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D S Q Q K L U E O I N P I A Y B Y O L T O I L U I O I O E
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B A P U O W E T T M E L D U S N P Q D M Q O V M T U L R D
N T B O T O C O M M U N I T Y E O U O M U T O A A E E I C

WORDS

A COMPILATION OF STUDENT WORK
DMACC WEST DES MOINES CAMPUS

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Why Do I Sit Here Day By Day

Bryce Charlton

Why do I sit here day by day?
 Watching the time just fly away,
 Same office, same desk, and same old chair
 Wondering if I can handle it another year!

Forty, fifty, sometimes sixty hour weeks
 No wonder why I feel so weak,
 Monitoring and reporting metrics every day
 I question, "Why anybody would want to stay?"

Medical, dental, mortgage, and insurance all are due
 Everything is starting to feel like déjà vu,
 Is money worth the amount of torture I portray?
 Just for the bills that I must pay.

Happiness or sorrows are at weigh
 For the decision that seems to be at delay,
 Do I leave in hopes to find what I want?
 Shall I do it all nonchalant?

NO! I shall not go
 For I can't let go of what I know,
 I can't let go of this comfortable life
 Just because my heart and mind seem to strife.

I will sit down and shut up
 Still continuing to work in this death cup,
 Only because I have the fear
 That my mind will never become unclear.

So, I sit here day by day
 Watching the time just fly away,
 Same office, same desk, and same old chair
 Dealing with yet another year!

My Father is Suffering From The Injustice of Captivity of War

Jwan Al Sayadi

Have you ever known a prisoner of war? In 1980, there was a war between Iraq (my country) and Iran (bad neighbor). My father did not work with the military; he was not a policeman. My father was an employee of a state-owned textile company. In 1982, two years after the war, the Iraqi government summoned all military and civilian men to participate in this war. My father was one of the victims of this war. When I was a one month old and my brother named Omar was two years old, my father left our home and went to the battlefield and was captured by Iran. My father was a prisoner of war without being guilty. My father suffered. He said, "Every day that passes is equivalent to a thousand days. Every day a dream to see my children and my wife." My father's sweeter older years lost their sweetness because of the eight years of his life spent in captivity. He did not know the taste of life during these eight years. My father suffered from the pain of longing for family, torture in captivity, and the difficulty of life after returning from captivity.

Before everything my father said, "During the first moment when I and the soldiers who were with me were arrested by Iranian soldiers, I never thought that feeling would get me. I felt my heart squeezed when I realized I would be away from my wife and children." Then after four months, my father was registered in the Red Cross. This registry helped my father a lot in communicating with my mother. At that time, through the Red Cross, my father sent many letters to my mother. Also, my mother sent letters and numerous photographic images of me and my brother at different ages. These messages and photos helped my father to communicate with us in spite of the distances involved and the difficulty of the situation which my father faced. I was five years old, and I have never forgotten my mother's tears dripping on her cheeks when she read the messages that my father sent saying how much he missed my mother, me, and my brother. He said, "Every day, I put the photos for Omar and Jwan under my pillow and kiss these photos. Every day, I remembered the little face of my little girl, Jwan, who was one month old. I could not forget her eyes looking at me in the last minute before I left my house for the last time." I was small and did not appreciate how difficult it is to be separated, but now, after I became a mother, I appreciate this feeling.

In addition, Iran's criminal military used the worst kinds of torture with prisoners. They used violent beatings, abusive immoral phrases, and racist behavior. My father said soldiers used psychological torture methods. "For example, they forced us to insult the Iraqi government, and they forced us to do their customs and religious rituals." One means of torture was to give less than a full meal. My dad said, "One day we heard screams from one of the prisoners who was crying out in pain. I went to ask the reason for the screams. Then my friend answered how he was witness to the crime carried out by an Iranian soldier who pulled a tooth of the prisoner with forceps." These soldiers beat the prisoners severely. These soldiers lost all compassion and humanity recommended by all heavenly religions. All religions urge prisoners of war to be treated well.

In 1988, the Iraqi government announced a cease-fire between the Iraqi and Iranian armies, which ended the war. There was indescribable joy when we heard this news. My mother was

crying for joy; my brother and I danced and sang "Papa will come." A month after the announcement to stop the war, the Iraqi government negotiated with the Iranian government for the exchange of prisoners of the two sides. At ten o'clock at night, the organization responsible for returning the captives contacted my mother, and they told her that my father arrived. After eight years, the dream came true. My father said how much he pined for the day when he returned home and hugged his wife and his children, who he was forced to leave for eight years. Between joy and crying, my dad said, "It was the toughest and most beautiful moment. I felt I came back to life after death." And he looked at me and my brother and said, "I am so excited to see you; I was hoping to stay alive for this moment when I saw you."

Returning from captivity caused my parents a lot of difficulties. The first was the need to find a suitable job because the company where he worked before captivity retired him. At that time, the amount he could take for retirement was inadequate to satisfy the needs of his family. Therefore, he needed to find a job. My father worked in the field buying and selling cars. He worked hard, and this helped to make enough money to live. My mother was an employee and was helping my dad so much. My mother and my father cooperated to provide for me and my brother a happy life. The second problem, in 1990, Iraq faced a blockade imposed by America, the United Kingdom, and a group of European countries. All Iraqis were suffering this year. That increased the suffering for my dad who had weakened in captivity. There was a shortage of food and medicine; life was unstable. My dad was tired physically and psychologically.

Wars always create devastation. Governments decide to declare war, and the people bear the impact of the destruction that results from these wars. There are a lot of victims who have suffered from wars. My father was one of them on the one hand, and my mother, my brother, and me on the other. Besides suffering, Mom and Dad had to bear the responsibility of two small children. She was working at the same time as taking care of us. My brother and I miss living near my parents. Suffering flooded family life. But the question remains for my father: Who should compensate him for the years lost in the land of injustice (Iran)? Who bears the responsibility of the suffering of my father?

Water²

Ashton Woiwood

Blue crystal sparkles of light come out of a salty ocean
 While the waves cavort on the horizon
 The sunshine penetrates through the liquid leaving behind a trail of light
 The soft rumbling of the waves in the distance
 I see miles of wet ocean
 As I lay on the warm soft sand
 I wait and wonder
 Where is my martini?

Extra-Terrestrials Are Extra Real

Jacob Snyder

Most people disregard the thought of aliens on this planet as a crack-pot conspiracy theory. There are plenty of inexplicable ancient monuments around the world that are strikingly similar to one another. Also, the underdeveloped societies allegedly constructed their shrines using only primitive tools and almost no advanced technologies. How can different cultures existing in different periods of time and in different corners of the globe build gargantuan structures that are eerily alike without some kind of help? Other intellectual species have been to this planet and have left encrypted signs and many believers in their wake. Based on the sheer size of the universe, it seems naïve to assume human beings are the only intelligent life. The beings of this planet have not fully explored the depths of the oceans, so it would be presumptuous to be certain life only exists on Earth in this solar system, let alone the entire universe. According to a local poll of Des Moines Area Community College students, done by the author of this essay, 51.3 percent of respondents believe in the possibility of alien existence (Snyder). Evidence of extra-terrestrials existence on Earth includes millions of reported UFO sightings or abductions and ancient civilizations constructed great complexes beyond their capacity and abilities.

Surprisingly, millions of people worldwide have claimed to have seen a UFO or have been abducted. On March 13, 1997, a well-documented sighting involving ten thousand citizens in Phoenix, Arizona and the surrounding areas saw what appeared to be three amber lights hovering in the sky for minutes. Multiple video sources corroborated these lights hovering on the edge of the city. The U.S. Air Force stated these lights were just flares released by an airplane while performing a training mission. The lights have since reappeared a few times over Phoenix. These "flares" hovered over the horizon for an estimated five or six minutes and disappeared as quickly as they came. A triangular UFO with four lights was also spotted traveling over the state on the same day. These "Black Deltas," as they have been dubbed, have been spotted around the world for decades now (Aykroyd). It is speculated the military may have reverse engineered a fallen craft to create the B2 bomber and other planes with advanced systems. Even, a former U.S. president sighted a UFO. President Ronald Reagan (when he was governor of California) had an unidentifiable sphere follow his airplane for miles (Aykroyd). Reagan spoke of how he watched it circle the plane like it was a toy.

Moreover, a highly-publicized incident grabbed headlines around the country dealing with a Washington D.C. sighting in July of 1952. A headline from the Cedar Rapids Gazette of Iowa, said in bold black lettering, "SAUCERS SWARM OVER CAPITAL." This event sparked actor Dan Aykroyd's interest in UFOs and the paranormal. Another ignition point for Aykroyd was the movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and he found this movie riveting at a young age. Granted, Aykroyd was very young when this scene over D.C. occurred, but this was still major news in the 1950s. He would not consider himself an expert, but it is a hobby that has lasted over fifty years of his life. The director of the film *Dan Aykroyd Unplugged* on UFOs, David Serda, explained Aykroyd in this way, "...it was like Einstein hiding inside of a comic genius." Aykroyd's thoughts on why other terrestrial beings might be coming here include: attempts to

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FIG.1 : "MASSIVE STONE WALLS IN INCA FORTRESS WALLS, SACSAYHUAMAN, CUSCO, PERU, SOUTH AMERICA." 123RF.COM, 123RF LIMITED, 2011. WEB. 20 APR. 2012

In fact, the most impressive ruins of inexplicable fashion are in Bolivia, shared by an excerpt from Ancient Aliens on the History Channel. A seemingly unimpressive sight at first, but upon inspection, astounding and immense boulders litter a small area named Puma Punku. The Imara Indians are credited with its construction, but their ruins give only a few hints on their creation. With no indication of why or more importantly how it was destroyed, experts theorize no natural force is the cause. One of the larger platforms weighs 800 tons. These ruins are at high altitudes surrounded by no trees or vegetation to help move these colossal stones. Some even show signs of machining and tool marks. This is very odd because the Imara Indians had no written plans or blueprints depicting how they were to construct and piece together these rocks. No tools or any mechanized items have been found near the Puma Punku ruins. Yet, these stones are so smoothly cut and polished, stone aged tools and chisels available at the time could not have made them. The lines were perfectly straight at ninety degrees and exactly the same depth through the entire rock. Holes were perfectly drilled into the boulders and are precisely the same distance apart and the exact same depth. This is unobtainable, even today.

