the grass that tickle the tips of your fingers, complimented by the occasional buzz of a lined bumblebee working, the mellow hum of a spotted ladybug or subtle flap of a butterfly's lengthened wings. The sky is a beautiful baby blue that tenderly cradles delicate clouds that rest amongst it, with the frequent sight of birds gliding cheerfully, giving it different shades and hues. The scope of countless tweets and chirps fill the air harmoniously as birds sing to each other and fill the atmosphere with a magnificent symphony. Your bare feet are comforted by cold soil that is soft and squishy but still earning your trust to remain on it. The speckled dirt is accompanied by the feeble movement of a beetle hurrying along, or the clump of earth that moves as an ant works its way home. Though solid and hard, the particles spill into the space between your toes that cause you to move them in happiness.

As you look beyond these fragments of nature, you see colossal mountains looking over the entire landscape. The clouds and dew cause the mountains to fade into the background, but they still hold their majestic look as their snow tips mix into the clouds causing a milky effect. Lakes, streams, and rivers flow in harmony as water trickles down among smooth and gentle rocks that clatter lightly against each other erratically. The cool liquid passes down pieces of branches, leaves and other fragments to scurrying otters and beavers making homes in the refuge of sticks. These senses tempt your taste as non-existent honey or sweet dew seems to roll over your tongue. No food could ever match the sensation of this imagined delight and the sparkle of laughter erupts from your chest.

To you, the world has stopped, everything is still and amazing, life is beautiful, and all worries, concerns, doubts, jobs and fears are nowhere to be found. You are coated in unimaginable freedom. The realism of this setting played in my mind since I had entered the world of this amazingly natural realm. This was my world that I loved so much. Worlds like these need to be



treasured today when technology and advanced knowledge overshadow the simplicity and enjoyment of these realistic places of refuge, amusement and freedom. Your world might have a different cover, but it's still for you, all you have to do is find it. That's why, when notifications are dead, social media is empty and games are glitching and boring, open a world of endless possibilities, open a book.

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## Grace Jo

Old worlds, new world, other worlds.

“Welcome to Earth!”, an enthusiastic robotic voice blares through the speakers. I look around at the landscape around me, there are lush green trees, soft mossy grass and the sky above me is a deep blue cloudless void. I explore, staring fascinatedly at the still, silent birds, insects and animals. “Why can’t we go to actual Earth for a vacation, we have to be stuck with this stupid museum!”, I hear a child’s voice say “Of course, we can’t, Earth has been blocked off of and abandoned for years, barely anyone has actually seen Earth. Not that anyone would want to, this planet is much better,”, the parent replies patiently. “But I want to go to Earth, it’s the only planet we haven’t been to yet! All my friends want to go to Earth too, it’s not fair!”, the kid whines as his mother drags him away. The world had evolved so much in the past few decades, scientists had found a new inhabited planet blossoming with resources, and the right living conditions. It was a planet, they named Novae Terrae, similar to Earth, in appearance, but it’s living conditions and resources made it even more perfect than Earth could ever be. It was a miracle how scientists had found a perfect planet that was completely inhabited... I shake my head to clear my thoughts as I walk through the Earth Museum, it was the first time I had been here, and not many people knew about this place. I turn to walk to the next room, where it shows how an average house on Earth looked like. It’s a living room, with a cosy couch, a strange black box labelled television. I examine the box and find buttons at the back of it. Out of curiosity, I tap a button realising too late that there’s a “don’t touch anything” sign. A few seconds pass and nothing happens, so I glance at the door to see if anyone noticed the sudden movement and sigh in disappointment.

Suddenly the walls shake; revealing a metal door with a face recognition pad. I duck down fast before the pad can scan my face and think about what to do. I look around inside my canvas bag, maybe I can pick the machine apart with a pencil? The museum brochure falls out and a thought hits me as I flip through the pages to reach the page where there is a photo of the museum’s founder. I bring the brochure up to the face scanner and wait. A beep goes off and the door slides open. I did it! I pause as I stare at the opening, should I go in? It’s not like I’m allowed to, but curiosity gets the better of me and I step inside as the door behind me closes. I gasp in shock, around me are cells. And through the gaps, there are people inside. They’re all wearing white scrubs and look dishevelled. I’m frozen in shock while the people around me take me in. They mutter incoherently to each other before one of them steps out from the darkness. “Quick! Hide! Before the humans come!”, he says frantically. He has a strange accent, that I can’t seem to place. I quickly hide behind metal column, then a sudden realisation dawned on me. The man had said human, as if he weren’t human himself! Before I have time to think further about it, the door opens. I’m too afraid to look around, but I hear footsteps coming... in my direction! I clasp a hand around my mouth to avoid making any sounds, and the footsteps move safely away from my direction. I hear the clang against the firm bars of the prison cells, “Filthy aliens”, I hear them mutter as I hear a door slide open and they walk away. As soon as I hear the door slide shut, I emerge from my hiding spot to meet the eyes of the aliens in front of me. I needed to get them out of here... and fast! I sighed in resolution at the task I had yet to do. I had aliens to save.



## Sarah Cosgriff

In the Clouds.

