

Cardlamity: An Illustrated Story, One Card at a Time

Description of game: Cardlamity is a collaborative character-creation storytelling and roleplaying card game. Players can either decide on or randomize a rough setting for the game (ex. cyberpunk dystopia, gothic spooky small town, high fantasy...). From there, in every round players will draw cards to flesh out the setting, create characters based on prompt cards and develop their characters' lives, personalities, and plots, and, finally, draw Calamity cards at the end of each round providing big setting-wide events that all characters will be able to react to.

Suggested number of players: 2-5

Duration: 25-40 minutes (can be longer, see variations)

Intended audience: young adults to adults interested in creative writing and storytelling

Materials:

- Paper and pencil (or colored pencils/markers) (to draw)
- Paper and pencil or computer (to take notes)
- Printable deck(s) of cards

Core dynamic(s): Perspective-taking, experience-taking (Zagal & Deterding, ch. 15), creative sharing and communication

Goal: The goal of the game is to create the bones of a story centered around a character or characters, while engaging in collaborative storytelling and having fun.

Setup: Card backs are labels according to which deck they belong in. Assemble the cards into decks (setting, character, plot, and Calamity), shuffle each deck, and put the decks in the center of the table to set up the game.

Complete and detailed list of mechanics:

- This is a turn-based game, with each player drawing a card from one of the decks (first setting, then character, then plot, then Calamity) at which point every player takes turns stating how their character will respond to the prompt.
- The game starts by players either, at their discretion, randomly drawing a basic setting card from the deck of setting cards or agreeing on one.

- Once a basic setting is chosen or randomized, each player draws a card from the Setting deck, and answers the question or prompt on it to add unique depth to the setting. All players may describe the same town/location, or different locations within the general vicinity of each other (everyone describes their character's house in different ways, etc.). Each player drawing a card and responding to it represents one "round" of Cardlamity—as described below, players should use each deck for approximately two rounds. Players continue to draw cards from this deck until satisfied with the depth of the setting, at which point players should begin drawing from the Character deck as described below. If playing in a group of 2-3, the game also advances if everyone has drawn three cards; if in a group of 4-5, the game advances after two draws. After all players are satisfied with their characters, each player states the name and pronouns of their characters for the reference of the table.
- Cards are drawn from the Character deck, players individually write/draw/describe their characters, which act as an avatar in the shared setting. Players continue to draw cards from this deck until satisfied with the depth of their character, at which point players should move to draw from the Plot deck. If playing in a group of 2-3, the game also advances if everyone has drawn three Character cards; if in a group of 4-5, the game advances after two draws.
- Plot cards are drawn, which represent mini-stories or events unique to the character's past and present, and are significant events meant to shape the character's personality. It may also be seen as an opportunity for a character to exhibit a certain trait at the discretion of the player controlling them. As long as the prompt on the card is touched on, players should feel free to answer however they like, with whatever works for their setting and group. Players should discuss the prompt on each card openly—the player who drew the card for their character will lead discussion and ultimately answer the prompt, but free and collaborative sharing of ideas is heavily encouraged! Players continue to draw cards from this deck until satisfied with the events in their characters' lives. It is recommended to play two rounds of the Plot cards, meaning each player should have two opportunities to respond to a plot concerning their character.
- After all players have finished drawing from the Plot deck, the next player whose turn it would be draws a card from the Calamity deck, representing a massive obstacle or event that unifies all the player's characters. Players must describe the thoughts, emotions, and actions of their respective characters in response to the calamity; do they try to fight the oncoming threat, do they embrace its chaos, do they succeed or fail in their goals at this crucial time?

- The Calamity card signals the end of the game, so players should take time and make sure that everyone is satisfied with the actions of their characters in this moment! Please take time, as well, to figure out how the events of the Calamity card may ripple outwards—where are your characters the morning after the events of the Calamity? How are the characters doing; have they been brought closer together, or driven irrevocably apart by these unprecedented events? These are some examples of the kinds of questions that players may wish to ask and answer to develop their characters as a group.
- There is no “win” condition, as there are no winners or losers in this game. The goal is to create a meaningful and interesting story together, not to win against your fellow players.

Debriefing: After the game, players should take 5 to 10 minutes to evaluate their experience of creating, sharing, and building upon their characters. Some questions to consider during this time:

- How did the experience of creating characters based on semi-random prompts feel? Was it comfortable to develop a setting and a character in such a short time and using an unplanned assortment of ideas—why or why not?
- How was the experience of sharing characters and creative work amongst players? How was the creative dynamic between players at the table?
- How was the experience of working together to build a shared world, and then responding to a shared crisis within that world? Were there creative disagreements among players, and how were they resolved?
- Was the experience of semi-structured creativity within Cardlamity productive? What were some of the main take-aways around creative processes and collaboration, or within other areas?

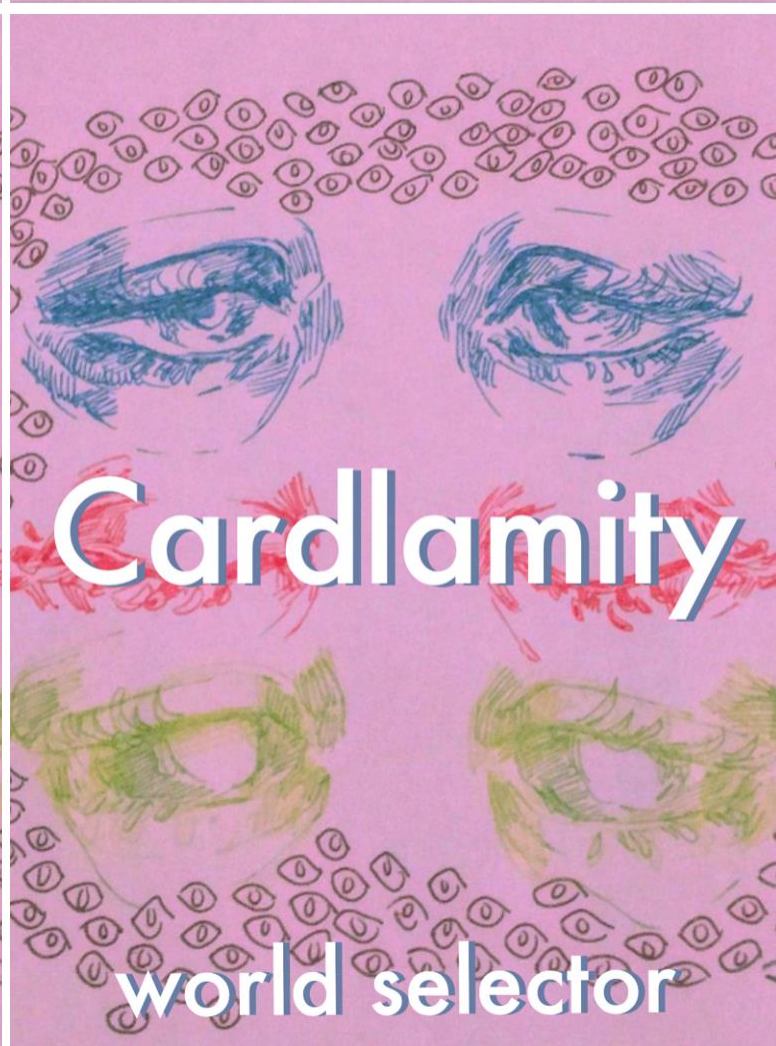
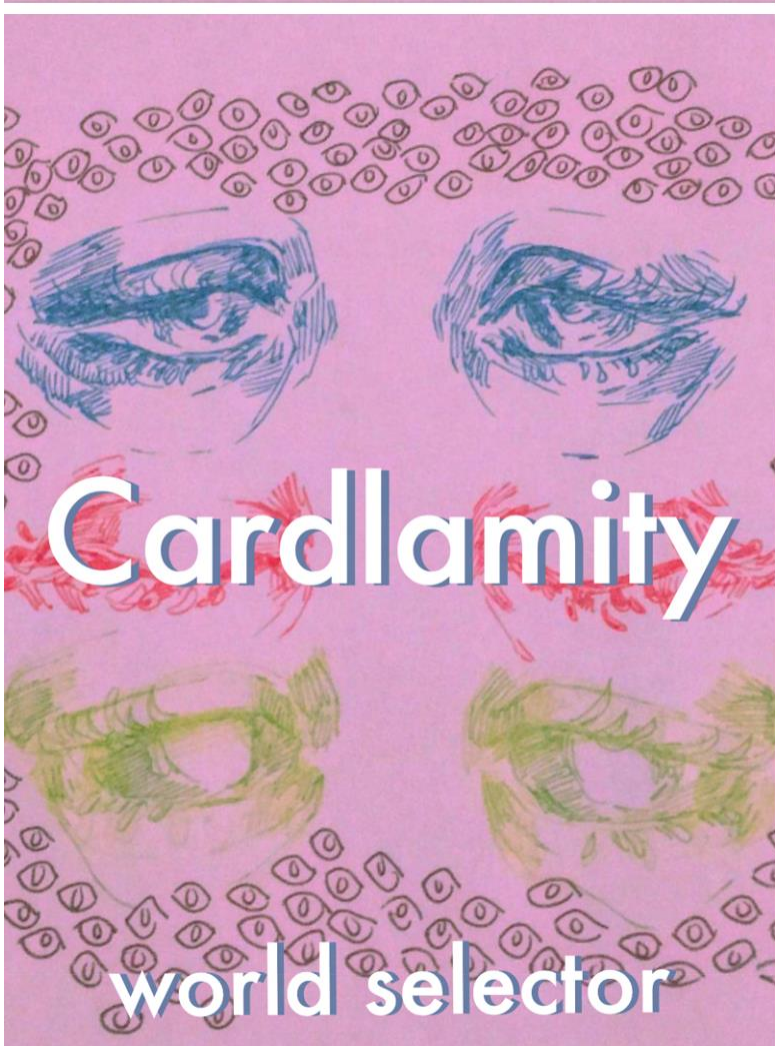
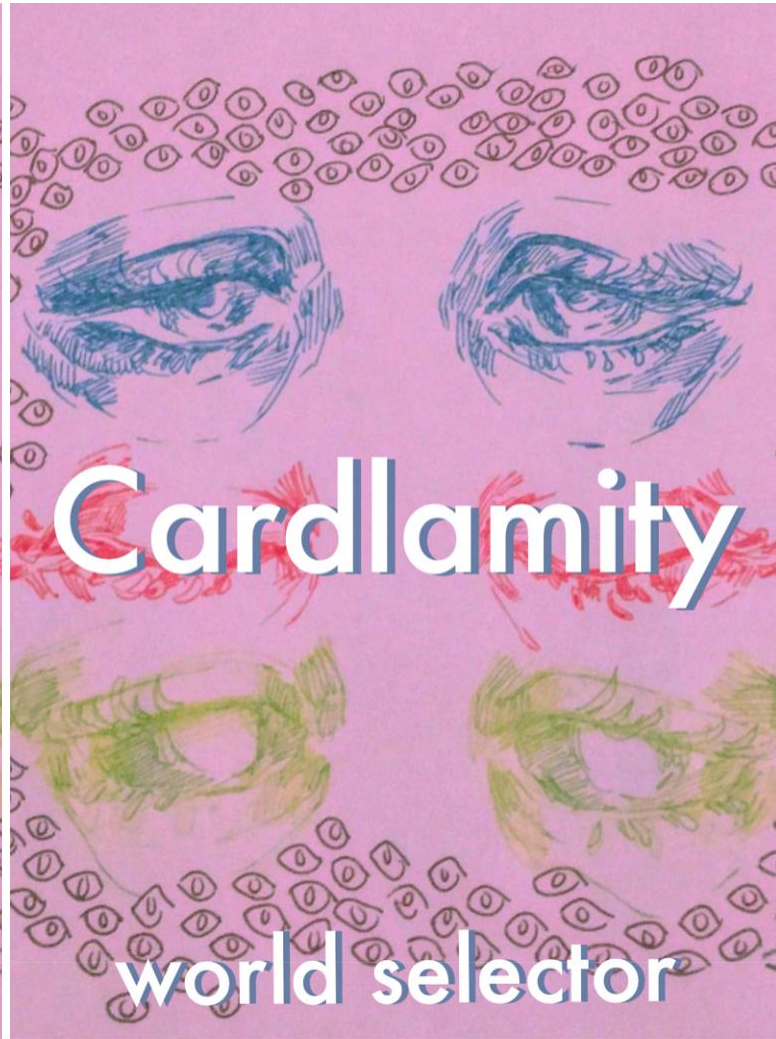
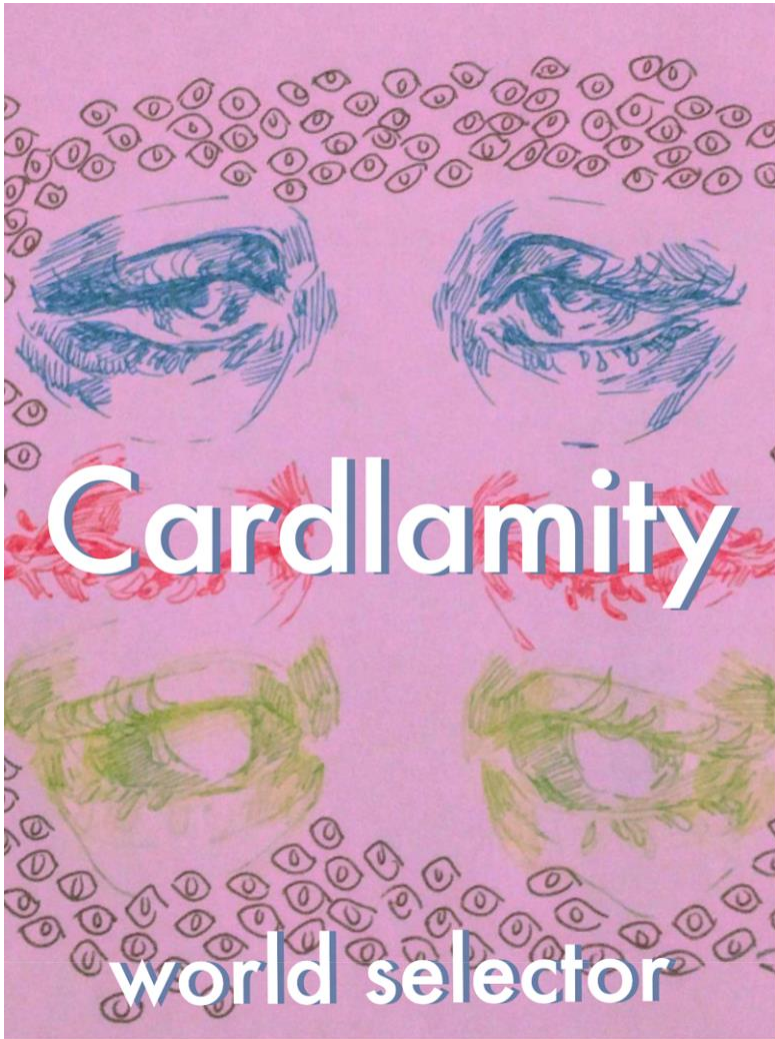
Learning objective: The learning objective is to teach basics of creative storytelling: that is, how to flesh out a setting, character, and plot. Our learning objective is intrinsically tied to the game mechanics, with each card drawn being an exercise for the player on how to respond to plot/character/setting prompts and how to develop their story. Players will also be able to experience sharing creative work with others in an open, low-stakes environment, and collaborating with others in various ways.

Variations on gameplay:

- Cardlamity can be played solo, if a player wishes, by drawing three cards from each deck (Setting, Character, Plot) in turn as in a normal game, and drawing and responding to the

Calamity card afterwards as normal. Another variation would be to create multiple characters with their own plots, playing “as” multiple people, and then imagining how they would all react to the Calamity card.

- The game can also be made longer or shorter as players wish. This involves drawing more or fewer cards from each deck as you go- setting development, character development, and plot development. Players can, if they so choose, even continue after drawing a Calamity card. Characters’ lives have been irrevocably changed, but that doesn’t have to mean that the story’s over....



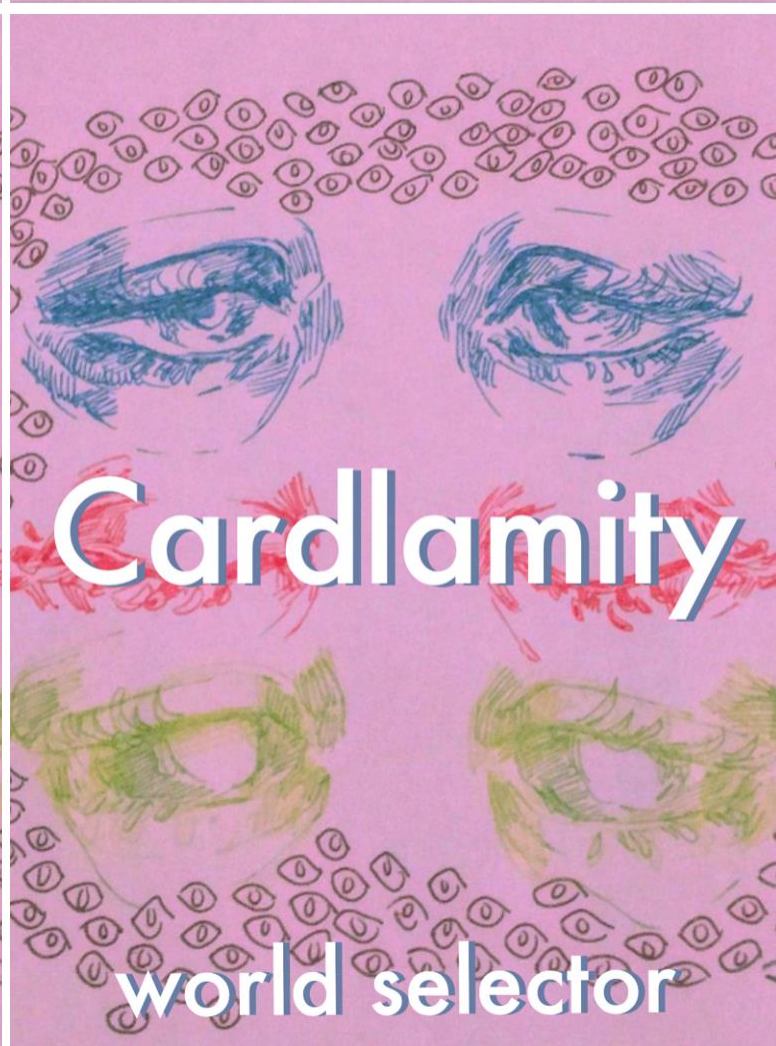
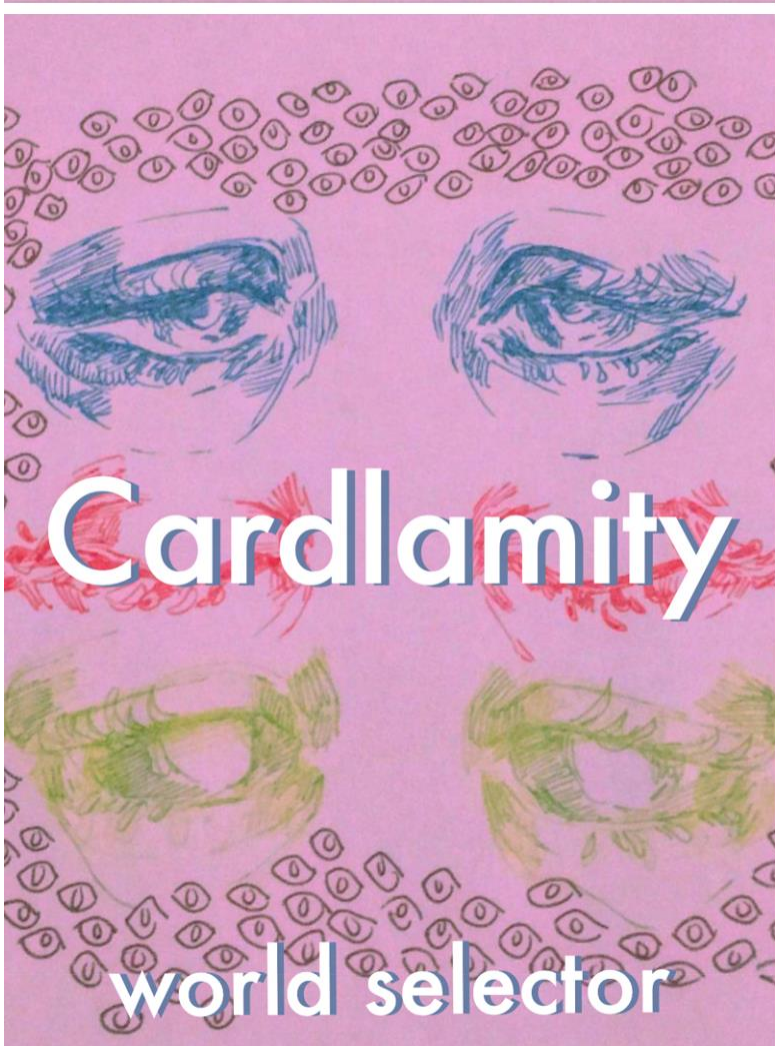
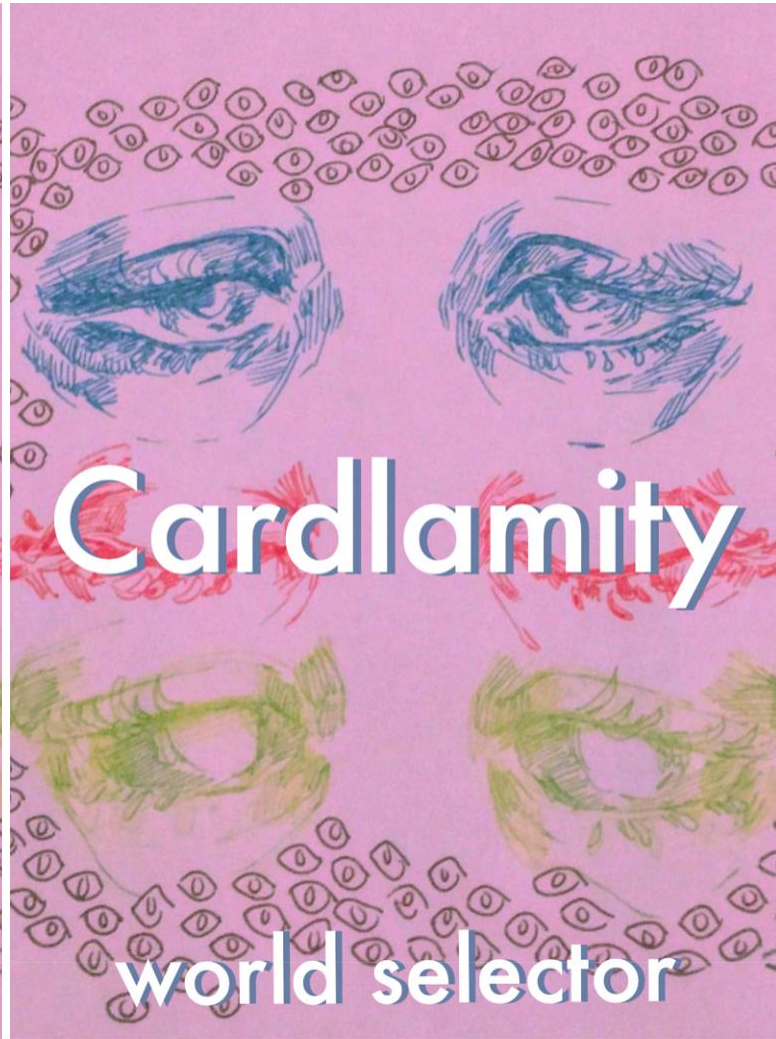
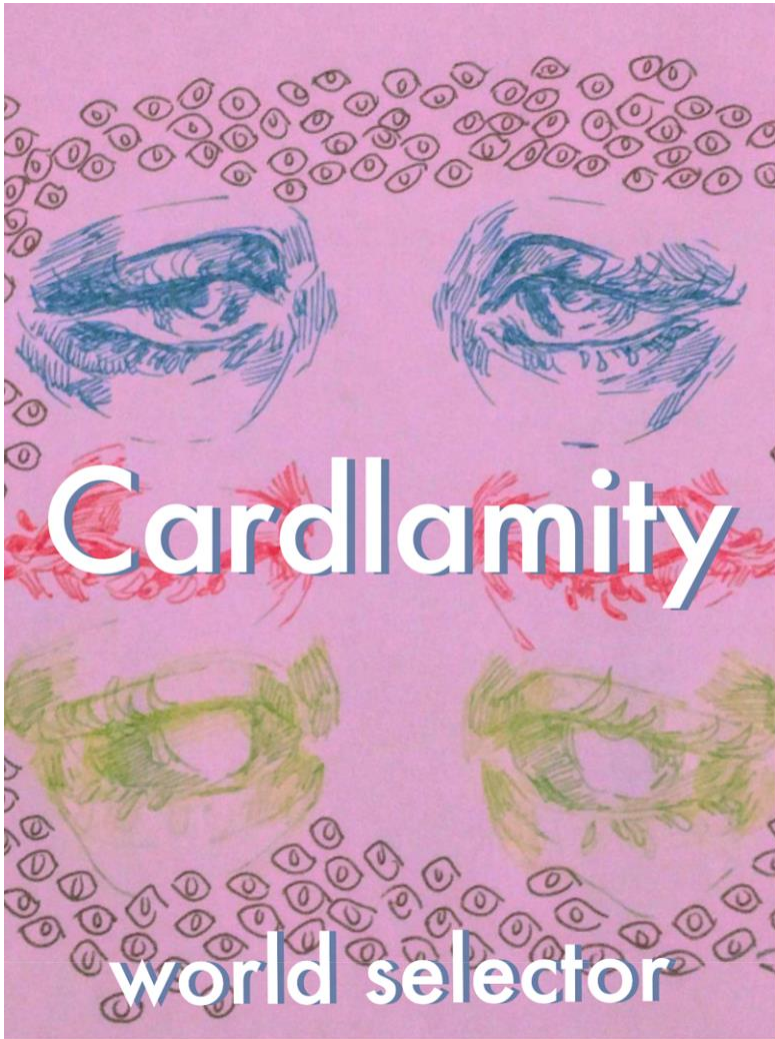