The most impressive fact about these stones besides their size and complexity is their composition. Most ancient peoples worked with clay or sandstone; these stones at Puma Punku are made of granite and diorite, which is second only to diamond in hardness (Tsoukalos). Here are some pictures showing some of the intricate and precisely cut stone works. These stones have right angles and what appear to be niches for other blocks to slide and lock into.



FIG. 2: GRAY, MARTIN, COMP. "MYSTIC PLACES - PUMA PUNKU." WORLD-MYSTERY.COM, LUNAR PAGES, 2012. WEB. 6 APR. 2012.



FIG. 3: GRAY, MARTIN, COMP. 'MYSTIC PLACES - PUMA PUNKU.' WORLD-MYSTERIES.COM. LUNAR PAGES, 2012. WEB. 6 APR. 2012.

The slots are too well-cut and symmetrical to be done by anyone but a master craftsman using diamond tipped tools or maybe a mechanized, computer-aided device. It seems out of reach for an ancient tribe existing around 500 A.D. to be able to accomplish this perfection. Even with modern engineering and mathematics, our own societies wouldn't be able to recreate the structure(s) at Puma Punku (Gray).

As previously noted, the Great Pyramids in Egypt have been dissected many times, and scientists are unsure of how exactly they were physically created. There are many theories, but they all have aspects that make them implausible. The size and sheer quantity of stones used is so great, no one theory can explain how the pyramids were created in the alleged twenty-year time frame. The two best theories for explaining the Great Pyramid of Giza both involved ramps. The first proposed ramp would be from the ground to the top layer of stones. This ramp could not be above a certain angle; otherwise, the stones could not be drug to the top of the structure. Not only would that require large amounts of dirt, which is much less abundant than sand in Egypt, but it would stretch over two miles. The other theory required a stone ramp on a corner to pull other stones up to the next level of the pyramid. Eventually, the ramp would not be able to fit on the top levels because it would extend over the edge of the last plain. This would leave the top of the pyramid unfinished. There were no stone ramps or evidence of ramps ever discovered.

Other unexplainable phenomena in pyramids were the lack of brackets inside the tombs for torches, and the fact that no soot is found on the ceilings of pyramids if torches had been used. It is still unsure how hieroglyphs were put into pyramids in pitch black. Unless the Egyptians had some other form of illumination in their corridors, how could they carve these symbols into stone? There is a theory involving a depiction of a light bulb of sorts in a tomb, and maybe aliens gave said light source to the Egyptian people. This source of light may have been returned or taken by the extra-terrestrials. Skeptics reason it is most likely a flower or anything else portrayed on the wall. The answer is most likely lost in time. In the book *The Great Pyramid, Ancient Egypt Revisited*, the author, John Romer, says, "... in this most remarkable of buildings, such 'errors' as its architecture holds within its 5½ million tons of stone are contained in a few inches." Exact measurements of the Great Pyramid are given as 440 cubits wide by 280 cubits in height (Romer 339). Roughly, this translates to 200 meters by 130 meters. Immense and complex, this pyramid is the last of the Seven Wonders of the World still mostly intact.

As a result, extra-terrestrials are real and have been to this planet because there is evidence of mass sightings of UFOs, first-hand accounts of UFOs by credible sources, and ancient indigenous peoples around the world accomplished fantastic things with primitive tools while society today could not replicate their results. If given enough evidence most people would consider the possibility. There is no hard proof for the public to gawk at and point to as the reason they believe in aliens. Only subtle hints from remnants of past advanced civilizations remain. Discover and decipher more clues to decide on extra-terrestrial for one's self. Personal recommendations of the author include Ancient Aliens on the History Channel and Dan Aykroyd Unplugged on UFOs.

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Red Light

Jamin Hardenbrook

Terrible things sprout from his jaded memory and mind. One, two, three, all of this chaos must mean something. If it does not, then all wasted energy and charred emotion possess even more power. He lights a cigarette and stares out his front windshield at the taunting red light. Stop. Think about the future, if there is one at all. Optimism left him the same day his fiancé left him for his brother. Hope left him the same day he realized every day ends in darkness.

Green means go. So go. He exhales the familiar poison that has kept him company for so many years. Tears begin to stream down his warm cheeks. The speed limit is 35, but he quickly hits 60. Other cars on the road fall behind him like stationary stars in the presence of a comet. He hits 75, and then decides he's not stopping for the next blood light. A fear of consequence ignites in his warping mind like a halogen flood light.

Perhaps a fatal accident or an angry officer with handcuffs and an expensive ticket, but he wouldn't stop anyway, never. His engine purrs as the road curves and the six cylinder automatic swerves. Sideways, just like the life he was given by some powerful deity with a disgusting sense of humor. In a blur of hopeless panic and screeching tires the fatal wind through his soon to be broken windshield feels good. It feels like the end.

A. Riddler

Nicole A'sha Hall

Why must you question,
My questioning?
I bet you bet I think
you think less of me?
Why are there three people on this street?
When it's just us two.
No, I am not off putting.
I am just putting off looking.
Hmm, don't.
To wander without me is a dead thought.
I need all the time I can get to know you.
By the way I am the Riddler new friend.
One plus one is two.
Maybe
It tis true.
But I know you plus you.
Equals not a single clue.
To believe or not to believe . . .
See chasing talking rabbits down holes is my thing.
Oh I forgot to introduce myself Riddler.
I am Alice, from Wonderland
So, can you help me find a place called Arkham?

Sylee Underground

Colin Wambold

Dark green blood dripped from the soaked bandage that covered his face, bright green eyes peeking out from between the folds of gauze. Just a few hours had passed since they harvested his nose.

He had managed to escape his holding pen during the commotion. Another Syl, one of his sisters, was trying to resist her first harvest. It hadn't taken long for the handlers to subdue her, but it was just enough time for him to slip out of the pen undiscovered. They would know that he was gone by now, but it would take time for them to find him. That was if the handlers even bothered to look for him. It didn't matter. He was almost free and with his limbs still intact. It was more than he expected.

He looked down at the slip of paper in his hand. Small numbers were scrawled on the paper in English that he could barely read, but these numbers would lead him to freedom, to the underground. The humans had called it an address. The numbers represented a location, a place where humans helped Sylee like him to escape the city. He was told he could find his way by comparing the numbers on other buildings nearby. It was amazing to him that humans still wrote.

Following the numbers led him into a dark alley between an electronics shop and a meathaus. The sign above the meathaus door read "Barratti's," but he had no idea of the meaning of the word. He stood at the back door to the meathaus expectantly, waiting, just as he had been instructed by the elder who had arranged his escape.

Barratti's was a richly appointed building of fine wood and marble construction where well-off humans could gorge themselves on Syl meat in a luxurious atmosphere over a vintage bottle of merlot. The meathouses were a glutton's paradise, with Syl cooked to order every possible way. Humans made reservations months in advance just for a taste and paid ridiculous sums of money for the privilege.

Behind the paradise of consumption, the reality of the humans' newest delicacy was grim and vicious. The Sylee were an arboreal race from a planet rendered lifeless by the rapid cooling of their sun. They had escaped their dying world seeking refuge, only to find slavery on Earth. The discovery that their alien chlorophyll, infused throughout Syl muscle tissue, reacted powerfully with human amino acids and caused limited cellular regeneration created a skyrocketing demand for Syl meat.

They were a passive people. They didn't speak and had an average life span of only eighteen human years. They communicated empathically, sharing feelings and experiences. Earthborn Sylee could rarely read or write and were slow to learn human languages. All of this made them appear to be easy prey for the selfish humans who saw them as stupid and feeble. Less than a decade after first contact with the Sylee, the humans had made an industry out of farming them as livestock, and meathouses were born.

From his position, the escaped Syl could see his brothers and sisters through the grimy window of the restaurant's rear door. His kin were tall, thin and naked, bound, gagged, and tied like a line of slaves at market, made docile by regular sedative injections. These Sylee were malnourished and mistreated; he could sense their anguish and see their long, sharp ears folded down in the Sylee expression of shame. There was nothing he could do for them now, but he could not allow himself to become one of them.

The kitchen of your average meathaus was little more than a butcher shop, with Sylee lined up to be butchered. The chef would dissect them one part at a time, but always leave them alive as long as possible. Arms were always first, as any cutting on the legs made the Sylee slow and harder to herd. After their legs were gone, the Syl torsos were kept in cold storage under artificial daylight, still alive, until the remainder of their meat could be harvested. After death, Syl meat rotted quickly, and was much less potent. The leftovers were processed and ground, then sent back to the holding pens to be fed to the next crop of Sylee.