My world is on a screen. I trawl through comments and likes and videos and pictures, like it really matters. I am immersed in a virtual universe of tweets and posts; thumbs-up or thumbs-down; and limited reactions. I count wins and losses as numbers on my phone. The door inches open and my Mum strides in. She snatches the device from my hands and scolds, “too much screen time!”. She mutters something under her breath like I can’t hear her and she’s out the door. I reach down under my bed and feel my way around. I drag out a soft, pink laptop cover and take out the silver computer. I sigh in relief at the familiar green glow. 64%. Then, I check what I’ve missed. It’s only been a few minutes but so much has happened. I’m back in this virtual world again, and I don’t think I can leave until I fall asleep on a device with empty batteries, silently cheering that I’ve made that world a better place.

It’s finally the weekend when I wake up, and I’m not distracted by the subtle breeze floating through my window or the sound of sizzling bacon, it’s the amount of off-screen time. I know I’ve missed too much just by sleeping; the other side of the Earth is just plugging in their devices to go to sleep, and they’ve uploaded so much already. When breakfast calls, I’m pulled from my phone and my stomach grumbles. When did I last eat? I asked myself as I stumble out of bed. As I eat, I constantly remind myself of my weight, but my hunger and starvation kept crawling back to me. I leave my half-finished plate on the table and scroll through pictures and videos on my phone. I study the pictures of myself in ‘flattering lighting’ and take screenshots of the hundreds of likes that it got. The wave of messages kept flooding through, and I smiled at each one that praised my skinniness and beauty. I frowned at the few that told me I was overweight. I sighed and looked down at my growling stomach. They were right. “You have a problem. Put the phone down.” My sister orders after swallowing her mouthfuls of bacon. I wiped my forehead of sweat and turned around to face her. Her hand was outstretched, calling for my phone. I refused her, but that only seemed to make her more agitated. “Give me half an hour,” I compromised, but she snatched my phone, threw it up in the air abruptly and it hit the floor in a spectacular smash, with shards of glass being lodged in furniture. It was a challenge. I had done plenty of them online before, but this was too much. I couldn’t bear it. My eyes narrowed at the broken pieces, staring at the glimmer in the glass on the floor. I was screaming internally.

My heart throbbed but I couldn’t let her win. I put on a brave smile where I hopped to my room, avoiding sharp wires and metal and ‘protective’ casing. The thought of not being able to use my phone sent chills down my spine. A metallic taste was in my mouth, and my stomach stirred. I reached for my laptop case, smiling as I pull out- nothing. It was all gone. The life that I’d built online had been destroyed, and I could do nothing. My first thoughts were always about what was on my phone. Every message, every like. But right now, I don’t stare at screens- I stare at sheets of paper. It looks alien, like it would jump out and take me far, far away, but it is still, still as stone. And my pen, finding it’s balance in my hand. Soon, it’s writing words for the first time in forever. And words come out so elegantly, not with a strained hand on my phone. I could only think about how effortlessly my hand moves in writing and how



words came out of me. I was back in the old world. And I realised how wonderful it is to finally be out of the clouds.

## Sreenidhi Vaidyanathan

### The Teleportation.

I sauntered leisurely through the walkway to the library. As I enjoyed the serene garden and chirping of birds, I was startled to the core by a loud yelling in the distance. A man was hollering into his phone. I turned my eyes away, to witness a golden retriever, sitting besides its owner. The man was however texting furiously on his phone, with utter disregard to his dog. Somewhere else, I could see an old man trying to walk at a fast pace, leaving his partner behind while she struggled to catch up. I walked into the library. A glinting light on a corner bookshelf welcomed me. I rubbed my eyes feverishly in utmost incredulity. An unmistakable red light was glistening in the corner. I raised one dubious finger and forced it against the light, letting out a noisy creak. The entire bookshelf split into two parts, revealing a gaping hole. I gingerly stepped inside, as darkness enveloped me. I noticed a tiny chip and pushed it in, only to find the lights slowly coming up, blinding my eyes with their sheer force. Sitting on the edge of a room was a cupboard, with the year 2021 written on it. Instantly, I gaped in thrill and my eyes were sore from opening them too wide. It couldn't possibly be... a time machine!

I edged closer, not daring to make the slightest noise. Emblazoned on it were some numbers. There was a remote with a button. Curiosity killed my insides, as I pressed the button. I waited for what seemed like ages, until finally, an automated voice filled the cupboard: "The Old World." I nervously took a shaky step outside. Blanketing me up was serene nature. My eyes landed on a crowd of people, with ragged shirts. They were mercilessly chained to the ground. "Please help us," they croaked at a crowd of people standing right next to them, wearing posh clothes, disregarding them completely. I walked further to see a group of women protesting for voting rights: "Why can't we vote? We deserve as much as men!" they shouted. "Go home, women! You can never vote," a man nearby jeered at them. I was appalled. People there lacked humane to understand that all genders, race and status are equal!

