



Issue #1

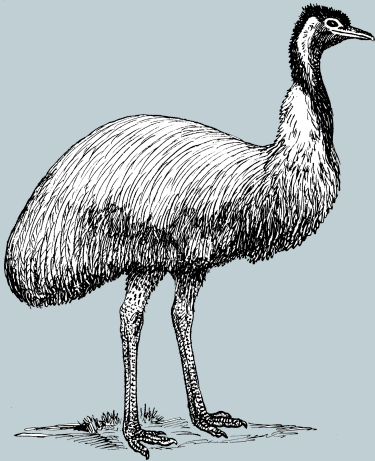
# Lion's Den

Ross A Lurgio Middle School Literary Magazine

## Weird History

### The Great Emu War

By: Stella Kloc



For most countries, a national bird is a prized and respected animal. For Australia, it's something you would declare and lose a war against. In the 1930s, emus had been eating farmer's crops. Instead of going to the Minister of Agriculture, farmers went to the Minister of Defence. In 1932, the army was sent out to hunt down emus. It seemed like a quick, easy war for Australia, but they underestimated the birds. The emus could run fast and take multiple bullets. One general exclaimed, "If we had a military division with the bullet-carrying capacity of these birds it would face any army in the world...They can face machine guns with the invulnerability of tanks." The military tried to be quieter, concealed soldiers waited for emus to be in range, then attacked. Still, it was a waste, the military was wasting precious bullets and supplies. Finally, the war was declared over, and with not many emus killed, Australia had lost.

## Short Stories

### "Among the Fallen"

By: Kaitlyn Daley

"What an expensive fate," she mumbled pathetically.

I could only form a curt nod.

It was more so I was afraid that my words would be the final blow.

She was delicate. An object thinner than glass at this point. The gentlest of words would have no benefit. The tamest of actions would have her shatter in place.

I couldn't be the one to break her. It was solely too cruel.

Or maybe it was just me being an utter coward.

A stray piece of ash drifted across the horizon, tracing the crisp trees and now fallen sun. Her eyes followed it mournfully.

*May your spirit repose, may your monsters awaken.*

"It's pathetic isn't it?" Her voice was nothing short of bitter as she laughed.

I shifted my stance; the outline of the matchbox pressed into my thigh as I layed a tender hand over my pocket.

*Shouldn't I feel guilty?*

But as the orange flames engulfed the surrounding scenery around us, I couldn't help but smile.



# Sworn to Secrecy

By: Ella Andree

## PART ONE

The crunch of leaves was the best part of their day. After an excruciatingly long day at school, the two best friends were exhausted. Noor was so happy to finally be going home. She'd had class after class after class, as well as a school-wide meeting about school politics. Her classmates had nominated her for class president, although the popular kids were probably going to win. That was just the first of five presidential debates. At the start, there were about 10 kids, then 2 were out after each one. The last one decided the president. There was still a long road ahead of them, and her chances of winning were slim.

After her best friend, Beck, had gone home, she decided to listen to some music. She stopped at a nearby park bench and took her phone and earbuds out of her backpack, then kept on walking. Stepping to the beat of the music, she watched for crunchy leaves to step on. You know that wonderful feeling that you get when you step on a leaf, and it has that fantastically satisfying crunch? Noor was looking for that leaf. It would make the rest of her day much better than it already had been. And when she saw a leaf, sitting there on the pavement, she knew that was the one. It didn't look like it would have a good crunch, as it was bright yellow with hints of red and green still in it. But she could tell just by the way it curled at the edges, that it would have that perfect, satisfying crunch.

She ran up to it, not caring at all how crazy she must have seemed to onlookers. She stomped her foot down on the leaf, and didn't hear a thing. *That's it. My day is officially ruined*, she thought to herself. But right after she thought that, she heard a large *crack*. She looked down under her foot, and realized it was through the pavement. Before she knew it, both of her legs were through the pavement. A large hole appeared, surrounding her feet. She tried to run away but couldn't. It was like her feet were glued to the ground. She took out her phone and tried to film it, as she wanted to make sure she wasn't dreaming later in the day. It wouldn't turn on, even though her music was still playing in one ear.