As the escaped Syl waited, the dim light above the rear door of the meathaus blinked out. He knocked three times, then twice. The back door of the meathaus swung open, and a human poked his head out and looked around surreptitiously. After confirming that the alleyway was empty, his eyes locked on the bandaged face of the escaped Syl.

"Got a name?"

This human was short and chubby, nearly half the height of an average Syl, with a black bandana tied around his shaved head and green blood staining his hands and apron.

The escaped Syl shook his head. He had never needed a name before.

"They'll give you one. Get in here, and hurry up about it."

The human grabbed the escaped Syl by the arm and pulled him into the kitchen. Shutting the door quickly behind him, the sous chef put his finger to his lips to indicate that they should be silent and led him into the walk-in refrigerator. He slid a crate of vegetables to the side and pressed a switch hiding behind it, which caused a hidden door behind further stacks of produce to slide open noiselessly.

"Go on; get down there before the chef catches us. Do you want to be dinner?"

The escaped Syl climbed over the produce boxes and entered the darkness of the hidden passage. His eyes adjusted instantly to the dark as the hidden door slid closed behind him. He saw a faint light at the foot of a rough-hewn stairway and headed cautiously down the stairs.

The room at the bottom of the staircase was small and square. Even before he could see them, he sensed a dozen other Sylee here, waiting. He saw them sitting huddled on the floor along the walls, all with the same harsh, defiant expression on their faces as he had. He sensed a mix of sadness, fear and a powerful determination to survive.

A diminutive human woman with bright copper curls was huddled down next to a young Syl whose right arm had been recently harvested before her escape. The woman stood up as the newest of the escaped Syl stepped down from the last stair.

"I'm sorry; I know there's not much room down here. We'll get you to the woodlands soon enough. You won't have to wait long, though. The coyote will be here tonight to take you to Willamette."

He nodded, then sat down on the floor, tucked his long legs up under his chin and held them protectively to his chest. He sat next to one of his youngest sisters who had already been harvested

extensively. Both of her arms were gone, and her face was badly scarred by the harvesting of her cheeks, ears and nose. The most delicate Syl features were sought after by the cruelest gourmands, who paid a premium for young, tender Syl flesh.

The human woman wrung out a rag sopping with green blood and grabbed a fresh bandage.

"What are you called?"

The escaped Syl just shook his head.

"I'll just call you Fourteen. When you get to Oregon, your hosts will help you pick a new name if you want. You can call me Gina."

"Jee-naa."

The humans' language of English was painful for him to pronounce. Fourteen didn't like communicating the way humans did. It hurt his mouth to form the words as he rarely had the need to speak.

"Yes, that's good. You're a clever one."

She finished fastening the bandage around the young Syl's arm, patting it comfortingly as she turned to face Fourteen. She looked him up and down, assessing his condition, and slowly peeled the bandage off his face. The bleeding had stopped, and his nasal cavity was directly exposed to the open air, but he didn't seem to notice. Syl didn't experience physical pain in the same way humans did.

"Seems like you're mostly intact, yeah? If we can get your nose fixed up, you might be able to pass a human by wearing some contact lenses. And we'll have to pin down those ears. I mean, you'd be a really tall human, but still. It could work"

Fourteen stared at her, confused. Her words came so fast that he could barely follow them.

"Ok, well we'll get back to that."

Gina slowed the tempo of her speech a bit, responding to Fourteen's bewilderment.

"Can you do anything . . . different? I know some of you can."

He nodded.

"Well, let's see then!"

Fourteen looked around the room until he spotted a rusted and broken hand-cranked canning machine, sitting on a small table across the room. He slowly raised his hand and extended his fingers toward the broken canner. The rough mahogany skin of his hand began to glow lightly green between the thin bark. The broken pieces of the canning machine made a scraping sound as they started to rise.

The pieces of the canner floated towards them, flakes of rust falling away to reveal bright, shining steel. As it came closer, it began to reassemble itself into a functional machine. By the time Fourteen's lithe fingers plucked the heavy canner out of the air, it was brand new again. It was as though he had reached back through time and grabbed it directly from a store shelf. The green glow in his hand faded away.

Gina was visibly surprised.

He was embarrassed about using his kinesis in front of a human, and he could sense the admonition of his nearby siblings in his mind. He had been restraining it for years, and it was invigorating to finally exercise that part of his mind.

"That's amazing! I've never seen a Syl do anything like that before."

She looked at him sternly.

"No human anywhere can do it either, you know. You're going to have to keep that under wraps until you get to Willamette. If any other human sees you doing that, they'll cut you up into steaks tout-suite."

Fourteen walked over and replaced the repaired canner on the table, then returned to his previous spot sitting on the floor. Gina continued to make rounds in the tiny holding room, dressing wounds and trying her best to make sure that all the Sylee were as comfortable as possible.

Above them, the muffled sounds of the dinner rush were beginning to die down. After a few hours more, the sounds of the kitchen also waned until, at about 1am, the slamming of the kitchen door signaled the departure of the head chef.

Three soft knocks sounded from the hidden door at the top of the makeshift stairwell, followed by two harder knocks. Gina dashed up the stairs and knocked once, hard. The hidden door slid open, throwing a sliver of bright light down the stairs and silhouetting the sous chef's paunchy frame in the doorway.

"It's time, everyone. Those of you who can move fine on your own, help the others. Let's get moving."

Fourteen stood at the base of the staircase, helping his brothers and sisters up the stairs. When he was the last one left, he went up, and the door slid closed behind him. The kitchen was spotlessly clean now, a stark contrast to its appearance when he arrived. There were no pools of green blood, no Sylee tied to the rack like cattle; not a single trace of the daily slaughter of his kin.

The loud chugging sound of a large box truck emanated from the back alley, and acrid exhaust filled the kitchen as the rear door of the meathaus opened. The fat sous chef corralled the line of Sylee as quickly as possible out of the restaurant.

Fourteen climbed into the back of the box truck. The sides of the truck were emblazoned with the Barrati's logo, a Syl steak on a garnished plate. The sight of it would have turned his stomach if he had one.

The inside of the box truck was only slightly smaller than the room where they had waited, and they all fit comfortably inside. Fourteen could sense waves of relief and anticipation from his kin, and he tried not to pollute their feelings with his own uneasiness.

As soon as every Syl was in the truck, the sous chef slammed the trailer door shut, latched it, then retreated back into the meathaus, locking the door behind him. The chugging engine revved, the truck lurched, and the illicit cargo was on the move.

Fourteen had never known his own world, but he could sense the pain of loss strongly from the elders who had been born there. Sometimes, the desperate longing of the elders was so powerful that Fourteen could see their very thoughts; he could feel the wet rain, touch the soft leaves of the mother trees, and see the red skies of Syla through their memories. That there might be a place like Syla somewhere on this Earth seemed impossible to him.

"Wi-lamm-ett."

The word hurt his mouth again, but the sound of it made him smile. The other Sylee smiled with him.

It had been about six hours since the Barratti's truck left the restaurant when it began to slow down; Gina had said it would be closer to nine hours before they arrived. A wave of worry spread through the senses of the Sylee, shared equally amongst them. The truck came to a halt, and Fourteen could hear voices outside of the truck. Blue and red lights flashed in the small ceiling vents, filling the trailer with a sickly purple glare. He tried to understand the words, stifled as they were through the walls of the truck.

"FDA enforcement control, sir. Please produce your license, registration, and cargo manifest immediately."

"Yes sir, just a minute."

Fourteen could hear the driver of the truck moving inside the attached cab, then some clicks, the shuffling of paper, then a small slamming sound. He didn't know why they had been stopped, but he knew what the FDA was.

The FDA was responsible for making food safe for humans, and since Syl meat was food, they controlled the Sylee. The farmers, butchers, handlers, and keepers of the Syl farming industry, including the pen where he had been imprisoned with so many of his brothers and sisters, all worked for the FDA. He could sense the hate from his siblings on hearing the word.

"Manifest says rotted Syl. You're a long damn ways from the nearest processing facility, citizen."

"I know, sir. It's a special order for new plant in Bend, sir, time sensitive. They're paying extra for this primo Syl feed. I'm losing money every second we sit here, officer."

"I'm inspecting your cargo. There's an APB out for a Syl that escaped a farm in Irvine last night. Get the hell out of that truck and open the trailer door right now."

Fourteen tensed. He listened to the chugging of the engine cut out as the keys were removed from the ignition. The driver's door opened, then closed, and he heard two sets of footsteps approaching the rear door, keys jangling. The other Sylee stayed as still and silent as possible, desperate not to be discovered.

The keys jangled in the back door's lock, and the handle of the door's latch began to raise.

Fourteen extended his hand reflexively, spread his fingers and his arm began to glow once more. The latch twisted suddenly down into its slot, followed by a loud metallic clank, and the sound of a small, metal object clinking against the pavement. He had caused the key to break off in the lock.

The FDA officer uttered a string of profanity that Fourteen didn't understand.

"Get this door open immediately, or I'm having this piece of shit impounded! I'll be laughing as your profits turn to mush and drip out the bottom of this truck."

"I'm sorry, sir! I don't have a spare key or anything else that can open it. We're gonna have to cut the lock to get it open at this point. I mean, c'mon, is all this really necessary?"

"Citizen, you will do exactly what the fu-"

The high-pitched squeal of the FDA officer's communicator cut him off.

"Unit 40, you are advised to return to your post immediately, code 0851. Repeat copy. Over.

The officer spouted even more profanity Fourteen couldn't comprehend.

"Dispatch, returning to post, code 0851. Copy. Over."