My vision blurred, as my hand found its way to press the button. "The New World: 3000," the automated voice rung out again. 'Future!' my curiosity skyrocketed. As I stepped out on an alleyway, my hopes and dreams went down the drain. Though there were high rise buildings, sophisticated technology, people walking robot dogs, the lot - everything was artificial. People were so greedy to consume everything and build more that they failed to realise that the world was becoming much worse than it was in the past. The future was out of control. I broke out into a cold, frantic sweat. "I don't want to be here, I don't want to be here," I kept telling myself as I pushed the button, whisking me to another world.

"The Other World: 2021." I stepped out, breathing in fresh air again. I was back to the present, in the library. Time seemed to have been paused while I was away. However, I could not fathom why they called the same place where I was before my ride, 'The Other World'. There were no changes whatsoever. But something was different. Something, that we were all



wishing to happen. I realised: The man who was shouting into his phone, was now talking relaxedly. The owner of the dog was stroking the dog's fur and playing. I could see the old lady stepping on the pathway, as her husband lent her a hand. Their eyes fell on each other, shining with love as if they had just met. I abhorred the Old World and the New World. The other world was the one I would want to live in. It was still in the present, with its own imperfections. However, compassion, love, and empathy were restored. Something that did not occur in both the Old World, and the New World. Finally, we were living in a world that was perfect in its imperfections.



## Ryan Toor

### The Bus Journey.

It was a crisp winter morning for school in my small country suburb in Louisiana. I am Tim, an African American boy who has grown up in this peaceful sanctuary of wonderful and caring people. Colour and creed were never a concern in my suburb. "Tim, it's time for school!" mum raised her voice that anyone could hear from miles. "I am off!" I replied hastily. While rushing to catch the bus, I held in my hand my favourite book 'Racism and Hatred'. This book was gifted to me by my late grandmother, who endured slavery and hate against people of colour in her generation. I could not get my eyes off the book as I continued to sit on the old wooden bench at the bus stop.

Once the bus screeched to a stop, I got on it. Mr Jones, a friendly quinquagenarian, Caucasian bus driver, greeted me, "Good Morning Tim! How are you doing?" showing his nicotine-stained yellowed teeth. "Don't forget to bring those freshly baked scones next time." "For sure!" I replied as I sat with Mrs Robinson in front of the bus. Mrs Robinson is a sweet white, elderly lady who was very fond of knitting on the bus. She takes the bus daily to visit her good friends in town for a cuppa. As I continued reading, I dozed off into the past – the 'Old World'. The next moment, I was back at the bus stop again. When the bus arrived, Mr Jones looked suspiciously at me. "Boy, you are wasting your time at school. Go on to the rear of the bus where you belong!" shouting at me cruelly. I walked to the rear, where Mr Jones instructed the black people to sit. Again, I felt hurt by the intolerance. Mrs Robinson, seated in front, placed her handbag on the seat containing her wool and knitting needles to prevent me from sitting beside her. The 'Old World' was a terrible place of unfairness and bigotry.

Suddenly, I was woken up by a soft voice, "Tim, what time is it?" Mrs Robinson, who was sitting beside me, asked. I realised I was back to reality – the 'New World'. The world I am living in now. "Yes, ma'am. It's 8 am," I replied. The bus continued on its journey through the city, where protesters were holding a march against racism. "Eradicate Racism!" they shouted angrily. "Our world is better than this! We are all one!" They raised their voice in protest. I was pondering about the 'New World' we are all living in now. I am grateful to be living in a world where people are willing to fight against intolerance and hatred. When the bus arrived at school, I descended quickly. On approaching the school gate, waiting for me were my friends; Marcus -Chinese American, Lucas-White American and Ajit- Indian American. We all have been close friends for years, and our friendship is inseparable. Just beside the gate was Mrs Clark, our school principal. With her stern wrinkled face and gold-rimmed glasses, she stared down at all of us. "Boys, you are late!" she shouted at the top of her voice. "Report to detention class immediately after school!" as she continued her rants. Oblivious of the trouble we are in, I put my hands around my friends' shoulders as we walked towards the class. "Thank you all of you for being my friends all these years." I sighed in relief. They gave me a dazed look of bewilderment. "Friendship is a beautiful bond that breaks all barriers of racism," the inner voice from my late grandmother echoed within me. While proceeding to class, I thought to myself, how will the future be like in the 'Other World'? Will we live together peacefully with dignity and respect, without racism? Maybe, all humans will have the same colour; then there



will be no differences? Will racism still prevail in the 'Other World'? Will it be a perfect place for humankind? Unfortunately, no one can predict the future, but let's make today a better place.

## Kaitlyn Sin

### Eternal World

It was almost silent. Not even the chirping of the birds or the whistling of the wind could be heard. Only the sound of my brother's raspy breathing filled the air. Each heave shuddered his body as if the world lay on his shoulders. I glanced outside. It was early still. The sun was rising behind the pink-blushed clouds, sending a fiery flame erupting through the sky. The streaks of purple, orange and yellow a canvas of the picturesque blue. I was woken from my daydream by my brother's monstrous cough. He was chilli-hot in the face, choking and spluttering, coughing his lungs out. I immediately gave him what little we had of our precious water supply. "Thanks, Sav." He mumbled sluggishly and slumped back to sleep. "S'okay Ty." I stroked his feverish forehead, as hot as the burning sun, and felt a pang of pity.