**Cyberpunk
dystopia**

**Gothic spooky
small town**

**Traditional high
fantasy with
dragons and elves**

**Alien planet with
silicon-based life
forms**



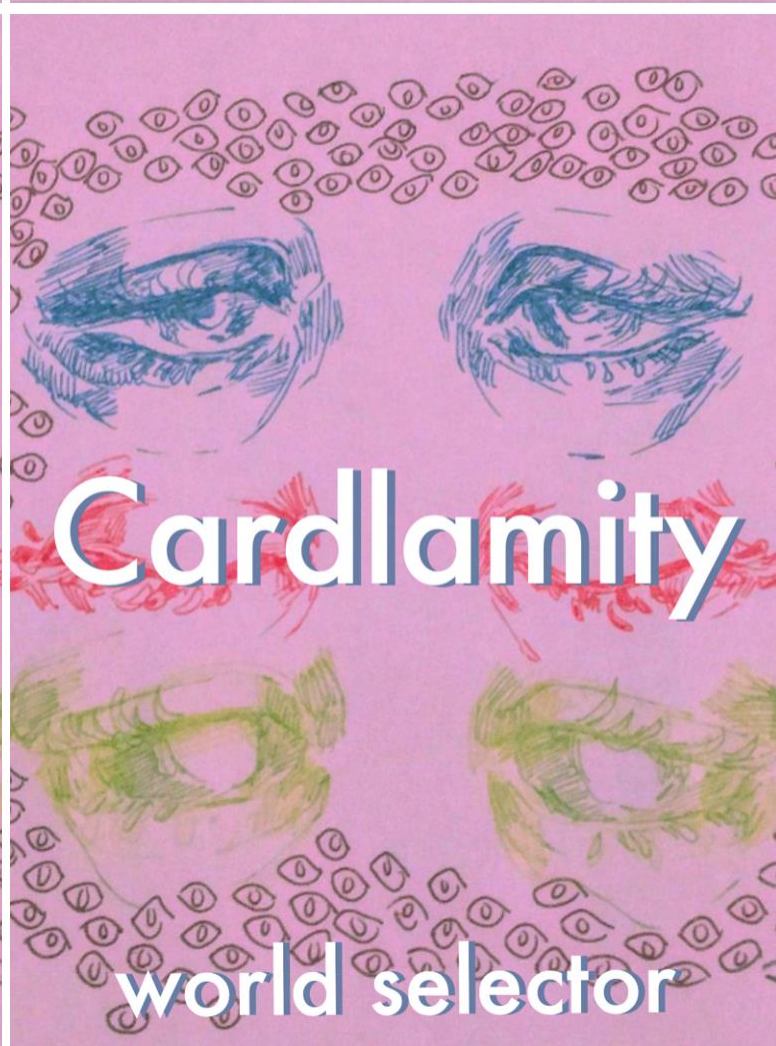
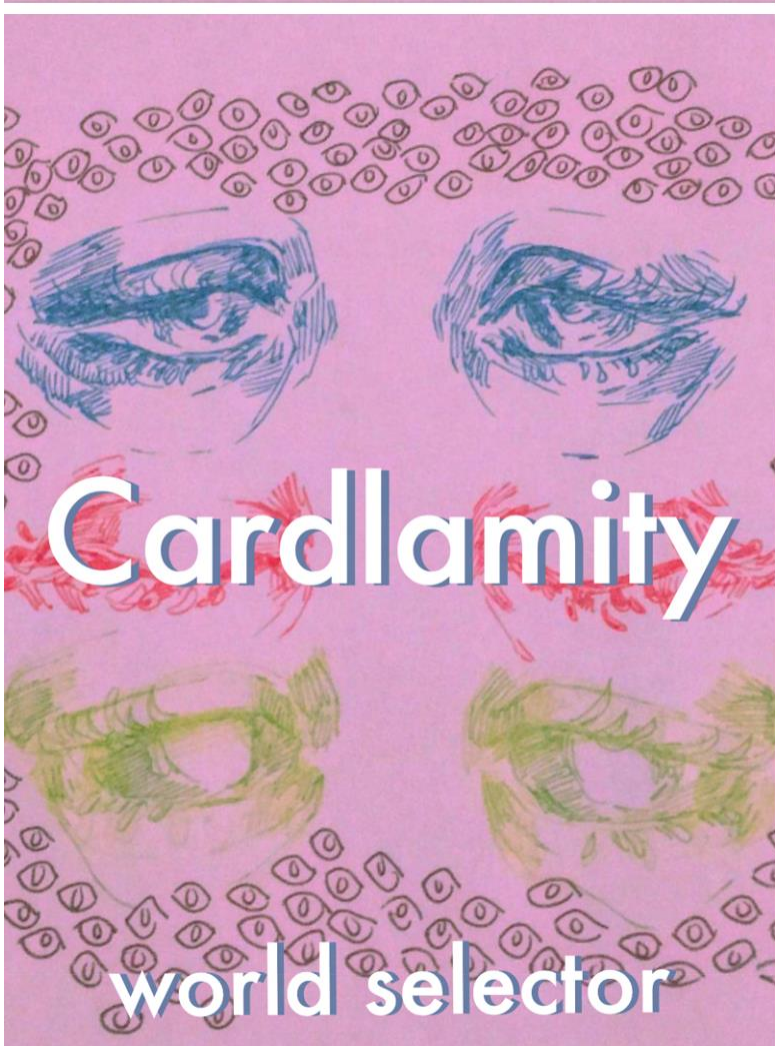
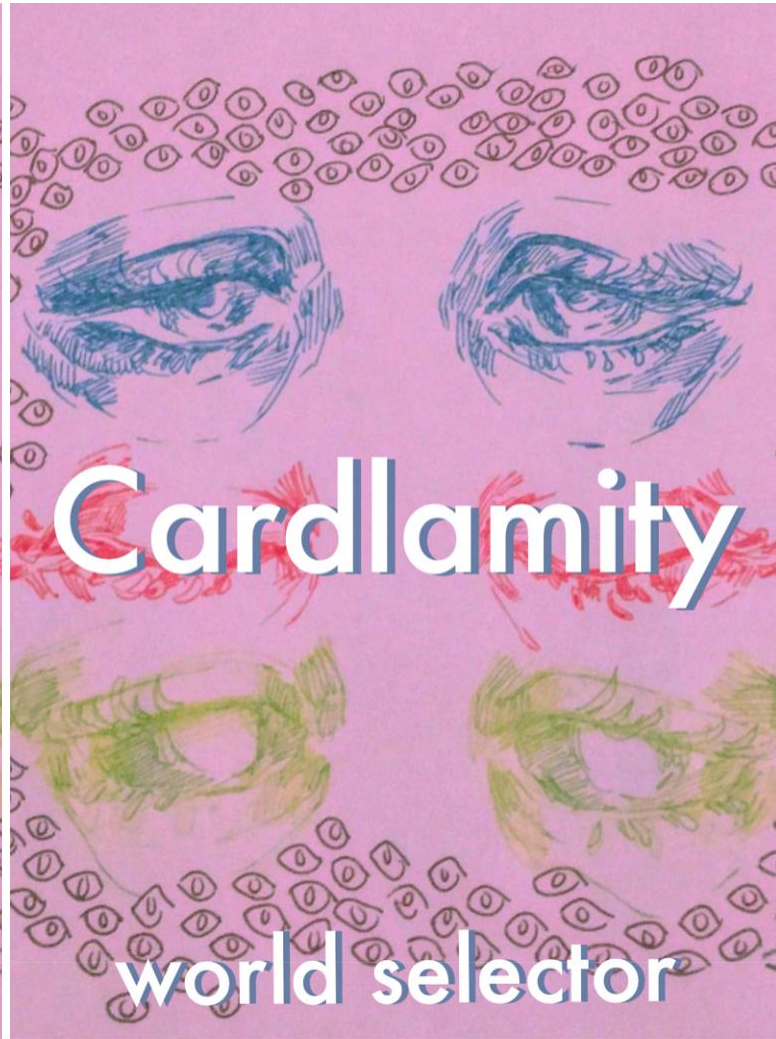
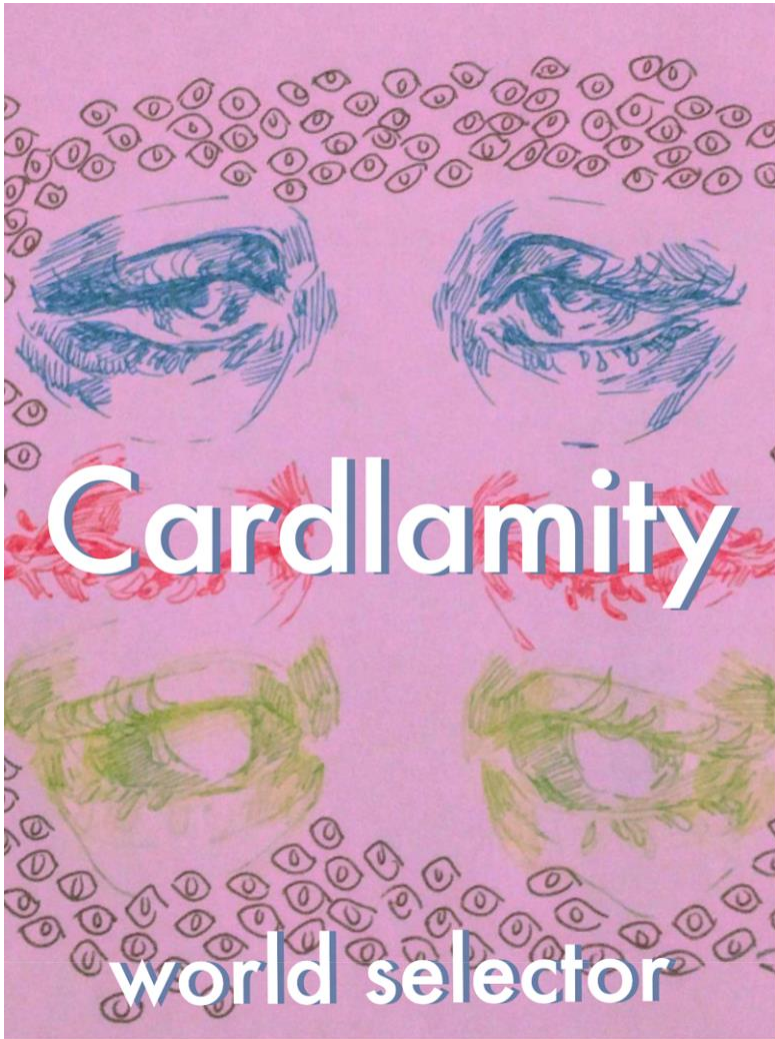


Modern day with
dinosaurs

Underwater city
with merpeople

Underground
network of
tunnels and cities

Monstrous Kaiju
and massive
mechas



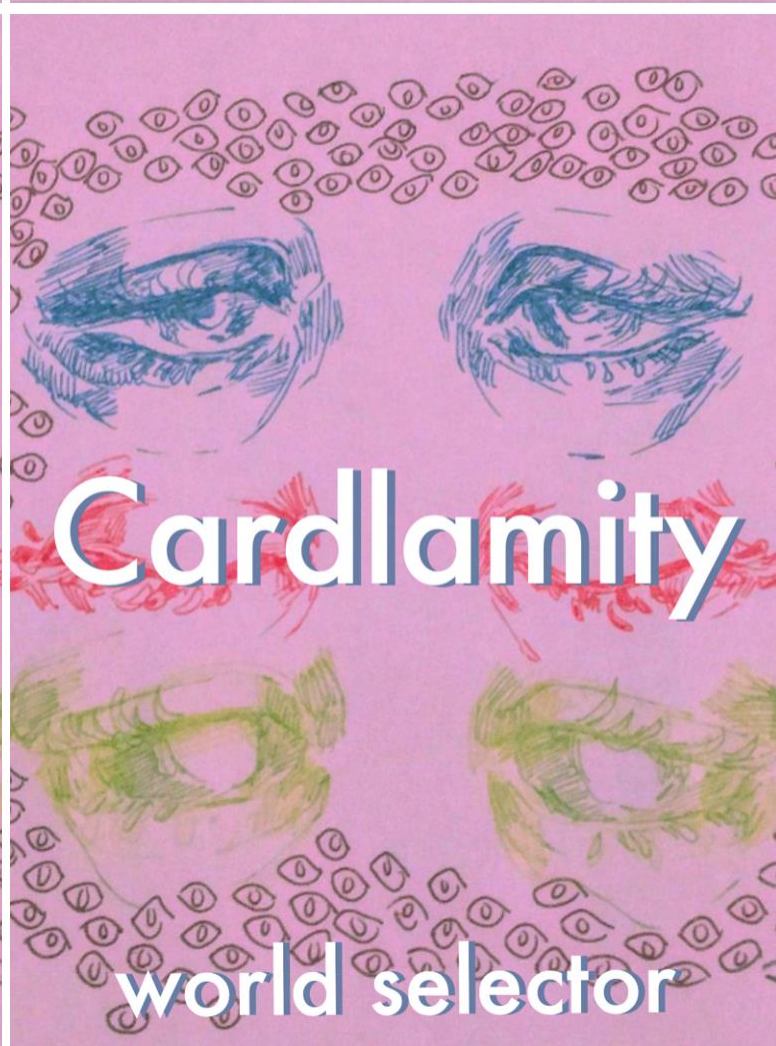
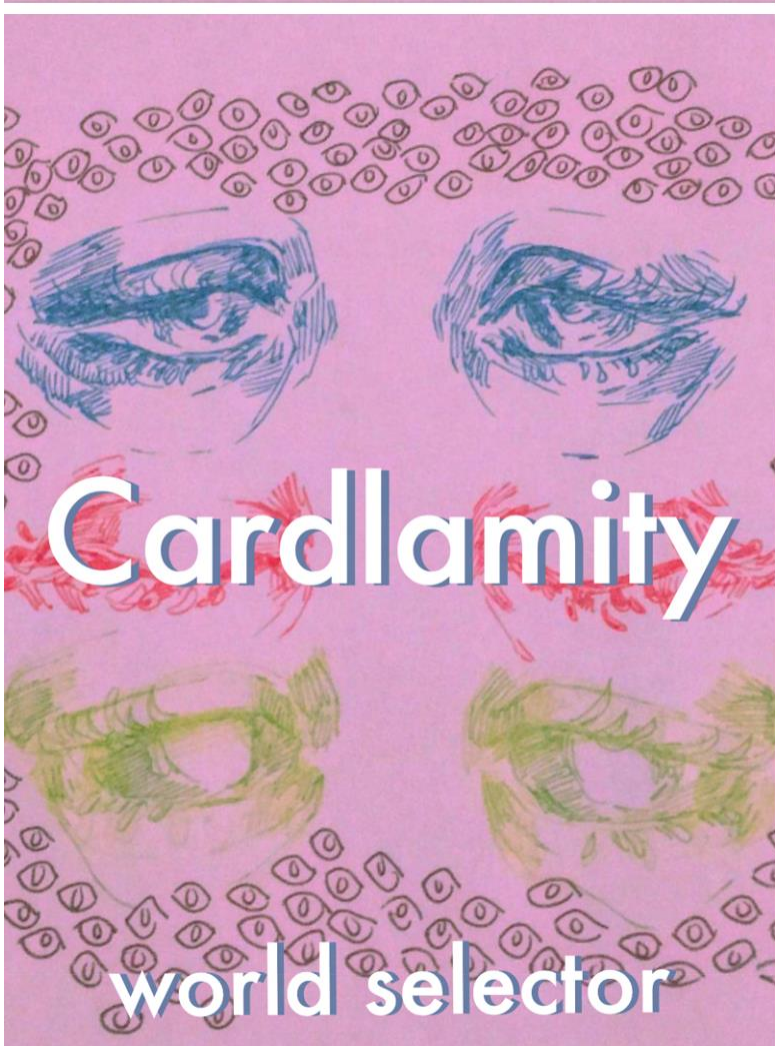
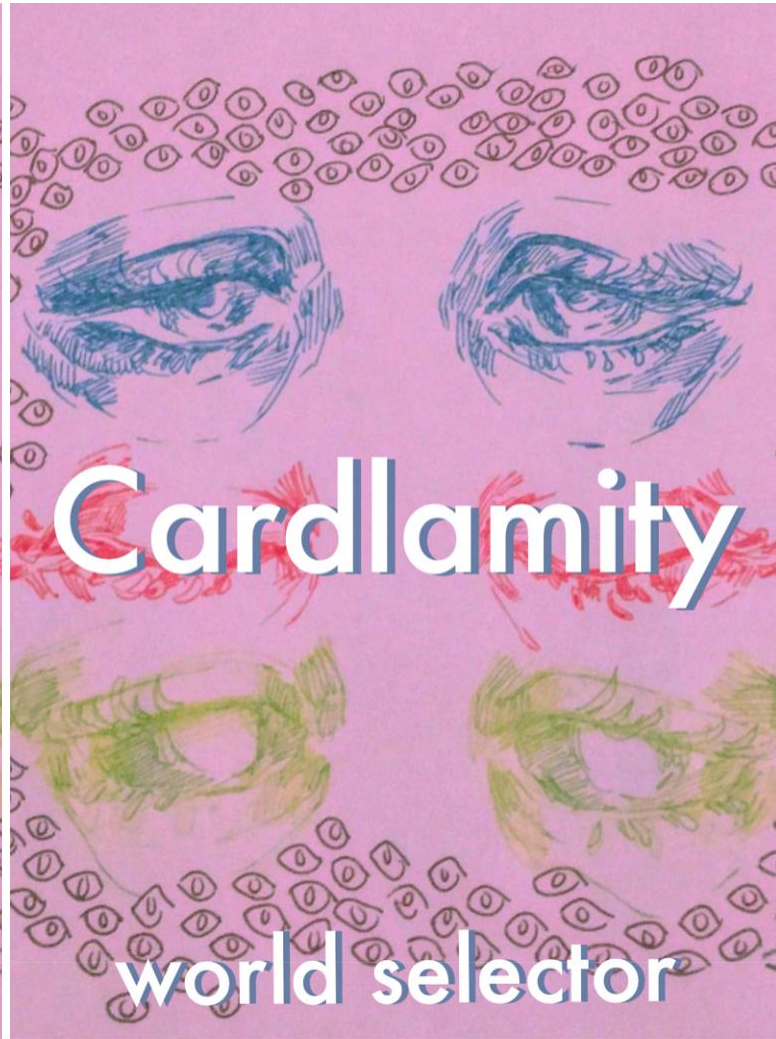
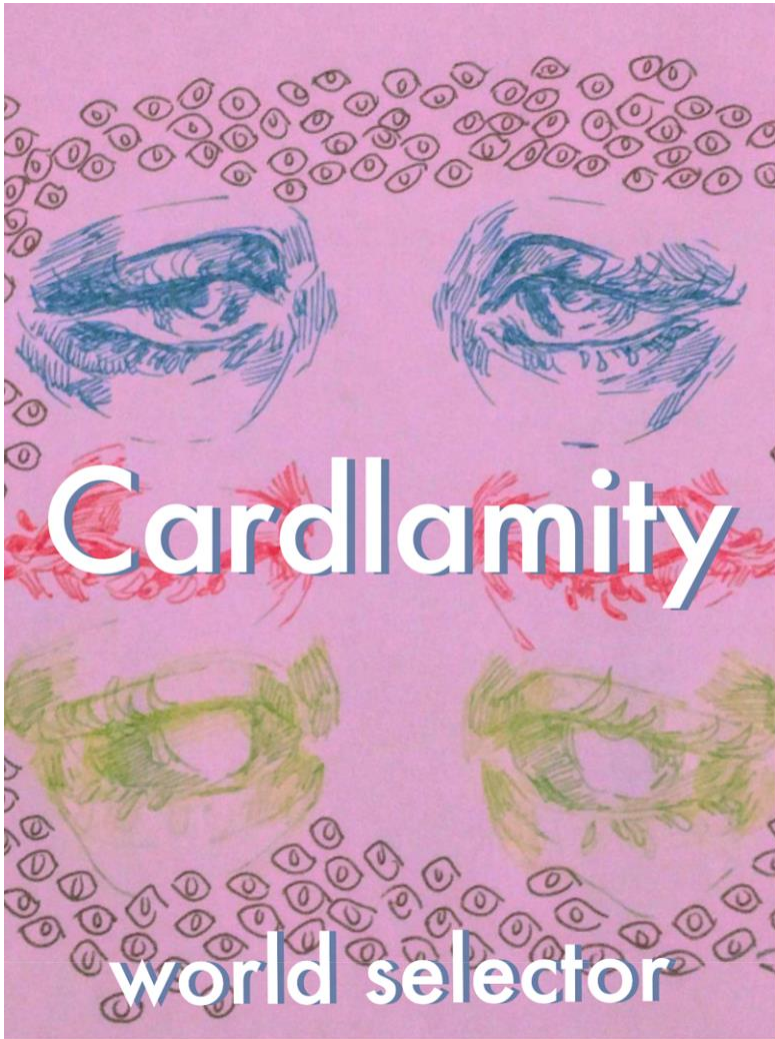


**Magical
circus**

**The Old/
Wild West**

The underworld

**Massive
labyrinth**



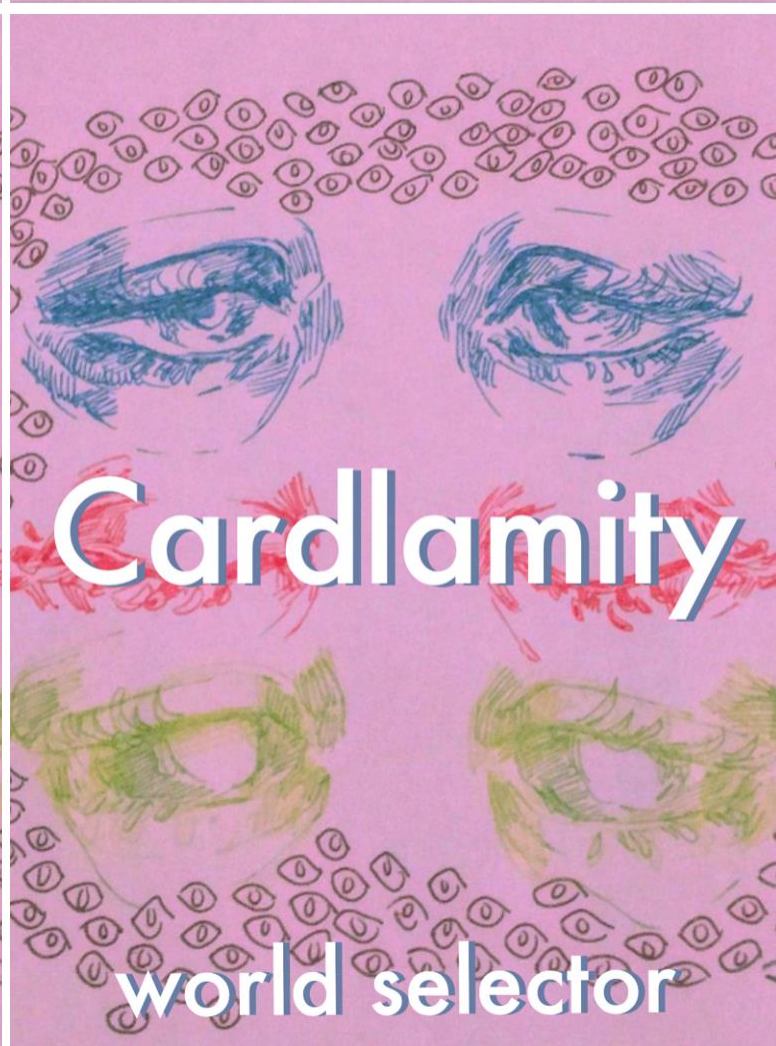
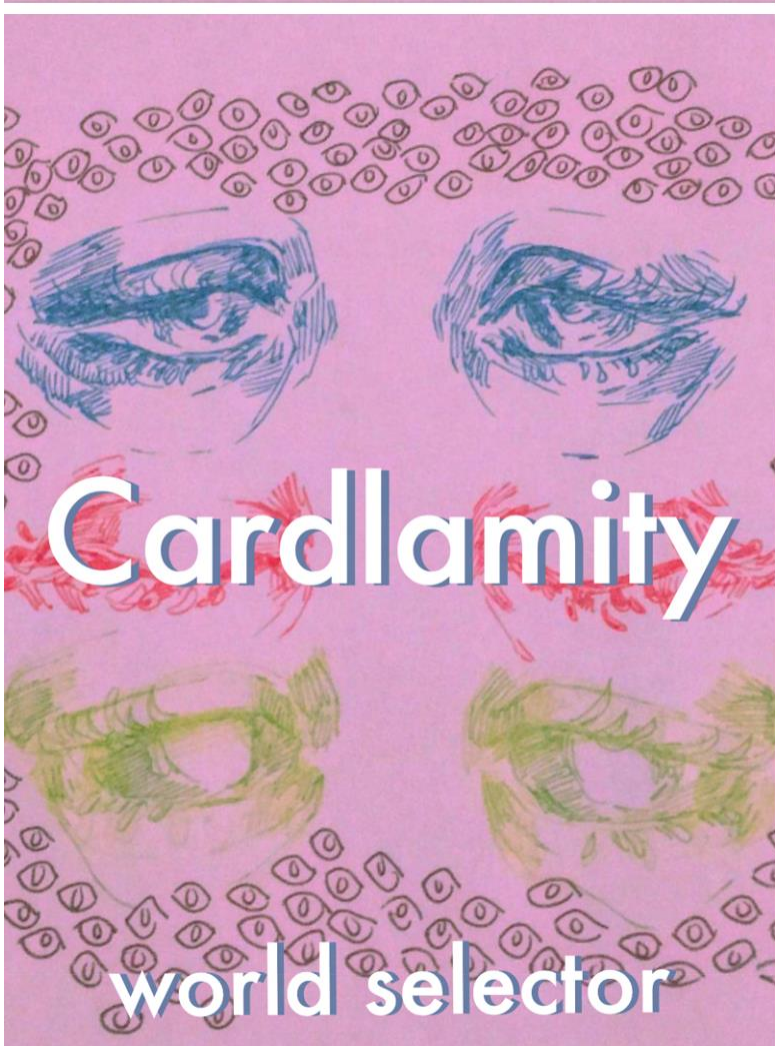
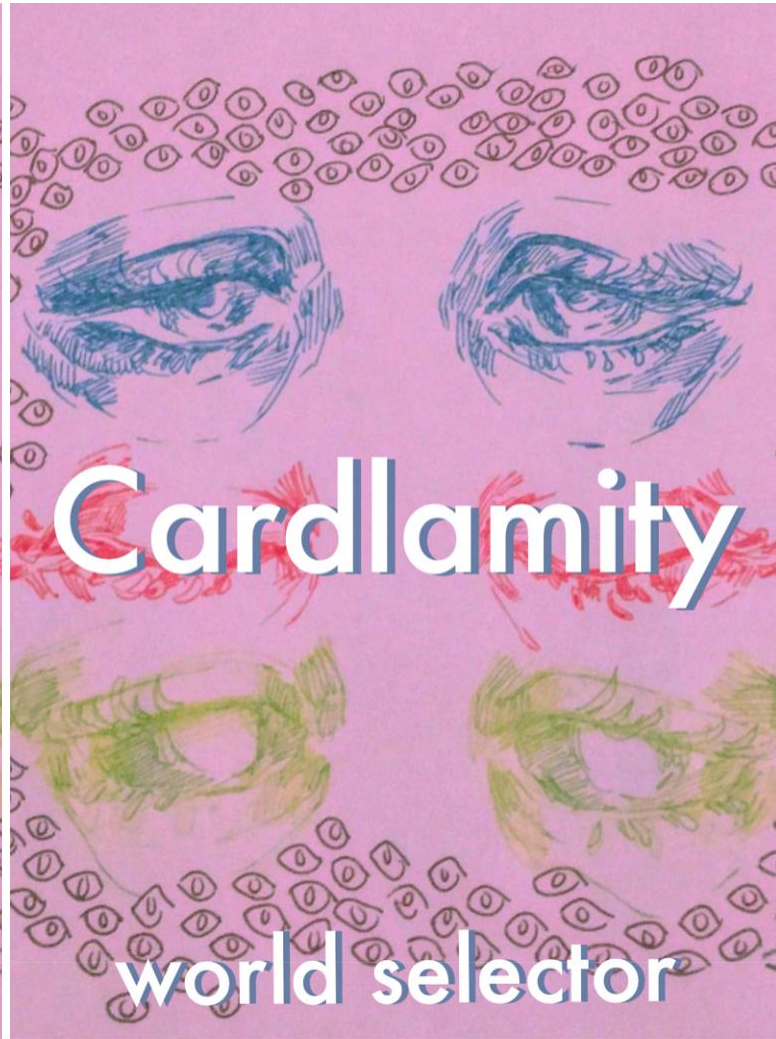
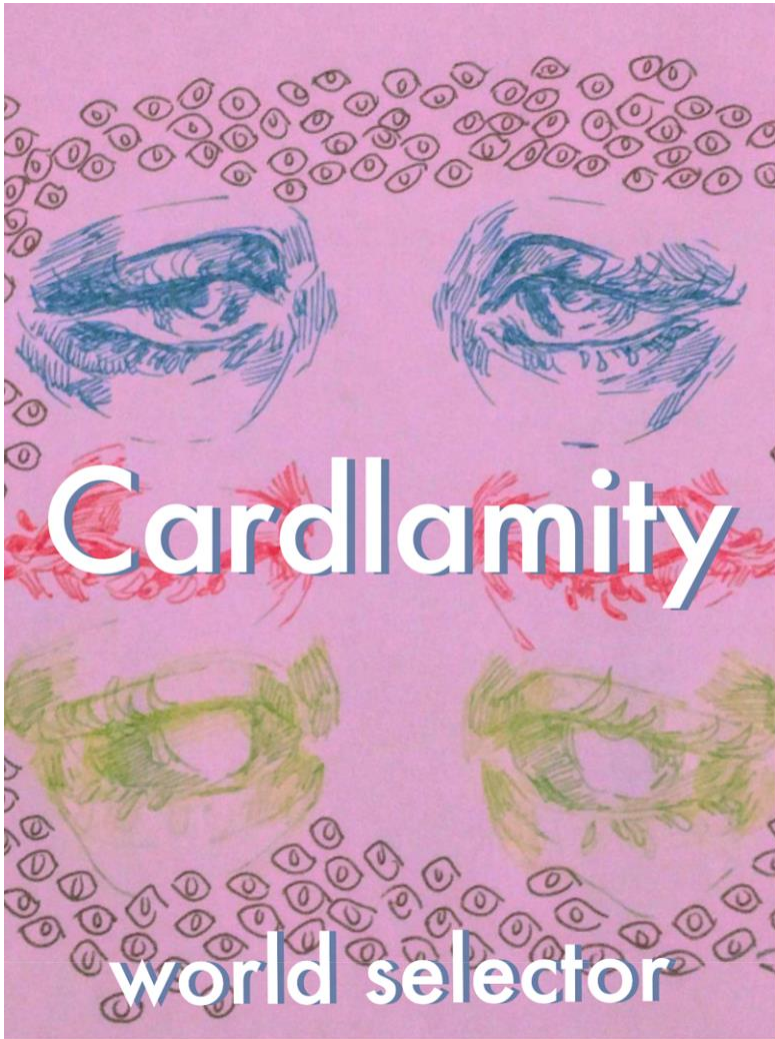