Fourteen heard the officer stalk back to his car without another word, get in, slam the door shut, and peel away. The driver returned to the front of the truck and jumped back into the cab. The chugging of the engine started up once more, and the truck lurched ahead.

A few hours later, Fourteen and his Sylee siblings reached Willamette. When they had stopped, the driver opened the back door with Fourteen's help. Fourteen stepped out of the back of the truck and found himself awestruck.

A wave of happiness, shared by all of his kin, overwhelmed his senses as the back door of the truck swung open. Everywhere they looked were trees, deep green and rich brown. They were different than he expected, with skinny branches and densely packed thin green needles, but he could sense the life inside them.

There were no factories, farms, or industrial buildings anywhere in sight. The air was clear and damp, like his shared memories of Syla. Fourteen dug his toes into the ground, absorbing the pure, clean nutrients from the soil.

His ears stood up for the first time in his life. His people could be happy here.

Fourteen heard the sound of another engine, quieter this time, then saw an olive drab Jeep turn the corner and park next to the box truck. A large man with long dark hair, a long beard, and an easy smile clambered out of the Jeep and walked right up to Fourteen. He was wearing a brown uniform with a green tree patch on the left breast of his shirt.

"Welcome to Willamette! I'm Ranger Lyle. The other guides will be here in a few minutes to help the rest of your people get to their new homes, but they told me you were the one to look for."

The driver of the truck got back in as soon as all the Sylee were safely out, waved at the ranger, and took the south road out of the forest.

"They said you'd pass, and I think they're right. Contacts and ears for sure, but you'll look almost human once we get a new nose made for you. From now on, it's our job to keep the forest safe."

The ranger slapped Fourteen on the back enthusiastically.

"You think you can handle that?"

Fourteen nodded and smiled.

"Come with me then. Hey! What's your name?"

"For-tin"

"You say Fourteen, boy? That's a number, not a name. What a shame."

The ranger thought for a moment, staring at the free Syl standing next to him. He drummed his fingers on his furrowed chin in contemplation.

"I think we'll call you Sam."

They Said

Nicole A'sha Hall

Love and not hate they said.

Shelter and not abandon they said.

Care and not be selfish they said.

Stay healthy and not sick they said.

Smile and cry less they said.

Be curious and not devious they said.

Listen and not to be judgmental they said.

Hold your head up and even higher they said.

Open your eyes to the sunrise they said.

Be realistic and don't wear a disguise they said.

Does anybody else hear the words we say?

Graves

Jasmine Ayler

I constantly check behind my back to make sure I'm alone.

"I told you not to do this." I direct towards him. I pick the shovel I brought with me up off the rain-soaked grass. Since it's so late at night, the cemetery is closed. I hope to be the only one here. My hands drive the tool into the ground and begin digging on top and around of his grave. "You shouldn't have gone there alone!"

While I'm busy removing the earth, he hails, "I won't do it ever again, I promise." As I hear his words, my pace quickens. "There's not much air down here. Hurry!" The panic in his voice causes me to feel weak.

"I'm trying as fast as I can!" I yell through the loud, descending water.

"You're not going to make it..."

I smile at the sound and feeling of the shovel head scraping against his casket. I jump down and clear fresh dirt off its surface.

Through strangled breaths, all I can say is, "I-I'm, I am here."

"Get me out now!"

I examine the large rectangle and crack it open with my shovel. "Why do these people seal it so tight?" I put all my strength in until I see the lid budging.

"I'm not sure."

His voice is close.

One last force sends the top open, exposing nothing but emptiness. I sink to my knees from bewilderment.

Moments later, I crawl out of the hole I've dug. My pants and shoes have seethed mud from the time I took idling. I watch it run from my clothes as the rain showers above me. I retrieve my shovel once more and start walking away.

"Don't leave me here!" he calls out.

Memoir of a Survivor *“Sexual Assault Trigger Warnings”*

Anonymous

The sun was just beginning to set as we pulled over the black SUV.

“I’ll be right back,” he told me. As he got out of the car, I turned the knob on the ceiling just above the rearview mirror. The microphone system allowed me to hear all that was being said. “Why didn’t you pull over when I first turned my lights on? What took you so long to pull over?” he asked the driver. The driver mumbled an excuse I couldn’t quite make out.

The officer went over the usual spiel of “do you know why I pulled you over today?” and asked for the driver’s license and registration. As he walked back to the car, his name plate and badge caught the light to temporarily blind me. When he got back in the car, he ran the driver’s license and registration—finding a clean record—he decided to let the driver off with a warning. “Make sure you get that tail light fixed,” he warned the driver, “and pull over when you first see my lights; don’t keep driving trying to find a street to turn on to.” I turned off the microphone system as he headed back to the car.

“You hungry?” he asked me as he ducked back into the car. I was, so we drove to Burger King to eat. It wasn’t until he was sitting in the booth that I noticed how much bulk his uniform added to his already strong build. I couldn’t imagine him being able to fit in the tiny desks we had in class (he already had to squeeze in the wooden seat/chair combination) in his uniform. He did look very sharp in the black get up. He wore (what looked to be) freshly pressed black slacks. Around his waist was his belt on which was fixed his gun in its holster on his right hip, in front of which rested the ammo pouch. At the back of the belt in line with his spine was his handcuff pouch. The left side of his belt was cluttered with pepper spray, glove pouch, expandable baton, flashlight, and his walkie-talkie. His black shirt was just as crisp as his pants. His chest seemed to bulge a bit due to the bulletproof vest that was hidden underneath. After we were done eating our burgers and fries, we went back out to patrol the streets.

Our next call was to a residence where a man had shot himself in the head. “Hold on,” the officer told me as he flipped on the lights and sirens. He slammed his foot on the accelerator as we sped toward the scene weaving through traffic and blowing through the lights. Turning into the parking lot of the apartment complex, he shut off the sirens. We were the first unit to arrive. A few seconds later, the ambulance and another squad car arrived. We walked up to the pale-yellow apartment and met a woman at the back door of the apartment. She led us through the living room and pointed to the room her son was in. The police chief then took her outside to get a statement from her. In the room, there was a male in his mid-forties on the floor with a bullet hole through his head. The gun lay just above his right hand, and there was blood all over the side of the wall. The man was still alive—barely. He laid there; his breathing was agonal. There was nothing we could do for him but watch him die. We could see the blood leaving his

extremities—turning paper white—trying to keep blood flowing to his heart during his last few moments. I'd seen people who had died before—people in comas—but to stand and watch a conscious, not physically sick person die right in front of me was different. I wondered what haunted him so much. What pushed him to the point of breaking, making him take his own life?

After he took his last breath and was declared deceased, we got the statement from his mom. She said her son had schizophrenia and a drinking problem. She stated that he drank everything in the house and asked her to take him to the liquor store, so he could buy more. She was doing dishes at the time and told him, "no." He then returned to his room shut the door and blared the TV. She continued doing the dishes and then heard the shot, ran into his room and saw him on the floor and called 911. I couldn't help but feeling sad and sorry for this man. He had fallen victim to himself—to the voices that haunted him. I was sorry for his mother too; I couldn't imagine the lies she was believing about herself right now, how she failed her son, but she hadn't. There wasn't much she could do. Those voices must have tormented him day and night until he couldn't fight anymore. The police chief told us we could go, that there wasn't much more we could do. The rest of the night my thoughts were with the man and his mother. I was reminded of when my friend Billy had committed suicide, but he was the victim of his sadness rather than voices.

Our shift was pretty calm the rest of the night. Apart from helping at a couple fender benders, there wasn't much excitement. Around 22:00, we got called to a park where security had found two girls half naked in a car. When we got there, both girls were obviously drunk but had put their clothes on. We found an open bottle of Grey Goose in the backseat. We gave both girls a breathalyzer (per protocol) though we already knew the results. They were both over the legal limit, but since the car was parked there wasn't much we could ticket them for. The officer decided to be nice and drive them home. By the time we had dropped them off our shift was almost over, so we went and filled up the car and headed back to the station.

As he drove back to the station, he tried to make small talk about something other than the day's events. "So you ready for the big test Friday?" he asked me.

"Honestly," I answered, "not really. I haven't had much time to study."

"We can go to my place and study for it if you want," he offered. Man, he's such a nice guy, and I need all the help I can get, I thought. "Sure, that'd be great," I told him. We pulled into the station, parked the car and headed inside.

"I'm going to go change real quick. That's my desk you can hang out there I'll be right back." He headed through the door that I assumed led to a hallway where the locker rooms were. I walked over to his desk and sat down and looked at the pictures on it. "Ready?" he asked as he came back in the room, I replied with a "yep" and a nod. "We can take my car, and I can bring you back when we're done," he suggested. I said it sounded like a plan and we walked out to his car.

The drive to his place took maybe ten to fifteen minutes. The whole time we joked about our criminology class and how neither of us was very prepared for the upcoming test. We pulled into the garage of his duplex and headed up the stairs which led into the duplex itself. The door from the garage opened into the living room which had an open kitchen connected to it.

"Have a seat, I'm going to use the restroom," he told me and gestured toward the black leather love seat. I sat down and took a look around the room. It was a nice little duplex; there were toys off in one

corner for when his son visited and a medium-sized flat screen TV. In front of me there was a nice black coffee table. The room was covered in an off-white plush carpet. The open kitchen had a counter that wrapped around the two far walls. "Do you want something to drink?" he offered.

"What do you have?" I asked him.

"Well, I have one Smirnoff Ice and some Heineken, but for an underage girl like you, I have Sprite," he teased me.

