

The Sundial



Issue 8 | Spring 2024

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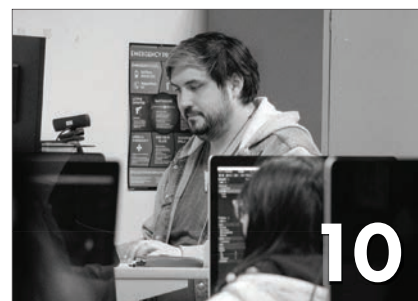


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Cover: Vincent Paraiso playing on a PC
at the Games Room. (Aliyah Hinckley)

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Letter *from the* EDITOR



From Candy Crush to Skyrim, gaming is a staple in many lives, including those at California State University, Northridge. In the third spring issue, we explore people's relationships with games from childhood hobbies to prospective careers. My grandmother got me an Xbox for Christmas when she deemed me old enough, and I played the Cars video game for hours on end. The game offered safe driving bonus points, which my grandmother encouraged and noted as training for my future on the road. Eventually, my uncle gifted me Grand Theft Auto IV, which my grandmother did not enjoy as much. From carefully steering in my grandparent's living room after dinner to grinding for experience in my room after soccer practice, I am a religious controller user.

Everyone's experiences are different, and some may take umbrage with my allegiance to consoles, as opposed to custom-built PCs. In the various sections of the magazine, we highlight people's gaming stories, with some playing on CSUN's esports team and others decorating islands in Animal Crossing.

Gaming fosters communities, and a single sentence or collection of adjectives cannot properly encompass its diversity. To put it into perspective, fighting games have an umbrella community who enjoy the genre. Mortal Kombat is a prevalent game within the genre and has its own community. Amidst the broad roster, each character has a fanbase full of people who advocate for buffs and better treatment. Not everyone who likes Mortal Kombat likes Sub Zero, and not everyone who likes fighting games likes Mortal Kombat, as they would happily share.

The game development club at CSUN highlighted in Campus Talk brings together students who aim to work in the gaming industry and create landscapes and stories to explore. As mentioned by Trisha Anas in Too Close for Comfort, gaming offers escapism, which is a concept explored by Indira Bürklin in her piece for From the Sol.

The many social aspects of gaming create a world for people of all backgrounds to enjoy. Whether someone has worn out joysticks or W, A, S and D keys, they have a story. The following are some of CSUN's stories.

Спасибо,

Sasha Alikhanov

Sasha Alikhanov, Print Editor

Comfort in Gaming

Bringing students together with PCs and consoles

WRITTEN BY JAZ MENDEZ

The Games Room interior. (Sundial file photo)

As fraternization steadily recovers on campus post-pandemic, the Games Room is providing students with a space for recreation. Fluorescent lights shine down on hyperfocused gamers, friends entertain a pool match and others play solo FIFA rounds. This recently renovated, dark room dates back to the early 2000s.

A referendum to build a recreation center was launched by the Recreation Center Committee in April 2007. The referendum captured key tenets, including leisure time activities for student wellness, recruitment and retention.

During the two-day voting period, 57% of students approved. The Games Room would eventually receive \$4,789 for console gaming to be implemented, as reported by the Daily Sundial in December 2008. Students were required to pay \$3.50 per hour to play. Now students play for free.

Games Room supervisor Tida Samanukorn believes the room has done more to attract students.

“Back then, we didn’t have many consoles or any gaming PCs,” Samanukorn said. “The pandemic definitely brought more attention to esports and that whole culture brought people down to this space.”

The Games Room features 12 pre-built PCs donated by alumni Bill Imada.

“He wanted to create a space where

our players could come down and play in person together,” Samanukorn said.

The room was previously scheduled for closure by the university to create a lounge area. However, Associated Students offered an annual budget to upkeep the space.

“Thanks to Bill’s donation and AS pitching [funds], it helped keep the space open today.”

In the modern day, the Games Room offers Nintendo Switch and PlayStation games as well as a variety of tournament ships: SMASH, billiards, Mario Kart, FIFA, Rocket League and Guilty Gear. Sign-ups and dates are announced on the Student Recreation Center Discord server, which can be found on the Games Room website.

These tournaments typically bring crowds of 30 people or more, some visiting the space for the first time.

“There’s a lot of different reasons why students come down here. Some just want to game on the gaming PCS, which we offer free for two hours,” Samanukorn explained. “Or some just want to be here to have their own study time.”

The Games Room is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The room may also be rented, which circumvents the scheduled opening times. Renting prices depend on how long the room is occupied and can be inquired via phone call.

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AI vs. Jobs

How AI is changing the gaming industry and people's jobs

WRITTEN BY JONATHAN DIRCIO

Game developers have used AI since the 1950s, and as the technology develops, it is being used for shortcuts in design without the need of workers.

AI has become more apparent in our everyday lives, and concern is rising over whether or not people should be worried. The abilities and uses of AI are rapidly changing with a new notable knack of replicating people's voices and faces, but it is used differently in gaming.

California State University, Northridge computer science professor and Los Angeles County Democratic Party candidate Cecile Bendavid shared the importance of learning and understanding AI as it spreads.

"AI is growing and will enhance learning with people learning how to live with it, rather than avoiding it," said Bendavid.

Generations of games have used AI to make characters act like real people. AI is used in video games with independent decision making to make adaptive characters act in a random, human-like manner, according to an article from the academic journal *Kultura Polisa*. This prevents non-playable characters, or NPCs, from being monotonous and robotic to ensure player immersion.

Another use of AI to improve player immersion is found in level design. Well known games, including *Minecraft* and *No Man's Sky*, use generative AI, one of the technology's many subfields, to create an almost infinite world. The endless generation is a task only possible thanks to AI.

Although there are negative sentiments around AI, the gaming industry is investing in the evolving technology. Companies like Latitude, Osmo and Gosu Data Lab specialize in emerging uses of AI in video games, including AI-generated stories, interactive play and data analysis. These groups have received multi-million dollar investments, according to the global product development company Appinventiv. The funneling of money piles onto the concern of low job security in the gaming industry as AI becomes more pervasive.

AI has been used to reiterate human art, which the company Promethean spearheads in game development.