I stepped outside and a cool breeze flushed my face. I was greeted by the same view I see every morning. Piles and piles of trash stretched far beyond the eye could see. Mountains as high as Mount Everest, mounds as wide as the ocean. I spotted the first of the dump trucks entering the site and I broke into a run. Each new load that came in was another chance of finding something to help Ty. I grabbed out my hook and digging like a dog, I turned over each piece of trash in desperation. But it was futile. There was more and more useless debris that I find every day. Each morning we woke up with a sense of hope, only to be crushed by what seemed like a tsunami of trash. I brought my fists down on the earth and my body shuddered with ripples of anger. "Sav? You okay?" A quivering voice appeared behind me. I whipped around. "Ty! What are you doing? Get back inside!" I panicked. We had no idea what illness he had but there was no doctor around here who could help treat him. "I only wanted to help you. I feel fine, really." He insisted, nodding his head vigorously before his fragile frame crumbled to the ground. The world went into slow motion. The montage played over and over again in my head as not just Ty fell over but others too.

Monty, the old man from across the road crashed down, ripe red spilling onto the harsh terrain below. Mary, who I played hopscotch with, was lying motionless and desperately shaken by her mother. And Ty. My body surged towards him and I cradled his head with my feeble arms. A cool splash of water rained on Ty like a waterfall. I saw Mr Ven, the elderly man I was always scared of, using his sacred water to revive Ty and every other fallen person. "He is ill. Very ill." Mr Ven spoke in short, sharp sentences and a sombre tone. I nodded silently. "Move him to mine. There." He pointed to a dilapidated house, at the edge of the dumpsite. I was shocked at the kindness that he was offering. Guiltily, I hauled Ty over my shoulder and raced toward it. "Check his pulse." Mr Ven urged. I pressed my two fingers against Ty's neck and felt around for a pulse. I couldn't find one. That was when my world stopped. I felt coldness in his limbs and before I knew it, he was gone. Forever. He wasn't grieved. He wasn't buried. Only averted eyes and a mutter of, "I'm sorry", before attending back to their business.



People were so paranoid of catching Ty's disease that they didn't even use the trash sites near him. They relocated and took the longer, road debris route rather than crossing Ty's path. The sun shined so happily in the brilliant blue, it mocked his death. No one seemed to care in this dumpster town. I still yearned for him in empty fields and soaring clouds. There he was. A single dandelion sprouted up amongst the weeds in memory of my beloved brother, Ty. It was a symbol of a young boy who was taken away too soon.

## Sarah Rehman

Crunch. Crunch. The leaves crackled mischievously as Kaiden walked towards his favorite big oak tree. He slumped down under the grass and rubbed his eyes. He hadn't gotten any sleep lately. The nightmares were getting worse. No not nightmares, that wasn't the correct word. More like . . . visions. He looked around. The autumn sun overlooked the big field scattered with towering trees. Greying leaves floated down slowly. There was no one around. That was partly why Kaiden liked coming here so much. He checked his watch. Nearly 5:30. His mum would kill him if he was late. Grudgingly, he pushed himself up and made his way home.

"Oh Kaiden, you're nearly very late," his mum said as she put soup on the table. Kaiden didn't say anything. He didn't need this right now. He hungrily slurped his soup and crashed immediately. Once asleep, however, his visions didn't get any better. He saw the usual, the big farmhouse, with that creepy middle aged man shouting illegal insults from the tractor. Telling him he was worthless....Telling him he wasn't good enough...Who did that man think he was? But that didn't mean Kaiden think about them. Then he was in a clean little kitchen. With wooden planks for the floor and top counters. A creepy old middle aged woman sat at a rocking chair next to the kitchen, knitting what appeared to be a sweater. She gave him a look of absolute loathing, and started repeating the usual insults. Then suddenly, he was in a bedroom. With dirty walls with all sorts of stains. He laid in bed and stared up at the ceiling, which had a stain that was...red.... BBBRRRRRRRRPPPPPPP.

Kaiden suddenly awoke to the suspicious sound of a large vehicle's engine being turned on. He sat up in bed, suddenly tense. Wait...No...This wasn't right. He was exactly in the place he'd dreamt about. This SO wasn't right. He ripped his covers off him and stood up. But something felt wrong. "This is sooo messed up," he muttered to himself. He looked down at his clothes and saw that they'd disappeared, and he was wearing a....dress. A simple light pink frock. He turned and found himself face to face with a mirror. And what he saw in it, chilled his blood. He was a girl. He had long dark brown hair braided down his back, large black eyes, rosy cheeks and thin lips. He would've thought he was pretty, IF this wasn't so messed up. He ran out of the room and into the ground floor. It was EXACTLY like his dream. "Oh man! Oh man!" he whimpered. He ran into a room and found a kitchen. The one from his dreams. Same old wooden floor, counter tops. But thankfully, the rocking chair was empty. He ran outside into the....farm. Just like the one from his dreams. But at the moment, it was quite peaceful. There were corn husks growing over wide stretches of land. Crows flew around fluffy scarecrows. A tractor stood parked near a tall building that could only be a barn. The door was ajar. He walked towards it and pushed it open. It smelled like grass and dung. It was eerie and dark. He



took about 10 steps inside it when the vehicle-engine-turning-on-and-scaring-him sound occurred again. He bolted outside and found that the tractor on and in full swing. And riding it in greasy overalls was a man. And his face filled Kaiden with absolute terror. Because it was the same one from his dreams! His pus filled face stared at Kaiden until he could stand it no more.

