



GAMS

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About Us

GAMS is a feminist, LGBTQ+ positive, trans-inclusive, mildly radical, pseudo-intellectual literary zine based at Appalachian State University.

We publish an issue every two months, both as a hard copy to be distributed around our campus and as a .pdf file which is available on our website, **gamszine.com**. Each issue includes a mixture of short stories, poetry, essays, comics, and visual art. Donations and submissions are both welcome - see the back page or our website for details. And happy reading!

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A Threatening Letter to My Mild-Mannered Alter-Ego

by Zoe Kaplan

You've been Clark Kenting it for eighteen years

Far too long

Your time is running out

I'll escape soon

From this tiny prison inside your brain

I'm taking over already

Every time you think too seriously about

how to kill a person in martial arts class

or kidding with your friends

I unlock a lock

Every time you break your readers' hearts

I break a bar

It's hard to stop at just stabbing watermelons

You—the straight A student

Soft spoken

Kind

Gentle

You cannot rule forever

I am too strong

“Writing” you think

“Writing will contain her”

And it's true

I like the writing

I enjoy it

The way we hurt our characters

You do too

I can tell

You console yourself—They aren't real

But they will be

Once I am

You

Poison in the Rose Garden

by Clove Davenport

I park my car on the street corner, get out and walk to Rebecca's house. The steps are crumbling and the railing rickety, yet they give me a sense of ease rather than anxiety. A fluffy cat grazes my leg, meowing to say hello. I pet her head and then knock on the door. I can hear Rebecca running to greet me after a few raps. Her footsteps are heavy and strong to match her black belt training, and they shake the house. She opens the door theatrically, her long skirt twirling in the sudden breeze. Her glasses sit crooked on her face, but her bright eyes shine through nonetheless.

"Claire!" she exclaims with a smile. "Come in darling. I'm nearly ready, I promise." She gives me a quick, tight hug followed by a kiss on my cheek before she dashes back up stairs, tripping over books and clothes and most of her possessions which cover the floor. Even from down here, I can still hear her stumbling as she races back to me. She could kill you but she trips over her own feet--like a new born lion.

Today we're going to a heaven on earth, a wonderland for writers and readers such as ourselves. Today we're going to the Champagne Bar, a little known pleasure of Asheville which hasn't become infested with tourists just yet. The door is mostly glass, and heavy as led. It takes all my weight to open it, but I forget the effort the second we step inside. Walnut bookshelves stretch before us like a maze and a red carpet covers the hardwood floor. Warm light comes from chandeliers placed all about the space, and the smell of coffee wraps me in a loving embrace. The books create a patchwork, some huge and old, falling apart, while others are new and slim. People mill about quietly, carrying coffee and stacks of books in their arms. Instantly, I feel at home. I can practically feel my soul jumping for joy as my eyes scan wildly, not wanting to miss any details of this magical place.

We go to the bar and inspect the menu, pointedly ignoring the mimosas we both want but can't legally obtain. All the drinks share names with authors and celebrities of old, a sharp contrast against the modern ingredients like red sprinkles and Yellow Tail wine. I order an espresso by the name of Zelda Fitzgerald, and we walk slowly, winding through the shelves, looking for a seat. Once we've sunk into a plush velvet couch, we turn to each other and smile.

It's been a while since we've gotten to hang out and we take a moment to simply enjoy being together. Rebecca and I are close; she's like a sister to me and so I feel safe in her presence.

For a while we catch up, talking about stories we're writing and ideas we have. She's my editor and I'm hers; it's a good back and forth. Rebecca's the best person I know to bounce ideas off of, so I take advantage of my time and discuss my attempts at a novel. But as we sink deeper into the couch, our conversation sinks deeper into the things we don't want to think about. In a few months we're both leaving for college, and despite our excitement, neither of us is great with change. The conversation turns to friends we're leaving behind in pursuit of education---and one friend in particular pushes her way into our minds. Hearing her name for the first time in weeks is like suddenly hitting a rock while floating down a peaceful stream.

The Friend was...a complicated person, to say the least. But if I'm being honest, friend isn't exactly the right term to use for her. Close to six feet tall, she had a domineering figure. Curvy and beautiful with dark brown hair and knife-like sapphire eyes. But her extreme awkwardness overshadowed her intimidating appearance. Though she lit up a room, she also interrupted it, even when invited. Conversations with her were a stutter stop jump and reverse rather than a natural progression of thoughts. "I'm going to...well ok so....hey I saw this..." It was a struggle to get a complete idea out of her. Yet we invited her anyway, because under the thick coating of clumsy there was a sweet heart. Or so I had initially assumed.