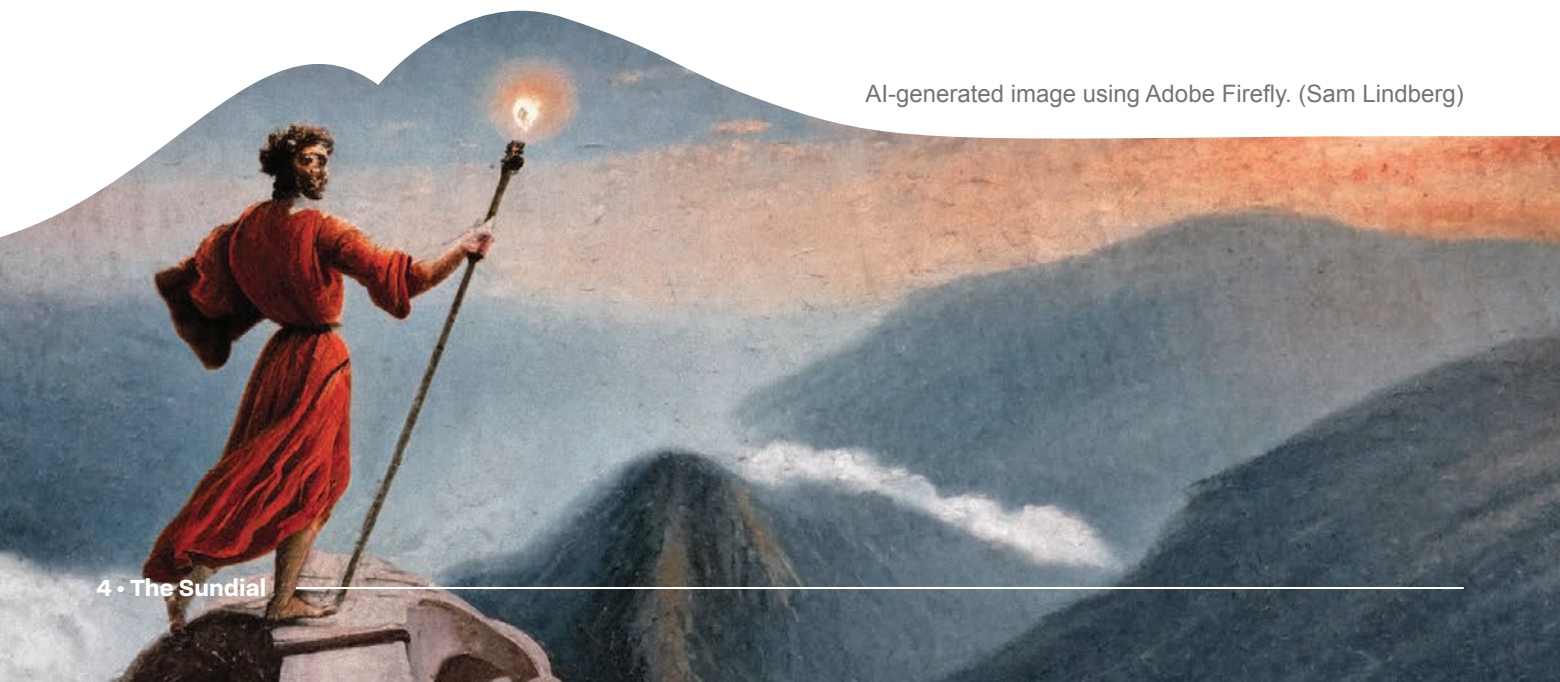
"The main goal behind Promethean is to take the creative intent in your head and turn it into actionable 3D content without the manual hassle," said founder Andrew Maximov to GamesBeat.

Promethean AI learns an artist's style of environment design and recreates it, which is seen by some as a more efficient way to create games. This shrinks the responsibilities of designers, which others see as a threat to their employment.

"People will always need to know how to code, but spending hours and hours on coding will go away," said Bendavid.

AI is still evolving and the way it is used in video game development is changing every day. As technology changes the landscape of design, people and their art persevere.

AI-generated image using Adobe Firefly. (Sam Lindberg)



Leading in Innovations and Layoffs

The State of the Video Game Industry

WRITTEN BY JESSE ILLANES

As the new year begins, some of the gaming industry's biggest players have already announced layoffs. NPR reported almost 6,500 video game workers have been laid off in the first two months of 2024 alone. At this same time last year, there were barely over a thousand layoffs.

Many are asking why gaming layoffs are commonplace and thousands of workers in this field are subject to losing their jobs each year when the gaming industry is by far the most lucrative entertainment industry.

A commonly accepted reason is the lasting effects of the pandemic. In 2020, many businesses sought qualified workers to fill their missing roles amid lockdowns. Now, most companies are no longer working remotely and have a steady workflow.

Because of the abundance of people who now work at these companies, it seems like the easiest way to make up

for revenue loss is to lay off workers, especially if they were hired in the height of the pandemic.

Epic Games, creators of one of the world's most popular games, Fortnite, laid off around 800 employees in September 2023, according to The Verge. The decision begs the question of how the makers of the highest-earning games year-round end up having to lay off their employees.

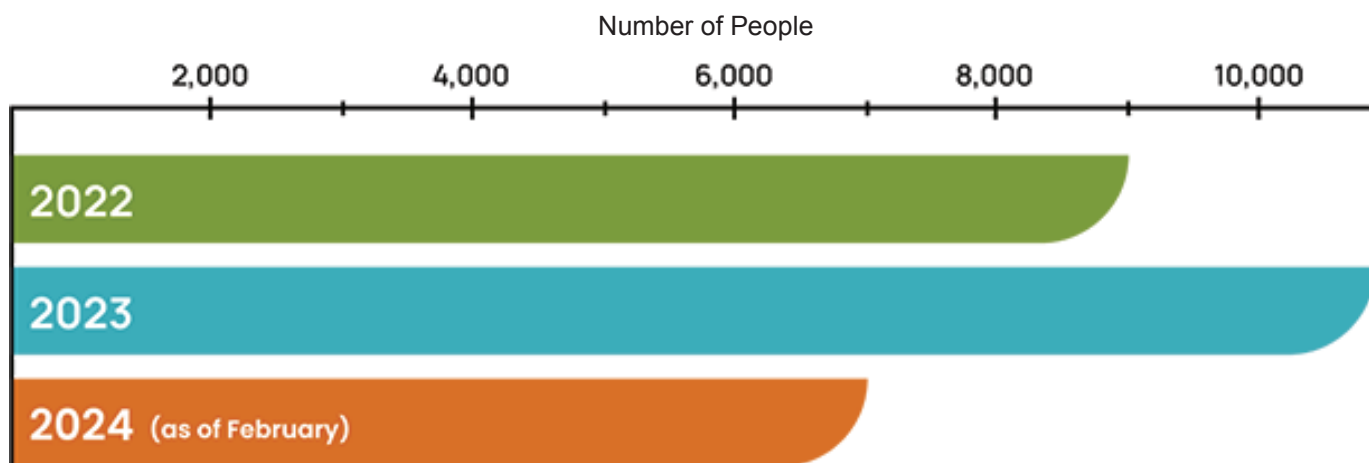
With Epic Games' decision to lay off 16% of their workforce, this effect was felt by companies that are not in the gaming industry. Earlier in the year, Epic Games acquired Bandcamp, a platform for fans to directly support up-and-coming bands and artists. Amid the layoffs, Epic sold Bandcamp to the licensing platform Songtradr.

This is just one example of a wave of layoffs that cascades through different industries, and massive business acquisitions have not prevented the surge.

Microsoft's proposed acquisition of video game company Activision Blizzard was a prominent business story in 2022, transcending gaming news and breaking into the mainstream media. After announcing their intent, the deal went through and was finalized at the end of 2023. One of the biggest technology companies in the world now owns some of gaming's most iconic franchises, including Call of Duty, Overwatch and Candy Crush. Despite the popular titles, they still laid off 9% of their gaming division in the beginning of 2024, totaling a staggering 1,900 people, according to CNBC.

Acquisitions usually mark exciting new partnerships and spawn bigger and better content for video game players, but Microsoft's did not bear such results. Epic Games and Microsoft's layoffs contribute to the stigma that job security is low in the video game industry.

Data of Video Game Industry Layoffs



Infographic of estimates from the independent website videogamelayoffs.com. (Natalie Ammari)

Competing and Team Building

The Activities and Goals of the Esports Club

WRITTEN BY DAVID CHAVEZ
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN SILVA



Vincent Paraiso playing on a PC in the Games Room. (Aliyah Hinckley)

The California State University, Northridge esports club is growing with prospects to bring in more students of all levels amidst the rise of competitive gaming.