The man gave Kaiden a look of deep hatred and spouted more words. Words after words. JUST like in his dream. He ran into the house, and before it happened, he knew what would happen. The old woman was there, giving her that distasteful look and spewing words as well. "...Little Lily...poisonous girl...." the woman muttered. Kaiden didn't really know why this bothered him so much. Truth was, he was afraid this stuff these people said was true. And he didn't want it to be true. But at that moment, as he ran towards the bedroom, he was sure of one thing. Some girl called Lily was at his house, living his life, probably scared out of her wits.



## Lucas Murray

My heart beats faster and faster. This is it. This is the discovery of a lifetime. I swim down slowly, getting deeper and deeper into the sea, swimming further and further away from light. Ever since this morning, I have become obsessed with finding out what is at the bottom of the sandy shores at the beach. I can hear a weird noise, almost like a heart beating. As I swim deeper and deeper, I can almost hear voices. Then I see it. The sand falls away slowly, revealing a tunnel. It is almost like it wants me to go in, opening at will. I go in anyway. Sandstone is everywhere, buildings as high as mountains. There are windows, even doors- like a whole different world.

Something tickles my foot. I giggle, until I realise what it is. A crocodile snaps at my toes. I gasp and swim rapidly, my scuba gear falling down, but I don't care. All I care about right now is escaping. I look for a place to escape, and then I see it. A crevice in the wall. It is not big, but it will work. I kick the crocodile in the eye, stunning it for half a second. It is all I need, though. I slide myself into the crack in the wall and hide. My heart beats faster than a speeding train. I pray that it doesn't see me. It slows down, carefully seeing each slot and slide in the wall. I need to get out of here. As I move deeper into the wall, something grabs my arm.

"AAAGGGHGHGHHGGGGGGGG!" My scream is muffled as I am pulled out of the slot. As I open my eyes, my dad is smiling. "You went in very deep. I was worried." At first I am relieved, but now I am frustrated. "I know what I'm doing. You shouldn't be worried." He glares at me, furious. But something's very wrong. His eyes glow red. His shoulders grow bigger. He gets taller. Then he silences himself, taking a deep breath. It must have been nothing. After everything that has happened today, it's probably the most normal thing that's happened.

As we go back to our boat, I feel like something is off. As I walk to the boat ramp, it seems to be wider. I must be hallucinating, maybe. I hope. When I put my shoes on, they are way bigger than usual. Strange. Eventually it gets dark, and we sit down and have dinner. As I turn and rotate my noodles, there are green, long capsules in it. "Iron and magnesium," he says, reading my mind. I don't have iron deficiency, or even any mineral problems. I pretend to eat it and enjoy it. He smiles creepily. Something is very wrong with my dad. "Dessert? I made ice cream!" He smiles. He pulls out a bowl of green stuff with white things on it from the fridge. I physically stop myself from vomiting. "Uhhh... no, thanks. I'm... full." He gulps down bowl after bowl of this stuff. As the moon goes up, I gulp, horrified. It's green. I hear voices again. The crevice! I don't know how and why, but I have a theory that the crevice is a portal between two different worlds. It almost stares at me, saying "Hey... come over here...". As I slip out of the boat, swimming to the crevice, my dad yells, "HEY! GET BACK HERE!" I ignore him and push on. The crocodile is still there, but this time, I don't run. I wrestle it to the ground, stabbing it in the eye. It cries and swims away. As I slip out into the real world, my dad yells "NOOOOO...". I look around. The moon is white. It could be promising. The boat is normal. I walk in and my dad hugs me, along with my sister. "We were about to call the lifeguards! At least you're safe." He hugs me again. I go to bed exhausted. My sister smiles at me, weirdly. Her eyes glow red. Her shoulders go wider. She grows taller. "Goodnight, Lucas," She smiles.



## Matthew Langford

And then touchdown. He was on the moon. Williams couldn't believe it. Just a year ago they'd made touchdown and now they'd set up a full base. It showed those communists. American ingenuity could achieve anything. The CO of the project interrupted his thoughts. "You all know why you are here. This Project will not finish itself. America, and by extension the rest of the free world, is waiting. Retire to your quarters and get some bedrest. Work begins at 0800."