The Fae realm

**Utopia ruled by
artificial
intelligence**

**World that is
post-zombie
outbreak**

**Post-earthquake
apocalyptic
wasteland**



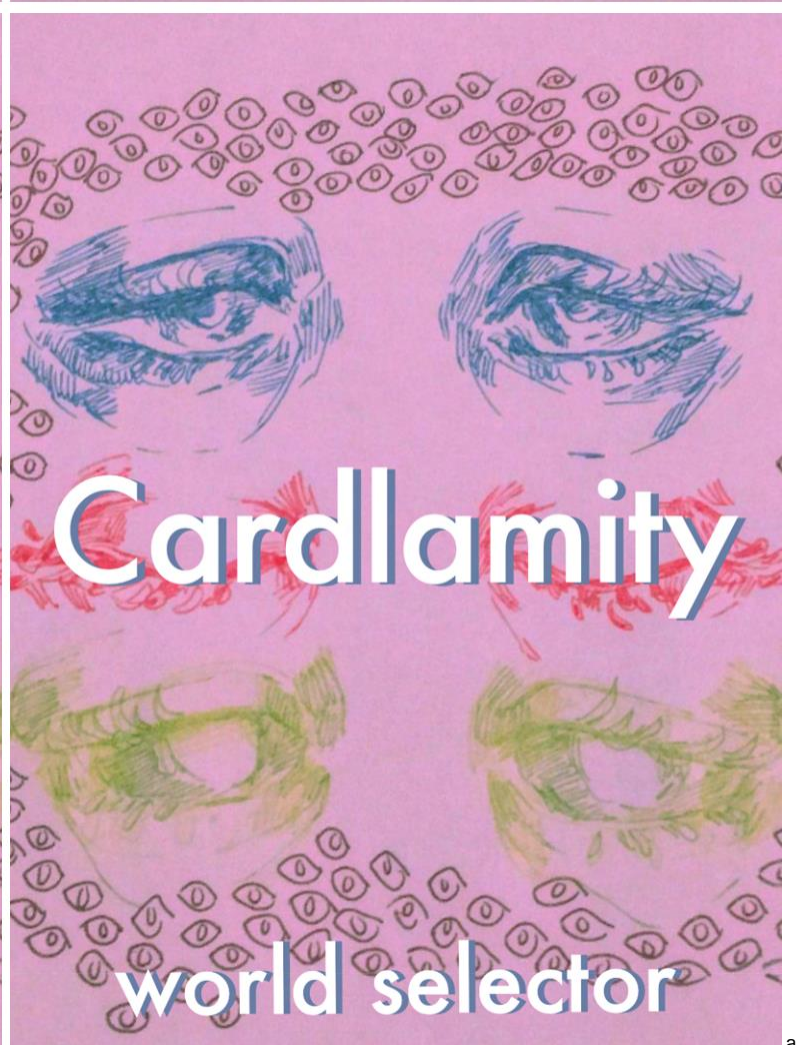
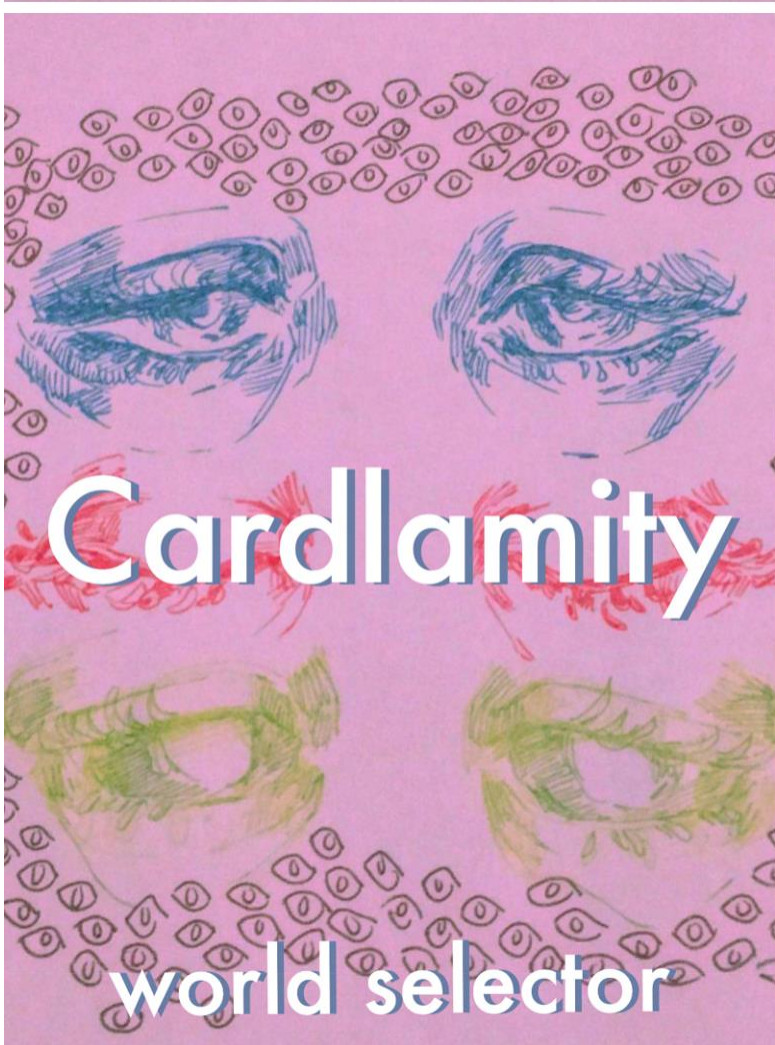
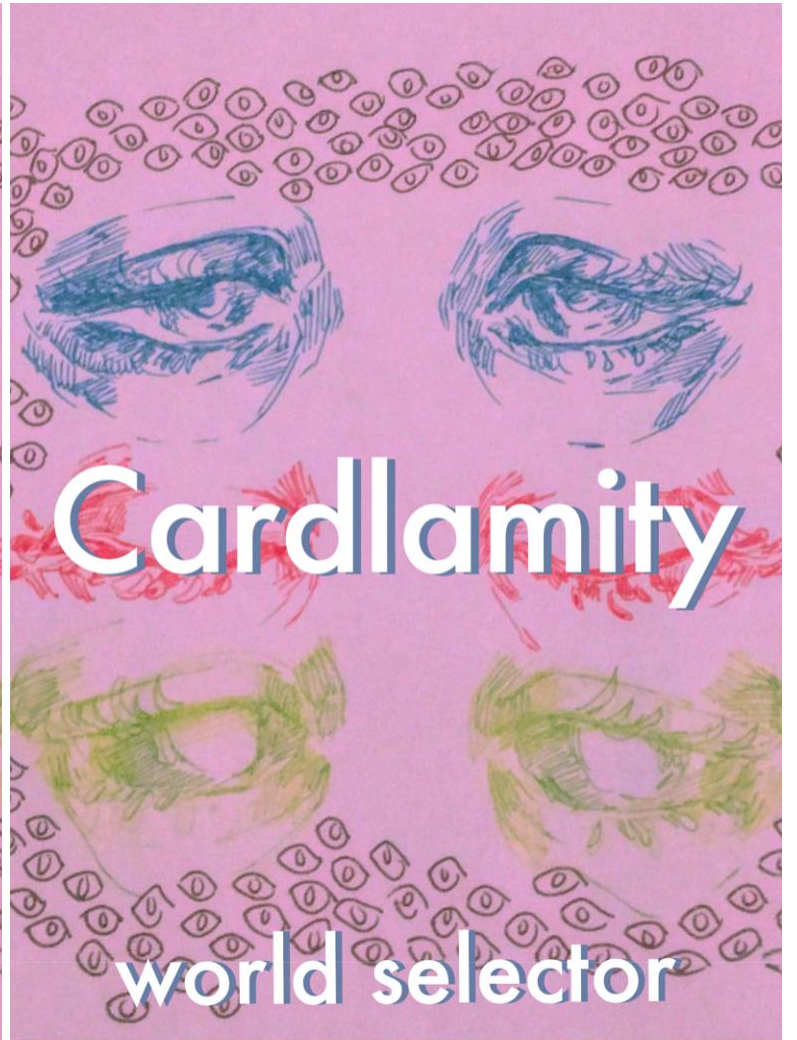
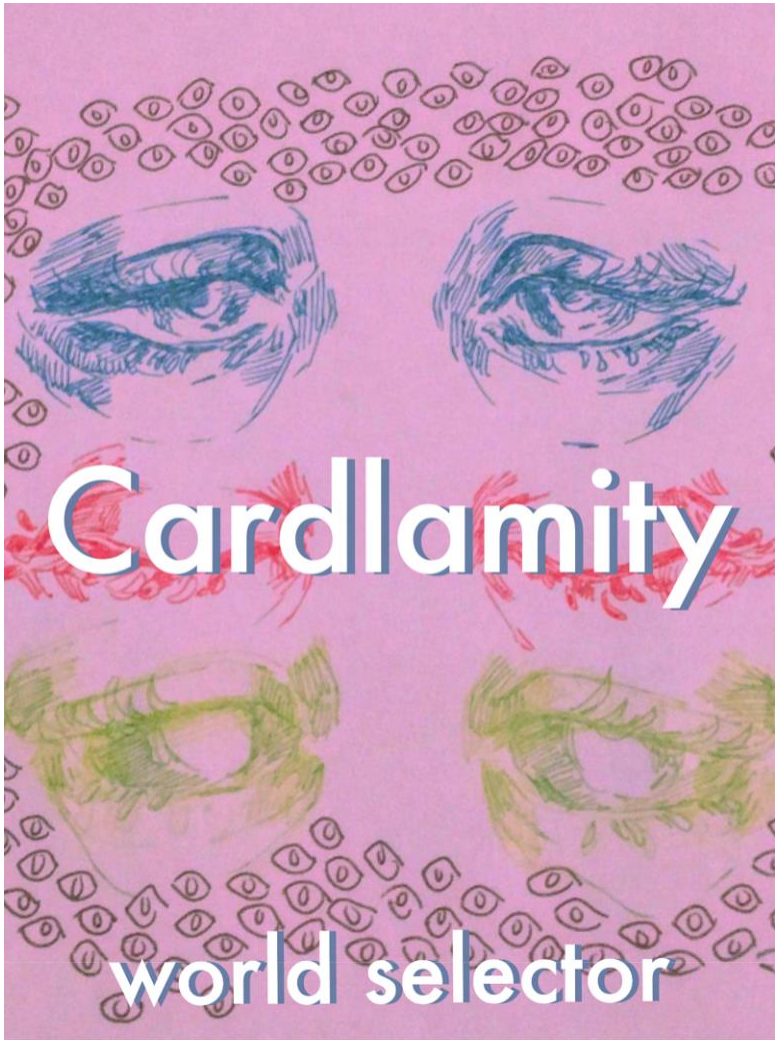


Space station
orbiting a
black hole

City inside a
perpetual storm

Lunar
colony

Fairy mushroom
kingdom



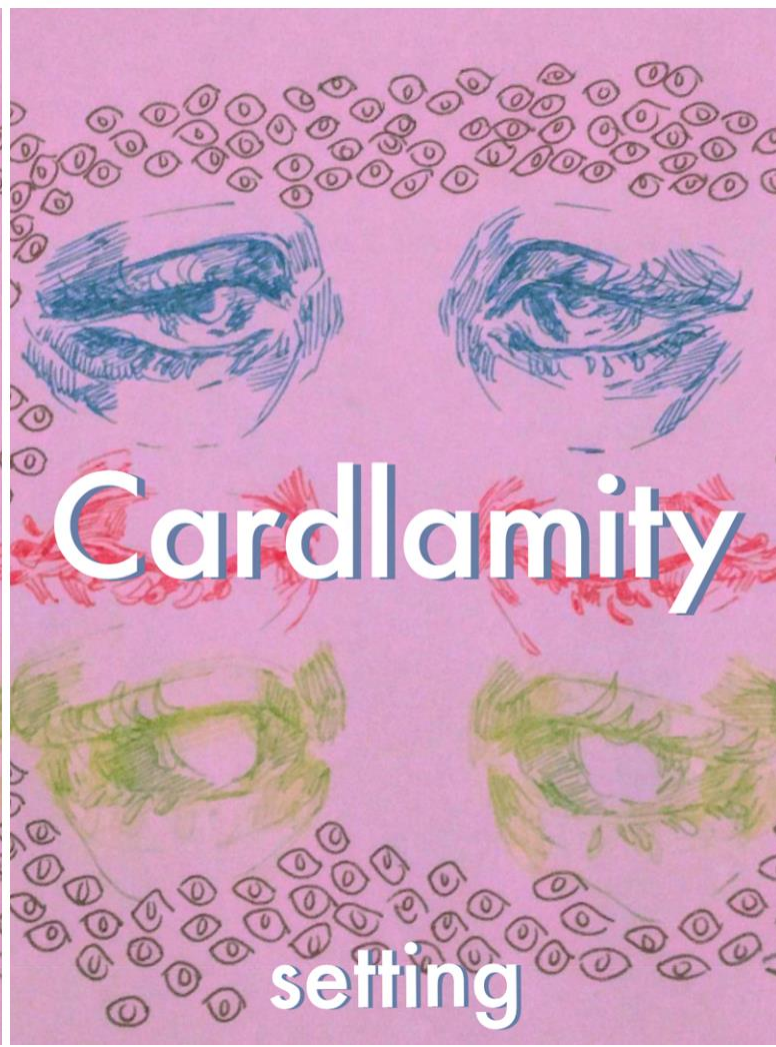
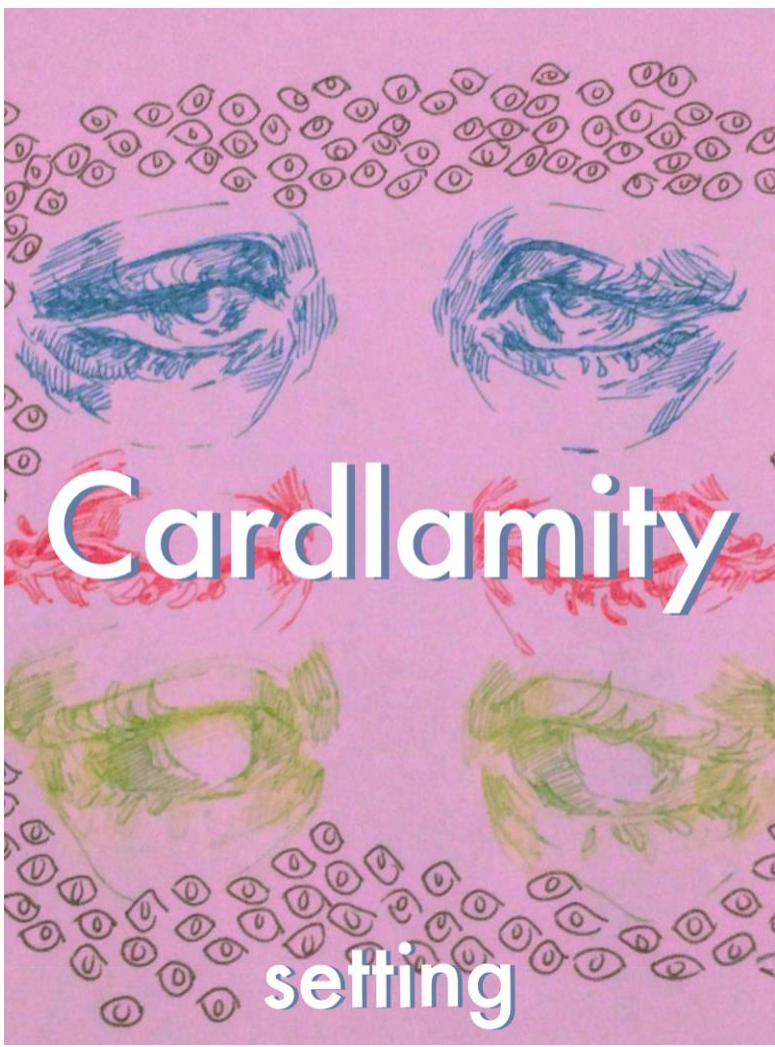
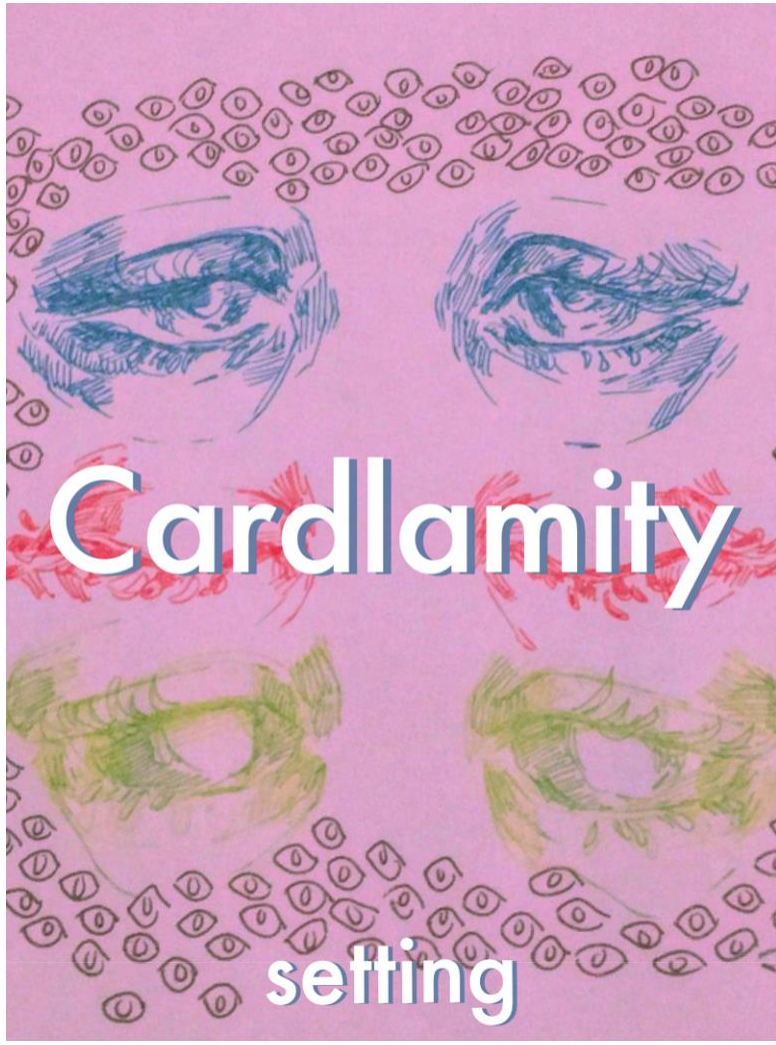
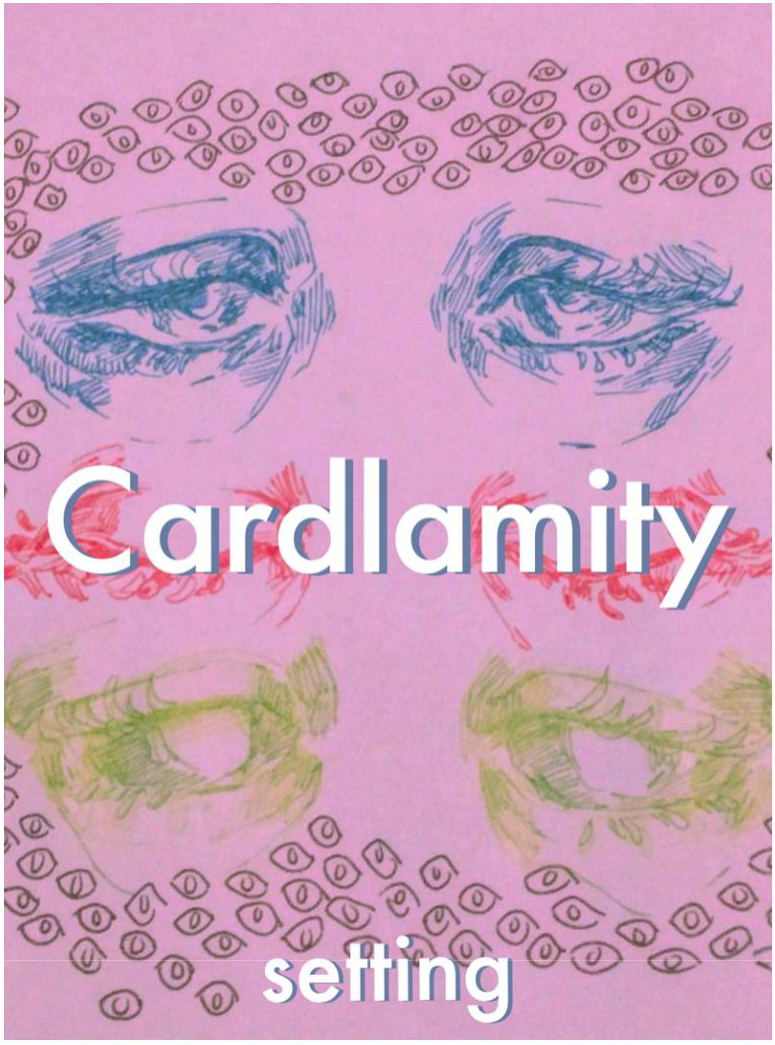