Within the ever growing gaming industry, esports are a space dedicated to people who have a talent or passion for competitive gaming. The CSUN esports club, founded in 2015, survived the pandemic with online meetings that helped keep them connected and create a sense of community before returning to the Games Room in the University Student Union as campus reopened.

With esports being new, but con-

stantly growing, some people may not know what esports are or what they are all about. President of the CSUN esports club, Parteek Singh Sidhu, gives context and compares them to track and field.

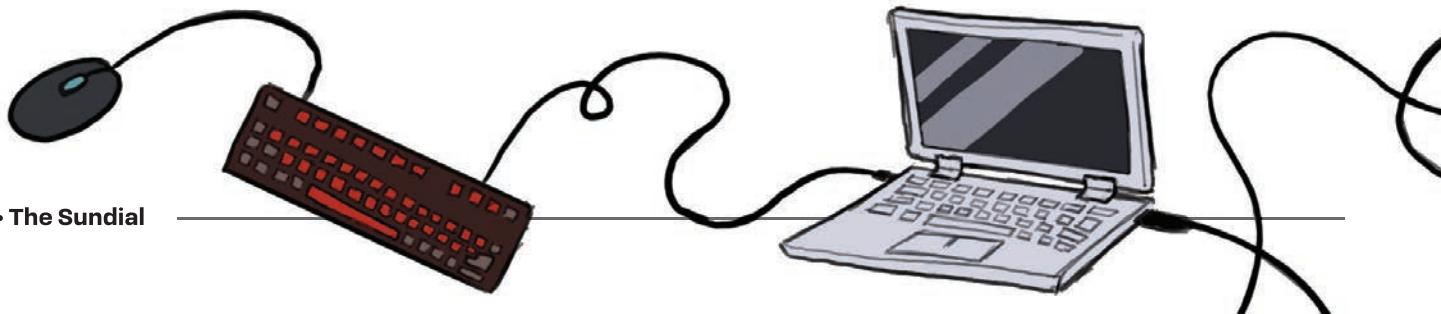
"In other sports, you ask anyone 'I play badminton, I play archery,' and everyone automatically thinks of one team or one sport, but if you say track and field, some people will say running, others will say discus, some javelin," said Sidhu. "So that's kind of like what esports is, where esports is the generalized term used for all these different types of games."

The esports club has teams built for certain games like Valorant, Call of Duty, League of Legends, Super Smash Bros Ultimate and Counter-Strike 2.

Some of the teams can play competitively by participating in collegiate programs like NACE and FACEIT and play against other schools.

Team manager of the Counter-Strike 2 teams, Micah Forteza talks about what practicing with their teams looks like at the esports club.

"At the heart of it all, as a collegiate esports club, I want to make sure my players are having fun first," said Forteza. "Practice, I feel like, is definitely a lot of





Alex Johnson, Ara Halajian and Vincent Paraiso playing at PC stations in the Games Room. (Aliyah Hinckley)

talk, a lot of gaming. We look at VOD reviews, we do professional Twitch VOD reviews for majors and big tournaments that they've been broadcasting."

The club has hosted events before, including Ruler of the Ring, a tournament for Valorant, a competitive first-person shooter team-based game, and MatadorWorld, an esports event that featured an industry panel, a free to play area and an invitational tournament where local universities were invited to compete in certain games.

The esports club helps build a community and friendships, while also creating networking opportunities for

people interested in making it into a career, building their resumes helping them gain experience.

"First, you have the club side where it's something casual, you join a club to have fun, to meet people, to make friends and connections," said Sidhu. "On the other side, we're also a university club, so we have to hold ourselves at a little higher standard and have a certain level of professionalism because some people who join the club don't join it just for casual reasons. They join it because they actually want to enter that field, that industry."

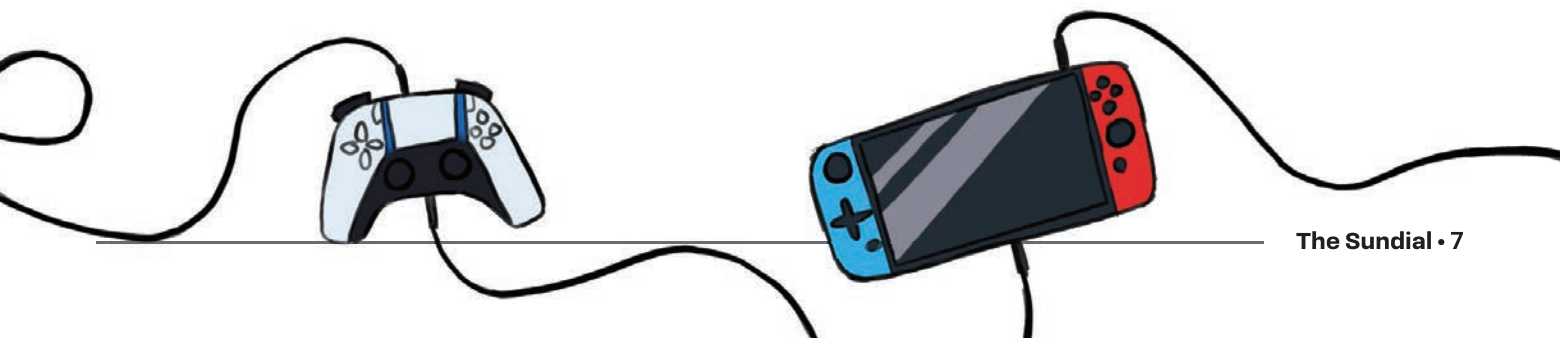
The club is not solely gameplay fo-

cused, which allows for other networking opportunities outside of competing.

"We have different departments we offer in the club such as graphics, marketing, media, socials as well as [being] professional players managers and team captains," said Sidhu.

Some competitive teams made notable achievements, including the Call of Duty team's top ten national placement and the Valorant teams' being able to play test in the new Riot Arena, where tournaments are held for professional esports teams.

The club also won the CSUN Sports Club of the Year award for two consecu-





Eriq Niblov, Fabio Pires, Davit Simonian and Gage Petrone chatting in the Games Room. (Aliyah Hinckley)

tive years and collaborated with Razer, a gaming hardware company, and Pizza Hut.

Sidhu has plans to expand the club to the whole campus and hopes to educate newcomers about esports. Esports are often seen as competitive and having a high barrier of entry to participate, but there is a casual side to it where people can enjoy viewing or playing the game without pressure.

"If you're looking at the competitive scene, [it's] insanely hard to enter that. You have to be good in order to even get your foot in that door, but if you're looking in terms of making friendships, you don't need to be good," said Sidhu.

"If you look at it from a base level, I feel like anyone can just pick up a console, anyone can pick up a controller, anyone can pick up a PC and just download a game and have fun."

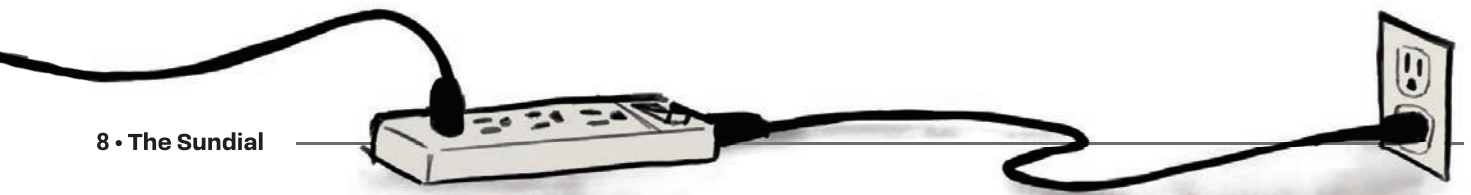
Esports are sometimes seen negatively and not taken seriously due to harmful stereotypes of players that participate or take an interest in it. Sidhu wants to challenge that stereotype.