"HELP," she screamed at the top of her lungs. Or at least she thought. No sound came out of her mouth. Nothing around her seemed to even stir. She looked down, took a deep breath, and allowed the pavement to swallow her up. After a minute or so, her whole body was underground. But somehow, she could breathe. She was standing in a small, hexagonal, stainless steel room. Or bunker, rather. There were buttons, screens, and jackets on the wall.

*Where am I? And what is this place, some secret spy bunker thing?* She thought. She stood and looked around for a second, then heard a loud monotone voice.

"Hello, Noor. Do not speak. Do not move. Do not make a sound. You are in the Center of Perception. You have been brought here today, and we will tell you why later. Take one of those jackets off the wall, preferably the purple one. It should fit. Then stand back on that hexagon in the middle of the floor. We will escort you onto the main floor," the strange man instructed.

She did as told, grabbing the purple jacket. She thought it would be too big, as it looked huge when she picked it up. But when she put it on, it fit perfectly. Luckily, it matched her outfit for the day. She walked back to the hexagon on the floor and stood perfectly still. She hadn't made a sound this entire time, except for the small gasp that escaped her mouth when she put the jacket on. Suddenly, the floor collapsed. She was thrown into a clear slide, like a water slide, just minus the water. *They really like to collapse floors here*, she thought.

As she slid down the slide she saw a whole new world underground. And no, not like those cringy “there’s another world alongside our world” type places. Well, kind of. But these people didn’t seem to ever leave. Floor after floor after floor, the slide just kept going. She could see out of the slide, as it was clear, twisting back and forth through the many levels. The walls were all steel, just like the room she started in. Bright colorful lights shone out of the ceiling and walls. There were so many colors- purple, orange, teal, yellow, pink, red, blue- all mesmerizing. People were all over the place- in colorful coats just like the one Noor put on. There were scientists, engineers, coders, security guards, and many, many more.

Finally, after a fascinating ride, she arrived in another small room. It was similar to the small starting room. This time, instead of a man’s voice over a speaker, she heard a soft but stern woman’s voice behind her. She turned around and saw a tall woman with long brown hair up in a bun. She had big blue eyes. Noor could have sworn she’d seen those eyes before. Her cheekbones were chiseled, and she had a sharp nose. She stood tall in a long light blue dress with a darker blue blazer overtop. There was a strange symbol on the right side of her jacket- one she’d seen before. It kept appearing in the many levels she’d seen, so that must have been where she’d seen it first.

“Good afternoon, Noor. I expect you are very confused at this moment. I would be, too, if I were in your shoes. Please don’t panic. I will lead you to a private room where we can explain. Now, if you wouldn’t mind, please quietly make your way behind me. Do not pass me. Stay behind me at all times. Understand?” she said sternly.

“Yes, ma’am,” Noor responded.

“Good,” the woman nodded. She turned around and put her hand up on a scanner. Immediately the door went up into the wall. She walked out, Noor following close behind. She went through 12 doors- Noor was counting- and twisted all throughout this strange place. After about 8 minutes of walking, they reached their destination. It was a large, but comfortable room. There were lunch tables, lockers, couches, and chairs. There were two people sitting on the couches, their backs turned. The woman ushered Noor into the room, then turned around and locked the doors.

“You may sit on the couches over there,” she instructed. The man and woman on the couches turned around, looking for who had just come in. Noor walked over and realized she knew the woman on the couch. She was wearing the same thing the tall woman was wearing, just in orange. Noor ran over to her.

“Mom, you’re here!” she said excitedly. She hugged her mother, unaware that she was not, in fact, her mother.

“Hun, sit down,” she instructed. Noor sat down next to her mother, looking nervous but relieved. “You’re going to want to be comfortable for this, okay?”

“Why?”