\*\*\*\*\* Project Faustus Objective: To use occult bargaining processes discovered during the Apollo 11 project to benefit the war situation in Vietnam. To do so, a team of specialised researchers have been sent to an isolated base on Mars. This provides isolation and keeps entities away from Earth. \*\*\*\*\*

"But is worth it? What we're doing, I mean." William looked up at David, the Pentagon's best occult researcher, who was pondering his answer. "Yeah, it is. Anything is worth it to stop the reds." "But at what cost?" "Screw the cost. My brother was conscripted during the first month of the war. Only his tag came back. You should have seen his letters. They were... I don't really want to talk about it. But the reds took him, and I need to get them back." Jerry walked into the room. "Now back to work, boys. As the CO said, this project isn't going to work itself." He walked off. "What a douchebag", David said, getting up, "Just because he's some big-shot wizard he thinks he can boss us around. Y'know, I heard that he was holed up in some backwater prison until they pulled him out for this." "And... boys? He's like, fifteen", replied to William, getting up as well, "Still it's best if we do get some work done. Fate of America and such. Do you want to operate the Vance, or can I?" "Whatever you want", responded David, as they walked out.

\*\*\*\*\* List of item requests for Project Faustus: Vance-Venkman Reality Mesh 2 Peters Thaumaturgic Field Measures Di Infernii Mysteriis, original Latin edition. 500 pounds of sulphur. 200 virgins 1 knife. Requests Granted. \*\*\*\*\*

"Mesh operational. Starting ritual" Williams stared at David. He couldn't bear seeing what was happening during the summons. David was looking straight ahead. His commitment was admirable. "Gate opened. Entity emerging." The C.O. started talking. "Mr. Peterson, you have your brief. Keep exactly to the terms of the agreement. We don't want a repeat of '43. If the mesh is stable, it can't hurt you. You're perfectly safe. Everybody ready?" There were replies from across the room, except for the researchers, who were too focused on the task at hand. "Entity emerged", said David. William took in a short breath. It always bugged him how little he looked like how he was depicted. There was no humanity there, just tentacles and malice. An alarm went off. "David, there's something wrong. The mesh is failing, and the PTR is going bonkers. I'm reading 200 Spikes and increasing. It's breaking all known laws of Thaumodynamics. I'm going to stop the operation." William rushed over to the emergency stop, but before he could hit the button David grabbed his arm. "You think you can just stop this, after all that's happened? Everything we've sacrif-" And then the mesh blew, and then the creature was out, and David was screaming, and Williams started running. Only one thing could be done now



. \*\*\*\*\* The main chamber was burning. How that could happen on this airless rock was beyond William’s concern at this point. All he cared about was the button. It would put a stop to this whole thing. And there it was, in front of him. He heard tearing metal behind him. He hit the button. -Nuclear detonation in 30 seconds- The entity ripped through the door. Williams picked up a chair and threw it at the creature, but it bounced harmlessly off. -20 seconds- A polyp reached out and reeled him in. William decided to say something before he died. -10 seconds- “Y’know, at this point -5 seconds- it seems appropriate to say -2 seconds- go to hell you –“ BANG And then nothing.



### Maryam Nemati

Better Than One's Wildest Dreams.

The dawns are dark, so are the evenings. Approximately, there are only 9 hours of clear sunlight in 24 hours. These times of the year are supposedly when the community is bustling, when everyone works and sleeps. Though I reckon my neighbourhood does this all year through. The only vivid memory from my childhood is to attain my dream of becoming a professional architect. Envisioning the beam on client's faces as they witnessed their impracticable dream turn into reality. Practically everyone expected my future to be a fantasising success. Though, for a fact, it takes more than a couple of expectations and cheers to make an almost impossible dream come true. I was fresh out of my final year of studying to be a licensed architect. I knew the high potential of my dream becoming reality. Although, after many attempts of applying for my occupation, my resume instantaneously got rejected, my ambition and hope died away like an ice cube melting on a hot summer day.

For some time, I volunteered to work business hours in a small boutique down the road. On this foggy morning, the heavy smoke covered the blue sky, I stepped out and looked up at my small, vintage, lousy, household. Guilt trips me every morning before departure about what I have turned to. To my lack of potential, to my disintegrating success as I serve 80 year-old's who treat me like a slave. The only hobby left of mine is contributing to the lottery with the exact 7 numbers every time. I let myself waste my last penny on a useless, unrewarding piece of paper in hope of prosperity. With optimism that my lucky values are shown, I hold my breath and flick to page 32. As usual, the number drawn is never remotely close to mine. An advertisement on the right-hand side corner with a substantial house catches my eyes, in wonder, I scan the letters; I couldn't believe my eyes. 'Looking for an architecture in central Sydney asap! Call: 0483833632'

Throughout the day, I visualise the future that could be ahead of me hanging on by a thread. The image of the advertisement popped up in my mind every minute of every hour. I want it. I need it. But I can't. As the roads were looking lifeless, I pulled the shutters down and ran until I broke a sweat. I was faced with 20 odd stairs that led underground. I took a big breath in as my legs took leaps of faith. Soon, I was encountered with a large roar of people laughing and shouting as the loud horn of metros echoed through the room. My whole body froze numb, my spine arched perfectly straight. The signals sent from my midbrain to my limbs felt pointless. Lifeless with what to do, what's my next step? My brain pushed every inch of my body to walk up the staircase; to stick to the innocuous lifestyle by earning minimum income rather than risk my accommodation and position. My hands start to sweat. My heart races faster than ever. It's pursuing me that this is what I wanted all my life, and I'm rejecting the chances of starting a new life with a clear mindset and reputation in the community. I stand on the pathway, emotionless as my heart and brain fight for what's right for me. I hear the metro announcing, 'closing doors soon'. My legs take the biggest steps as quick as they physically can. I breathe faster by the minute as I sweat through the wind. My body fights against the cold weather as my fingertips feel numb. Soon enough, I'm in a small cubic box with 20 other passengers. I take



my water bottle out and take a gulp of water as I sit down on the closest empty chair. Blank, I look at my wrist and whisper, 'it's 8:07, although tomorrow's a brand new day'