"There's this negative connotation around it as its gamers, they're like, the rejects of society, or like people who only watch anime or never seen daylight or touch grass, so there's this negative cloud around esports and what it

represents," said Sidhu. "We have people who do a lot of other things, not just esports. This is like a hobby to them, some of them it's a profession, but it's more than that. They can do other things and show off."

As the club continues to expand, and as more students learn about esports, it aims to create a space where everyone can enjoy their passions together.

"I'm hoping that people are more open, or more accepting of what we can do," Sidhu said. "And it's not going to be limited to the gaming community itself, that's already been established, but open it up to the whole campus."





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NOW PLAYING...

Gaming Psychology

WRITTEN BY ZIPPORAH ALTITIA PRUITT

SUBHEAD.EXE

What are the positive and negative benefits of playing video games?

Gaming as we know it has evolved in the past few decades.

It has become more than just a way for college students to pass time and de-stress amid assignments. From primitive light-based graphics games, such as Tennis for Two, to the upcoming blockbuster sandbox game Grand Theft Auto VI, a once-niche hobby has turned into a major sect of media. Titles vary from a deep, story-rich game such as God of War Ragnarök to forming squads with friends for team death matches in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. There are also low-stress and relaxing games, such as Animal Crossing, where players collect resources and decorate their island.

There is a game for almost anyone. The question is how this type of interactive media affects the minds of young players.

Through gaming, many young players experience a sense of community with multiplayer modes in titles such as Destiny 2 and World of Warcraft. Multiplayer games foster a sense of community with how players can form groups, sometimes called clans, to do missions together, talk and effectively forge bonds that can only be rivaled with those born from blood. People can meet and befriend others from across the world or even deepen bonds with those that they already know in real life. Either way, players are all connected, which can lessen anxiety around talking to



strangers by exposing them to different personalities.

Dr. Corinn Cross, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council of Communications and Media, shared how connected children are online with games.

“It helps to keep them connected and allow a social outlet,” Cross said, regarding young gamers. “A lot of games have a creative aspect that can be really interesting and great to some kids.”

This connection, though, has caused strife between people. There is a stereotype that gamers scream obscenities or racial and homophobic slurs into their microphones in fits of rage or to get a rise out of their opponents and peers.

Some video games block voice chats entirely to try to quell the waves of toxicity and foster a more inclusive environment. Sadly, this also extends to clans. A clan is an organized group of players in a multiplayer game that bond together to achieve various goals in-game. Some of them, while kind and approachable, can foster elitism and cliques with high score acceptance requirements and troll-like behavior, which is equivalent to cyberbullying.

Aaron Daly, a professor of game animation at California State University, Northridge, founder of the game development club on campus and a game developer, shared his thoughts on toxic behavior in gaming.

“I think a lot of people can say, ‘Well, I’m going to get away with this because in an hour, they’re gone from my life forever,’” Daly said.

Hypercompetitive games like League of Legends intensify the multiplayer element, which has caused the esports community to grow rapidly over the years. Esports are competitive gaming taken to a professional degree where people form teams, get drafted and even play in worldwide tournaments with cash prizes up to millions of dollars.

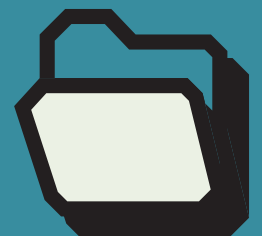
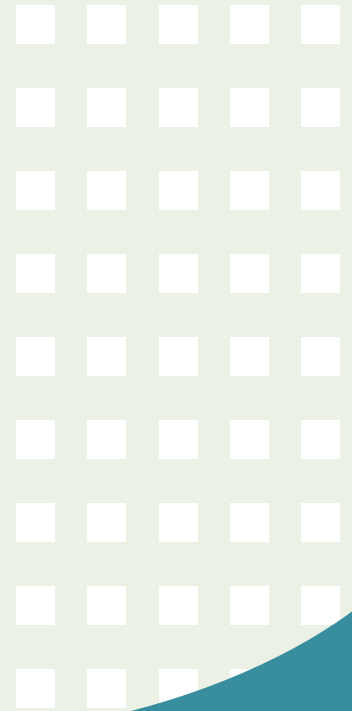
“People use it as a way to destress, escape from reality ... in the last five years or so, it has helped people to be able to make a living,” Daly said.

Esports, just like other sports, bring out emotions in people, with some players being belligerent toward their fellow competitors. In 2018, during a Madden NFL 19 tournament, a man who recently lost the tournament returned with an AR-15 and killed two people before turning the weapon on himself. While the video game itself was not at fault, the hypercompetitive environment can create an atmosphere of anger and strife among many players, especially when money is involved.

“I think that not everyone, obviously, who plays a first-person shooter game or is exposed to excessive violence in video games is going to go and become a school shooter,” Daly said.

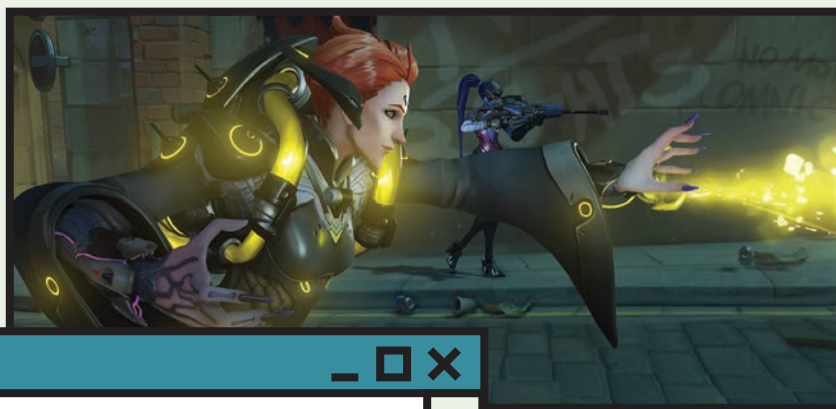
Gaming is a serious business to some. Livestreams are a direct result

Screenshot of Animal Crossing.
(Nintendo)





OVERWATCH.BLIZZARD



Screenshot of Overwatch.
(Blizzard)



of gaming's communal nature. People are able to watch their favorite player or person livestream games, which highlight their skills and candor. This is the equivalent of seeing a professional player train, a comedian try out a routine, or just chatting with a person for company.

Streaming has also become a massive business, with many brands and games joining forces with online personalities to promote their products. The epicenter of this phenomenon is Twitch, the forefront gaming livestream platform.

"I think that students should only get into streaming or into esports if they love the methodology of it," Daly said. "It's the same argument where people want to become famous actors or YouTube stars but don't know the day-to-day of it."

Even with all the good, streamers are a different beast entirely when it comes to standards and practices.

"When you allow your child to engage in that and watch Twitch, you're basically letting your kid hang out in somebody else's living room," Cross explained.

Streamer Kai Cenat was in hot water after a meetup in New York went awry when many of his young fans created a riot to see him. Today, streamers are seen as celebrities with legions of fans ready to either fight for them or parrot their opinions.

Streamer XqC, who is known for playing Overwatch, was in recent controversy for his streamed reactions to Israel-Hamas war footage with the same excitement one would give a Marvel movie trailer. When he was called out for it by a peer on X, he responded by showing a duffel bag full of money.