“Well,” the tall woman interjected, “I am your mother. That one you’ve always known is my twin sister, whom I set to raising you. You are my daughter, my only child. You are the daughter of the Prime Ruler of the Center of Perception. We wanted to keep this from you for as long as possible, let you lead a completely normal childhood. We don’t normally have people as young as you down here, but occasionally fate leads them here. And by you stepping on that leaf, fate has brought you here.”

“What-what do you mean you’re my mother?”

“I know this will take some time to get used to, but eventually you will be used to it. I promise.” She squeezed Noor’s leg as an attempt to comfort her, “Are there any other questions you have?”

“No,... Mother,” she responded questioningly. Her mother gave her a weak smile.

"Why don't we take you to your room?" she asked. Noor quietly nodded, and stood up. She could feel her knees shaking a bit, but took a long deep breath and felt a surge of strength flow through her. By this time, everyone else had stood up and were looking at her curiously. She nodded towards the door, so everyone started walking towards it. Once again twisting and turning through the many corridors, they eventually made their way into a room with a sign that said "NO ENTRY- PRIME RULER'S PRIVATE QUARTERS!"

"I get a Prime Ruler quarter?" she asked curiously.

"Yes, you are my daughter after all," she responded. They walked into the door to the left of the entrance. There they found a fairly large bed, piled with pillows and blankets. There were drawers open in a big dresser, a crooked carpet, and a stained couch. The tall woman seemed disgruntled.

"Looks like the cleaners never made it down here. I'll have to call them," She started towards the door.

"No, wait!" Noor ran after her, "I'll do it. Just give me some cleaning supplies and I'll do it. Please."

"Are you sure you want to?" she asked. Noor nodded confidently. Her mother looked over to her aunt, unsure of what to do. Her aunt nodded. "Alright. I'll send some supplies down to you. Do you want us to leave?"

"Yes, that would be ideal," she responded quickly. They walked out, but her aunt stayed behind.

"How are you doing with all this? I know it can be a lot to take in, finding out we'd been lying to you this entire time. Do you need any help here?" she said, all very quickly.

"No, I'm fine. But I don't have any clothes down here. Or any of my belongings except for what's in my bag."

"Right. I was going to get your things after this. I should be back in an hour or so. Anything specific?"

"Just the essentials, some entertainment, clothes, chargers for my phone and laptop, anything else," she listed off.

"Alright. I'll see you later," she said to her. Her aunt walked over to her and gave her a squeeze-hug. Then she walked off, out of the door.

Noor turned around to the mess of a bedroom. She picked up a pillow off the floor and looked closely at the symbol she'd seen so many times before. *Center of Perception* it said. She wondered what in the world it meant.

"Maybe I should start fixing this place up," she said aloud to herself.



## "Hazel and Crimson"

By: Leah Boone

Everyone thought the two were made for each other. It seemed more like fact than opinion at its climax. But the deeper you peek through the glass, the clearer the image behind it becomes. More unsettling truths illuminate themselves, but more pleasant truths also rest in warm sunlight. It rises to the surface like effervescence in boiling water- that was the simple truth of knowing anything. Or at least that's what he thought, at some point.

Even if it seemed right to assume, the closer you looked, the more purely platonic it unraveled. It showed itself in unsettling carnation hues, akin to the pale pink of the maturing spring blooms. Somewhere in his heart, he wanted that peaceful bliss to seep back into his body, reminiscent of water and a sponge. But as he stood adjacent to the jagged, maroon-colored stone, he wished instead that his feet were permanently rooted to the ground. With a simultaneously bright and dark appearance exuding from its (frankly rather sloppy) architecture, he felt out of place in the underworld-esque landscape.

Though, judging from the numerous ravines trickling lava and the sporadic bursts of flame that erupted like geysers in random spots, it might as well have been the underworld.

The strange location essentially epitomized discomfort. It was somewhere between the two- the human world he had known for his entire life, and where everyone else was surely waiting already.