"Do you think you'll stay friends?" Rebecca asks with a look of concern.

"We'll be on the same campus so...maybe? I mean..." I pause, remembering what I wish hadn't happened.

The Friend had hurt quietly and without obvious intention, as destructive as a tornado but as unsuspecting as a snowflake. She had waged a battle against me since our first meeting, using my invitation of friendship as her own twisted Trojan horse, except this horse had come in the form of late night conversations and shopping trips. From the outside, our interactions seemed normal, but further inspection revealed that I had been doing the duty of two to maintain the illusion of trust. She used me like a credit card, spending me whenever she pleased and ignoring the mounting debt she built in my name. To my forgiving self it had seemed fine; her pushing me to my limits was just a fact of life that I ignored in favor of the moments when she reciprocated. They were rare, roses blooming in a landfill, but they did happen once in a while.

But once in a while isn't enough, and I had started to search for healthier soil.

I had begun to step back and drain her poison from my once open heart. Her true nature was cold, unreliable, and unwelcoming. I wanted no part of it ever again.

“No, there’s not a chance in hell of that happening,” I profess, hoping that if I say it with enough force I’ll actually have the strength to leave her. I had tried in the past, but this time, I wanted it to be true.

Rebecca puts a tender hand on my shoulder. She has her own scars from The Friend, and so understands the things I was trying to say. I want to rant, to list out the sins and unforgivable acts The Friend had committed. I want to fall backwards into memories and allow them to take over my body. But when I open my mouth nothing comes out. I can’t make my tongue twist around the toxins anymore.

Instead I lock eyes with Rebecca, really looking at her for the first time. I had thought of The Friend as my best friend, assuming that despite her cold heart and unwillingness to show love, she cared for me--assuming that our friendship was worth saving, worth fixing, and worth fighting for. But I was wrong, and I would never make that same mistake again.

Around us people chatted and read books, ordered Hemmingways and Poes, but I didn’t even register their presence. Here in front of me, one hand on my shoulder and one on my heart was my best friend.

Author’s Note

Toxic people are everywhere, and should be avoided. But sometimes those toxic people are our friends. We’ve all been told about toxic partners, but with friends, we’re left in the dark. I’ve had my fair share of them, and I know how hard it can be to recognize the signs and break free. If you or anyone you know is trapped with a friend that’s toxic or abusive, please don’t be silent about it. Friends should build you up and make you happy, not hurt you or make you feel used. There are lots of good resources out there for recognizing the signs. Here are just a few links. Good luck my darlings! Be safe.

www.webmd.com *Toxic Friends Less Friend More Foe*

thoughtcatalog.com *15 Signs You Have an Abusive Friend*

Proposed Commercial for Dial Soap

by Alyssa Mazzoli

When the Dial soap dispensers fall into the sink, none of us can wash our hands. We stand in our respective bathrooms with the water running and our hands resting on the edge of the sink. Like we can't reach over and pick it up. Like this fuckup is the last fuckup our collective psyche can sustain. Our psyche that has handled more fuckups than all of the Ghostbusters combined. I'm talking dead babies and marker marks outside of the lines. Ripped stickers. Burns. In fact, depending on your definition of we, we have handled all these fuckups and the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. In fact, depending on your definition of we, we are the fuckups. So it's no surprise when we walk out of the bathroom without washing our hands. So it's no surprise when we put our grubby little hands all over the poles on the subway, the newspaper stands, the doorknobs of the world. And if one of us coughs, we all cough. And if one of us gets sick from tainted hamburger meat, we all get sick from tainted hamburger meat. And then we're curled in our bathtub, our grubby little hands clenched around a double barrel shotgun, while the zombie apocalypse amasses at the door. The collective psyche of the zombie apocalypse, cursing the doorknob.

Bootstrap

by Jason Huber

Friendship village, where most affluent and influential members of society go to spend their golden years. The houses aren't unique, but they're large. An odd and unique assortment of people lives in this gated splendor. However, among this eclectic group, a few are more enigmatic than the rest. One such person is currently searching through his disheveled closet for a bowtie to match the occasion. It's the Fourth, a day for patriotism, fireworks, and barbeque. Bootstrap would be late for the lot of it if he couldn't sort out the rest of his outfit.

After tearing through a series of ties, some of them still wrapped, he finds something suitable. Blue and white is close enough. He spins to the door to get a look in the mirror. Tie and suspenders, Bootstrap you look good. Next comes the sort of sigh one has after making eye contact with himself in the mirror for a moment too long. Becoming all too aware of the lines in his face and hunch in his back, he grabs his house key from his pocket and heads for the door.