Recently, a World of Warcraft streamer known as Asmongold has been critiquing American game designs of women, which he sees as inferior to Korean-made characters. Using Stellar Blade as an example, the streamer prefers sexualized heroines to realistic-looking women. Fans spread his rhetoric, noted by some as misogynistic, across the internet, which sparks toxic debates.

Sometimes, the dedication to gaming and fandom can lead to neglecting personal, social or academic responsibilities.

"There's also people who end up dropping out of college because they can't help themselves from gaming and then they can't focus on anything else," said Cross.

There is a line to draw in consuming these products, especially when games come with an entry fee and purchasable items that some people divulge their entire savings into buying. Known as microtransactions, these in-app purchases can be predatory due to the ease of dropping

Daly teaching a class. (Devin Huynh)

PROFESSOR_DALY.TEACH



lots of money to get quicker progress and unique cosmetics.

The popular game Fortnite has microtransactions, which only add cosmetic changes that do not give an advantage to players, but other games, such as EA Sports FC 24, contain random packs of playable characters that really make one feel like they are trading their hard-earned cash in a soccer-themed casino.

"Buying a skin for your character is something that's totally nonsense, but gives you more social credit within your field that makes people want to spend that amount of money," according to Daly.

Gaming has changed just as much as humans have through the past decades. Just like all things in life, there are positives and negatives. The gaming industry provides jobs to people, which can take them to places they did not expect. Through his work, Daly became a virtual production supervisor and Unreal engine developer alongside his teaching.

"I work on television shows and movies where I make a good living using game technology to craft

storytelling in a way I think is a really engaging process," Daly explained. "They're making a game, basically, and projecting it on a giant TV screen to show it behind the actors."

Daly worked on the recent live-action "Avatar: The Last Airbender," the hit Disney+ series "The Mandalorian," and other projects.

Video games can be the stepping stone for someone to follow their dreams. From winning multimillion-dollar prizes at tournaments to creating backdrops for the newest Marvel movie, the possibilities are endless.

"I think students are extraordinary, passionate about games. And one thing I really try to keep in my students is the love for games themselves and try not to crush the spirit of it with the work that is required to make a game," Daly said. "When making games, it can be a lot of work. More work than most people think would go into a game, to make sure that it has no bugs. So generally speaking, if you choose a life of game development, that game development should eat into your game-playing time and not your social life time."

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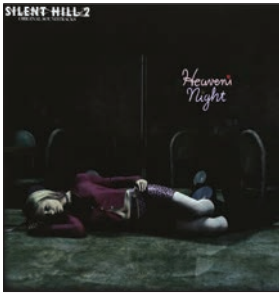
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Cantando

WRITTEN BY JESSE ILLANES

Video games are crafted to be well-rounded experiences for any player to immerse themselves in a remarkable journey. The unsung heroes that flesh out the playtime are the soundtracks provided by legendary artists in the world of video games who created iconic songs such as “World 1-1” in Super Mario Bros. by Koji Kondo, or “Sweden” by C418, also known as Minecraft’s main theme. Here are a few examples of how soundtracks elevate a video game from something you play once in a while to a meaningful and lasting experience.



Silent Hill 2

The quintessential psychological horror game was paired with an ominous and eerie soundtrack created by Akira Yamaoka, which at times, would play triumphant piano melodies and rock ballads. Yamaoka, who was also the sound designer for the game, helped create a world where the music informs how the player is supposed to feel. Players first listen to “White Noiz” in the first cutscene with James arriving at Silent Hill, which sets a tone that puts players on edge. It provides a gloomy atmosphere with reverberating notes, which make it seem as though the song is echoing, illustrating an unsettling tone through the music. An iconic song from this game that people outside of the playerbase can recognize is “Promise (Reprise).” Players first hear it in the beginning of the game when James encounters Angela holding a knife close to her face, which is also seen on the game’s box art. The cutscene paired with the song’s piano notes invoke intrigue and suspense.



Hotline Miami

There was an indie game boom in the beginning of the 2010s through word of mouth and gaming marketplaces, which saw smaller scale games become as defining as the big releases of the era. One of those games was Hotline Miami, a top-down pixel shooter that focused on strategy, where players take out the Russian mafia as an animal-mask-wearing vigilante. The music takes inspiration from the music and games of the 80s, as the electronic synth soundtrack provides an upbeat score for fast-paced and frantic gameplay. Some songs were licensed from M|O|O|N for the soundtrack, while artists like Sun Araw and Jasper Byrne created music specifically for the game. Perhaps the most emblematic song of Hotline Miami is “Hydrogen” by M|O|O|N, which uses repetition of drums and other sounds to create a blood-pumping tone that fits the gameplay.



Jetset Radio

At the turn of the millennium, Sega released the colorful, cult classic Jet Set Radio on their Dreamcast console. With HD remasters and widespread love for this game, the game is a standout of the early 2000s with players spreading graffiti while battling rival gangs and escaping the police all on powered inline skates. Hideki Naganuma crafted a soundtrack inspired by hip-hop and J-pop from the era that accompanies the player skating through Tokyo creating works of art. The soundtrack includes original songs by Naganuma and licensed music from artists like Deavid Soul, a Japanese electronic duo known for bombastic dance music, and Guitar Vader, a Japanese indie rock band who contrast the soundtracks’ mostly hip-hop and electronic style with peppy guitars and drum beats. “Let Mom Sleep” blasts as soon as the game starts with the charismatic Professor K yelling “Jet Set Radio” at the title screen, which lays the foundation for a charming and zany experience.



Red Dead Redemption 2

A defining game of the last generation of consoles, Red Dead Redemption 2 was the long-awaited prequel to its 2010 predecessor, an iconic game of its own time. Players control Arthur Morgan in the 19th century, trailing through the West with a vagrant band of bandits and general misfits. The game is regarded by some as a cowboy simulator because the very detailed and accurate environment Rockstar Games created fits an adventure fitting of the Wild West era. Woody Jackson composed the soundtrack with musical motifs from Western films, which fit scenes whether they are somber or action packed. Jackson’s composition was paired with contributors Senyawa, D’Angelo, Willie Nelson and more, whose work made the soundtrack the fitting for the Wild West’s chilling thrills and prevailing accomplishments. “The Housebuilding Song” is a standout of the soundtrack and plays near the end of the game when players take a break from the outlaw life and build a house to possibly leave that life behind. The song paints the picture of The Wild West ending and a new era dawning.

Matador Marquee

WRITTEN BY DEVIN MALONE

Video game adaptations have taken the small screen by storm in recent years, with the likes of Netflix's "Castlevania" and HBO's "The Last of Us" receiving ratings over 90% on Rotten Tomatoes, and the latter winning the Saturn Award for Best Horror Television Series. In contrast, video games have a long and tumultuous history with the big screen, with decades of flops and misfires giving video game adaptations a bad name until fairly recently. The following are some of the more notable and notorious video-game-to-film adaptations from the past 30 years.



"Super Mario Bros."

1993 - Dir. by Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel

While not the first big screen adaptation of the Mario Brothers — an animated film released seven years prior in Japan — this was one of Hollywood's first stabs at making a feature film adaptation of a video game. Taking a lot of liberties with the source material, this 1993 adventure flick turned a familiar romp through the Mushroom Kingdom into a Tim Burtonesque nightmare, one which did not win over any fans when it first released. Currently, Super Mario Bros sits at 29% on Rotten Tomatoes. However, the film did develop a cult following over the years, with some fans going out of their way to retrieve and edit 20 minutes of cut footage back into the runtime.



"Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within"

2001 - Dir. by Hironobu Sakaguchi

Video game creators are not usually that involved in the film adaptations of their works, often opting to take a backseat with limited creative input while others take the wheel. This was not the case when Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi decided to direct "The Spirits Within," a \$100 million CGI sci-fi film with a stacked cast featuring Alec Baldwin, Ming-Na Wen, Donald Sutherland, Ving Rhames and Steve Buscemi. Despite the film's lofty goals, "The Spirits Within" failed to make its budget back and killed Square's new film production arm. Sakaguchi left Square not long after the film's financial flop and formed Mistwalker, a video game development company that would go on to make Lost Odyssey and The Last Story.



"Resident Evil"

2002 - Dir. by Paul W. S. Anderson

Capcom's Resident Evil franchise fared much better with its first feature film than Nintendo and Square's adaptations. Set in a subterranean lab underneath Raccoon City, a group of special operatives fight for their lives after a biological weapon turns most of the former staff into the walking dead. The film managed to make over \$100 million dollars at the box office despite not being loved by critics at the time, and spawned five sequels featuring the film's original protagonist, Alice, played by Milla Jovovich.



"Sonic the Hedgehog."

2020 - Dir. by Jeff Fowler

Getting the Blue Blur on the big screen was not easy. The film adaptation's original redesign of Sonic faced heavy backlash after the first trailer dropped, which pressured the studio to make alterations and push the film back three months. The eventual "Sonic the Hedgehog" film features the titular hedgehog with better resemblance to his video game counterpart. Unlike aforementioned adaptations, the film got fairly decent reviews and managed to become one of the highest grossing films of 2020. The film was successful enough to obtain a sequel, with a threequel slated for release later this year.

Controladores de Matadores

WRITTEN BY PAMELA GARCIA

For many college students, video games are an excellent way to de-stress during the semester. Whether they are story-based games or competitive games, there is something for everyone. Here is a glimpse into the favorite games of the newsroom staff.



Baldur's Gate 3

Set in the universe of Dungeons and Dragons, Baldur's Gate 3 is a role-playing game that fully immerses players into the adventure of the Forgotten Realms. It is the favorite of Assistant Sports Editor Gabriel Duarte. **"The choices are meaningful, the characters are lovable and the story is great. It's a real-life board game come to life,"** said Duarte.



God of War Ragnarök

This action-adventure game had one of the bestselling launch weeks in PlayStation history, with 5.1 million units. It is the selection of Social Media Editor Carolina Tello. **"The performance is one that can't be beat with emotional moments, incredibly satisfying puzzles, and combat,"** said Tello.



Mortal Kombat 9

Mortal Kombat 9 keeps the series' fighter game roots intact, while continuing its storyline from the aftermath of the Battle of Armageddon. The game is the pick of assistant culture editor Rodrigo Hernandez. **"I like its graphics, stories and fatalities — it was the first fighter game I remember playing,"** said Hernandez.



Batman: Arkham Knight

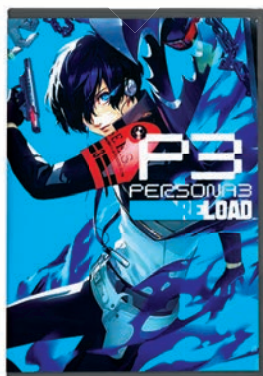
As the final installment of the Batman: Arkham trilogy, Arkham Knight takes players around Gotham City as Batman, protecting himself and the city from foes. The game is the choice of sports editor Ryan Romero. **"Rocksteady Studios goes far and beyond to tell the story of Batman by having entertaining fights, entertaining missions, and more importantly an entertaining story,"** said Romero.





Mario Kart Wii

Acting as one of the many spinoffs to the original Super Mario Brothers games, Mario Kart Wii was released in April 2008. It is the favorite of assistant social media editor Jasmine Cuza. **"I think that the characters, cool tracks, and races are what makes it so fun and unpredictable — and the fact that they have power-ups makes the game even more exciting,"** said Cuza.



Persona 3 Reload

Having just released on Feb. 9, Persona 3 Reload reimagines the original 2006 role-playing simulator with spunky graphics and updated gameplay features. It is a new favorite of copy editor Jay Kuklin. **"The way Persona stands out to me so much is the storyline, especially in Reload. And the visual effects are also another factor into why I've gone knee-deep into Persona,"** said Kuklin.



Hyper Light Drifter

Hyper Light Drifter serves as a perfect amalgamation of beloved games in the action role-playing genre. It is the pick of social media day editor Trisha Anas. **"If you ever wanted to know what a Dark Souls, Journey, and Legend of Zelda lovechild looked like, this game is it,"** said Anas.



The Sims 4

Known as one of the bestselling games of all time, The Sims franchise is a staple in the genre of life-simulator games. The Sims 4 is the favorite of social media day editor Teagan Davidge. **"With many other games, you go through it once and move on. Here, there are an endless number of families, houses and storylines that you can create within the game, which make you want to play it again and again,"** said Davidge.



Rocket League

Mixing both the kart and soccer game genres together, Rocket League is a fan favorite of both critics and gamers alike. The game is also the pick of news editor Griffin O'Rourke. **"The competitive feeling of playing against a good team and winning is multiplied when I'm with my friends, it's a lot of hype,"** said O'Rourke.



Outer Wilds

Taking players through an intergalactic mystery, Outer Wilds is an exploration and adventuring game that won the hearts of many sci-fi fans. It is the pick of print managing editor Claire Boeck. **"It has one of the most emotionally compelling stories I've ever experienced in a video game,"** said Boeck.

Throwing Punches and Taking Names

Finding community through video games

WRITTEN BY TRISHA ANAS WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN SILVA

I tucked myself underneath the warmth of my blanket after my mom shut off my bedroom lights. The only thing offering any kind of light was the glow from my Game Boy.

I switched it on, loaded up Pokémon Ruby and was greeted by the familiar 32-bit songs that accompanied each area I would encounter.

I grew up an only child, so the only things I felt like I could rely on for company were movies and video games. The reason I hold so much nostalgia for them is because these characters and stories made me feel less alone.

Toward the end of high school in 2014, I found that I had a knack for fighting games in particular. Street Fighter, to be specific. I still remember the first time I ever picked up that game. It was for fun, at first, but I have been known to be extremely competitive.

As you can imagine, a 5-foot-1-inch girl like myself felt like Zangief, an enormous, 7-foot Russian wrestler with massive muscles, was the character for me. Was I compensating for something? Maybe.

It almost felt like your typical training montage. In the beginning, I learned how to be better, practicing combinations for hours on end until my thumbs literally bled.

It is hard to say what possessed me to hyperfixate on it, but there was something about the satisfaction of finally being able to follow through seemingly impossible combinations.

The “hard work” I had put in for a few years was paying off. I was enamored.

But what I also began to realize was that sense of satisfaction was not the only thing that I loved about

gaming. I also enjoyed being a part of the community.

During the 2020 pandemic, I, like everyone else, was confined to my home outside of work. Amid the stress I had from working in the emergency room and the fear I held from the developing virus, I once again found solace in video games.

Animal Crossing: New Horizons was my saving grace. It acted as both a stress reliever and a way for me to continue to connect with my friends, despite not being able to see each other face-to-face.