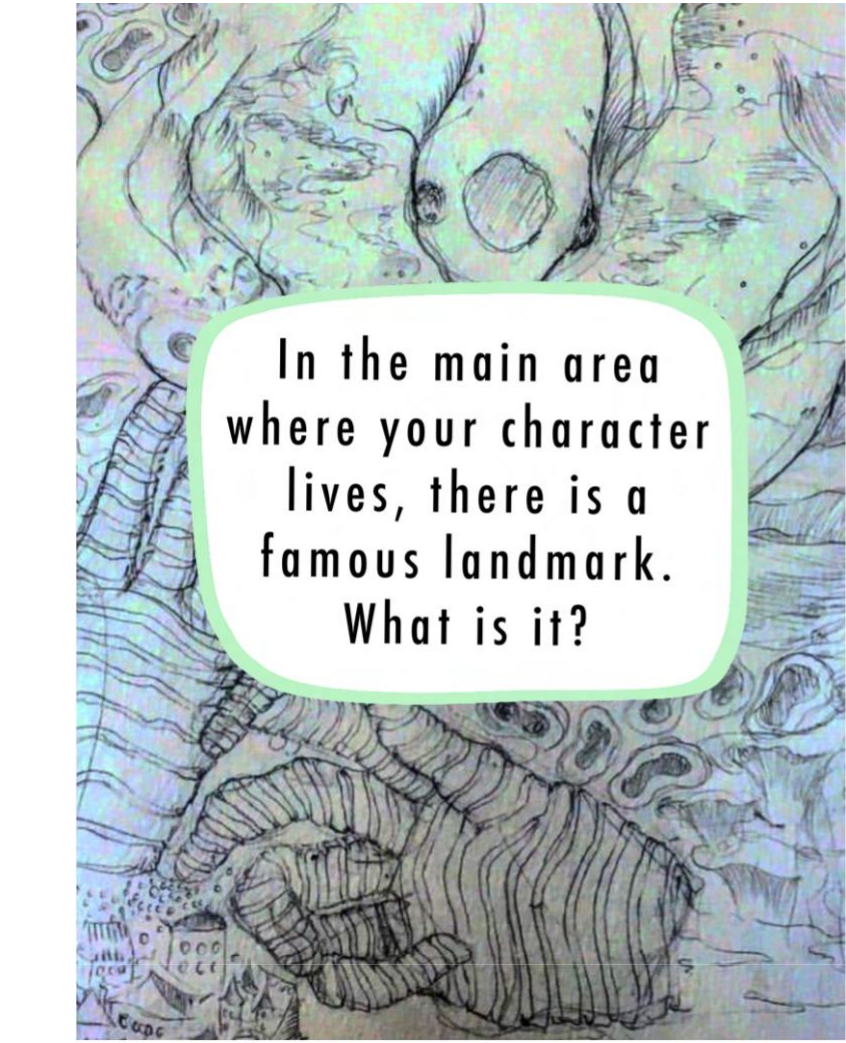
**City inside an
active volcano**

Deep space

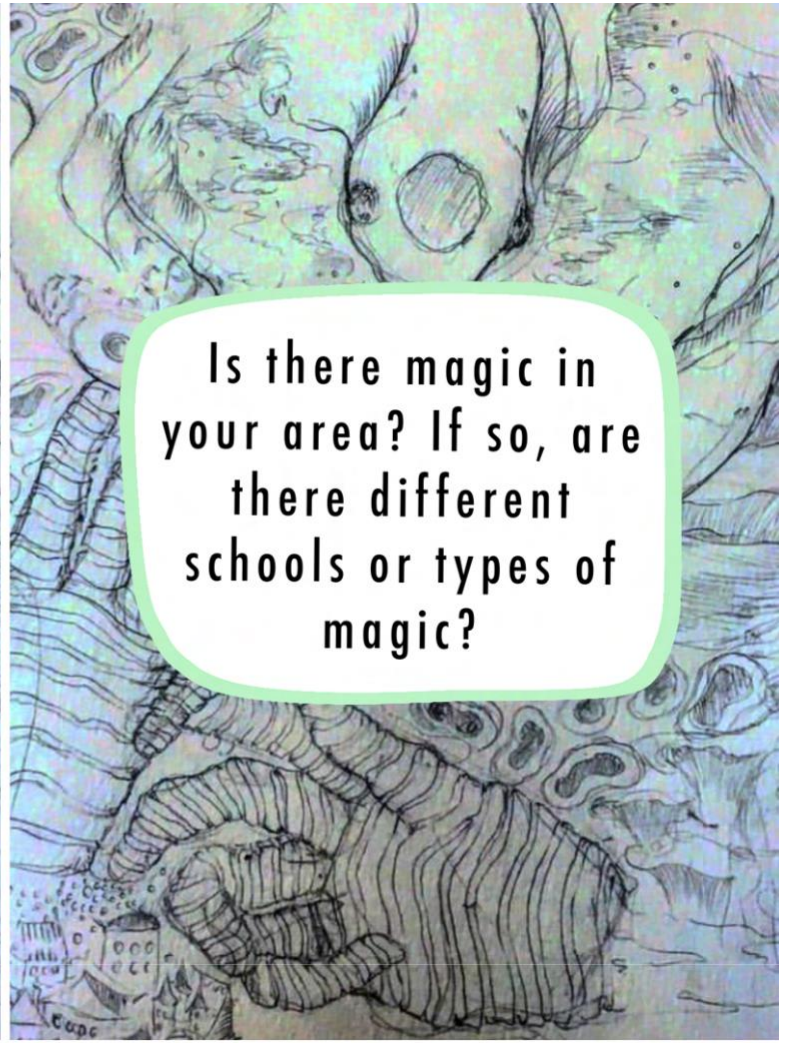
The backrooms

**Flooded
wasteland**





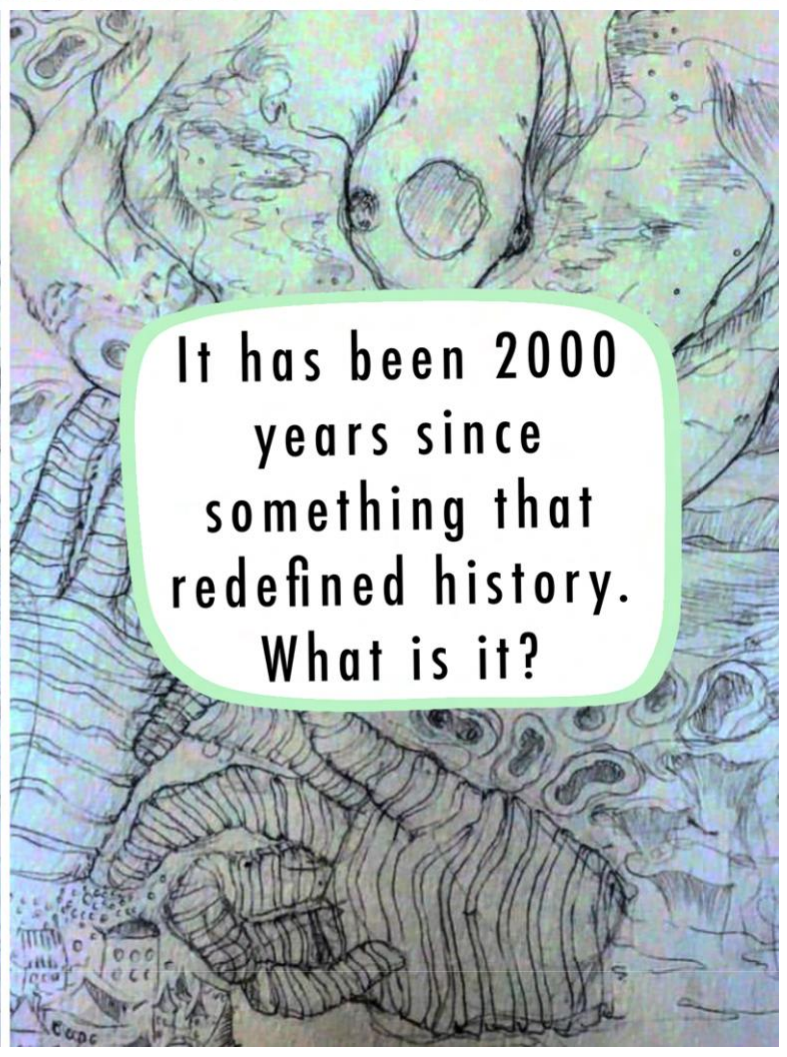
In the main area where your character lives, there is a famous landmark. What is it?



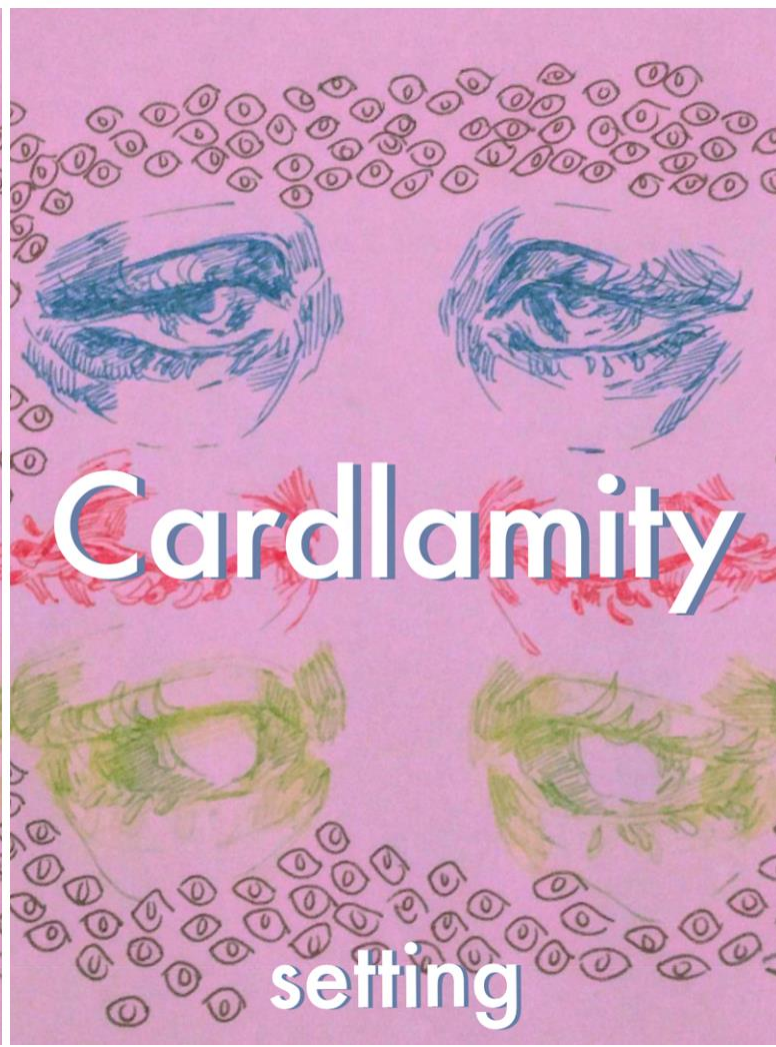
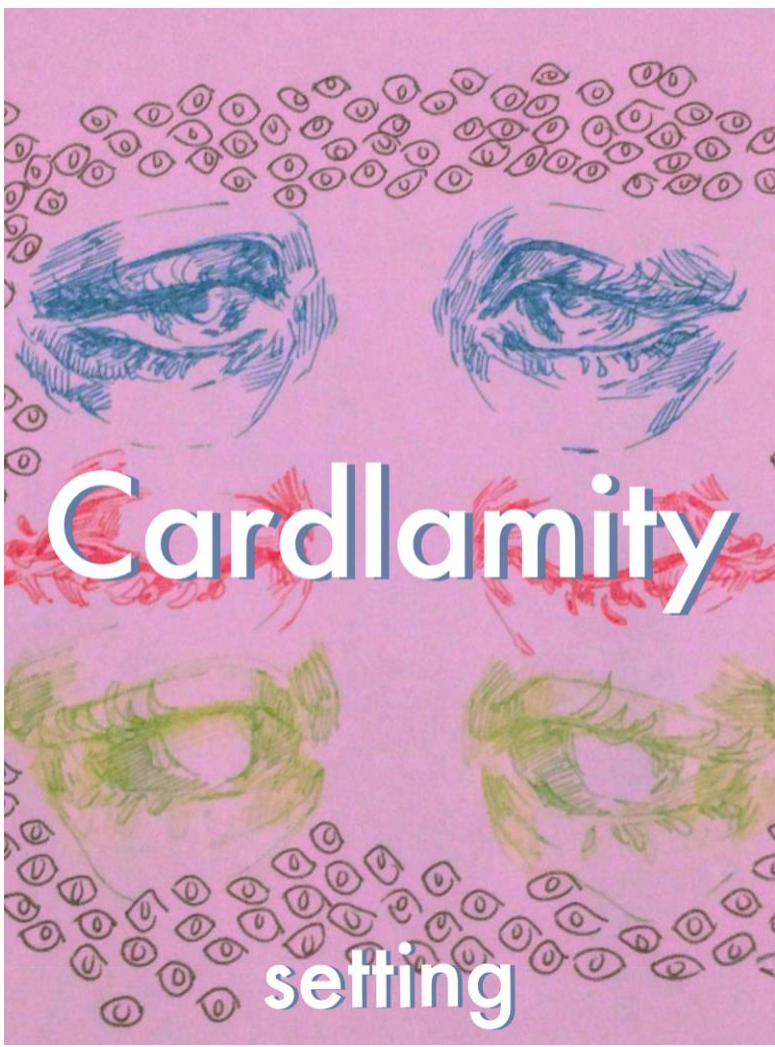
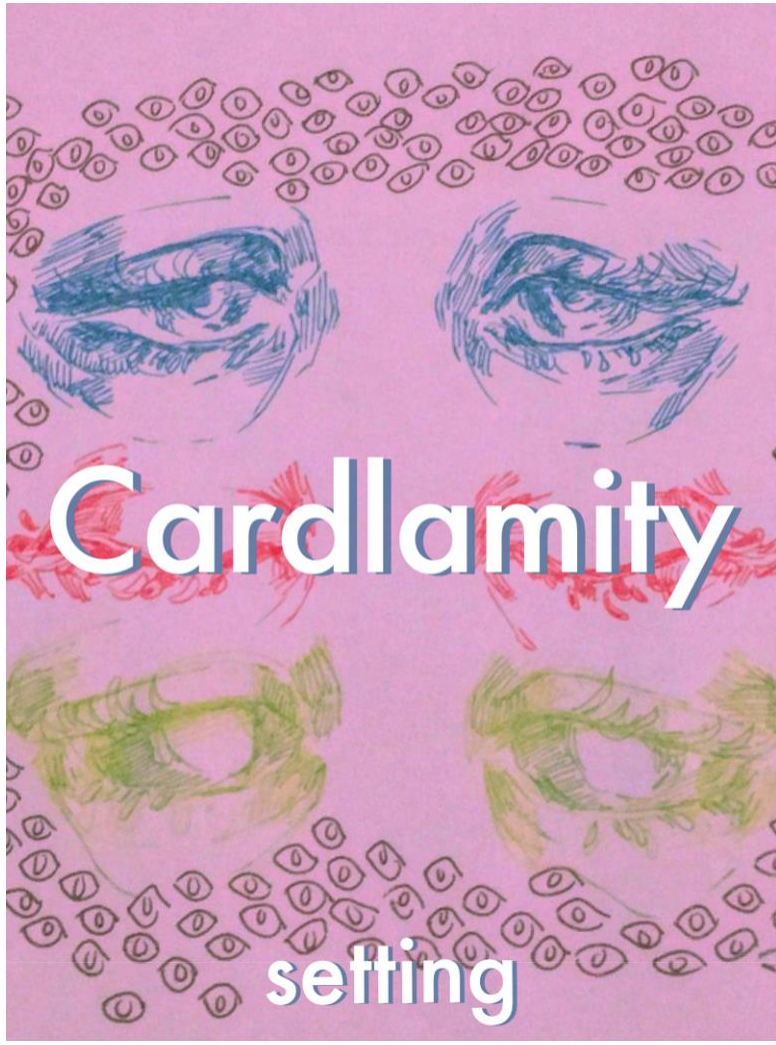
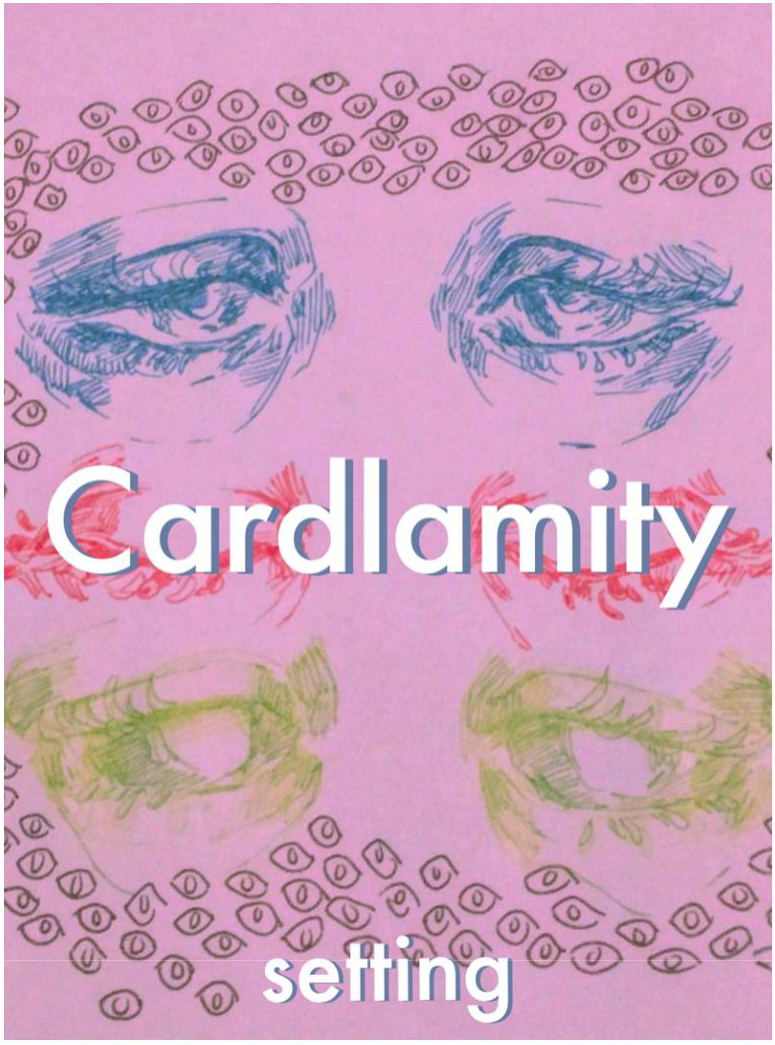
Is there magic in your area? If so, are there different schools or types of magic?

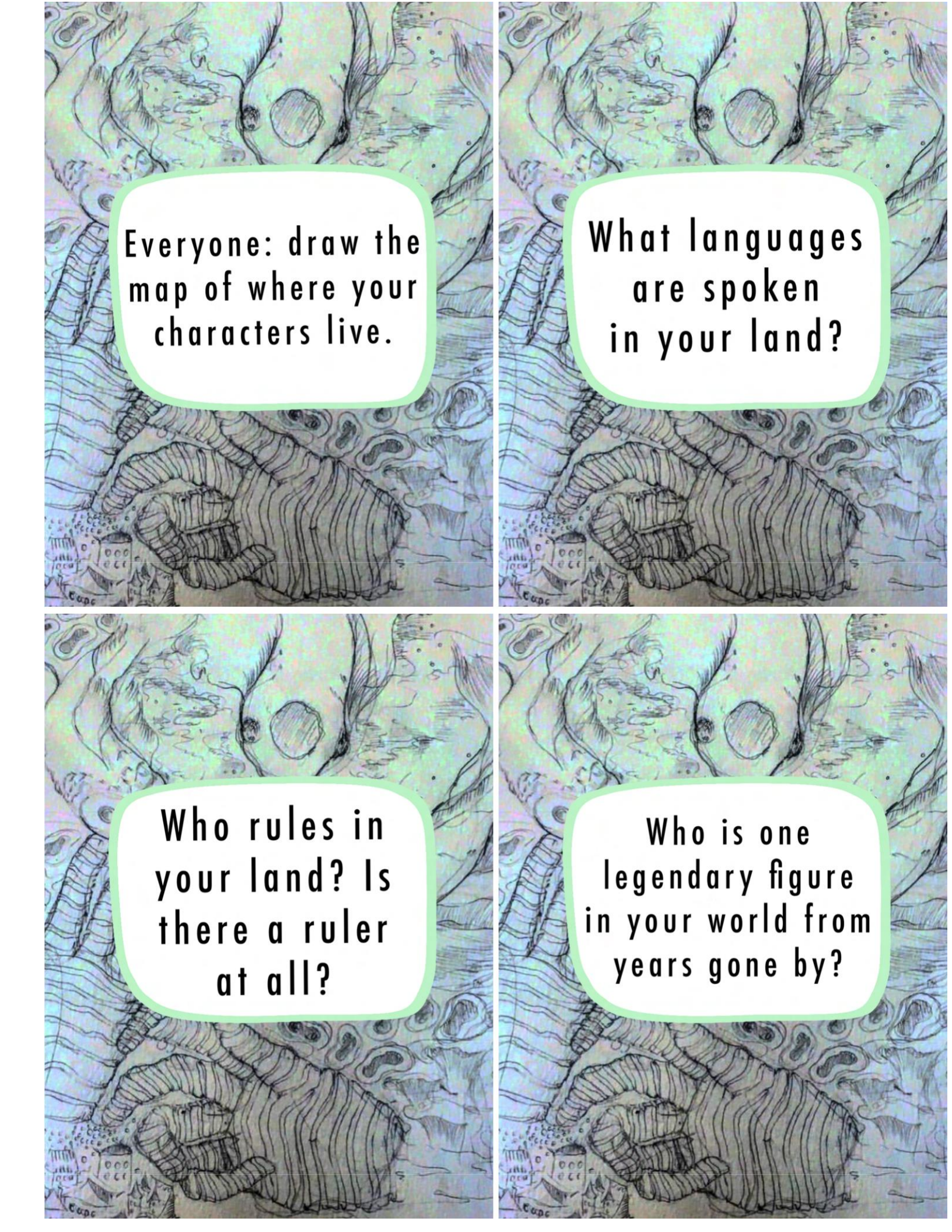


Is there technology in your area? How advanced is it?



It has been 2000 years since something that redefined history. What is it?



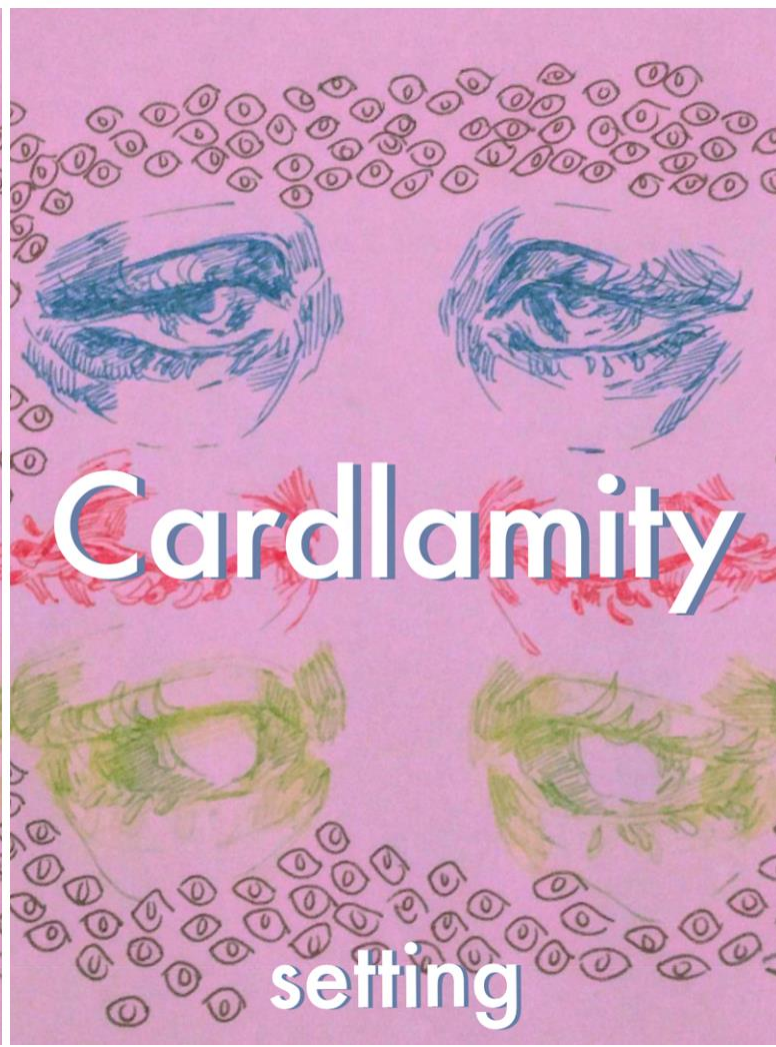
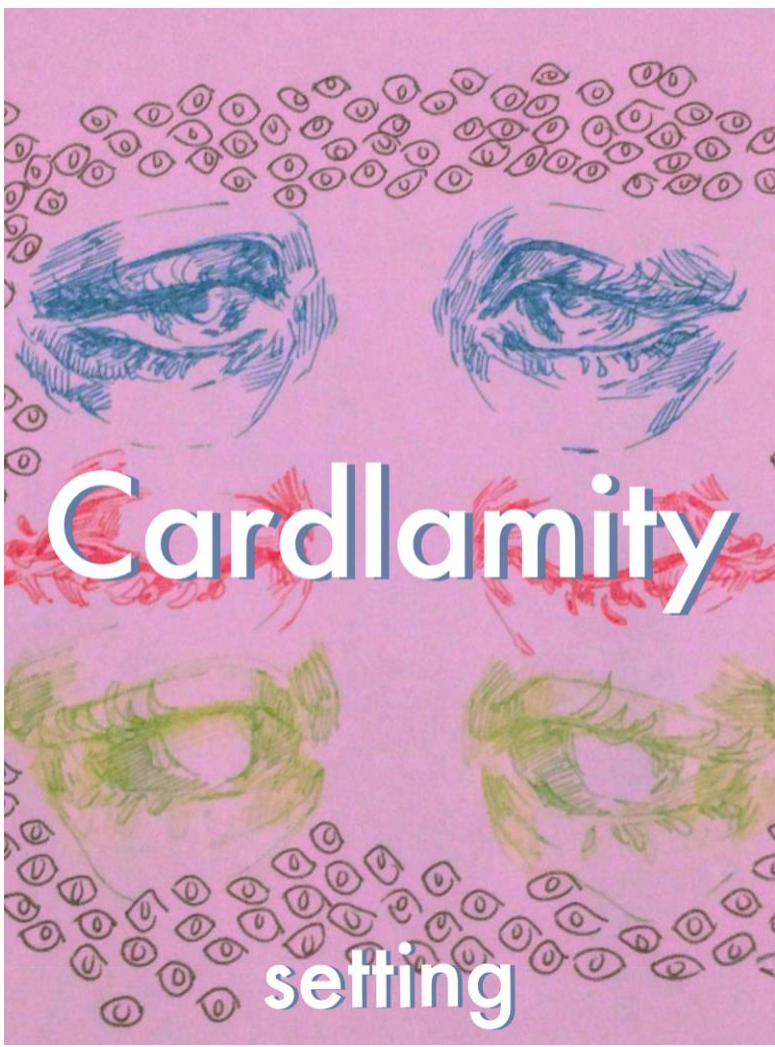
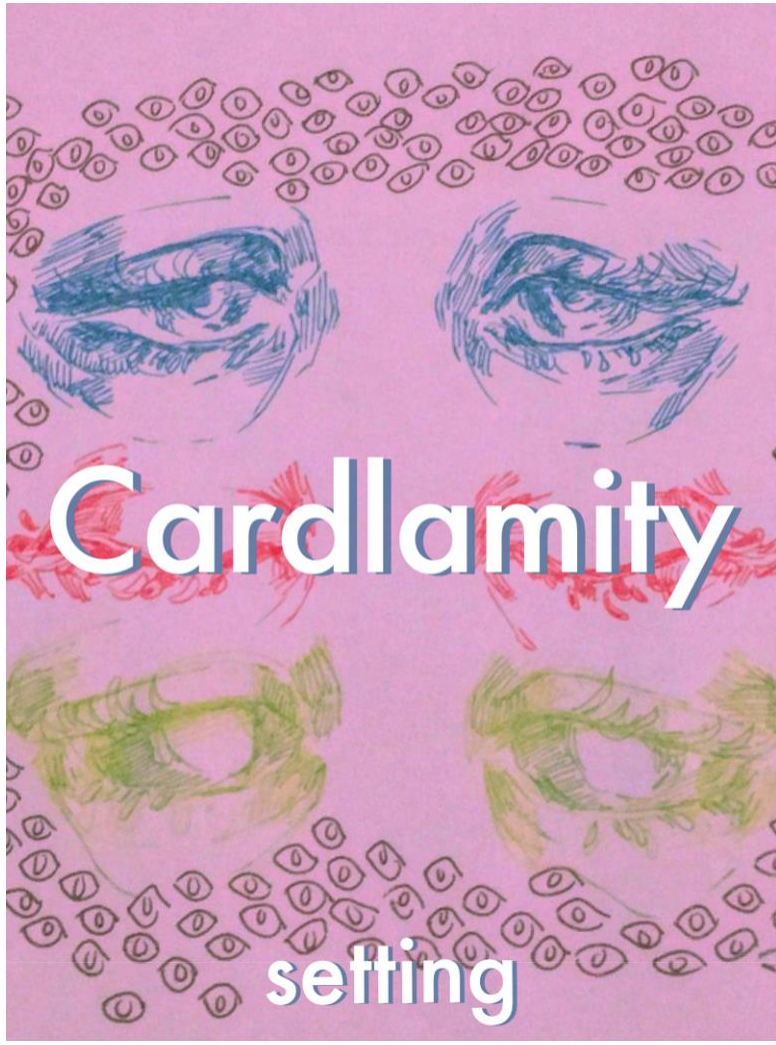
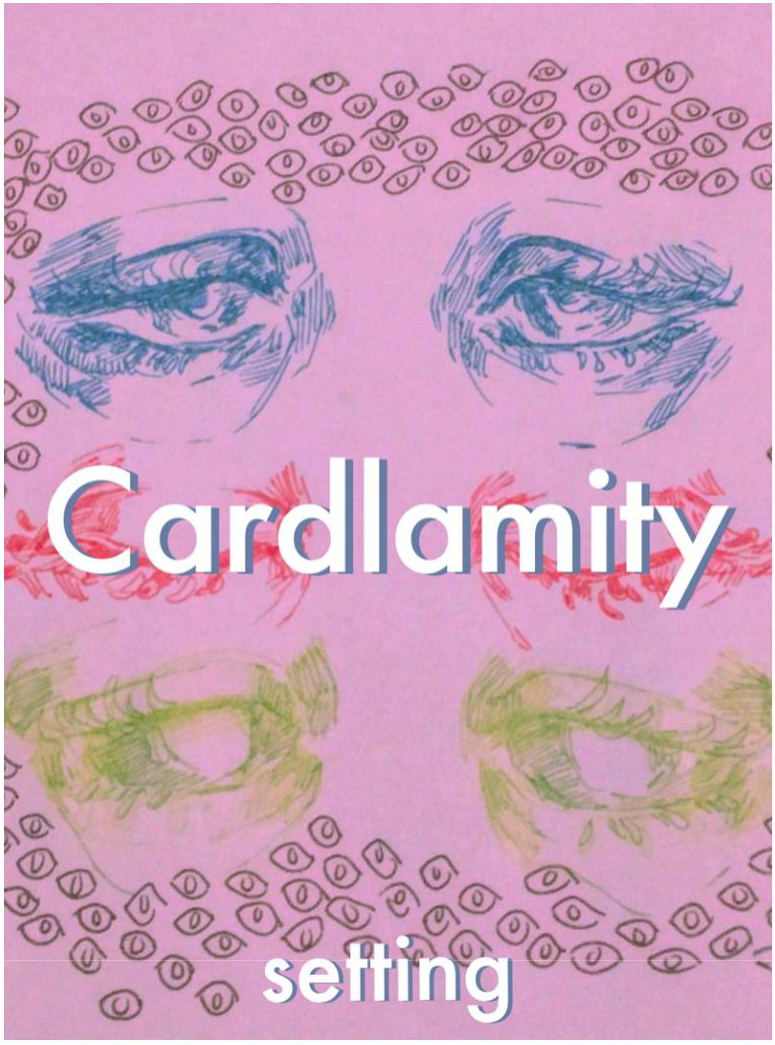