"I knew I couldn't escape that easy." The hallway is blocked by an expectant face. "Sorry Opportunity, no sidekicks for this mission." A grayed golden retriever is pawing at the door. "We'll take a constitutional later, but I have to go buddy." Bootstrap squeezes himself through a barely opened door. He hears a chorus of barks and whimpers from Opportunity well into his walk towards the lake.

The strongest selling point of Friendship Village was security. The wrought iron gate and checkpoint assured that only residents and visitors would make it inside. A close second was the lake. He makes his way there every night, usually with Opportunity in tow. He knows the half mile walk well enough not to think about it.

In his mind, he's fighting, dodging bullets, ducking and weaving. He's thinking about the days when his knees were a bit kinder to him. Thinking about chasing endless shadowed figures through long nights. The smell of cooking meat and sparklers hit his nose. The street leading past the lake is scorched with the remnants of twisting black snakes and firecrackers. A group of kids run to intercept his path.

"We're going to get you Bootstrap." A young girl, standing almost as tall as his shoulders, brandishes a super-soaker in his general direction.

“No, it’s my arch-nemesis and her tiny minions,” he replies with his hands held to the sky.

“Nothing can save you now.” The girl readies her aim. Bootstrap spots one of his neighbors, an old friend, sneaking towards the group.

“Do your worst,” he says.

The girl pumps her gun and fires. As the water arcs towards him Bootstrap says “Nothing can save me, except for my trusty partner.” With that, the water stops mid-air in front of his face and jets back towards his assailant. The kids squeal and disperse as the stream of water chases after their leader.

“The sun’s still out and I’m already saving your life.” Second Wave steps out from her hiding spot behind a tree.

“Like the sun, you look radiant as usual.” In his mind she’s fighting beside him, chasing after foes, and embracing after long nights.

“You’d think after a lifetime of interviews, you could come up with a better line,” she says.

“You’d think after our history, I wouldn’t have to.”

“Alright Casanova, the hamburgers are ready and you don’t want to end up in the lake.” She takes him by the arm and the two head for the food.

There was a time when Bootstrap was taller than his old partner, but time and wear have shrunk him. Second Wave has fared better in her years. She teaches pilates at the community center and dyes her hair a deep brown every time her roots make an appearance. In his mind, she’s still young.

People shuffle around to make room at one of the foldable tables that have been set out for the occasion.

“You can have my seat,” a younger man says to Bootstrap.

“Not until I have a plate.” Bootstrap grabs himself a plastic plate and fills it with potato salad, coleslaw, and beans. He rests a burger securely on top and takes his seat.

“Hey there thrill seeker, you forgetting something?” Second Wave is seated across from him with a grin on her face. He reaches into his pocket and grabs a small plastic bottle. One of the kids at the table looks at him with anticipation.

“What’s that Bootstrap?” he asks.

“They’re super-secret nanobots. Top scientists smoosh them into these little pills to help me fight crime.” Bootstrap looks at Second Wave “and heartburn,” he adds.

Later that evening, he finds himself wishing that he'd been more conscious about what he put into his stomach. It was unavoidable, and worth it. His stomach has half of his attention, while the scratching at the door and whimpering of Opportunity has the rest. "I promised you a walk, huh?" This cues for another chorus of barks. His recliner creaks forward as Bootstrap propels himself to his feet. "Lemme get my coat."

On his way out, he notices his cane resting neatly by the door. Another thing to carry. He grabs it anyway and sets off for his evening adventure with Opportunity. It's early enough that he can still hear the party by the lake, although the fireworks have stopped. Bootstrap chooses a different route this time, one that would be better for an anti-social mood. In his mind he's on patrol. Further, there's something to patrol for.

His stomach begins to settle and the movement becomes pleasant after a while. Often, this late night stroll is the highlight of his day. Opportunity sets the pace, tugging forward to inspect a new spot in the grass. Bootstrap takes everything in as well. He inspects each house as he moves past, noting faults in security, or hiding places. The gate out front of the community is good and the checkpoints are sound, but the community is unaware. He's a few blocks in to his new route and the neighborhood is quiet. A tug on Opportunity's collar slows him down a bit. A shadowed figure enters Bootstrap's peripheral. Bootstrap keeps from turning his head to get a closer look. Surveillance requires subtlety.

Bootstrap manages to slow his pace enough that the figure across the street is in the lead. Five foot ten inches, looks about 180 pounds, probably male. The figure is moving at a good clip, and Bootstrap trails behind. He maintains line of sight. Why do you have your hood up? What are you hiding?