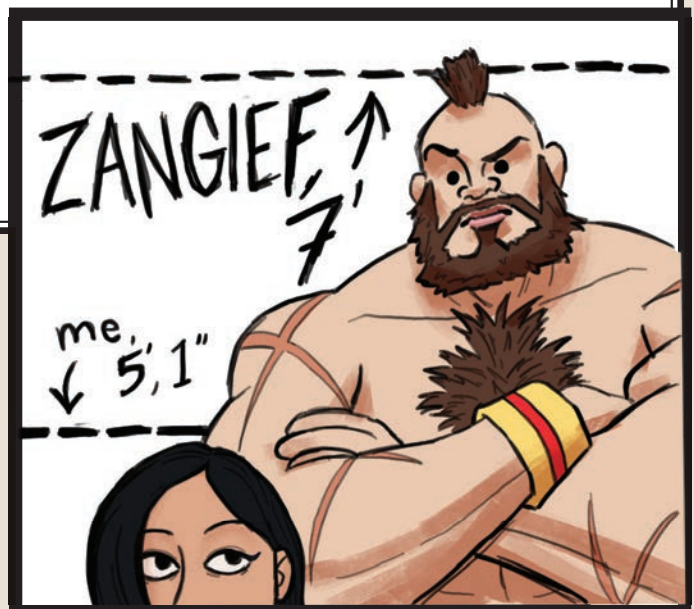
It was like we were kids again and none of our problems mattered.

Before I knew it, more games had flown into my radar. Games like Journey, The Last of Us and Hyper Light Drifter had quickly become my favorites. They were all beautifully animated, well-written and well-composed.

It was then that I learned how much complexity a lot of games had, outside of what people might think are just made for kids.

I hope that everyone gives video games a chance and does not reduce or dismiss them as a childish medium because you never know what you might find.

You might even find the same comfort I found in them, whether that’s in Zangief or in a virtual animal friend.





Group members from left to right: Fiorela Zamora, Anastasia Naydina, Kameron Hamilton, Sarah Hassan, Reginald Dunn and Sergio Soto.



President Anastasia Naydina speaking with Lukas Moy (left) and JR Zaha (right).

Building Experiences Together

Why students want to develop games

WRITTEN BY CONRADO PICANCO AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALIYAH HINCKLEY

California State University, Northridge's Game Development Club serves students who have a passion for the multidisciplinary field of video game development by making opportunities and academic resources available to help them create games. They hold meetings, game nights and game jams, collaborate with other clubs for workshops, and invite guest speakers.

The members' reasons for game development vary from hobbies to prospective careers. Anastasia Naydina, president of the club, was drawn to the craft by her interest in video games from a young age.

"Honestly, just the entire concept of a video game inspires me. If I take a step back to consider all the stuff that makes a video game, in my head all of that should have been impossible to do, but it is literally possible," said Naydina. "This, as well as the constant flow of fresh stories and ideas in the video game medium, also motivates me to want to be a part of it as a career."

Another reason students pursue game development is to create the same joy that the games they played growing up created for them. Club Vice President Christina Eugenio's siblings inspired her interest in the field.

"My older brother introduced me to video games, and I did the same to my little sister. We all love to play video games together. I love how video games have created a great bond between my siblings and me," said Eugenio. "Although the genres of games we play are different, we all find a game we can play together and make great memories!"

Club member Jonathan Kollmorgen can attest to that.

"I have played games all my life," said Kollmorgen. "My goal is to bring just as much joy to others who play my games as I had when I was younger. Being able to make games that are beautiful and inspirational so people can really love and appreciate them."

Despite their passion, many members are uncertain about their

futures in game development because the industry has been in a crisis.

Between mass layoffs, the threat of AI taking over, poor working conditions, and so on, the road to making a living creating games will not be easy, but it does not discourage them from pursuing their dreams.

Rose Karia, who had days where she pushed herself to work 14 hours a day and sometimes work while sick to prepare herself for the industry, hopes to change that.

"The end goal for me would be to make it as an indie," said Karia. The term "indie" refers to independent game developers who either work on games by themselves or with smaller teams instead of huge production companies. "I would like to start a studio and run it the right way, ensure people are looked after, nobody has to work the hours I have, and provide people with a place where they can make great things in a way that is sustainable and can support the people who actually do the work that makes a company great."

Across the Hill

WRITTEN BY INDIRA BURKLIN
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN SILVA



Long blobs with circular eyes, no mouth and spiky heads. The ghosts assemble to form a line every sunset. Everyone always gathers to see where they're going. On Saturdays, Dad takes us to the hill to watch by my request. An old woman perches on the side of the dirt road with some cardboard sign that reads, "two dollars a view." Dad says she'll just tear up the paper anyway.

When the show begins and we have found a spot to park in, I think to myself: Why is Olive so quiet. Usually, she mumbles about how it's unethical to watch the ghosts and how we should let them be instead of watching them like they are "puppets in a show." She is quite smart for a 10-year-old. I turn to look at the backseat expecting to see her looking at her socks and scowling, but she was gone. No more than a second has passed when I turn to face forward only to see the heel of her pink cotton candy-colored sock flash in the distance where the ghosts are hovering away. My mouth hangs open as chills run down my spine, and Dad stays silent, unemotional, unmoved.

I open my mouth. I scream "OL-IVE!" Before Dad can say anything, I

open the car door. I run down the hill, extending my left knee too far since the hill is so steep. My sister's socks had made a wet imprint of her tiny feet on the cement following the dewy grass. The wind rushes past my ears, through my shirt, blocks my nostrils and whips my hair around. The sunset is blaring bright orange and pink streaks across the faint clouds and into my eyes. I feel a tug on the back of my shirt just before tripping on a rather large pebble. I think maybe it's Olive playing a trick. I whip my head around.

"Findley, you scared the shit out of me. Don't fuck around at the hill, okay? You could get hurt. Now get back in the car. There is nothing we can do, Olive chose to run." My dad has collapsed on the gravel as well, panting and angry looking. His gray hair sticks up a bit in the front.

"But Dad — "

"No," he says firmly.