Everyone: draw the map of where your characters live.

What languages are spoken in your land?

Who rules in your land? Is there a ruler at all?

Who is one legendary figure in your world from years gone by?



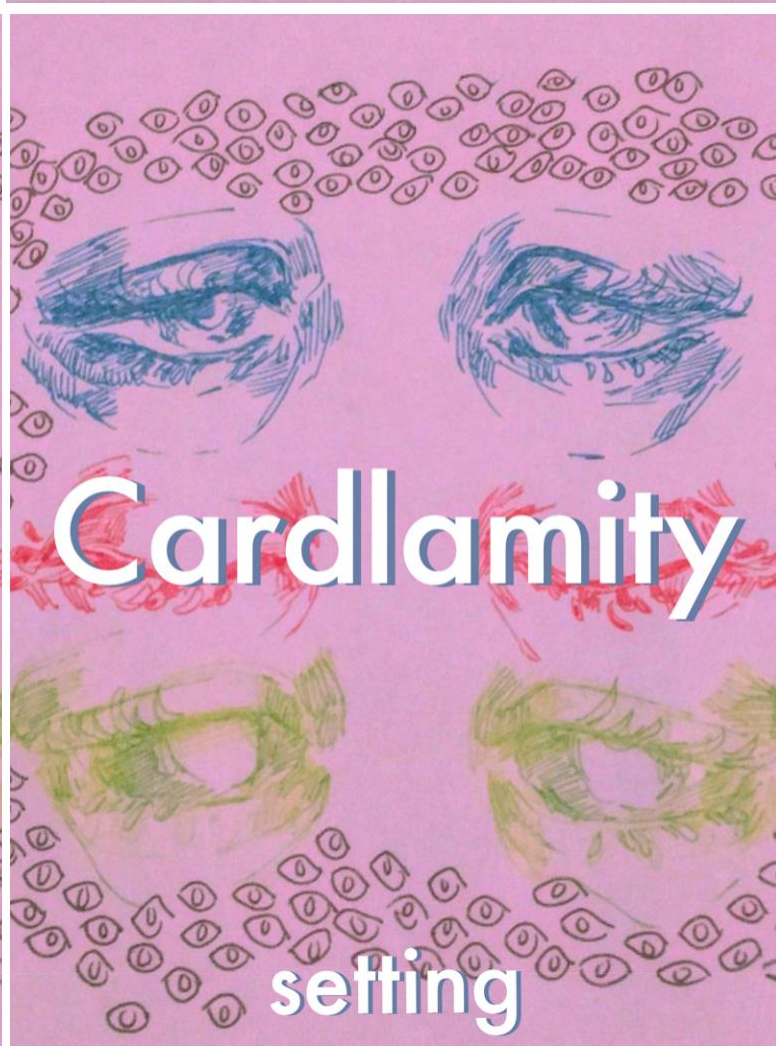
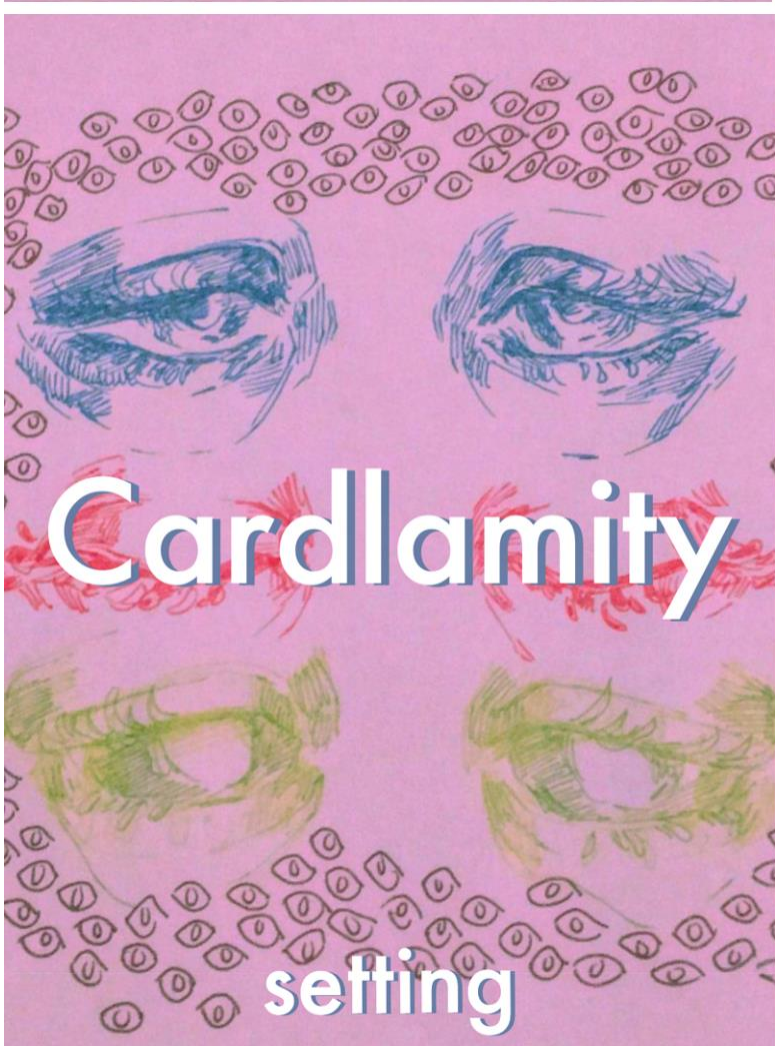
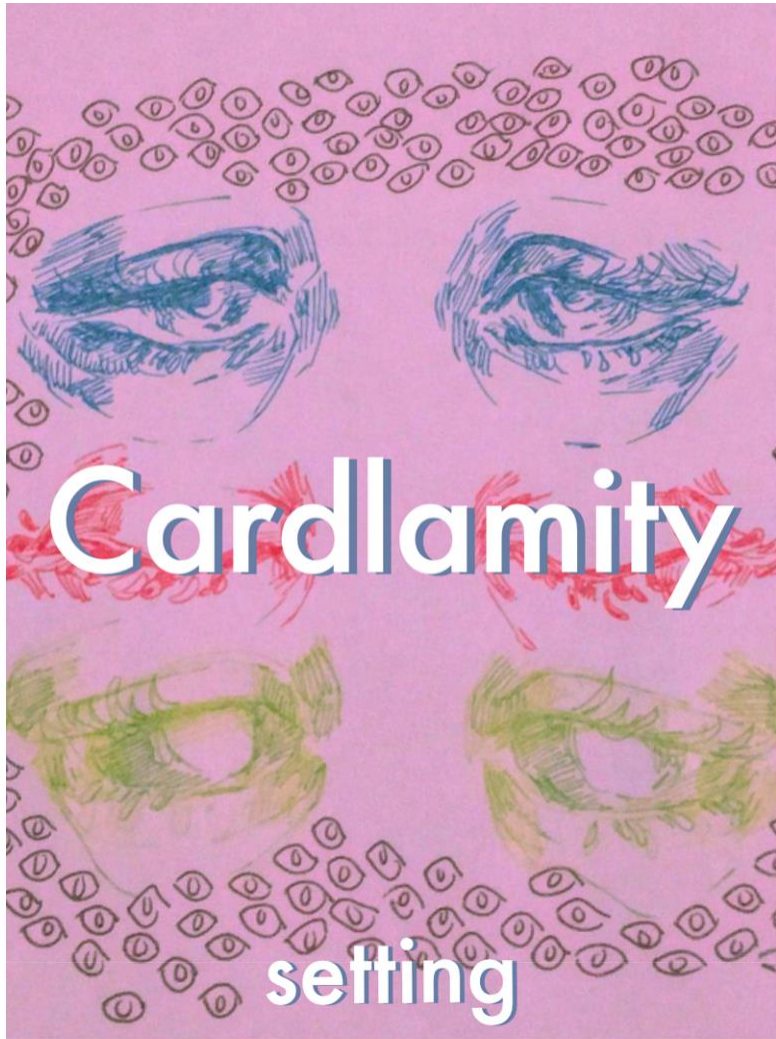
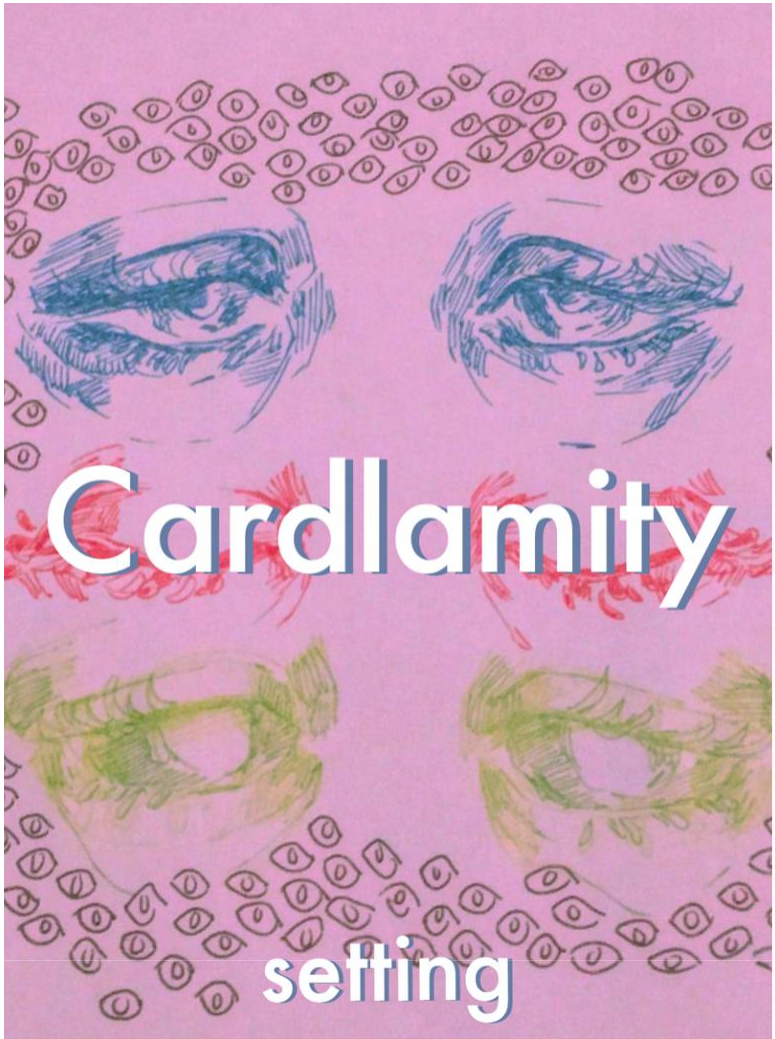


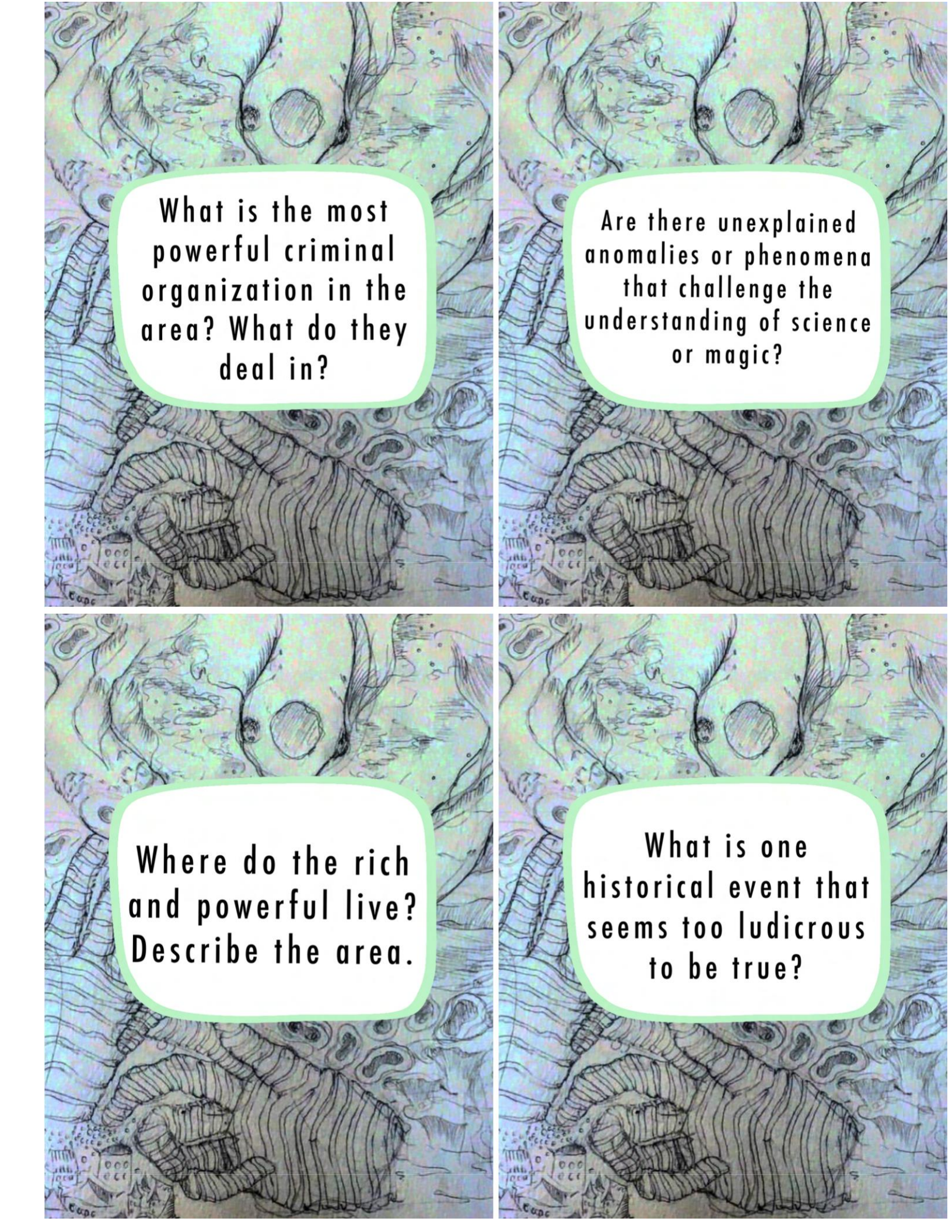
Is there war?
What is it for?
If not, how is
peace being kept?

What kinds
of jobs
or professions
exist?

Describe the plant
and animal life in
your world. Are there
any fantastical
creatures?

What does power
mean in this setting?
How does one gain
power?



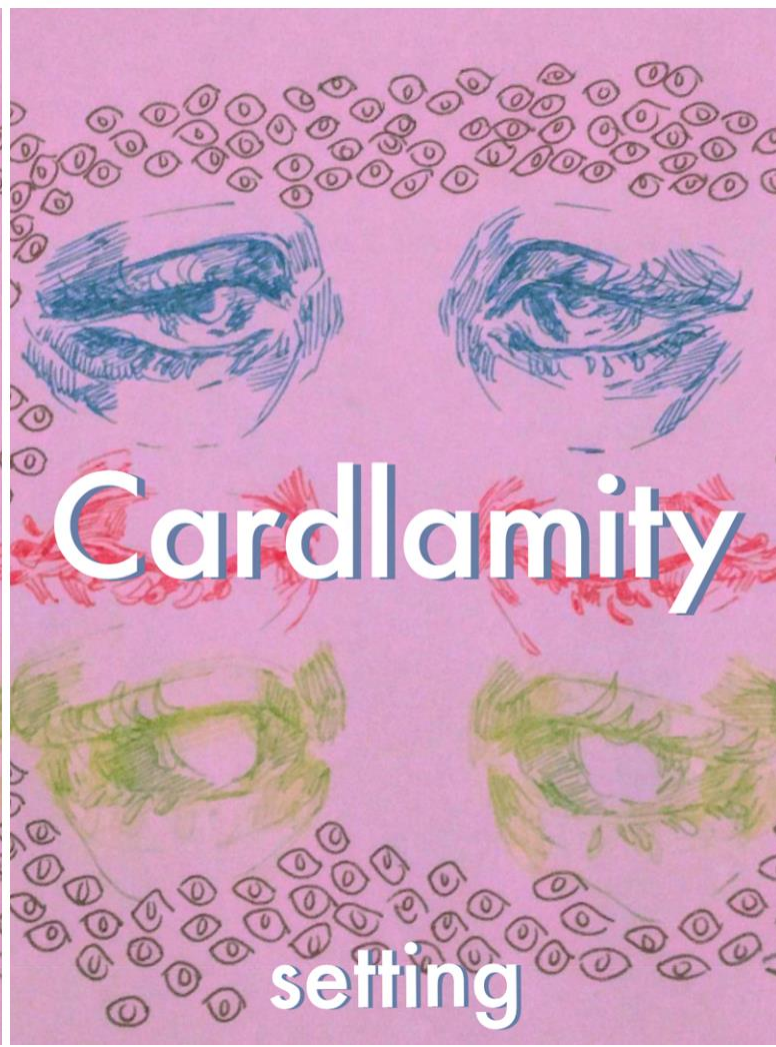
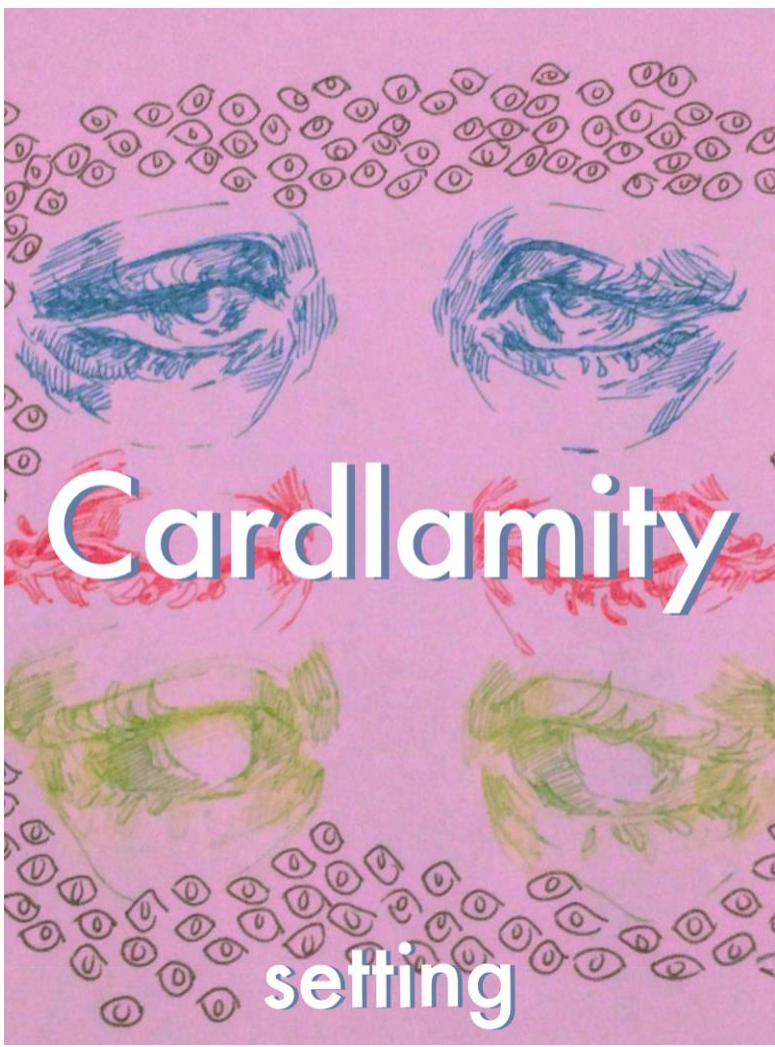
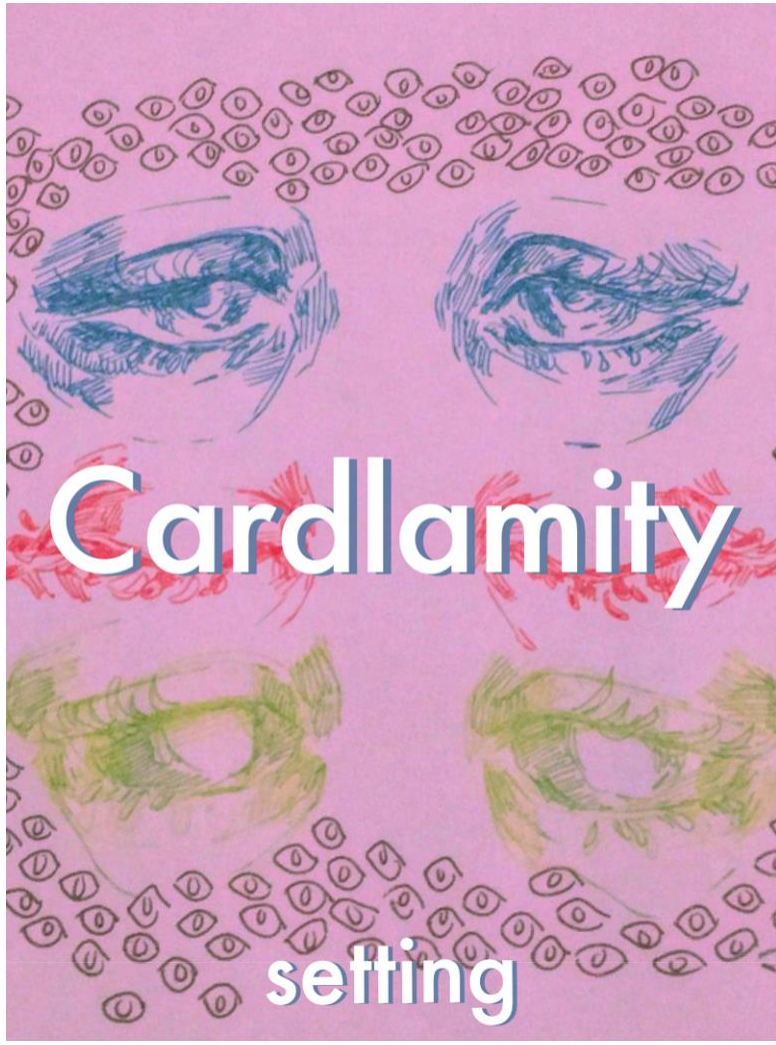
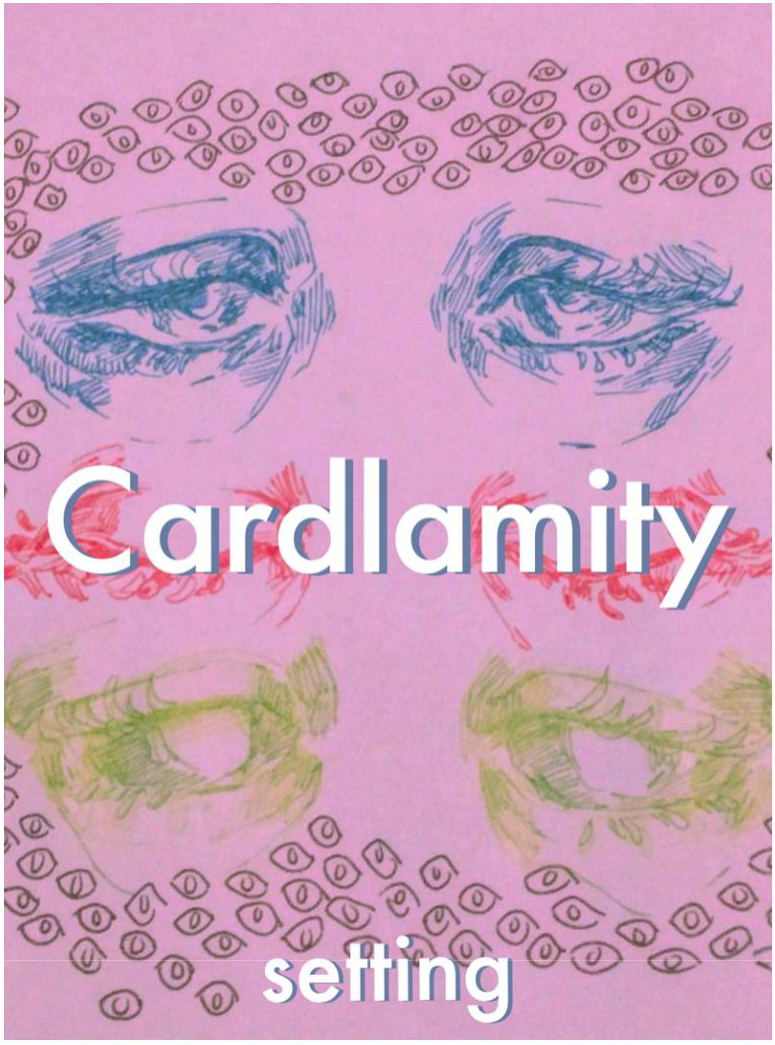