"I'll take the Smirnoff," I told him.

"Now what kind of cop would I be if I allowed a 19-year-old to drink?" he said jokingly.

"An off duty one," I retorted. "I can handle my alcohol."

I got up and asked where the bathroom was. He pointed down the short hallway and told me it was the last door on the right. The hallway was carpeted with the same soft carpet as what was in the living room; I walked past the first door and to the bathroom. There were stairs to my left that led to bedrooms, I assumed; the wall in front of me displayed more pictures of his son. I walked back to the living room and sat back down on the love seat, next to him. My drink was opened for me and sitting on the coffee table. I grabbed it and started drinking.

"What kind of questions do you think will be on the test?" I asked him. He shrugged and said he didn't know. I turned to face him. "Should we get started?" I asked. He said sure. I leaned down to grab my stuff out of my bag, I felt a little dizzy as I leaned down and got back up. My dizziness must have shown on my face.

"You okay?" he asked me.

"Yeah, I was just a little light headed," I told him. He leaned forward, toward me. I thought it was to reach my things. Instead, he kissed me. He then pulled me on to his lap and continued kissing me. I tried to squirm, but my muscles wouldn't seem to obey. I managed to pull my face slightly away from his. "I don't want to do this," I gasped. He then picked me up and started walking down the hallway. He pinned me against the wall near the stairs to readjust his hold on me. "Please," I begged, "don't do this." He carried me up the stairs to a room. He laid me on the bed and began to undress. I kept screaming at my body to do something—anything! But it wouldn't—why can't I move?! What happened next, I'm sure you can guess. The exact details I can't recall. It's still a blur to me; it's like a movie that skips from a portion being fast forwarded too much.

The next thing I vaguely remember is him throwing a towel at me and telling me, "Clean yourself off." Next thing I know I'm back at the station in my car. I called my roommates and told them I was going to my mom's house for the night because I didn't feel well, and I was planning on going down there in the morning anyway. Part of me still wonders if I did it to punish myself, or if I was hoping she would be the protective mother I needed.

I drove to her house feeling as if I was in a dream, still dazed. When I got there, I parked in the driveway next to my mom's car. As I walked up the sidewalk to the front door, I went slowly, not sure if my legs would hold me. Quietly, I unlocked the door and slipped in. I managed to make it through the kitchen and living room to the hallway past the bathroom and into my room. It's the same as it was two years ago; nothing has been moved or changed. The room still haunted me, maybe even more so after what had just happened.

I crawled into my bed and started sobbing; too scared to sleep I stared at the ceiling replaying what had happened to me in this room by my brother-in-law, five years ago, two years ago, and what happened tonight. Memories taunted me, and I began hyperventilating. I just wanted to forget, erase these things from my mind. I heard my mom moving around, and I knew it was time for me to pull it together, to put on a smile and make her day. I carefully got up and went into the bathroom and washed my face hoping it wasn't splotchy from all my crying.

"Good morning, Mom," I chimed as I came out of the bathroom to meet her in the hallway.

"Well, good morning. This is a surprise. I thought you weren't coming until later," she replied.

"Well, I wasn't planning on it, but then I thought I'd surprise you and come early, so we could spend more time together," I lied.

"What a nice surprise!" she beamed. I smiled back trying to mask my wanting to break down again.

"I'm going to go take a shower really quick," I told her trying not to sound so hurried.

"Okay," she said and turned into the kitchen to make something for breakfast. I ran downstairs to the shower and turned on the hot water. I buckled into a ball and began crying again.

I tried to burn the shame, guilt, and fear off my skin, as I scrubbed the evidence of the night before down the drain.

* * *

I write this not because I want pity because I don't. I write this because I hope that putting this down on paper—rather than having it stuck in my head—will help me gain more healing from this than what I've found so far. Also, I believe it is an important memory, as crazy as I may seem for saying that, but I have grown a lot from this experience in many ways. The biggest is the healing, even being able to talk or write about it is a victory in and of itself. I used to hate myself for this. For the longest time, I blamed myself for what happened. Sometimes, in moments of weakness, I still do for allowing myself to be vulnerable—raped—again. I used to think I did something to deserve it. I used to think I was dirty, defiled, untouchable.

Now, I realize those are lies. I didn't ask to be violated. I didn't ask for my trust to be betrayed. I used to look at myself as a victim, but that's not what I am. I am a survivor. I used to think the fact that I was raped meant I was weak, but it made me strong. How? Because this isn't what defines me. Raped is not who I am. I survived. Unlike that poor man who fell victim to himself and the voices that never left him alone. Unlike many other women who have been raped and that was the last event in their lives. Mine was not. I survived.

Another reason, the main reason I write this is there are other women who have had the same thing done to them. Currently, it is what defines them because that's what they've come to believe, that they are damaged goods and nothing more. If you are one of these women, I'm talking to you.

You are so much more. You are not damaged goods.

I believed this about myself for years. I still have to fight those thoughts, but they don't control my life anymore. My hope is that this inspires you to change your thinking about yourself and to give you hope. You can get over this. This is not who you are.

I was asked if this changed me. It most definitely did. I used to be trusting of everyone I met. Now, people must earn my trust especially men. I won't be in room with a man unless there is someone I trust with me. I have a hard time respecting authority figures now. My heart still races every time I see a cop, in fear it might be him. If I'm at a get-together, I get my own drink, and it doesn't leave my sight. When I go somewhere, I locate all possible exits from all possible areas I might be. I'm much more observant. I have insomnia and am a light sleeper; I used to sleep through almost anything. I'm paranoid especially at night. I am also very protective of my friends. I've been told I have PTSD from this, and while the symptoms are there and I know it, I'm still too proud to admit it. I used to be an unsuspecting person when it came to "bad things" happening; now, I expect the worst but hope for the best. I can be a skeptical person now, where I used to try to believe the best in everyone. My thoughts about myself have changed time and time again.

I have found that as much—as I want to forget and erase this part of my past—I hold onto it because it has helped make me a stronger person. Having to face this memory to be able to write it down caused the pain to resurface. I found that—as much as I didn't want to put this on paper—I needed to because it still had a strong hold on me. While I don't expect to ever be over it, I hope writing it down can help me live better with it instead of trying to push it away.

Mirror

Jasmine Ayler

Standing before me is something unknown, aberrant in fact. My mind races through phases of disgust as I stare into the figure's eyes. I flicker my attention onto something else, but it pins right back. Tears begin to accumulate and lick down my face, as the way rain droplets do upon a sloped surface during a cool, stormy evening. The air I'm enveloped in freezes my tears' tracks. I glare at the ground beneath, keeping record of all the tiny, salty parcels coming from me.

Pressing my palm into a tightened fist, I focus back onto the guise. I strike the mirror once. Nothing occurs. Striking again, it fractures. Each blow sends an excruciating ache up my arm, which makes me whimper softly. Blood trickles down my hand, but I don't stop. I can't stop.

I hit the glass once more and study it. Intricate cracks have exploded throughout, yet it stays in its rectangular form. A fragile but beautiful motif is left behind, something I haven't seen in perpetuum. My limb throbs from my most recent wound; I bite my lip hoping to distract from the pain.

I pull back and bash into my distorted reflection. Bits descend to the ground, leaving the blaring sound echoing in my ears.

I kneel on the floor and see myself anew, except this time, I'm in pieces.

Intro. to Community

Kayla Schenkelberg

"Give me some more/Time in a dream/Give me the hope/To run out of steam" (The 88). Somebody told me to try out a TV show called *Community*, and I heard this song for the first time, but definitely not the last. Five seasons later and I now do an awkward upper-body-only dance whenever the title sequence song starts playing. *Community* is a little-known secret in TV-land, but I always watch this diamond in the rough when it airs Thursdays at 8/7c on NBC. The story centers around a study group made up of a wannabe activist, delusional geek, ignorant jock, offensive divorcee, moral mother, and a straight-A ex-junkie all led by an anti-hero protagonist named Jeff. He eventually grows from a snide, narcissistic pseudo-lawyer into a loyal friend—though he's still sarcastic. Don't be hindered by the title, *Community* is relevant to a broader audience than just a community college student like me. The show runners have created a new kind of TV show, and the characters are an explosive mix of social class, race, gender, religion, age, and personalities that have a chemistry rarely seen in your typical sitcom.

I can't imagine not being able to see *Community* for the treasure that it is. However, I need not look farther than the negative comments on Metacritic.com to find a collection of cynics calling the show "dull, stupid, and pointless" and "the most offensive show I have ever seen." I cannot help but wonder if these people have ever heard of *SpongeBob* or *South Park*? Certainly, *Community*'s quick, witty scripts and friendly jokes rise above the crude and stupid humor found on other channels. To generalize judgments against the show, a number accuse *Community* of thinking itself hilarious while being "unfunny" and "boring" with stereotypical characters. Well, I cannot deny that *Community* finds itself amusing and does not fail to display that self-confidence in self-referential lines, but this trait adds to the personality of the show. As for the complaint that the show is "boring" and "not funny," these points are very difficult to argue with since they are accompanied by loads of supportive research and are not solely a personal preference of humor. To anyone who claims that the ensemble of characters in *Community* are stereotyped: you are completely right, but you maybe fail to see the character development throughout even one season of the show. For example, Troy's character begins as your typical self-centered, bullying, high school jock but then shatters the stereotype by transforming into a quirky, sensitive friend with an endearing innocence. This change happens almost effortlessly unlike the show's struggle to stay on air to keep its characters alive.