As if the troublesome waiting had become known to the hooded man, he beckoned the brunette in with frigid, tense hands, whose fingers hardly moved even as he made something akin to a grabbing motion. The spiky-haired boy opposite the hooded man sighed simply, rolling his eyes as he adjusted the comic book in his hands to be right in front of his face.

Even with the hostile impression, both were clearly proficient in whatever the guard had mentioned was their work- something nerve-wracking, he remembered. Swallowing back a rebuttal, he clenched his fists and slowly walked into the cave.

It was cleaner than expected for a cave in the middle of a strange terrain. The hooded man hunched over a neatly organized desk and the chair in the corner was claimed subtly by his assistant, who looked him directly in the eyes as he sat down then returned to reading.

"You summoned me." He stated simply, the fact spilling past his lips easily like it was a universally known fact.

"Yes. You are not fit to see the next world. We can change that." explained the man, who leaned forward, resting his chin on the back of his hands. It sounded too tempting to just refuse. But nothing so mysteriously intriguing became true without paying a terrible price.

"What will it take?" The boy held back from screaming the words in hopeless anticipation. It was better to have hope than wallow in despair.

"Everything."

"How would you define everything? Do you want my family? My friends? My life? Can I have it back after I leave this world?" He shot out questions like bullets and the man shook his head.

"I want this..." he pointed at the boy who stood with determination opposite him "...to become something else. You with your pathetic lack of talent have been deemed unfit to enter the next world. Become our plaything and you can move on freely. You'll become..."

The man leaned in, standing up and hunching over in the process. To his ear, he whispered fervently "...something like a god. Doesn't that sound amazing?"

It honestly didn't. He was fine with being the plain old, down on his luck person he had always been. Preferred it, even. But the face he had dwelled on for so long rushed back like a dam had broken. From the bottom of his heart (a phrase that he had used often), he knew he would definitely prefer losing himself to whatever the man had talked about than to never see his closest friend ever again. And by then, even if you told him what would happen, he'd be too stubborn to back away.

"I'll do it."

The hooded man smiled and turned to grab the attention of the boy with the comic.

"Very well. Neurologist, prepare for a procedure."

## **Interviews & Reviews**

### **Cross Country in Quarantine: A Review of a Not So Typical Sports Season**

By: Ella Andree

So we're all very well aware that the whole world is currently in a pandemic. With the sudden appearance of COVID-19 in the U.S., we had to go into remote learning for the last quarter-and-a-half of school last year. And now that we're (kind of) back in school, one major thing that has been impacted is sports. So I'm going to be explaining how safety protocols were carried out, how competitions worked, and more. But since I can't speak for any sports other than cross country, that's what I'm going to be focusing on.

To put it simply, the season was... weird. We started very late into the year. Normally, you'd start around the second day of school. But we didn't start until the middle of September this year. So that was a setback, but not too big of an issue. Another thing that affected the season was the practice schedule. In order to carry out necessary safety protocols, we're currently in either a hybrid or remote school schedule. Whoever was in school on a particular day also had practice that day. For example, the A-K kids were in school one day, so they went to practice afterwards. It's really quite simple. Fridays just weren't included. This schedule affected the season because normally you'd have practice almost every day (Fridays were optional).

Since we didn't have practice every day, we were supposed to do a light run for about 2 miles on off days. Who knows how many people actually did, though. Not having practices every day made it harder to run. Since you weren't training every day, the practices were long and fairly difficult. It was fun... just hard. The least we ran was about 3 miles.

But the big thing was meets (or races). Normally, you'd go to a designated place and compete against other schools. But with COVID and everything, we couldn't really do that. So instead, they had a big(ish) Tri-County meet. They only took the top 6 people for boys and girls. So we did a few time trials in order to figure who would be going. We did two, and were supposed to do three. But the last one got cancelled due to rain, which is actually out of the ordinary for Cross-Country. The last time trial ended up happening the week after Tri-County. The top 6 people for boys and girls, from both sessions, ended up going. It was a tad bit confusing at first, as it didn't seem very logical to mix two different cohorts together, but it worked out.