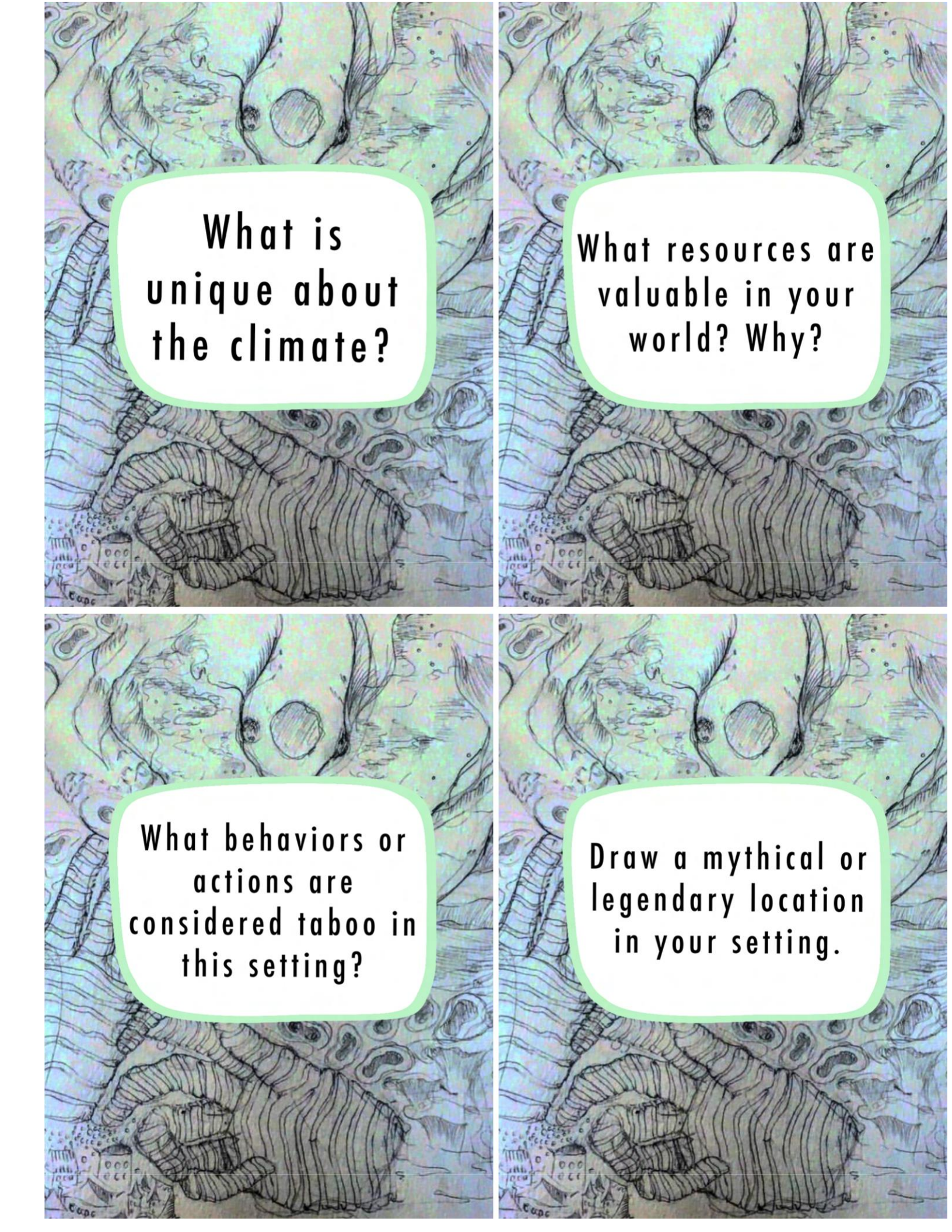
What is the most powerful criminal organization in the area? What do they deal in?

Are there unexplained anomalies or phenomena that challenge the understanding of science or magic?

Where do the rich and powerful live? Describe the area.

What is one historical event that seems too ludicrous to be true?



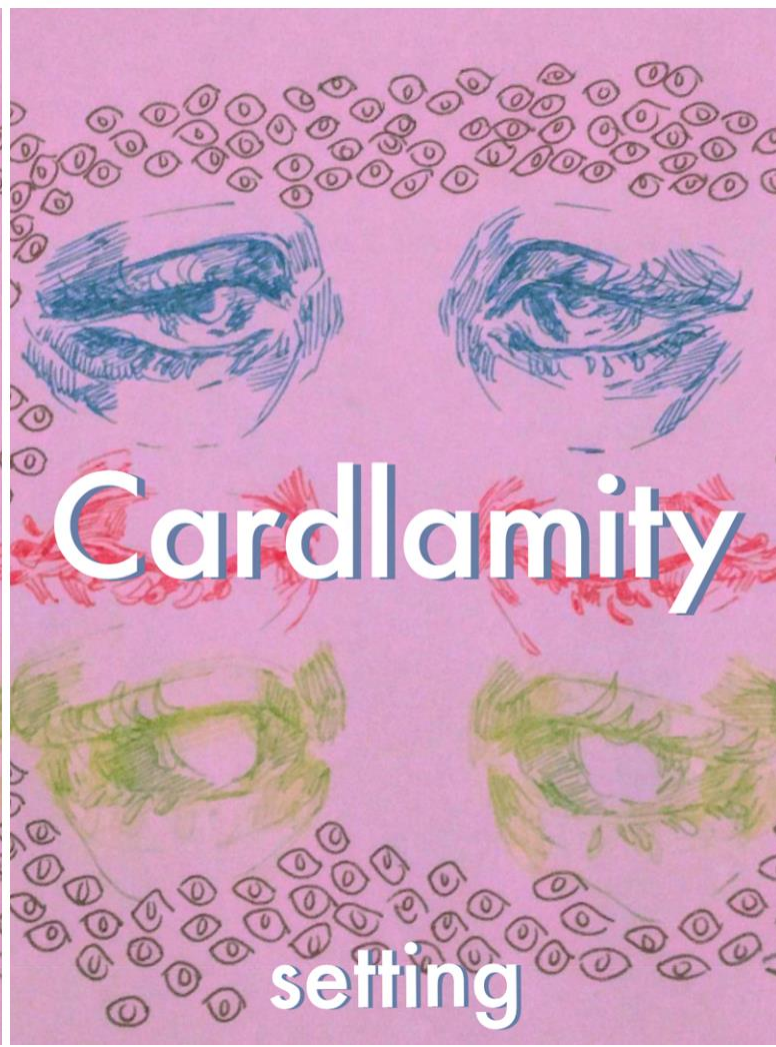
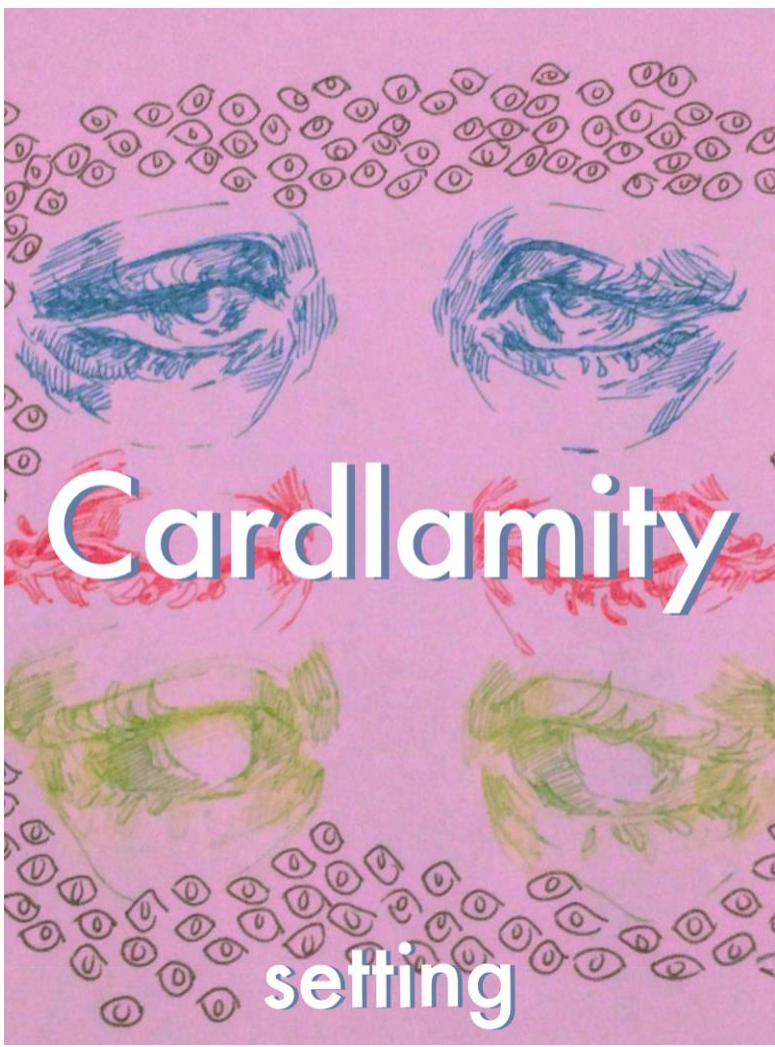
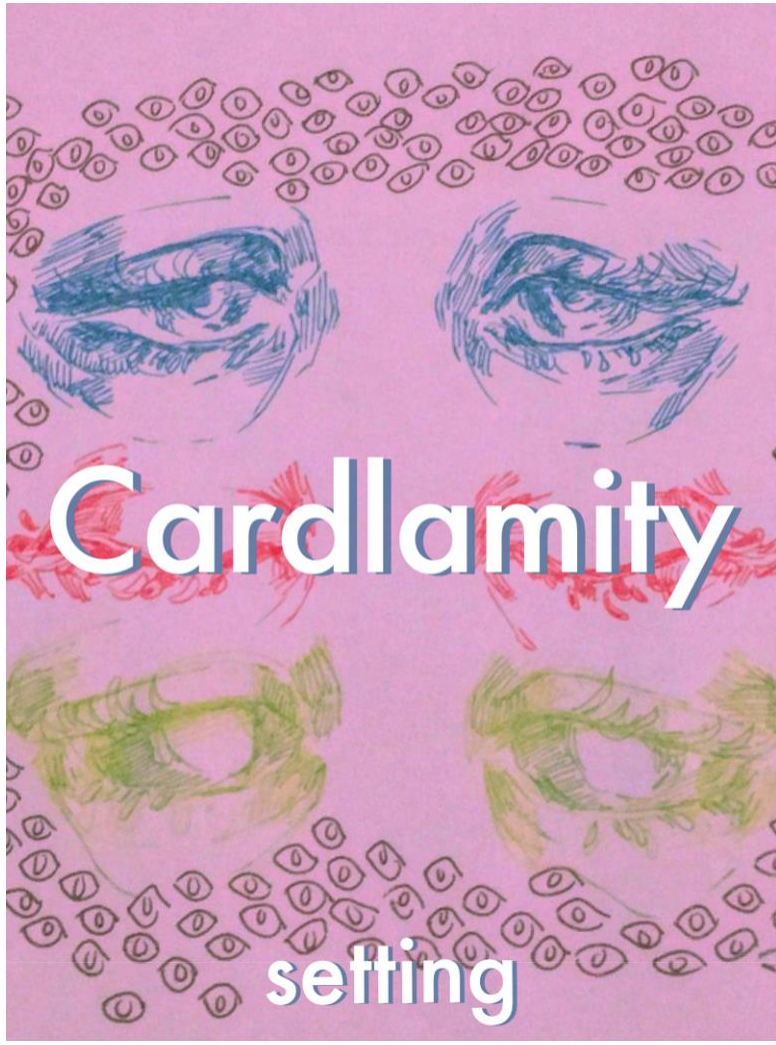
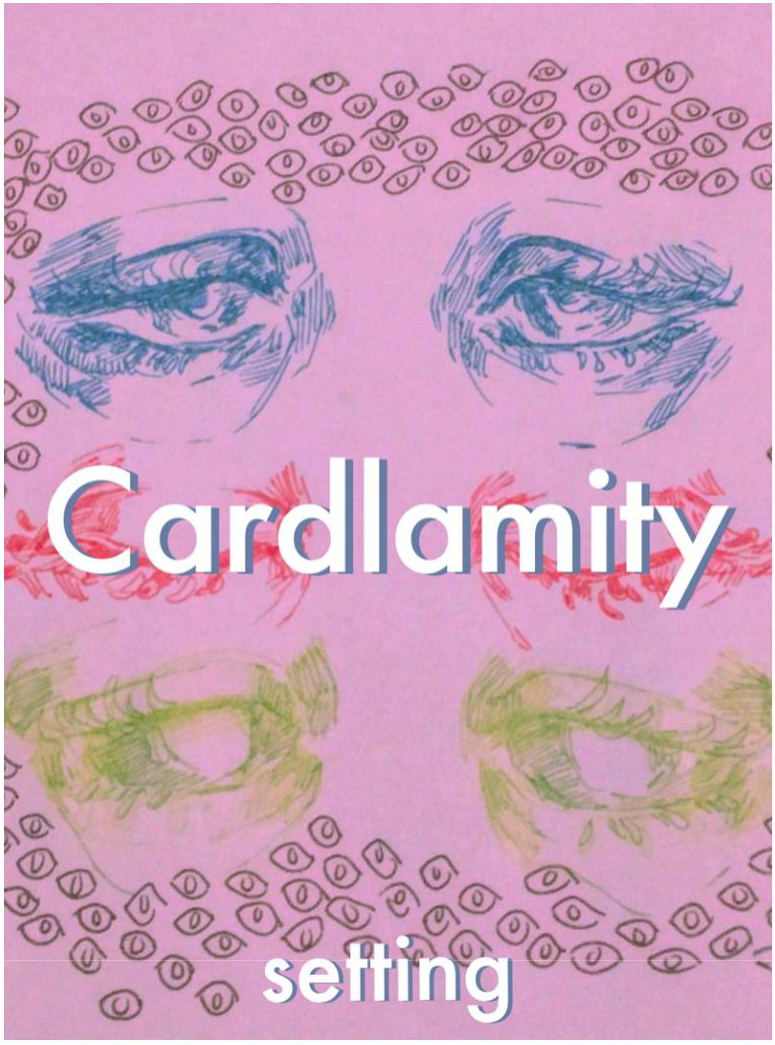


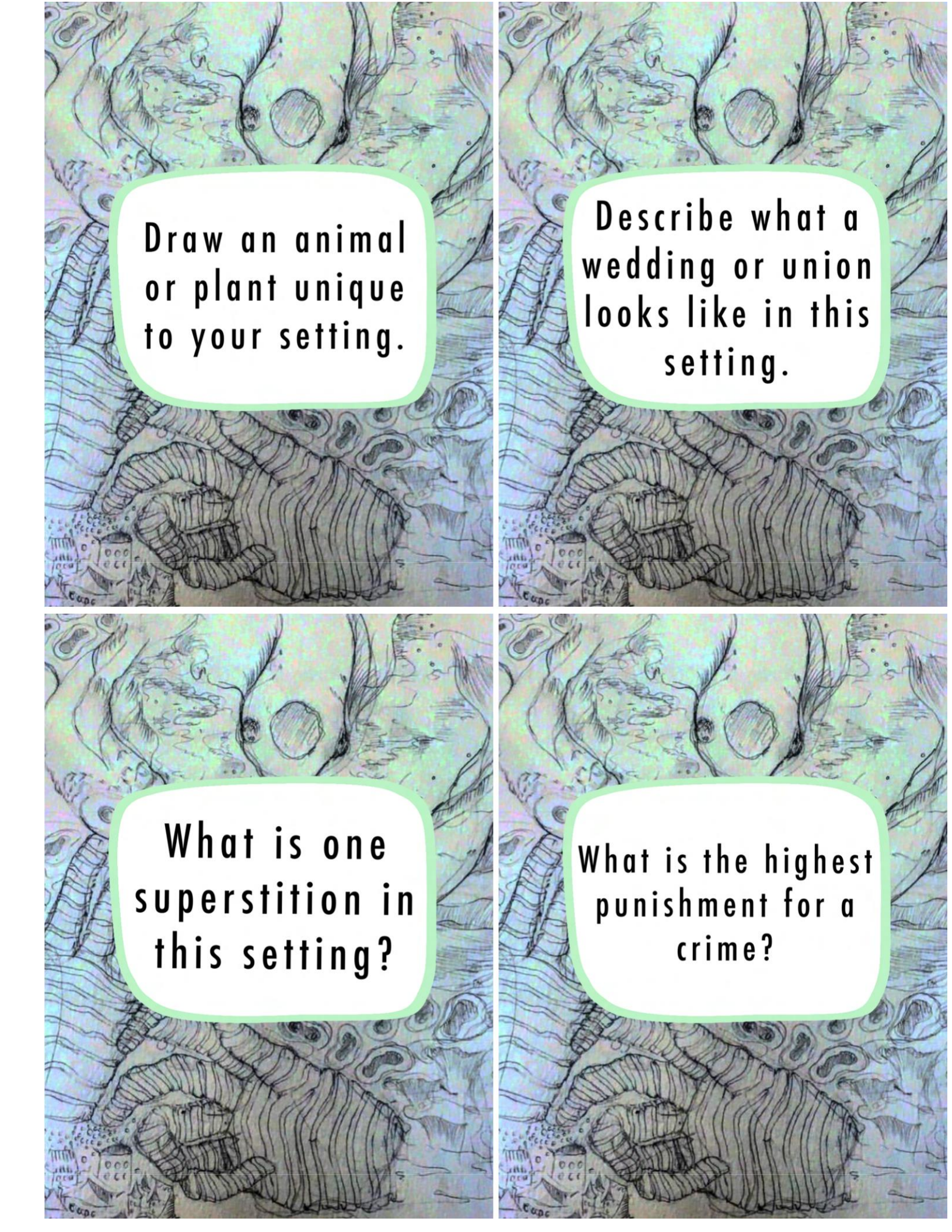
What is
unique about
the climate?

What resources are
valuable in your
world? Why?

What behaviors or
actions are
considered taboo in
this setting?

Draw a mythical or
legendary location
in your setting.



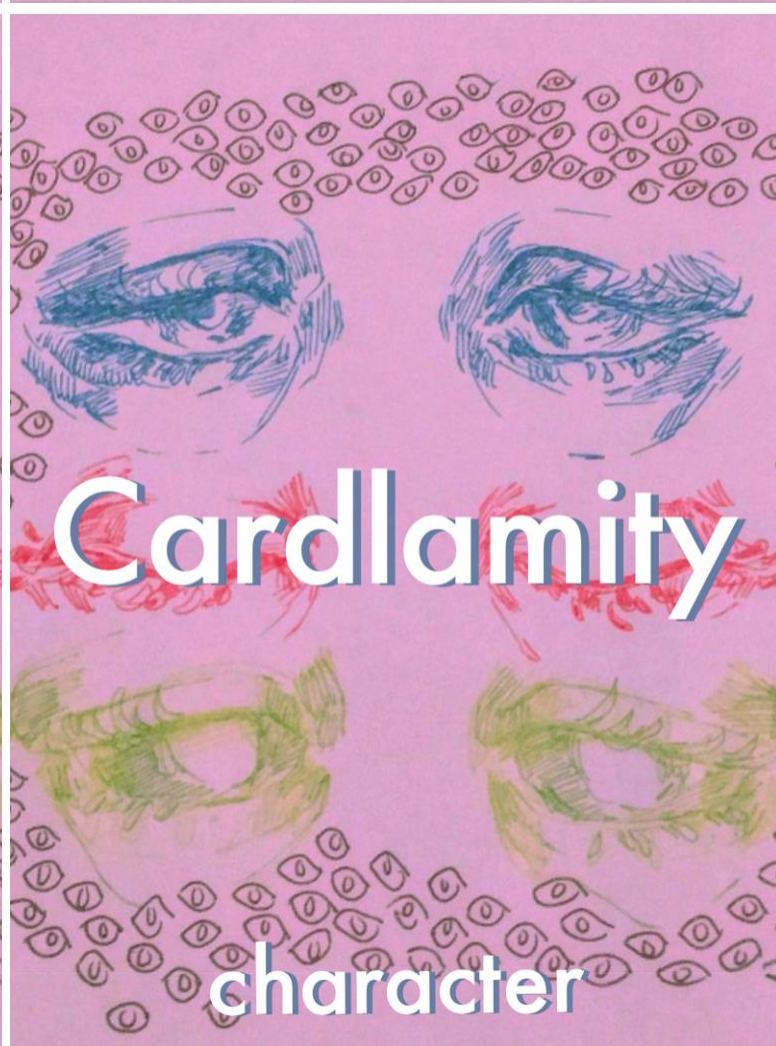
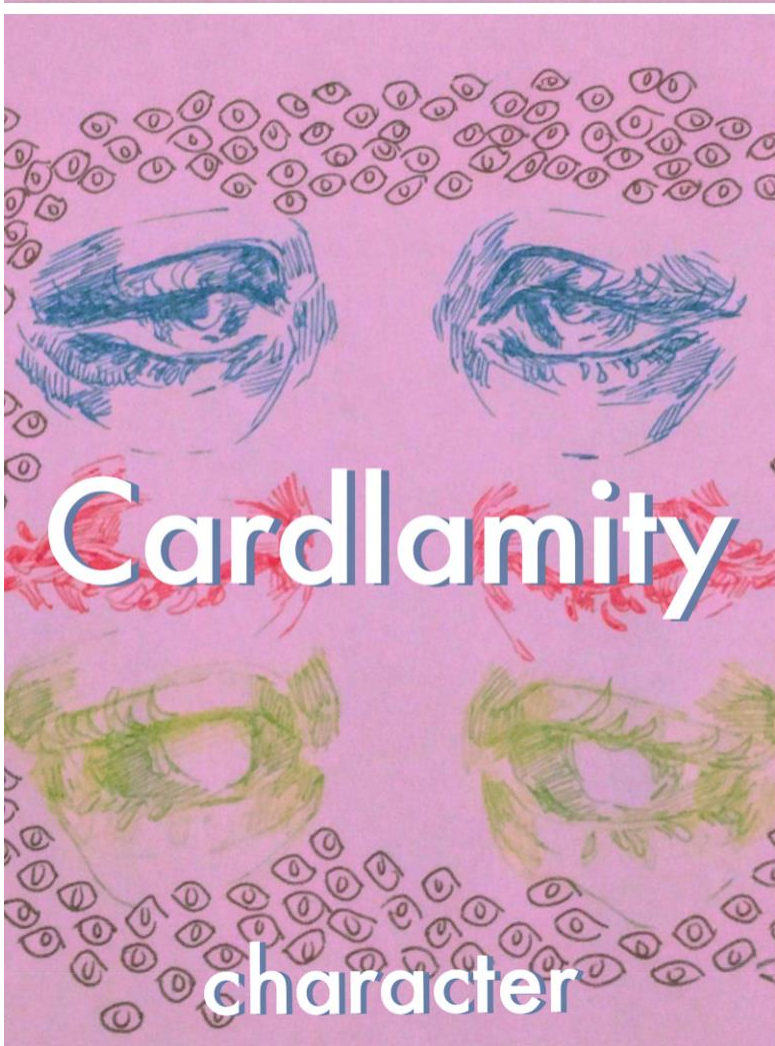
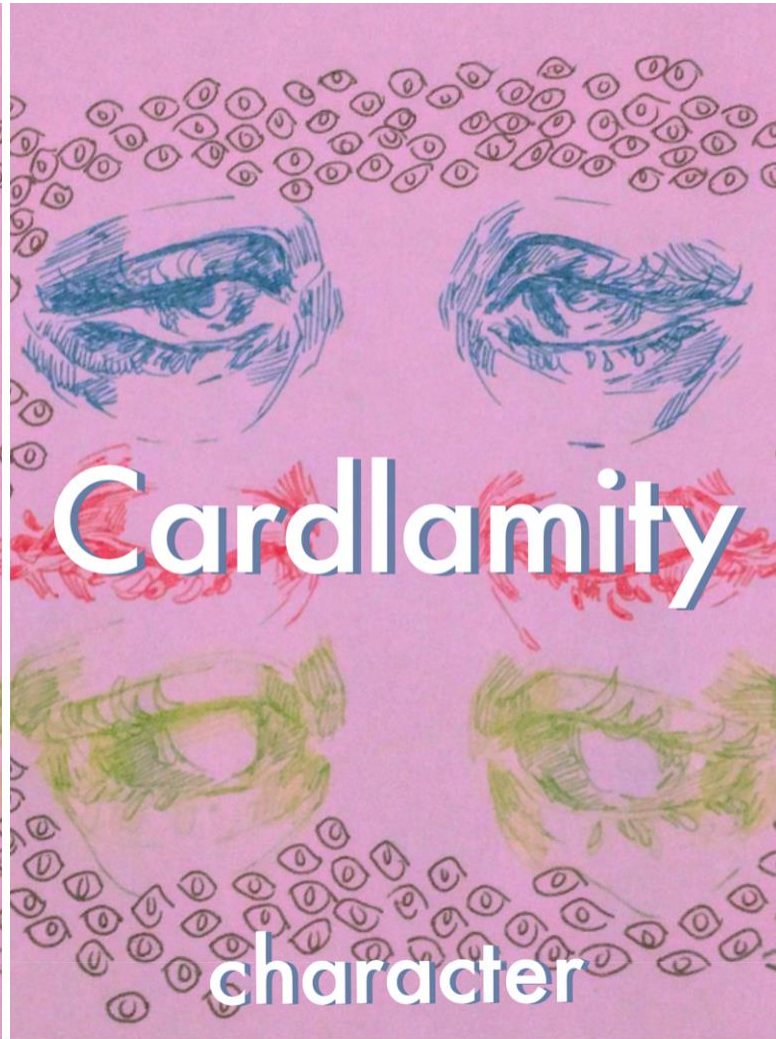
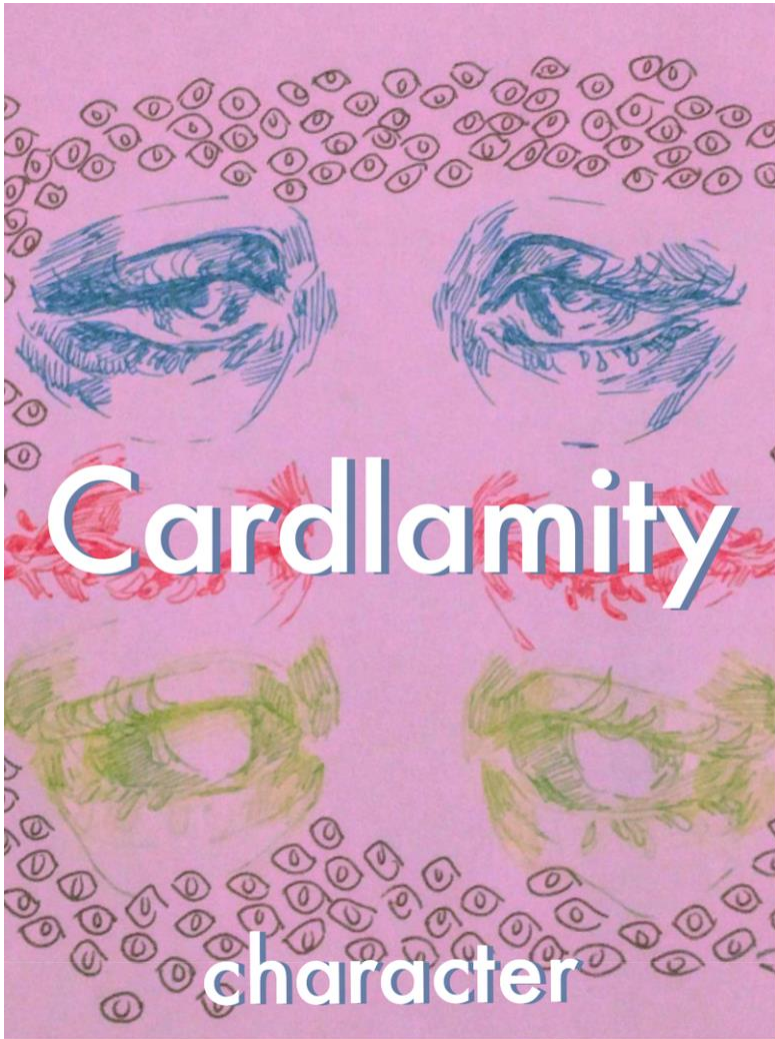