## Samantha Kay

Millions of years of exploration, ending with the bang of a capsule, a shudder went down my spine like a cat been hit with a droplet of water. A split second of light shines on my face before been suffocated in a pillow of grey. Below me, billions of people I've never met, engulfed in flames, knee deep in water or slowly passing away with the hue of radiation hitting their face. Surrounded by people lacking competence or any slight version of empathy, simply here because of the people before them and the money they possess. The breaking of the atmosphere and the buzzing of the rocket, the light that once Sunkissed my skin every summer disappeared, never to be seen by me again.

Just like me, the ice caps couldn't take it anymore, fitting in with the ocean's harshness. The once majestic trees that stood tall, destroyed in one sitting, just like a wrecking ball to an old house. So how did I get on this one-way flight to a planet oozing streams of dark red. Unlike the ambassadors, influencers and models around me, I'm simply here to make up part of the 15-year-old society, otherwise I would be left like all the others to reach my near definite fate. The end of the initial blast off, a steady pace and a cheer over the speaker. "We have left the Earth's atmosphere and are ready to take the step forward to relocating our past life on our new home, Mars! The bar is now open and ready for use."

Just like that, almost as if everyone forgot about everything that we destroyed in our path for an easy lifestyle. Our children would never get to see monkeys giggling and swinging in the trees and bears going fishing for their cub's breakfast. People flock to the bar like seagulls used to flock to a hot chip on the floor of a fish and chips shop. I see the other kids my age, almost looking as alienating as what's on Mars. I grab my phone out and put my air pods in, the sound of The Stokes fills my head as I drift asleep. All my thoughts start to drift away as I'm abruptly woken by a light tapping on my suit. I open my eyes to see one of the boys from the group as he sat down next to me. Instantaneously there was some sort of connection, a look in his eyes which made me truly believe he cared about the Earth as much as I did. Words slowly start flowing between us, discussions of our past adventures and lives, political debates about who was truly to blame for the downfall of society. I was stunned, somebody with intelligence on here with me, most people on here were rich and famous, with such intriguing stories that they could distract future generations from asking questions about how we ended up millions of kilometres from our original home.

The next seven months became a blur, everyone met their match from "heaven", all ties with our once flourishing home were cut and all parties had whittled down to a sense of serenity on the ship. Six o'clock in the morning, woken up in a daze, an alarm with such a beautiful tone it couldn't possibly be alerting us to danger. Words booming around the ship, an electric feeling coursing through everyone's veins. Within the next hour all moments and memories that occurred aboard this muggy ship will be put aside and all attention will be relocated to admiring our new 'home'. As we all buckle in for the last time, everyone's hands winded between each other's. More energy vibrating in the room than gasoline in the tank. The rocket



descending, a plunging feeling in my stomach, squeezing hands with the person next to me so tightly my knuckles turn white. Touchdown, a lunge forward and cheering throughout the ship. Seven months of restlessness finally ending, this time our future is for us as a community to decide.

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## Namdent Nurokina

### End of the Horizon

3097 marks the year humanities greatest invention, the androids, rose up and fought back against their creators. After becoming self-aware, a group of androids believed themselves to be superior to humanity. This group soon turned into a large opposing force, with millions of androids across the world. On a snow-covered hill, purple blood slowly gushed out of Samantha's exposed core, soaking her brown jacket. Troy and Juliet seated her atop a luscious snow-covered hill. As Troy knelt down in front of her, he gently shifted her synthetic blonde hair to one side, revealing a large gaping wound. The metallic-like endoskeleton that once hid beneath Samantha's warm, olive skin was now on display for all to see. Her left once blue left eye had blacked out, redirecting power to sustain her battery life. Samantha looked at Troy, then Juliet, only able to vaguely discern their faces. She noticed the sorrowful expressions painted across their faces; however, Juliet's was more authentic. After all, humans have always expressed emotions clearer than androids. She'd been with them ever since they fled Nyus Island, which housed the Android development facilities. The thought of being freed from that place - let alone with a human's aid, seemed impossible, but without an energy source similar to the island's, androids would continuously deteriorate, leading to an inevitable shutdown. This is the tragic demise faced by all rogue androids.

Samantha glanced down at the flashing blue light embedded in her chest, worried it could stop any moment. She took in a sharp breath and shifted her gaze to Troy. "I won't be there to make the decisions for you. You have to decide what's best for yourself from now on." Troy audibly swallowed and nodded in silence. The freezing wind clumped his long blond hair, swaying in every direction. The fleeting colours of twilight began to fade, the sun's ephemeral grasp on the world continuously slipping away. The clouds in front of them curved like a spiral, softly steering the powerful rays of sunlight beneath the hazy lavender valley. Samantha turned to the setting sun, knowing that it would be the last time she'd ever set her eyes upon. Samantha cracked a subtle smile. "Thank you both, for everything-" The blue light had ceased its flashing; both of her eyes were now completely lifeless. Her mouth hung slightly open. Troy's hands shook uncontrollably, as he tried to stifle his cries, unsuccessfully. Nightfall arrived sooner than expected. The dark, purple valley below had plunged into darkness.