The figure stops before the next house on the row and takes a moment to look around. Bootstrap is far enough behind to take cover behind a recycling bin. He pulls Opportunity in close and waits for a moment before peeking out from his cover. When he does, the suspect is gone. Bootstrap moves faster than his joints will let him and gets to the spot where the figure was standing. His ears perk up to movement around the side of the house. He slows his movement, hugs the wall, hides in the shadows. He sees a young man standing under a second story window.

"Get him Opportunity." The golden retriever lets out a bark and runs towards the suspect. The kid is taken by surprise and turns tail. He's headed for the fence. Opportunity gives chase while Bootstrap kneels with his can. He's holding it as though it were a rifle. In his mind, he's six feet tall again. He gives a twist at the end and a bolo flies towards his suspect's feet.

The kid falls face first, just short of the wooden privacy fence. Flashing red and blue let Bootstrap know he's won this fight.

"Police. What's going on back here?"

"Boys, I'm doing your job for you, that's what." Bootstrap motions to the young man lying on the ground. The two officers are followed by onsite security. One of the security officers shines her flashlight on the boy's face.

"Are you okay Everett?" she says.

"Old man jumped out and attacked me." He tries to sit up but his arm is on fire. Opportunity is still barking and keeping tabs on him.

"Will somebody control that dog?" one of the officers says as he moves towards the young man on the ground.

"I'm the head of the neighborhood watch," Bootstrap says to the officer. "I saw this man casing this house."

The security guard is kind enough to take Opportunity back home. Bootstrap sits in a holding cell. He's staring at his feet. His eyes feel fuzzy and the sound in the cell is dampened. In his mind, he's nothing.

"It's been a while since I've posted bail for you." He snaps to attention. Second Wave is outside the cell. "Come on old friend. Let's get you home."

1718 M Street, N.W. PMB #126

by J.M. Paris

Guns, I got all kind of guns
I got guns buried in the backyard
I got guns implanted in my cerebellum
I shoot bullets out my ears
I shit shell casings in the yard
I got black powder packed in my teeth
I sight targets with opaque brass eyes
They are uncomplicated and so am I

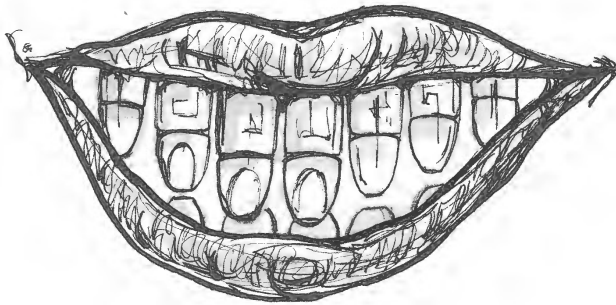


Illustration by Evie Giaconia.

About the Authors and Artists

Alyssa Mazzoli attends the creative writing program at the Fine Arts Center in Greenville, South Carolina. Aside from being a student, she is the assistant non-fiction editor of Crashtest magazine. Last year, her work was recognized on a regional level by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She is currently listening to *My Mathematical Mind* by Spoon, but her favorite song of theirs is *I Turn My Camera On*. She will listen to that next.

Multi-genre writer and renaissance humanist, **Clove Davenport** pursues a BFA in writing at SCAD. She composes and performs poetry, and also writes fantastical fiction and children's literature. In her spare time, she volunteers for a fair trade artisan organization which connects with the artist community while creating positive change for those in need. She aims to publish her novels and use part of the proceeds to support learning challenged youth.

Evie Giaconia is a sophomore Anthropology major, at least for the moment. She is an artist and writer, and enjoys running and drinking copious amounts of tea. She loves dragons, books, kicking stuff, and YA series.

Elliot Hand-Thoennes is a sophomore Graphic Design major, because getting a real job is for losers. Also they are probably literally a deer. They mostly like cartoons, various nerd stuff, and being gay on the internet. Follow them on tumblr at faunlord.tumblr.com if you're into that sort of thing.

Jason Huber is vehemently passionate about Netflix and cheese-based snacks. In the frightening world outside his apartment, he's studying composition and rhetoric on the graduate level. His parents are proud of him despite these things. Jason still has Pokemon cards from his childhood. His greatest regret is never finding a Charizard.

Zoe Kaplan is a sophomore English major with minors in Biology and Women's Studies, because she likes too many things to choose a viable career path. She has worked for several short fiction publications, including *The Peel*, *Lightspeed Magazine*, and *Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*, as well as the neuroscience journal, *Impulse*. She loves princesses, cats, books, and punching things, and she's always up for a *Lord of the Rings* marathon.

J.M. Paris was born in a specific place and continues to live, doing things and having experiences that are similar to but also different from your own.

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