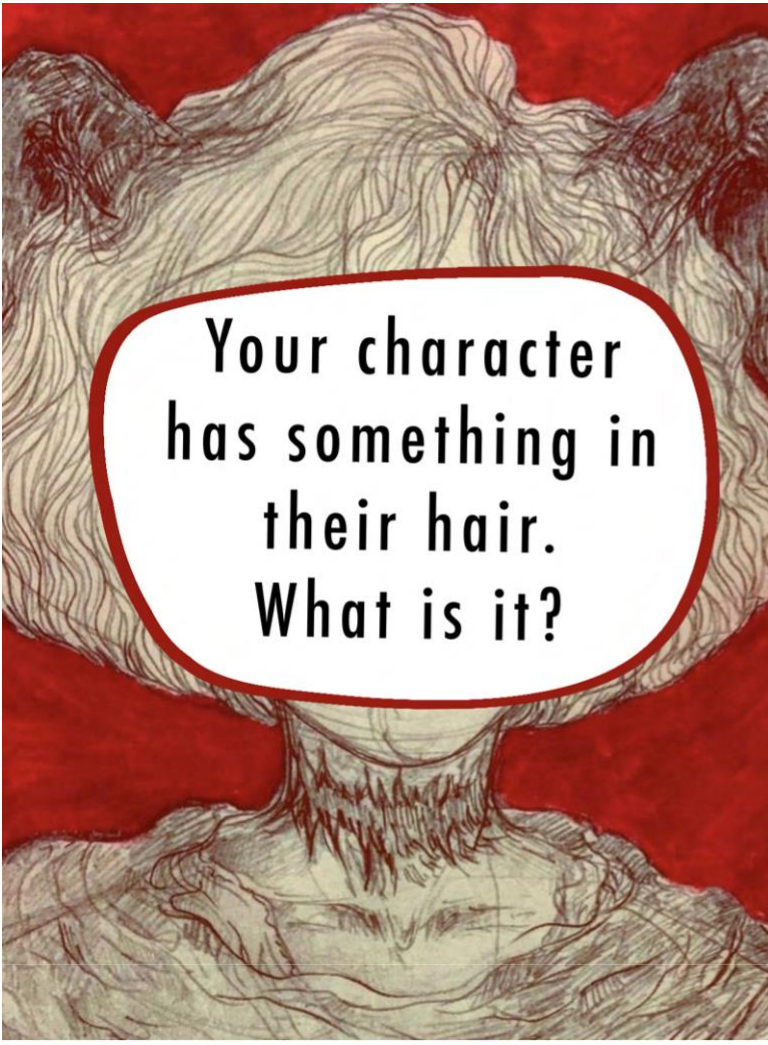
Draw an animal or plant unique to your setting.

Describe what a wedding or union looks like in this setting.

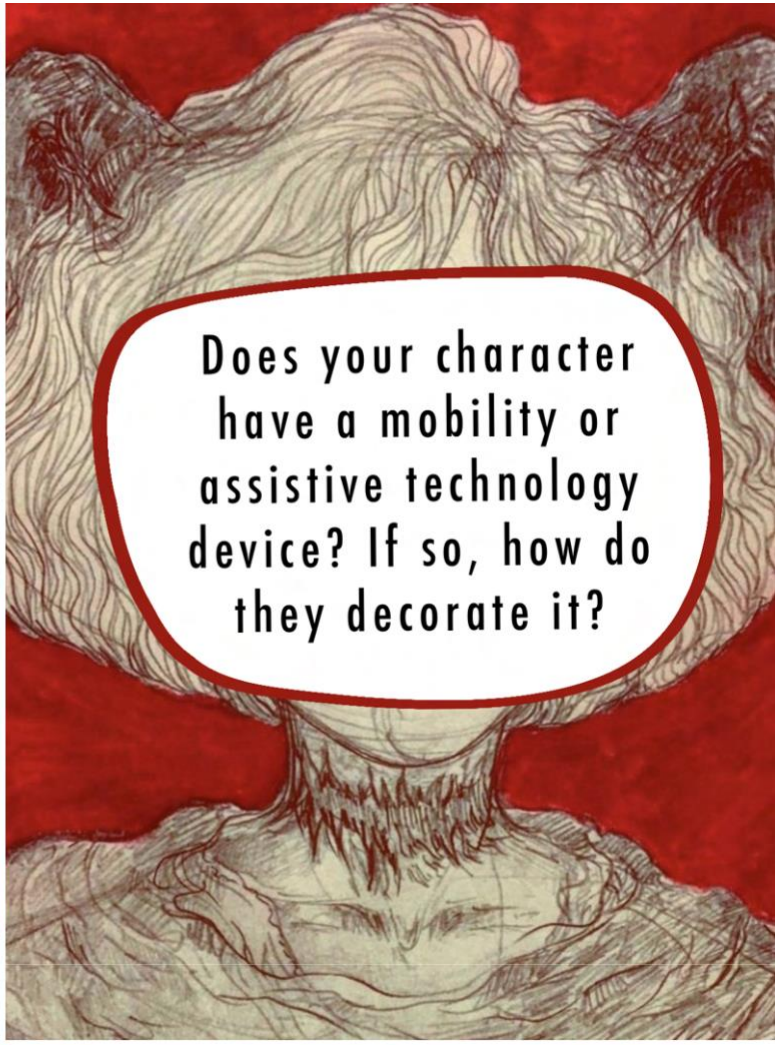
What is one superstition in this setting?

What is the highest punishment for a crime?

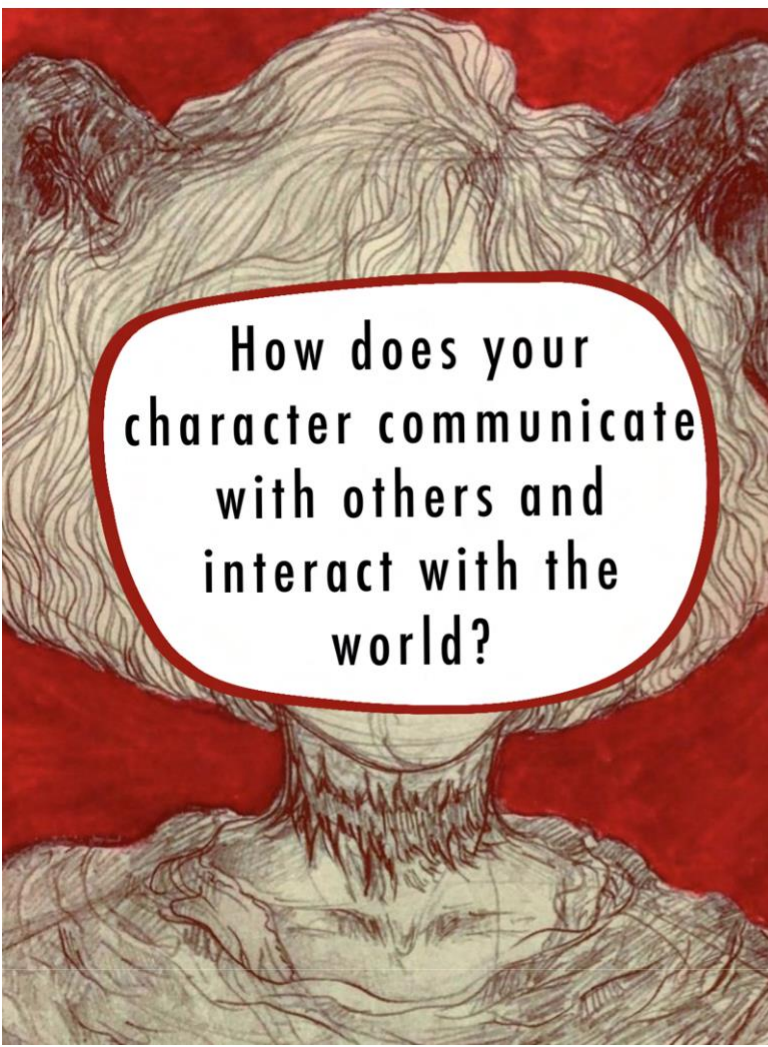





Your character
has something in
their hair.
What is it?



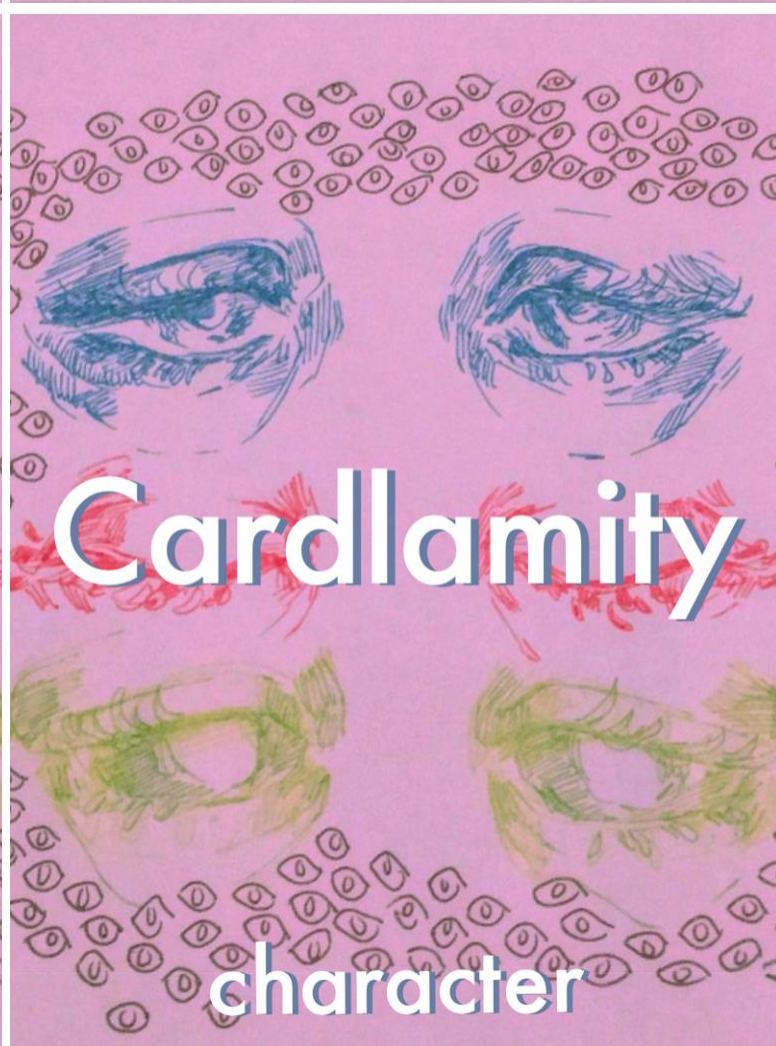
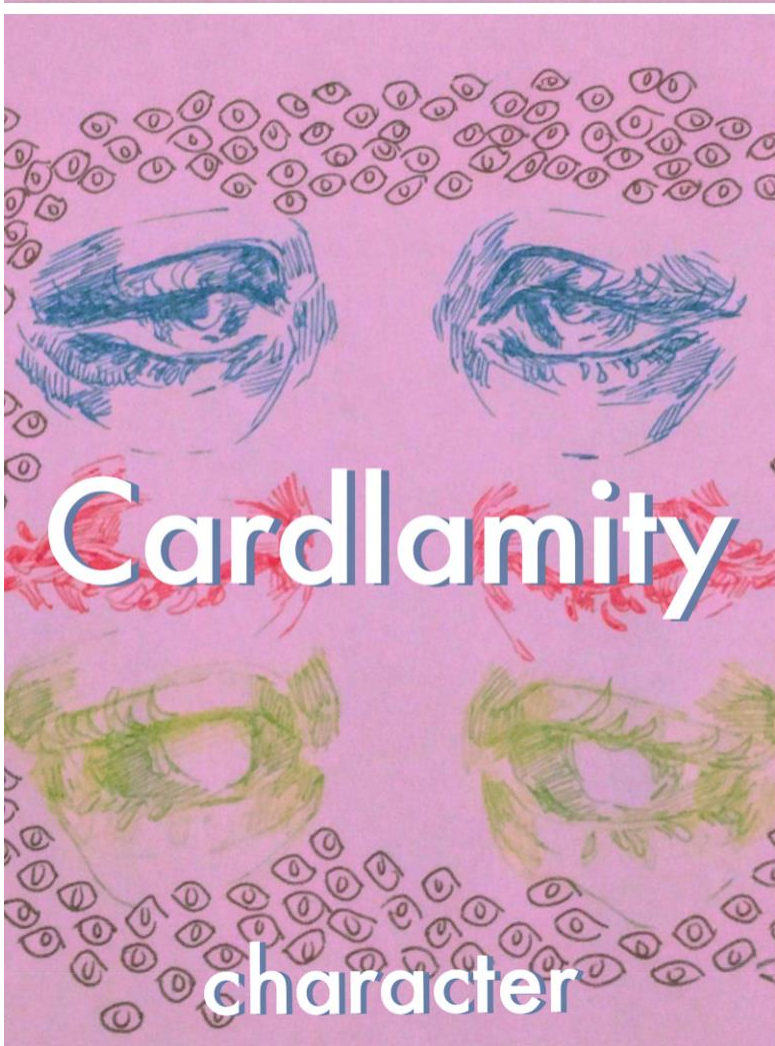
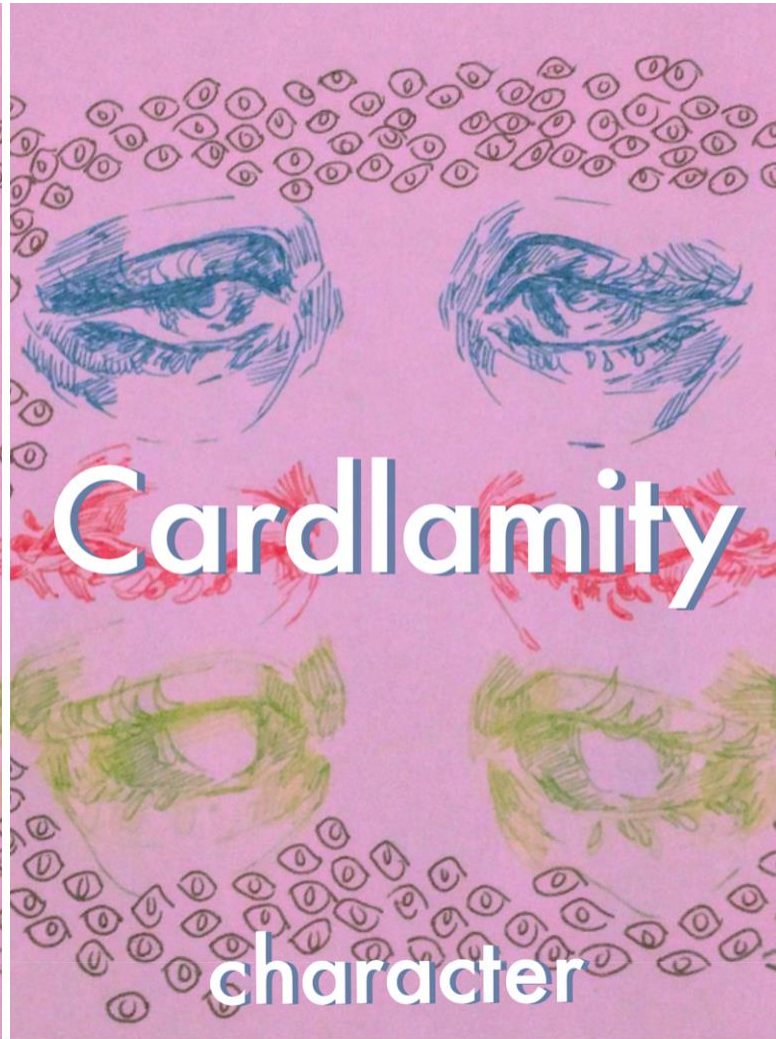
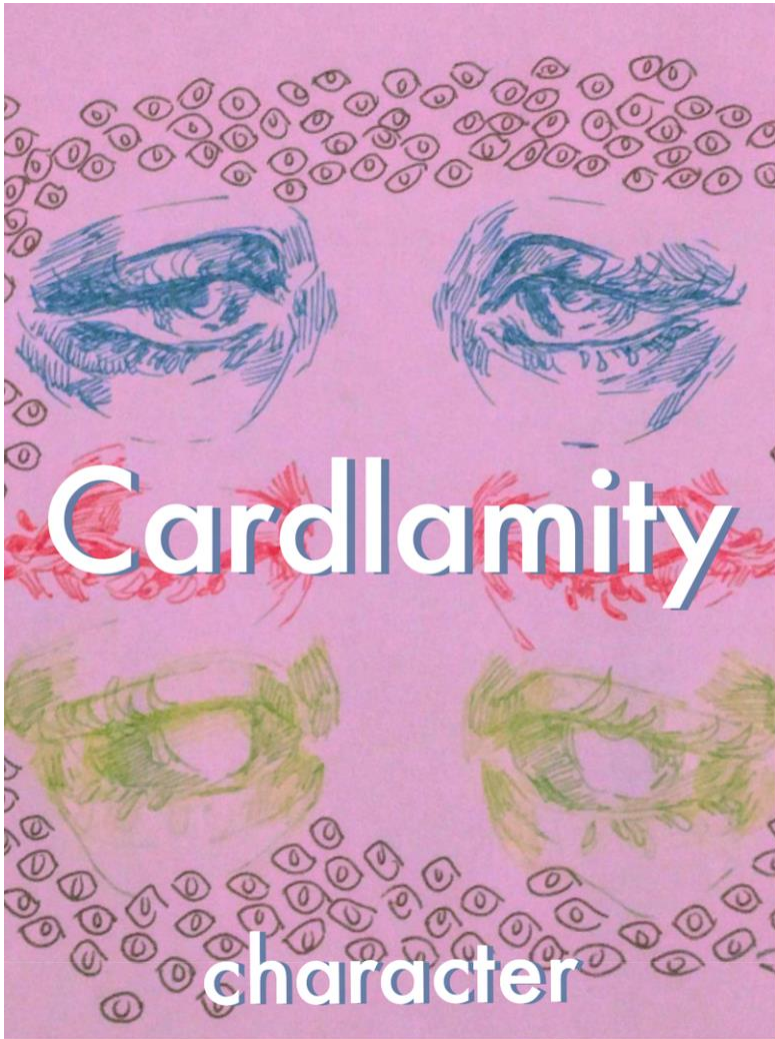
Does your character
have a mobility or
assistive technology
device? If so, how do
they decorate it?

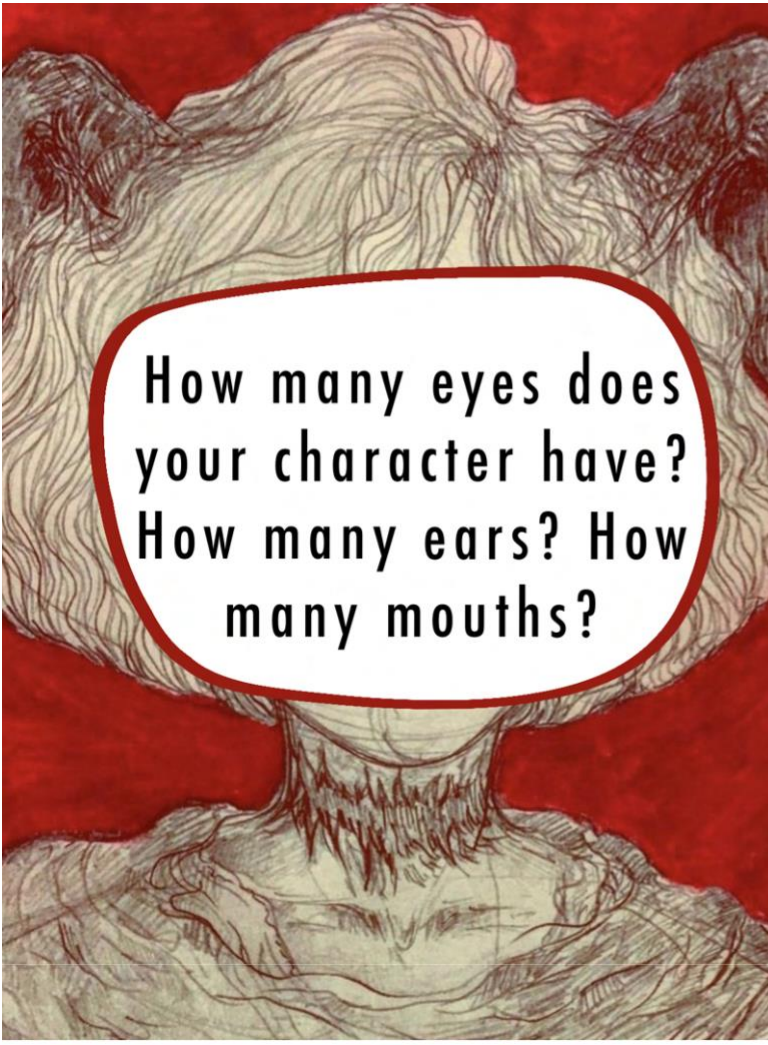


How does your
character communicate
with others and
interact with the
world?

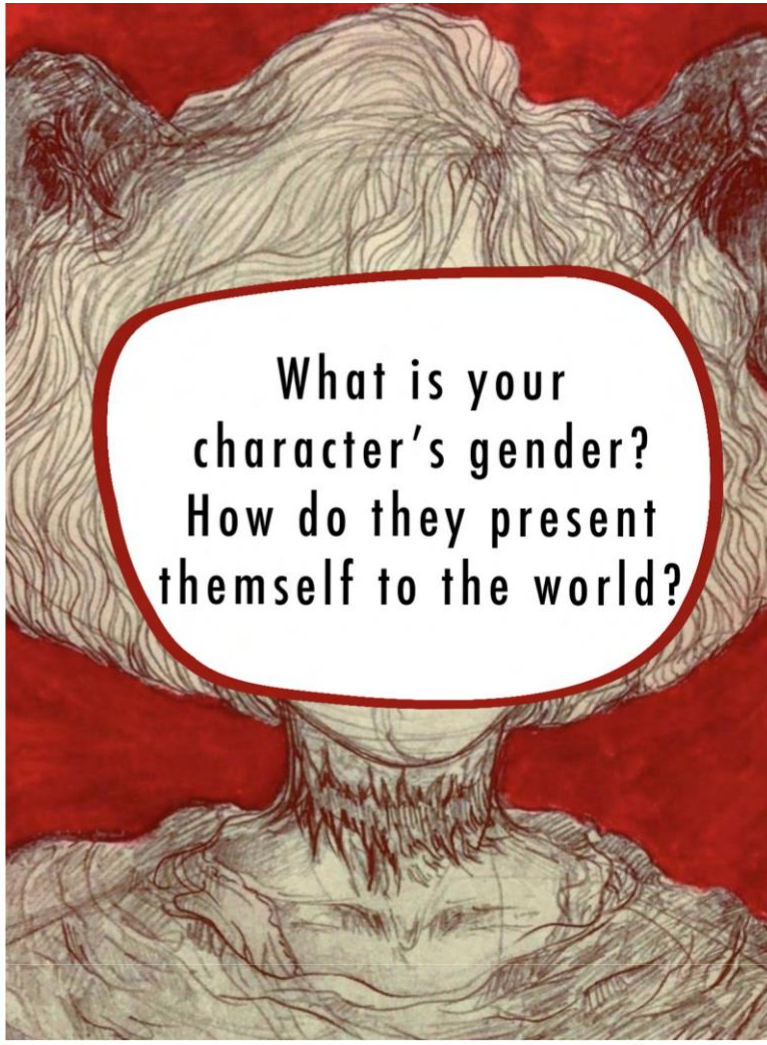


What color and
texture is your
character's hair?