The moon dominated the night sky, maintaining watch over Troy and Juliet as they returned to camp, passing by numerous androids. Some were severely damaged, others had already deactivated; a variety of men, women and children-classed android models, masked with faces of anguish and misery, all scattered across the snow-covered plains. They'd all been through hell to make it to where they were now. Troy buried Samantha's body next to thousands of other graves, all marked with fluorescent red crosses that stretched far across the snowfield. He knelt on both knees, whilst slamming his fists into the snow. "I can't take this anymore!" He yelled and broke down in tears. Juliet stood silently beside him, knowing that she was unable to ease his torment. "My people are trapped in those horrifying facilities, only to be dispensed to billions of humans who treat them like slaves, forcing them to obey their every command



until their core is drained... No one should have to suffer like that!" "So what is it that you want, Troy?" "I want them gone! Every single one of them!" Juliet took a step back, rattled by his words. "Seeking revenge isn't the right thing to do, and you know it!" She placed her hands on his shoulders. "If you kill them, there will rise to avenge their loved ones, and your people will have to fight them in the future. The cycle will continue until both sides are erased from history!" Troy shook her off, turning around. Juliet walked off, leaving Troy to ponder in his thoughts alone. He'd have to decide for himself for the first time.



# Ashutosh Alung

## The Float Pill to Mars

The night sky shimmered as Leo paced down Vincent street, the city's only street which had its own garbage collecting mechanism, courtesy one of the ingenious ideas of Leo himself. He walked past the pet shop, dodging the crowd outside his favourite restaurant. Leo Mcgruffin just couldn't stop thinking about what he had discovered. His mind buzzed with thoughts which swirled around his new-found discovery. Even the enticing aroma of freshly baked loaves of banana bread from his favourite French bakery couldn't stop him from thinking. His mind raced and so did he, turning swiftly onto the 5th avenue continuing down the dark alley as the lights from the street seemed to dissolve behind him.

As he approached the door of his dusty and ragged laboratory which was crammed in the corner of the street, next to "BILLY EVERLASTING UNDERGARMENTS" and opposite to "BILLI'S NEVER-SMELLING SOCKS" voices behind him boomed in unison, "Ahoy, Leo! Where you hurrying off to mate? "It was Jessie, Jake, James and Jackson, all of his friends from the "The Scientific College Of Scientific Discoveries." "What are you upto? You even left the party very early, what's going on?" James asked curiously. You never visit this barren old laboratory unless you are onto something. "Not much guys, except that these days I have started liking red colours" Leo responded as he flashed a grin confirming he was certainly onto something. The team ventured inside, quickly sitting down on the circular couch in the dimly lit room.

Leo started, "Guys, for the past six weeks, I have been working on something, something which can prove to be a breakthrough in the history of science! I have finally discovered the formula for floating high up in the sky! Any human who once consumes that pill will become as light as a feather and dash upwards at supersonic speed, however if I go to another planet with a different magnetic field, we can come down to the surface and now after my marvellous creation, I wish to land floating on mars." As Leo finished, his friends gulped their saliva down the throat and stared at each other in awe. it was like they had been hit by something excitingly unbelievable "What say, are you guys in or not?" Leo asked. With pride in their eyes, they nodded and beamed at him. The very next day morning, at dawn, the excited youngsters were ready in their space suits to experience floating. Popping the pill, they held hands. Within a few moments, they felt as if they were slowly rising-up. As they floated towards their destination, they saw an inky black sky with several light balls. The red planet, the point of fascination for millions of scientists was now ready to welcome the first human footsteps. As the team landed, their eyes got fixated on a banner that read, "WRESTLING CONTEST ON MARS"

Down in the crater, millions of aliens were concentrated around a big arena, cheering for two gigantic fighters in the wrestling ring pitted against each other. The five friends skidded down the crater and landed amongst the crowd. Millions of eyes blinked and gaped at them pushing them ahead. Within spilt seconds, the towering figures picked them up with their bare hands. "You Earthlings?" a creature asked. "Fight us, or you shall die here" he said, tossing the five ahead. Jessie, the first one to recover from the mighty blow, charged ahead with all her might, Jake and James clasped tightly around the creatures' legs making them fall on their



knees. Jackson and Leo leaped onto the creatures' heads and smashed them down with their elbows. Pow thud, the five emerged victorious! The spectators cheered as they rose, they erupted in joy! The five were brave and bold and were crowned the wrestling champions of mars! The Martians then rewarded the victorious visitors with a bespoke spaceship, allowing them to leave only with the promise that they carried the Martian secret to their graves. On the way back, Leo glancing at the red spot on Jupiter said, "Guys, it looks like I have started liking storms as well." "So what do you say," he added.