Unfortunately, this little show has had a magnificent fight to get each of its five seasons renewed. The *Daily Times* confirms that *Community* "fans may be modest in number, but their loyalty, or something, has convinced NBC to keep renewing the show long after by all normal standards it should have flunked out." No one is completely sure why *Community* survived this long against all odds. It's "a mess ratings-wise, but it...still draws largely unabashed love from critics (and from its shrinking but passionate group of fans)," says critic Alan Sepinwall in *The Hollywood Reporter*. This love is apparent with high scores in online film reviews; according to Rottentomatoes.com, a popular source of film critiques, *Community* has scored a very respectable ratings range of 76-92 throughout its five seasons. Despite critics' praise and the convincing numbers, some unenthused viewers aren't to be charmed by *Community*'s eccentric humor or its fantastic adventures like a zombie apocalypse, a Claymation episode, a crime show investigation using puppets, and an epic paintball war! Yet, however high *Community* soars into the clouds, it always grounds its audience with some truths relevant to our lives in the real world.

The most overdone issues discussed in the news and political debates, like sexism and racism, are also addressed in *Community*. Miraculously, the show manages not only to avoid taking a definite stance on issues but also to note these problems without offending any particular side. *Community*'s approach acknowledges their existence and importance, but excludes all the aggressive arguments that often accompany such topics. In the show, Britta's character regularly gives voice to a feminist point of view, thus providing representation of feminism. And unequal representation of race in the media is recognized when Abed proposes to sacrifice himself to get Troy to safety then explains, "Troy, make me proud. Be the first black man to get to the end" ("Epidemiology"). Even what has been called reverse racism is addressed when Jeff hears the study group talking about "white Abed"—a guy named Joey who looks identical to Abed—and asks if that makes Abed "brown Joey," at which Shirley gets offended and implies that Jeff is being racist ("Physical Education"). Scenes like these bring up real world issues, most often in a humorous way that doesn't darken the mood, but still prompts viewers to consider the significance of the problems. But *Community* doesn't limit itself to popular issues; it also comments on the problems viewers seldom see acknowledged.

In addition to issues brought up constantly in media, *Community* sometimes hits viewers with problems that we often don't consider as dilemmas. Sometimes, the reference is hidden beneath humor, like when Shirley consoles Jeff as he trains to beat Europeans at foosball: "Jeff, you don't need to worry what foreigners think about you; that's your birthright as an American" ("Foosball and Nocturnal Vigilantism"). Even though we, as Americans, often joke about our obnoxious ethnocentrism, *Community* takes a serious jab at it and forces viewers to acknowledge their self-centeredness. The show becomes more personal at other times and slaps us in the face with reality in the middle of some amusing, lighthearted scenes. For example:

[Abed is filming a documentary]

ABED: Jeff, I think you should play the role of my father.

JEFF: I don't wanna be your father.

ABED: See? You already know your lines. ("Introduction to Film")

Unexpected scripts like this stab me in the heart and bring to mind the statistics that say less than half of the families in America are intact. In *Community*, Abed's character grew up without his mother and with a grieving father who doesn't understand him. Viewers are forced to remember that situations like this are commonplace, and the sympathy felt towards Abed is relevant to a great number of real people. Fortunately, *Community* doesn't dwell on these topics for long but springs quickly forward into the next round of playful entertainment.

Unlike many other shows, *Community* relates to its audience through constant pop culture references instead of using dumb, crude satire of real life issues and stereotypes. While re-watching several episodes of *Community*, I tried keeping track of all the humorously misquoted allusions made to other TV shows and movies. I failed miserably. The writers of the show seem to have an infinite supply of references up their sleeves, ready to use when viewers are least likely to expect them. Like in "Modern Warfare," Abed rescues a defenseless Jeff from an attacking paintball player using epic slow-motion, action movie moves and then turns to Jeff and says, "Come with me if you don't want paint on your clothes." This is a hilarious twist on *The Terminator* and exaggerates the absurdity of a simple paintball game turning the campus into some sort of paint-pocalypse dystopia. Even modern trends like the nose-goes game (popular in my generation, at least) or our recent fascination with a zombie apocalypse appear in *Community*.

While *Community* often follows the script of any normal TV show, faithful viewers know that the typical sitcom moments inevitably prelude something completely unexpected and far from status quo:

[The study group tries to convince Abed to approach a girl.]

ANNIE: Well, do you think there's a version of yourself that might go over there?

ABED: [enthusiastically] Absolutely.

ANNIE: Can you be him?

ABED: OK. [Abed starts stalking intimidatingly towards the girl, sticking out his tongue and hissing, while splaying his fingers dramatically. The group rushes to drag him away.]

BRITTA: What the hell was that?!

ABED: A different version of me. I think he was a vampire. [Wiggles eyebrows.] ("Physical Education")

Scenes like this are so ridiculous that they either frighten viewers away or further endear the show to fans' loyal hearts. Personally, this scene in particular sends me into fits of laughter.

The show has its own quirky humor, and it's not the base, senseless kind of humor that pervades many other shows. *Community* is clever—witty—and keeps its viewers on the edge of their seats by taking risks that most other TV shows wouldn't dare. Whole episodes parody *The Godfather*, the Civil War, *Doctor Who*, *The Matrix*, and the apocalypse. And there are numerous scenes where the show plays dangerously close to the fourth wall. In a *Glee* satire episode *Abed*, in the midst of a duet with the *Glee* Club music director, sings, "Everything's cooler when cameras are spinning" as the camera spins around the choreographed singers ("Regional Holiday Music"). This is only one of many instances where the show pokes fun at itself in a self-reference that is startling to newcomers to the show. In an online discussion, my classmate applauded *Abed*'s "metacritical character" for adding "a new dimension to the modern sitcom." The type of meta consistent in *Community* contributes to the characteristics that make it special. But even without breaking the fourth wall, *Community* interacts with the audience through the inspirational speeches that Jeff monologues or the moral lessons learned by the study group.

Despite the tied-with-a-bow endings, *Community* is definitely not your ordinary sitcom. While the vast majority of TV shows scramble to present some kind of new, bigger truth to the audience, *Community* reminds you of those simple universal truths that you learned as a kid: "Be yourself," "Don't judge by appearance," and "Everyone is special." These cliché sayings aren't any less true today, and *Community* demonstrates this in the midst of all of its delightful weirdness. An article from *Newsday* states that *Community* "can be fresh, funny, smart and extremely aware of its own cleverness; it also can be terrifically odd--odd good, or odd bad, or sometimes odd-good-bad-strange all at once." Decide for yourself whether *Community* is just a peculiar TV show with wacky situations and trite proverbs or if there is something more complex that keeps us hooked on the show. "And I can't count the reasons I should[n't] stay/ One by one they all just fade away" (*The 88*). But fans' love for the show will never fade.

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Just a Community No Longer

Nick Stuetelberg

What's happened to American television? Every single big network sitcom—with exception to a few—seems to play towards an audience that isn't actually there. Now, that's not my way of saying these shows aren't popular, because as many readers can attest, shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and *Two and a Half Men* attract audiences topping 19 million and 8 million viewers per week respectively (Kondolojy). That's insane! As a lover of comedy, I can't help but scratch my head when watching these two programs. While these Chuck Lorre-produced sitcoms are nothing spectacular in their own rights, they are at the forefront of something horribly wrong in American culture: our inability to sit down and pay attention to what's going on in front of us. Shows like *The Big Bang Theory* continue to perpetuate our ignorance as a society to see the real humor in relationships and group dynamics, instead choosing to eschew its responsibility to treat characters like actual people in order to regurgitate the same predictable jokes week-in and week-out. Really, just think about it for a moment. What shows can you think of that accurately reflect the complex, flawed people we human beings are and how we interact with each other?

This question is why I found myself so surprised by a hopeful little show called *Community* on NBC when it first premiered back in 2009. Sitting down to watch it, I had no expectations except that my friend pointed out to me beforehand that it starred a guy named Joel McHale, host of cable show *The Soup*, which points and laughs at the ridiculousness of modern American pop culture. *Community* was mind-blowing to me, really; and that first episode set up for something that no audience member could ever see coming—a resurrection of smartly written comedy not seen on network primetime since the days of *Seinfeld* and *Frasier*.

The surprise of this show came in an unlikely package. *Community* features a colorful cast of characters coming together to scrape by in a Colorado community college. Not exactly what comes to mind when thinking of expertly-crafted television, right? With sharp, fast-paced dialogue, however, and storylines with more twists heavily based in American pop culture, the show is what I consider to be truly representative of complex group dynamics in our modern society—a task that is not so easy to accomplish in the span of 21 minutes.

A typical episode of the show features the group's towering, confident leader, Jeff Winger (played by Joel McHale), facing down problems that threaten the cohesiveness of his study group-turned-friends-turned-family. Each character serves as a slice of the group pie, as it were, functioning at first to fill certain stereotypical roles (nerd, jock, et cetera) to which any kind of audience member can identify with. Annie Edison, the do-gooder and straight-A student, on the surface seems to be the one person who has it all together in life (despite her brief pill addiction in high school), but is often drawn out by the allure of taking on the role of someone new. Then, there is the passionately misguided activist, Britta Perry, whose attempts at analyzing everything in the show's little world often times reveals her own insecurities as a person during her attempts to steer the group in a morally acceptable path. A hardcore Christian and motherly figure, Shirley Bennet serves the group as a censor, often struggling between her default setting as a single mom with deeply ingrained prejudices and a woman fighting for independence. An unlikely

best friendship forms between the nerdy, robotic, and suspected Asperger's syndrome sufferer Abed Nadir (often serving as a narrator of the show's subconscious and self-aware nature) and former high school football star Troy Barnes. Finally, there is totally-out-of-touch-with-reality-baby-boomer Pierce Hawthorne, whose lowbrow humor and misogynistic, homophobic, and racist opinions put him in position as a child in need of looking after. Together, with a large, rotating cast of crazy classmates and school faculty, the group manages to embody the conflicted personalities that inhabit modern society while dealing with everyday problems. But seeing as this is a television show, their problems are far from being of the everyday variety.