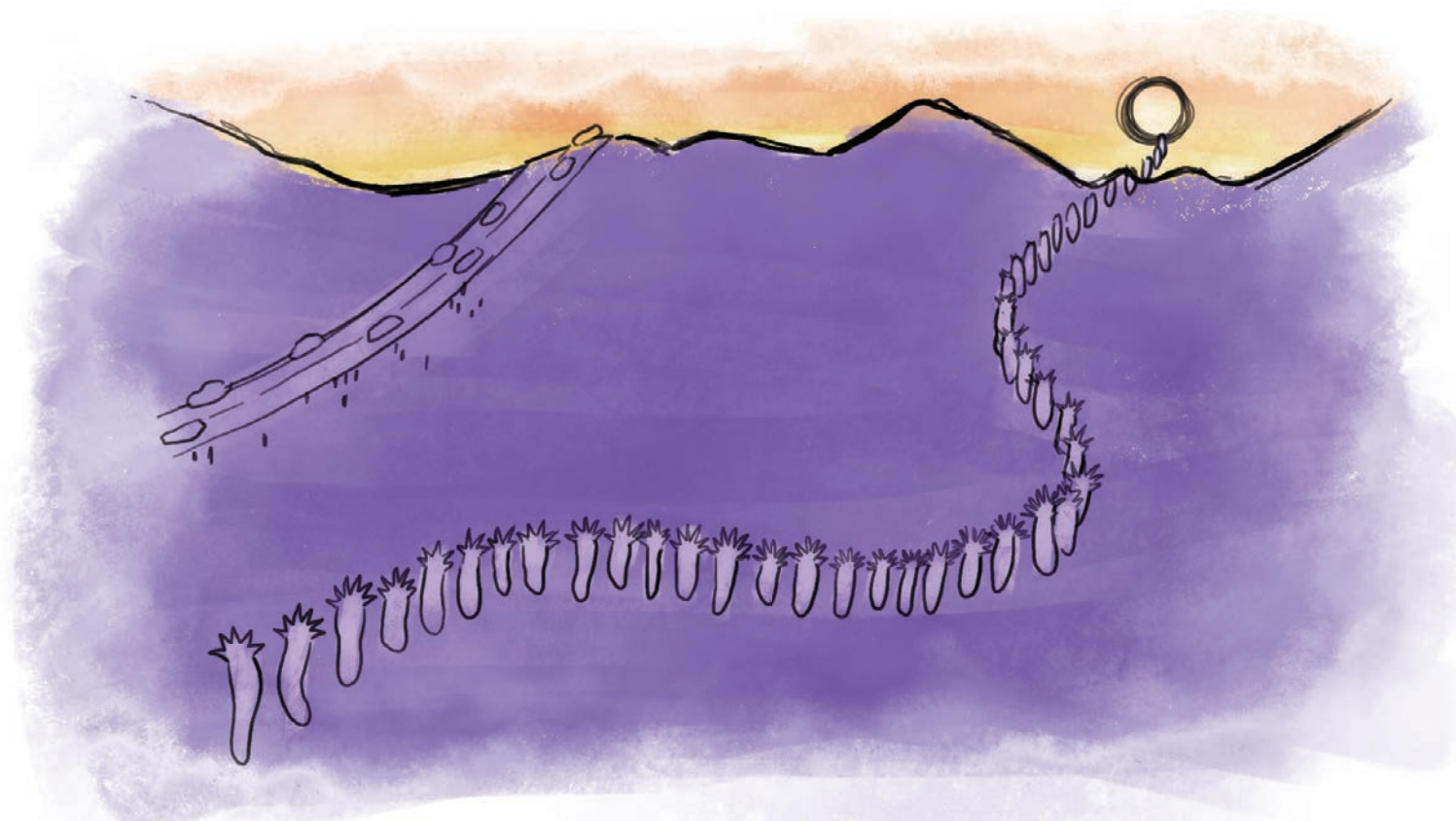
On the drive home, I watch the rest of the sunset and the ghosts from the right side-view mirror. I think about why he said no. He must know best. Maybe Olive is fine and this happens all the time. Maybe I am too young to understand, just like with mom. All he

ever told me about mom was that she chose to leave too. He doesn't like to talk about it.

When we arrive home there are about 20 cats on the lawn. An orange one in contrast with the faded blue house has red eyes and matted fur. It sits on the porch looking feral, lost angry. I point to them but Dad ignores me and strides right on into our house. I walk up to the orange cat and say "pspspspsps." It glares at me, blinks and walks away, all the way down the street, moving its torso side to side with sass. I want that one. The rest of the cats stare at me blankly, and it makes me kind of uncomfortable. Are they here because of Olive? I shake my head as I head inside and catch a glimpse of Dad blankly staring at the lawn, I think there is maybe a tear in his eye. I imagine him thinking about how he's stuck with the less intellectual daughter.

Every time the phone starts ringing we think it might be her, calling from where the ghosts have gone.

Each Saturday, Dad and I would still drive to the hill and watch the ghosts fade away. We have no choice; it is against the law not to. He always locks the car doors now and tells me it is so



the begging woman doesn't open one. Most days I am quiet and Dad always asks why with a pair of sunken eyes. I feel bad for him, but I don't know why he asks me that. Maybe he doesn't know what else to say or do. He is also quiet most days. Gray hairs bud from the front section of his hair. Sometimes I imagine what he was like before mom went away. Even when Olive was here he'd muster a smile and a joke. I wonder how many smiles he used to have.

One morning several weeks later, I slept in because it was Sunday. My hair had become a nest from not brushing it. When I went out to water the plants in my polka dot pajamas that drag on the floor when I walk and my zebra slippers flopping around I saw that sassy orange cat sitting beside the strawberry plants. "Pspssps." I begin to coax the cat to me. She comes to me and rolls in the dirt.

A few minutes later, I go inside after watering the plants and she sprints in after me. I stare at her and then grab a can of tuna from a stack and give some to her on a paper plate. The house smells like sadness and stale pizza. Dad is still sleeping, he sleeps most days now actually. At night I hear him shuf-

fle out to the dining room table, where he usually sits in silence. I try to avoid it when he does that. I'm not sure why he does it, but it feels like I'm interrupting something.

She follows me everywhere, the orange cat, even into the bathroom while I comb and braid my long brown hair. I enjoy her company. For some reason, I feel like the cat is judging the shitty haircut Olive had given me a while back.

"Ahh I don't even care dude I think my sister fucked me up she definitely didn't do this right. Also, this is the most efficient hairdo, I leave it like this for weeks," I say chirpily to the cheeky orange cat.

"This is the most efficient hairdo, I leave it like this for weeks," the orange cat says, mocking me and tilting its head to the side and glaring at me. Olive would always do that. One time she made me so mad I threw a piece of wood at her foot. Maybe this cat is Olive. Maybe she has come back.

"Hey I thought we were friends," I say to the cat, hurt by the imitation, especially if it's Olive and this is what she came back to tell me.

"Hey, I thought we were friends."
"Stop imitating me!" I shriek.

"Stop imitating me!" the orange cat shrieks with delight in its eyes. Olive almost had made me this mad in the past. My face turns hot and I grab a peach-scented candle from the bathroom cabinet shelf and throw it at the cat. She lays there dead and limp and I can't look. I can't take the sight of it or what I have done. Dad knocks on the bathroom door. I burst out crying right as Dad bursts in. He sees the cat with his hollow eyes.

"Findley, what happened? Was there a spider?"

"No, Dad, the cat," I sob and point, "I killed the cat."

"What cat, what are you talking about?" He says. My eyes widen as fat tears roll down my face.

"Huh?? How can you not see that cat!"

"I don't know Findley," he whispers. He widens his arms to give me a hug which I lean into with my arms draped at my side and my chin's weight between his shoulder and neck. I feel frozen. My thoughts race.

Does my dad need glasses? Am only I meant to see these cats? Is Olive messing with me?

"I think we have to go to a psychiatrist," Dad says quietly.



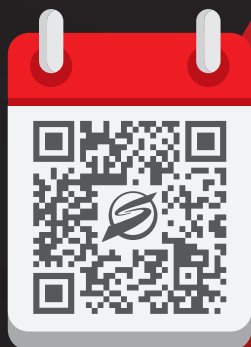
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Tuesday, March 26: 3 – 4 p.m.

📍 Pride Center



Art Jam Wednesdays

Wednesday, March 27: Noon – 1:30 p.m.

📍 Plaza del Sol



Computer Lab Tech Tips: Adobe Illustrator

Wednesday, March 27: 1 – 2 p.m.

📍 Computer Lab



DREAM Center: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status as a Pathway to Citizenship

Thursday, March 28: 1 p.m.

📍 Zoom



VRC: Game Night

Thursday, March 28: 5 – 7:30 p.m.

📍 Games Room



Games Room Billiards Tournament

Thursday, March 28: 5 – 9 p.m.

📍 Games Room



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