Also, the last week or two was very rainy and the last three practices just never happened. It was a little disappointing, as we never had a real conclusion to the season. But given the circumstances, we're lucky that we even got to have practices. And it was a great season, nonetheless. Hopefully next year we can have normal practices and meets again, and I look forward to seeing what the future holds.



# Interview with a Marine Raider

By: Isabella Norcross

This is an interview that I had with a Marine Raider that's actually enlisted right now! A Marine Raider is a part of MARSOC, also known as Marine Corps Special Operations Command. If you have seen a lot of cop/military shows, it's kinda like that. They go on secret missions and team missions. For the sake of this Marine Raider's privacy, their identity has been withheld. Here's how it went:

Me: Hello! I have a few questions to ask: is that okay?

Raider: Yeah, that's totally fine.

Me: Okay so how does your training start as a Marine Raider?

Raider: When I first started training, I had to go to the regular military training for 3 months. Then I went to something called SOI for about 2 months. After that I waited for a year and a half then applied to become a Marine Raider. But then I had to start training again for another 3 months.

Me: That's an awful lot of training to do for this job!

Raider: It took a lot of time all right haha.

Me: So, what do you do for your job?

Raider: Well for what I can say I uhh I do a little bit of everything . From security to actual war things.

Me: Sounds like a lot! Well, how does it feel to be a part of the Marine Co.?

Raider: It was/is very fulfilling. Some can't do it, some can.

Me: Well why did you want to become a Raider? Why not be a normal Marine?

Raider: Well, I wanted a bit of a challenge and to be the best of the best and to do that is to do special operations.

Me: What is your favorite part of being a Marine Raider?

Raider: Traveling to all the places I've been and the brotherhood! I have many brothers in my unit.

Me: How does it feel being a part of this great opportunity?

Raider: It's hard to describe, it's a big honor to become a raider. It's a very hard decision

to make. It's just incredible!

Me: What's your favorite equipment that you use?

Raider: There's all types of equipment that we use and it's kinda hard to pick a favorite but it's probably my night vision goggles. We don't use them very often but it's very fun.

Me: Is there any hard part of this job for you?

Raider: Hardest part of my job is being away from my family. I wish I could bring them with me but I can't.

Me: If your kid (if you have one) were to ask what your favorite part of the job is, what would you say?

Raider: If my kid asked me what my favorite part of my job was it is probably coming home from travelling to all of my family.

Me: Well those are all the questions I have! Have a nice day!

Raider: Thanks, you too!

Well, I feel like this interview really informed me on what happens during this job and everything in between! I hope you guys found this as interesting as I did!

## A completely unbiased review of the show Haikyuu!

By: Luis Cruz

Haikyuu is an anime produced by Sentai Filmworks based on the manga by the same name. Haikyuu is focused around the main protagonist Hinata and his volleyball team and the games they play. While the main character is Hinata and the Karasuno volleyball team, the show constructs a detailed and engaging backstory for almost all of the other characters and teams. The side characters feel less and less like side characters and more like less focused main characters. However, the show still brings the light on Hinata. Hinata, devoted and likable, is not the standard protagonist. He is always trying to gain something and get better. You can tell just how much he loves volleyball and wants to be the best. And because the show isn't always attentive to the actual main characters, he never gets stale. The show's plot is about Hinata's journey as a high school volleyball player and his training and games. It focuses less on the character itself and more on the sport and how they learn it. This show is constantly reinventing the story to keep it from being boring and predictable. To do this, they add new characters, settings, or antagonists. And rather than the antagonists being easily hateable, they make them feel like they are relatable and human. The show keeps the characters fresh and intriguing and switches up the plot so just when you think something will happen, the opposite will. The show is currently in the last stretch of it's fourth season. It is a great starting anime for new watchers and definitely a contender for top 5 best sports animes.





## Comic Strips and Illustrations