In one iconic episode, and possibly my favorite, entitled "Advanced Dungeons and Dragons," the group finds itself playing the classic role-playing game to help boost the ego of a fellow classmate, Fat Neil, who they suspect is on the verge of committing suicide. Normally a subject to not be taken lightly, they handle the distressing feeling of a person on the edge by embracing the fantasy world Fat Neil often hides within. This episode reaches for heights far greater than what most other television shows are capable. With no animated visual representations for the plot set in a fantasy world imagined by the characters playing along, the story heavily relies on the acting abilities of its cast to make the viewer feel like they are really in a different world of crazy adventure where action, romance, and betrayal take hold:

[Jeff, who is visibly creeped out by Abed, the Dungeon Master, pretending to be an elf maiden willing to help them on their quest, is shunned by Abed, so Annie steps in instead.]

ANNIE: Alright. C'mon. Can we just do this? Hi- hello. I'm Hector, the Well-Endowed. You've got a bunch of pegasi. Let's make a deal.

ABED: [In his weird elf maiden voice.] What kind of deal?

ANNIE: Alright. I take her by the hand and lead her to the stable. I light a candle and rip off a piece of my tunic, which I fashion into a blindfold.

ABED: [Closes his eyes and raises his hand as if backing away, but wanting to hear more.] I'd like to, but I don't know if I---

ANNIE: Shhh. Shhh.

[Jeff looks at Annie with a weird look on his face, intrigued and confused by Annie's out-of-character sexual aggressiveness.]

ANNIE: I place it gently over the elf maiden's eyes. I slowly... [whimsical music reminiscent of something from Lord of the Rings starts playing, making the rest of Annie's dialogue inaudible as the rest of the group looks on. Troy is clearly interested in the sexual acts and starts taking notes.] [The camera pans over the table of the study group- Shirley in horror, Britta indifferent, and Troy listening intently to Annie as he continues to take notes. Annie and Abed exchange business-like conversation about the affair, and subtle hand gestures give us some idea of what they're really doing.]

ABED: [The music finishes, and with his arms fake tied up, Abed collapses into his chair] Umph! [Now out of character.] Okay. You both fall back exhausted, but still entwined.

ANNIE: [She falls out of character and is peppy as normal in response.] Great. I stroke her hair lovingly and spoon her for the appropriate amount of time before leaving.

TROY: [Looking up from his note-taking] How long is that?

To me, the show's search for an identity is one of its greatest attributes. Even when the gang is caught up in a whirlwind of fantasy and drama, the clout of *Community's* dialogue is what anchors the show while it reaches for so much more. This episode, with the characters all simply sitting around their large six or seven-person desk in the campus' study room (where much of the show takes place as the characters' home on campus) shows what can be done in a 21-minute span when done right. There are no constant flashbacks or mock interviews to gain extra laughs. No. Instead the genius is how the characters play off each other.

For some viewers, expecting one's mind to be solely focused on a television show for a half-hour on Thursday night might be asking too much. A more unusual complaint that piqued my interest, though, was an article from *GQ* contributor Larry Fitzmaurice, in which he says: "Community's writers are unconcerned with their characters attaining some sort of personal growth" (Fitzmaurice). Going back and examining these characters in other seasons actually reveals something quite contrary to Fitzmaurice's point. The freshman season of *Community* gave us hollow—albeit lovably hollow—characters that were firm in their beliefs and put the show in a spot that could often feature plots revolving around a melting pot of modern America's different people. Interestingly enough, the show has quickly evolved in the five short years it's been on air, which has led to these once simple characters stepping out of their default identities as cogs in the machine to challenge the very nature of formulaic characters in television. Not only do we see the heroes become villains and vice versa, but relationships are constantly being tested and reformed.

Further illustrating my point, a season two episode entitled "Virtual System Analysis" sees Annie trying to coax Abed away from his fear of growth and change. Abed's fear manifests itself in a bizarre way with an empty bedroom in his and Troy's apartment called the "Dreamatorium." What Troy views simply as their place to escape the world and feel like kids again while emulating their favorite show, *Inspector Spacetime* (a *Doctor Who* ripoff), is revealed to mean so much more to Abed. Not only is he scared of being abandoned by his maturing friend, but Abed also fails to realize that his anxieties about the future are shared by practically everyone. It's in this moment of weakness, where Annie, who has been forced in the episode to embrace the imaginative world of scenarios which Abed's fears have taken form, that growth is captured.

While people may feel it is an easy way to dismiss the show as nothing spectacular with a similar excuse to Fitzmaurice's, a multitude of others clamor for the continuation *Community*. "It's at once a goofy, shenanigans-driven comedy, a self-aware commentary on pop culture, and an examination of ethical and philosophical concepts, and it demands to be viewed on all three levels simultaneously" (Seitz). Critical appraisal, fan loyalty, and hilariously unsubtle product placement have gotten us closer to fulfilling "six seasons and a movie," which inadvertently became the chant of *Community* after Abed used it in several episodes in reference to then-struggling and eventually cancelled NBC superhero show *The Cape*.

If I'm honest though, being a fan of *Community* hasn't been easy since the start. Now in its fifth season, the show has managed to hang onto its 3-million weekly viewers (Kondolojy). However, in what is already a peculiar show with a group of smart, loyal fans that have high standards for the program, these challenges in the Thursday night primetime lineup battling *The Big Bang* juggernaut have not been helped by NBC in many ways. Speaking last year on the struggles of *Community* and its partner show, *Parks and Recreation*, the network president, Robert Greenblatt, had this to say: "We just can't

get the audience for them. They tend to be a little bit more narrow and sophisticated than you want for a broad audience" (qtd. in Yeoman). NBC's tactic to fix this audience issue included piling money on top of practically every sitcom pilot script that's come its way, which in turn has put my beloved show on extended breaks (hiatuses, really) several times since 2009. Not only has this quick-fix attitude with random injections of lowbrow sitcoms into the lineup led to the suffering of the show in gaining traction with new possible viewers, but a public dispute between eccentric show-runner, creator, and executive producer, Dan Harmon, and Chevy Chase, who played irritating Pierce Hawthorne, maimed the program in a number of ways. Due to this highly publicized argument between two creative egos, it led to the resignation of fearless leader Harmon before season four and the eventual departure of Chevy Chase at the end of that season.

There is a bright side to this whole conundrum though. While I do admit the show was somewhat torn apart (dumbed down, really) in season four, in which Dan Harmon did not take part, his return for this current season has been, in my opinion, incredible in many aspects. In the meta (self-aware) nature of the show, season five has been labeled as something of a "reboot" with the characters blaming the horribleness of last year's episodes on a school-wide gas leak. Although this new season has forced us to say goodbye to Abed's partner-in-crime, the lovable Troy, *Community* feels like a return to form. And by "form" I mean spiraling into complete and utter insanity with episodes like "Analysis of Cork-Based Networking," which includes affable Annie infiltrating an underground janitor society at Greendale alongside grumpy Professor Hickey, played by *Breaking Bad* alum Jonathan Banks, and having to go on a favors-for-favors mission like getting the porn-blocker on the custodial computers removed just in order to get a hilariously small project done.

At a time when *Community* is attempting to reestablish itself as the television show fans like myself have come to love, now more than ever is the perfect time to join in and figure out what it's all about. In a world where it is all too easy to cash in on formulaic, predictable characters, the show bravely eclipses these farces to deliver genuinely memorable laughs and heartfelt moments, which will leave you wishing to be part of their world even if only for just an episode. And plus, who knows? Maybe you'll even learn a thing or two:

JEFF: I would do anything for my friends, which I think is how everyone in the world feels. Which is why I finally understand war.

Well, maybe not.

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Haircut

Nicole A'sha Hall

You take a detour through the halls
I see that you're short but stand tall
I see your tattoo behind your left ear
I like it
I wish I could do it
I love your haircut
Shaved sides
With a wide smile
I can tell you're strong
I can tell that you want to be bold
With that haircut
I almost talked to you
You're always a bench away
Then I realize
You're always a class away
I'm scared
Why, I hope you'll ask
I'd probably answer, it's your stare
It's empty but full of good looks
I wish I was that decisive
Instead I stare from a distance and hope you notice me
I already notice you
And now it's your haircut
That has ahold of me

My Daddy's Fear

Jasmine Ayler

I want you to picture if you can a seven-year-old black kid sitting in his daddy's car thinking he's in so much trouble. My daddy has just told me to go sit in the car and wait on him to come out of grandma's house. My grandparents live dead smack in the middle of the hood. Their house is one of the quieter streets, but the projects are around the corner, and you can see crack heads and drug dealers from their porch. I'm watching fancy cars with big rims and loud music ride by every minute or so. When I look closely enough, I can see which way their hats are turned and whether or not they are smoking marijuana. I'm thinking to myself, "Man, those dudes are living the life."

As I'm daydreaming the car door opens and daddy gets in. Now my fear has returned, but he quickly reassures me than I'm in no trouble. Then he looks right at me and says, "Son, today we are going to take a drive, so I can show you some things that you need to see around here." I had absolutely no idea the impact this drive through the hood would have on me for the rest of my life.

As we pulled away from grandma's house in my daddy's burgundy Cadillac, Sam Cooke's "Made for Me" was playing from the tape deck. I glanced at my daddy's face, and his expression was one of pain and concern. I wasn't sure what it meant, but it worried me. Not far from grandma's, we came to a stop sign, and there were maybe ten or so guys on the corner. They wore baggy jeans, and their hats were cocked to the east. I learned early on what it meant if you wore your hat to the left; you were in a certain gang. A closer look revealed the guns tucked in their pants. I wondered how they kept the guns tucked in when their pants were down by their knees. It was something I never quite understood.

While at the stop sign, I heard guys calling out, "Hey, big Vince! How you doin'?" A couple guys simply said, "Wassup, Brah?" Daddy just waved and kept going. It was at that moment that he began to explain why we were out on this drive. He pointed to those guys and said, "Those guys have been out here for years and will be out here when you're older." I suppose I understood what he meant. On every corner, there were crowds of these guys. He cut the music down and told me he never wanted to see me on a corner. He asked me if I understood him, and I said I did.

Throughout our drive in the inner city, he peppered me with questions and provided insight about what I was seeing. Daddy explained the distinction between black men and niggas. I was shocked to hear my hero speak this way and tried to understand why he felt the need. At the age of seven, I could only grasp this on the surface. I figured black men took care of their homes and families. They also worked hard whether college educated or average factory workers. As if he could read my mind, he said, "Yes son, selling drugs to your own people and the willingness to kill someone over drugs would make you a nigga."

I asked him why the projects were so dirty, and he said it was because they failed to grasp the

idea of a presentable community outside the house or personal relationships. I thought to myself, "Why is this like this?" Guns, drugs, crack heads, and murder. I asked if there were good things about growing up in the projects, and he said yes. He explained there was a strong bond that formed between families that grew up under these circumstances. Aside from that, he didn't say anymore. I suppose he didn't want to. The drive wasn't about the good.

I would grow to learn that those bonds he referred to were only on a case-by-case basis. What I did grasp was the importance of all he said that day. Everything I saw on that drive motivated me to get out of there, make something of myself, and leave it all behind.

Imagine little me sitting in the passenger seat with my fresh haircut, polo shirt, and too-small shorts from a late-80s style my dad hadn't quite got away from. I was only seven yet was being forced to grasp the harsh reality of my culture. It wasn't as pretty or cool as it appeared. My daddy—my hero, my superman, my idol—was taking a firm stance against a lifestyle that seemed appealing.

That day is etched and burned in my mind. Whenever I take a drive through that part of town, I still see those very same guys sitting on those very same corners. For some reason, I never once doubted any of the things my dad explained to me that day. It has been and will always be the most important day of my life. It's the day that my daddy prevented me from being a statistic in the inner city of Rock Island, Illinois. My daddy has since passed on, but the memory of that day is still fresh to me. His words echo through my mind and their meaning through my heart.

I am twenty-nine now and a father myself. I fully understand my father's fear.

Rodeo Girls: Trashy Fun or Just Plain Trash?

Emily Scholtec

Late last year when Rodeo Girls premiered on A&E, there was a wide variety of responses from viewers. Some horse people were excited to see a show featuring their hobby on TV; many more were disgusted by the trashy nature of the reality show. Since the show aired in mid-December of last year, Rodeo Girls has ultimately surprised no one by depicting the sport of rodeo in an unrealistic and largely unflattering light. A large population of equestrians had sworn off the show ever since the promotional poster was released featuring a girl running a barrel pattern mid-turn wearing a pink bikini top, short shorts, boots, and a hat, with a whip in her mouth.

Before I launch into all the problematic parts of the show, I should point out that there are some positive aspects to Rodeo Girls. The first time I watched an episode of this show, I was concerned about how the women would be portrayed. I was pleasantly surprised to find that, despite the scripted, boy-drama fluff, all the girls were depicted like many female members of rodeo: tough and self-sufficient, but part of a larger community. Not only that, but their onscreen personas each had defining attributes other than "strong," which is important, yes, but a good female character needs more depth than being purely tough. Darcy LaPier struggles to find a balance between her love of rodeo and her home life as a single mother. Marvel Murphy wins some money and takes it to a casino, hoping to make enough to fix the brakes on her trailer, but instead loses it all on a foolish bet. Barb West returns to the circuit after spending two years off with her husband, despite his hesitancy for her to return to competitive riding, and mentors rookie Jessica Holmberg. Amanda Gilroy of Popmatters went so far as to say that the women of Rodeo Girls, "though they might not see it this way themselves, ... emerge as post-feminist figures, with all the contradictions and complexities attached to the term." I would argue that—while embracing one's identity as a woman while competing in a very demanding, highly competitive sport is a wonderful thing—it should never come at the expense of one's equine partner, such as when, midseason, Darcy LaPier chooses to finish her makeup rather than properly warm her \$200,000 horse up before their run, which can permanently damage the equine athlete's legs.

However familiar we become with the ladies of the show, we never get the chance to develop the same connection with the horses we hear so much about. Only two of their names are mentioned in passing, and the viewer has to be paying attention to catch them. Halfway through the season, Darcy's controversial new \$200,000 liver chestnut horse disappears, inexplicably replaced by a buckskin. The audience is literally given no explanation for this. This is evidence that the show is not representative of real rodeo, where the horses are top focus, especially at the professional level, which these women are running in or trying to break into. In any discipline of equestrianism, a rider will often be remembered by her horse. However, after watching the whole

first season, I doubt whether most viewers would even be able to tell what each girl's horse looks like. In fact, the non-equestrian viewer is given the briefest possible explanation of the sport. The few real issues that rodeo competitors face that this series actually touches upon are unfortunately overshadowed by bickering in the barn aisle and drunken debauchery.

While Gilroy of Popmatters may argue that the women of the show are postfeminist figures, she concedes that "the boys don't live in a post-patriarchal world." Anthony is smarmy, womanizing, and misogynistic. Ty, while the same age or younger than the women of the show and not a barrel racer himself, thinks he knows best for the whole ensemble, and except for his cousin Marvel, the girls all accept his condescension unblinkingly. There is also no representation of people of color on this show.

Most viewers are not aware that main character Darcy LaPier is in fact an executive producer on the show, and in every episode, someone else seems to have a problem with her. She is literally these girls' boss, and yet they still act catty (downright bitchy) to her somewhere in every episode. At the conclusion of episode one, she is conveniently standing at a good spot for the cameras behind all the other cast members as they gossip nastily about how rodeo is her "rich girl hobby." Barb suggests that if she spent as much time training as she did on her makeup, she might actually win. Darcy, of course, is shocked by this betrayal and spends the rest of the season surprisingly trying to prove herself to the others. However, what Darcy doesn't realize is how scripted and predictable the girls' conversation and her reaction sound. Executive producer Darcy's new "rich girl hobby" is clearly this television show. She's out to make herself a Kardashian on horseback.

It's a shame that her "vehicle for D-list fame seek[ing]" (Saraiya, AVClub) had to come at the expense of hardworking cowboys and cowgirls who are nothing like the ones depicted on Rodeo Girls. In reality, rodeo is a family-friendly sport for spectators and competitors alike, but many families might, after watching even a few minutes of this show, reconsider heading down to the fairgrounds this summer to support their local chapter. Rodeo Girls depicts the sport as mostly "mattress hopping" and partying than serious competition. A local barn owner, who was the number one barrel racer in the state of Iowa last year, and whose oldest son was the number one Iowan bull rider, do not like the show about the sport they love so much. Give any person, especially an equestrian, a series about the reality of the show, and it would earn respect from other disciplines and interest from many non-horse people. Rodeo Girls depicts the entire sport of rodeo as one long, glamorous, drama-filled party, when in reality, the actual struggles of genuine rodeoers are often anything but.

However, the morality of Rodeo Girls all hinges on a deeper question: does reality television have an obligation to depict, well, reality? Troy DeVold, in an interview with AVClub, gives an example of a reality show about ten celebrities that share a house. He argues that while the premises for some reality shows may not be authentic, the reactions in them are, and the reactions are what we watch for. However, in Rodeo Girls, this seems to be the opposite. The premise is perfectly legitimate (a group of professional barrel racers hanging out together during the season), but the reactions and personas of the women on the show are all manufactured and plot-inspired.

Is this morally right? While some aspects of the show are so fictitious they seem comical to a real equestrian—such as the fact that they clearly filmed some of the girls' runs in a stadium with empty bleachers whereas other runs at the same rodeo have a full crowd—Rodeo Girls does excel in giving the viewer a glimpse into some real attitudes, politics, and issues that legitimate rodeoers face. However, the viewer almost has to already know what is real and what is not to form a valid conclusion about how much reality Rodeo Girls offers its viewers, and there are several aspects about rodeo depicted on the show that most rodeoers wouldn't want the general public to take away as reality. I don't believe that as many horse people would have such opposition to the show if, at the beginning of each episode, they had a short disclaimer that some of the action and dialogue is scripted, or if Darcy LaPier was more open about the fact that Rodeo Girls is her show.

Ultimately, is Rodeo Girls a successful piece of television? It depends. If, say, one needs a vacuous piece of television to put on after a difficult day to make yourself feel especially intelligent, levelheaded, and responsible, then perhaps. Otherwise, Rodeo Girls follows the same format as countless other tacky reality shows, just with a niche lifestyle background.

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