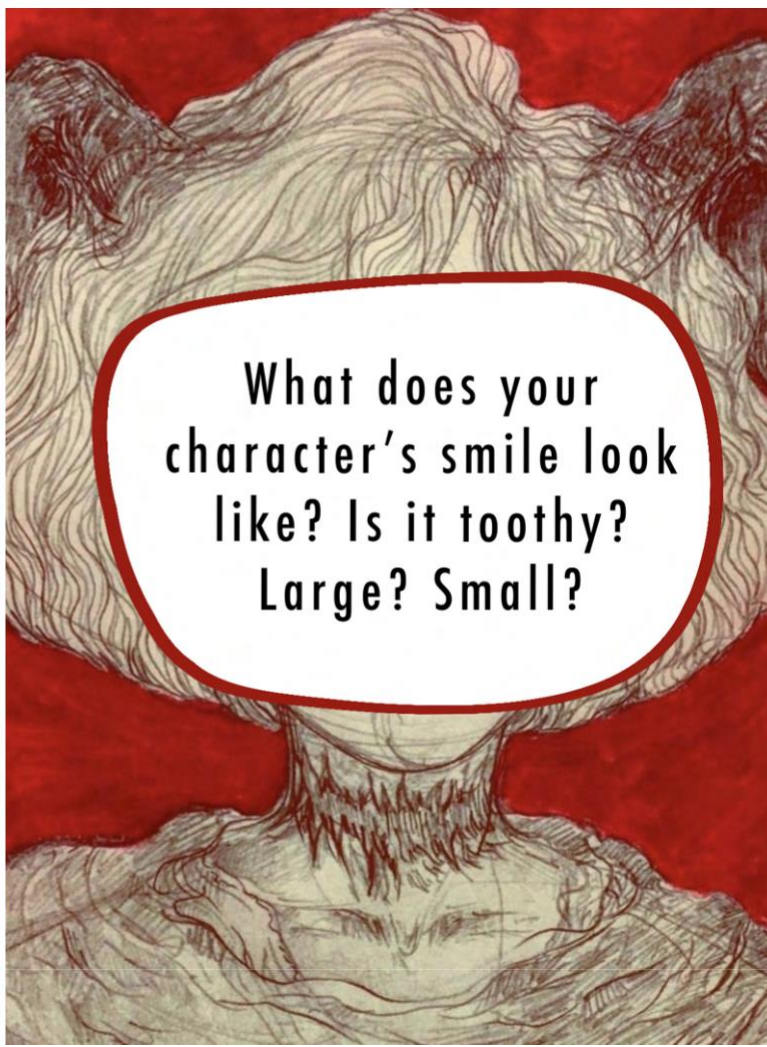
How many eyes does your character have?
How many ears? How many mouths?



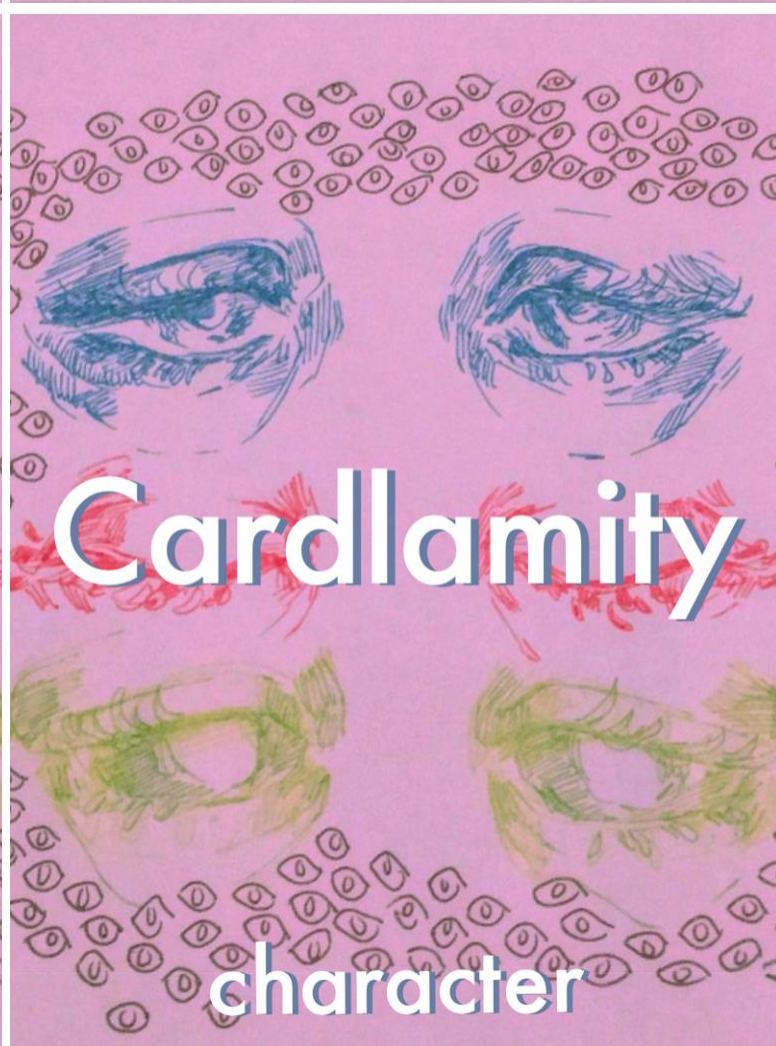
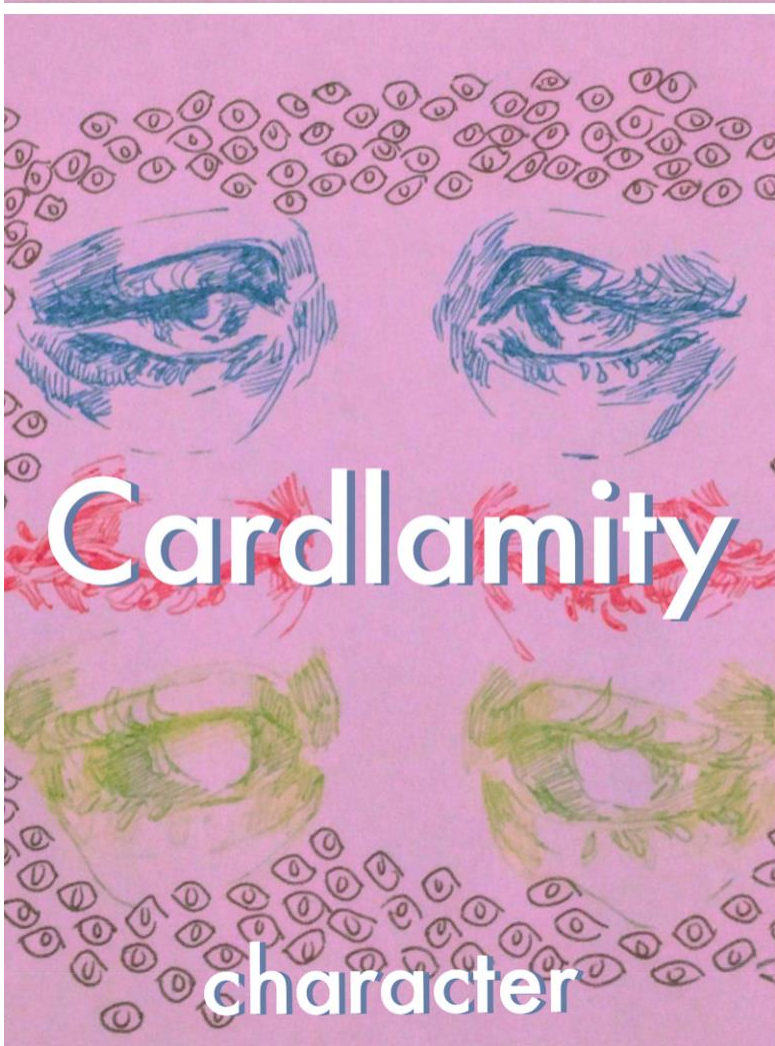
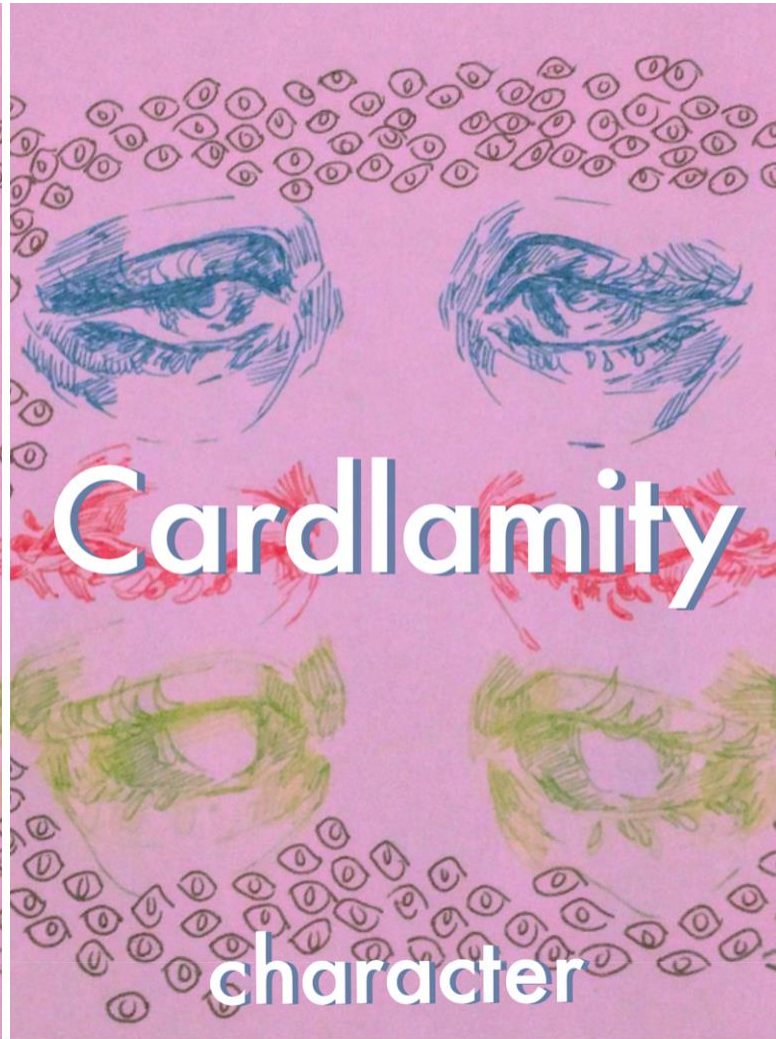
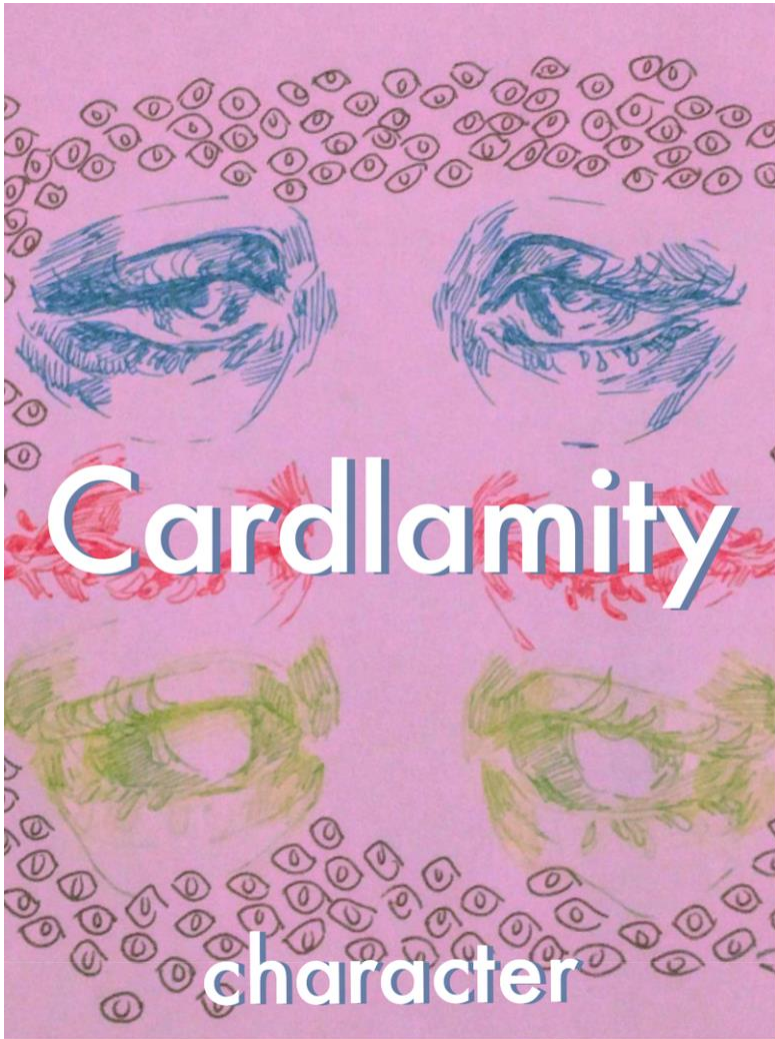
What is your character's gender?
How do they present themselves to the world?

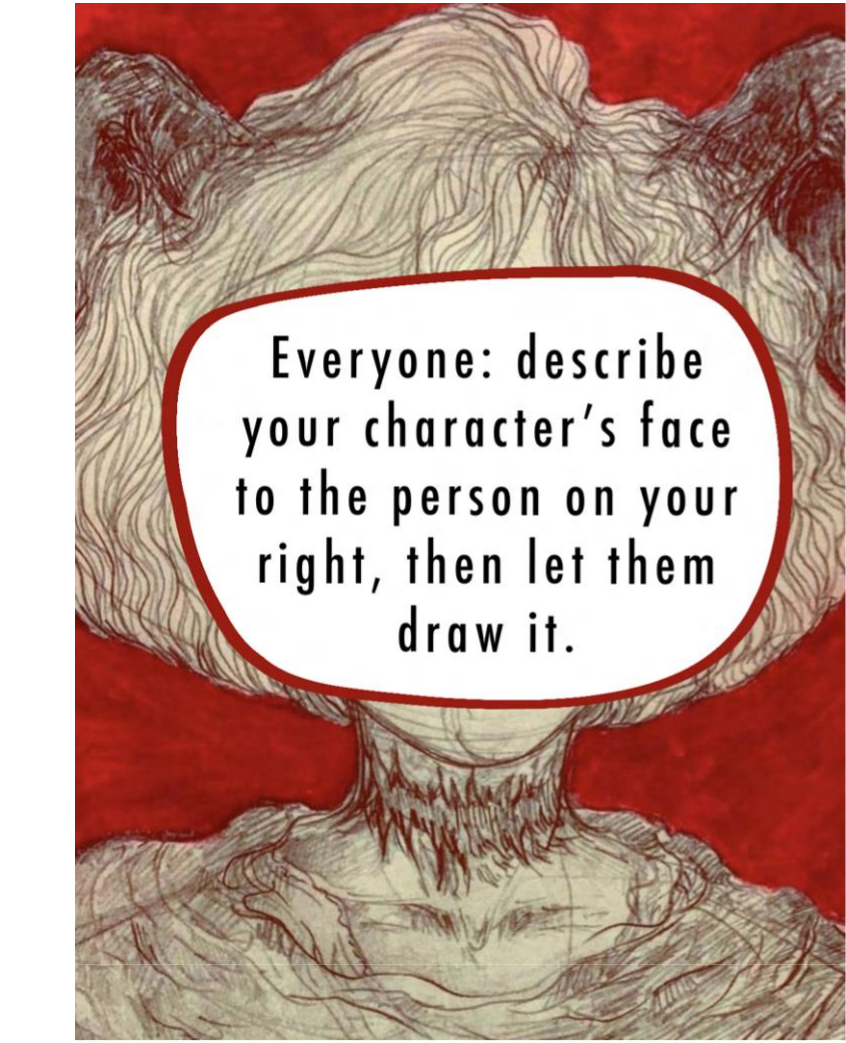


What color are your character's eyes?



What does your character's smile look like?
Is it toothy? Large? Small?





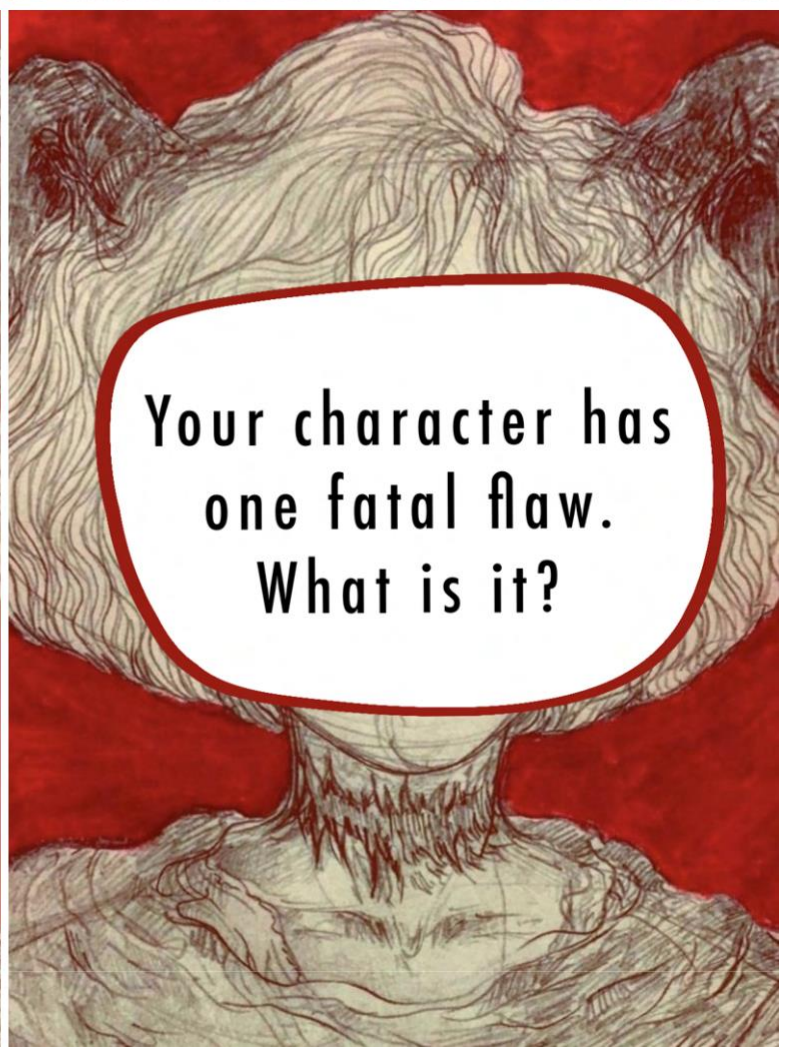
Everyone: describe your character's face to the person on your right, then let them draw it.



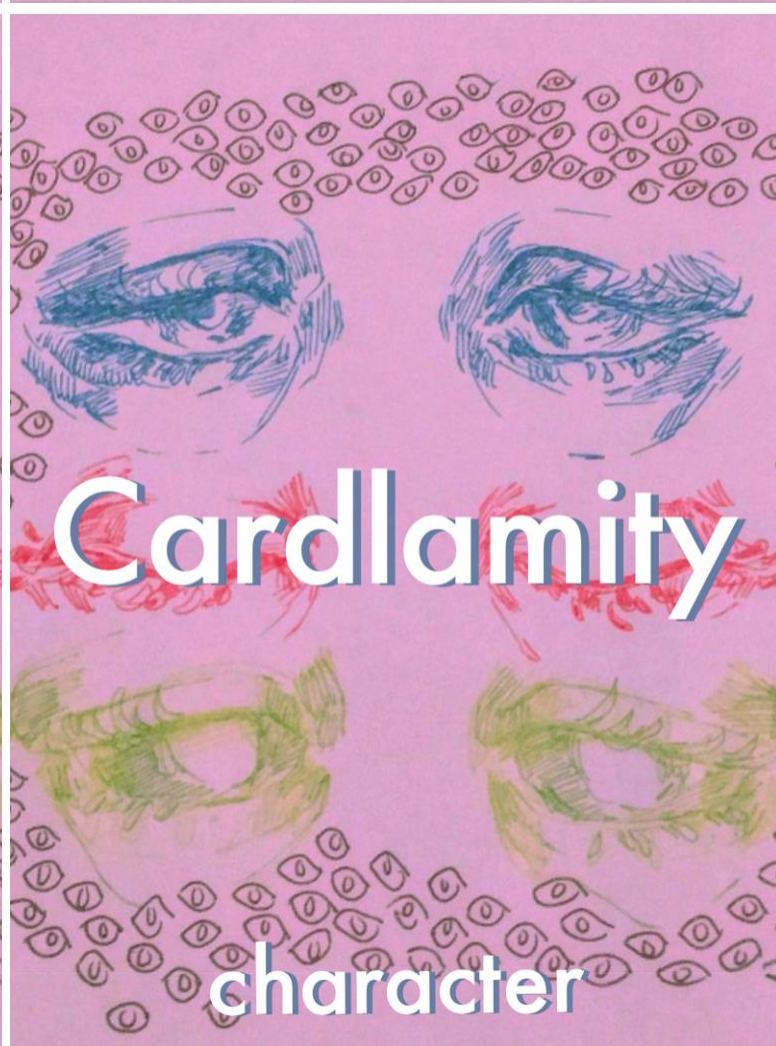
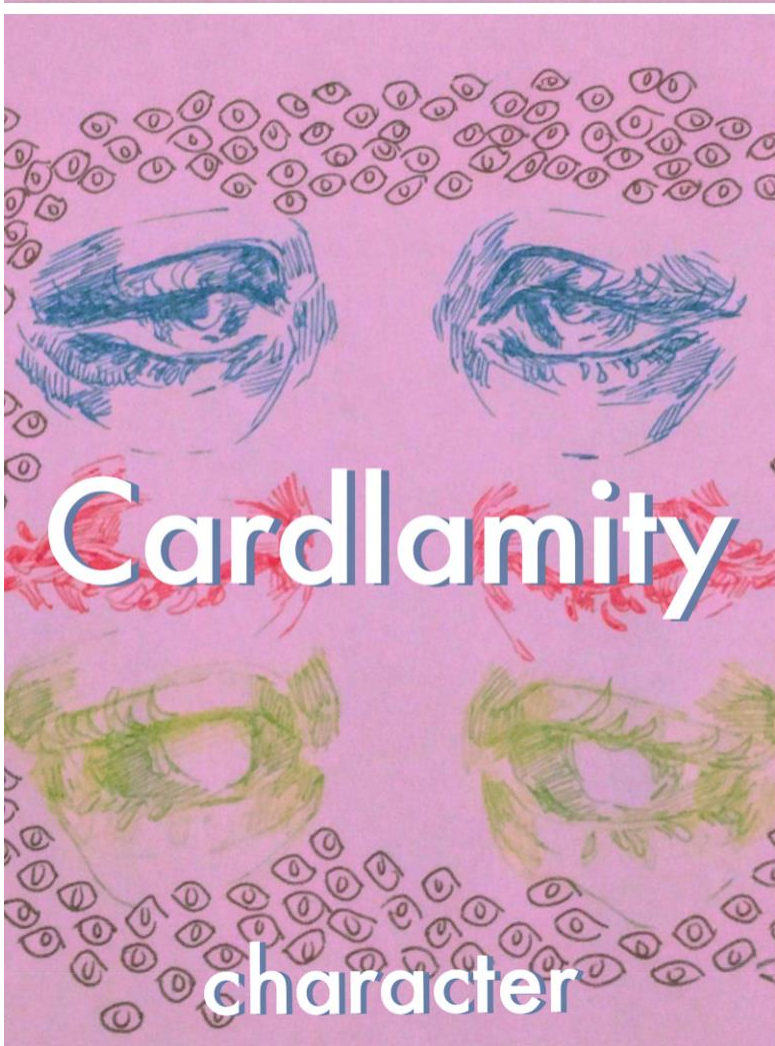
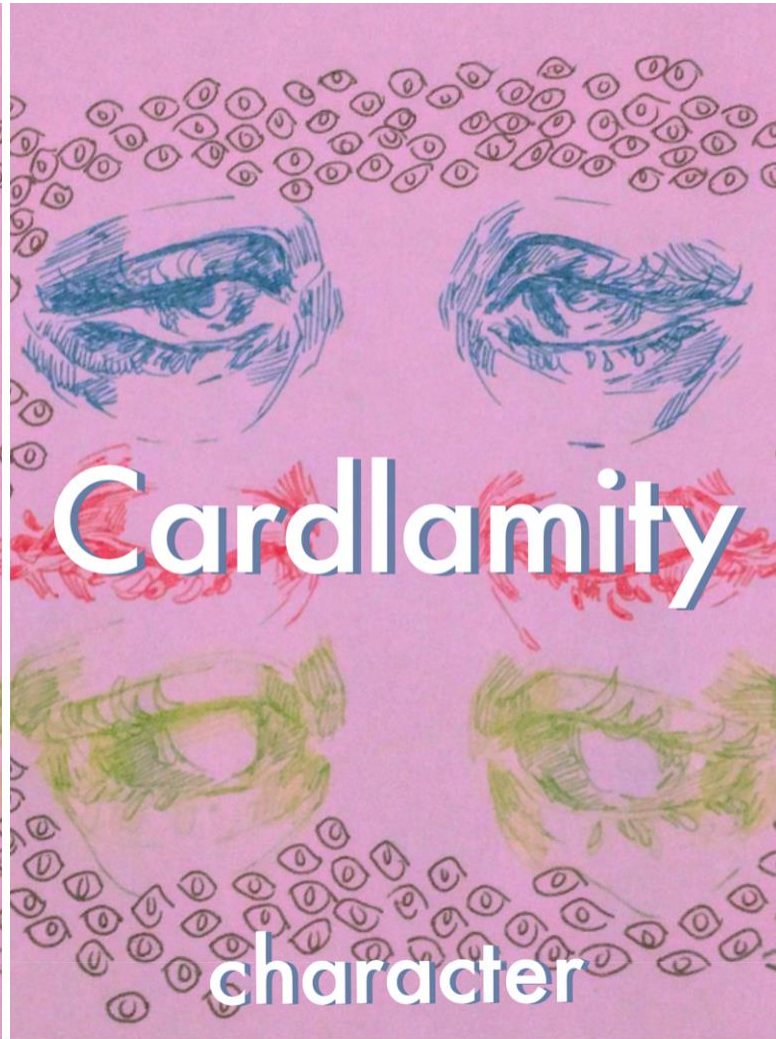
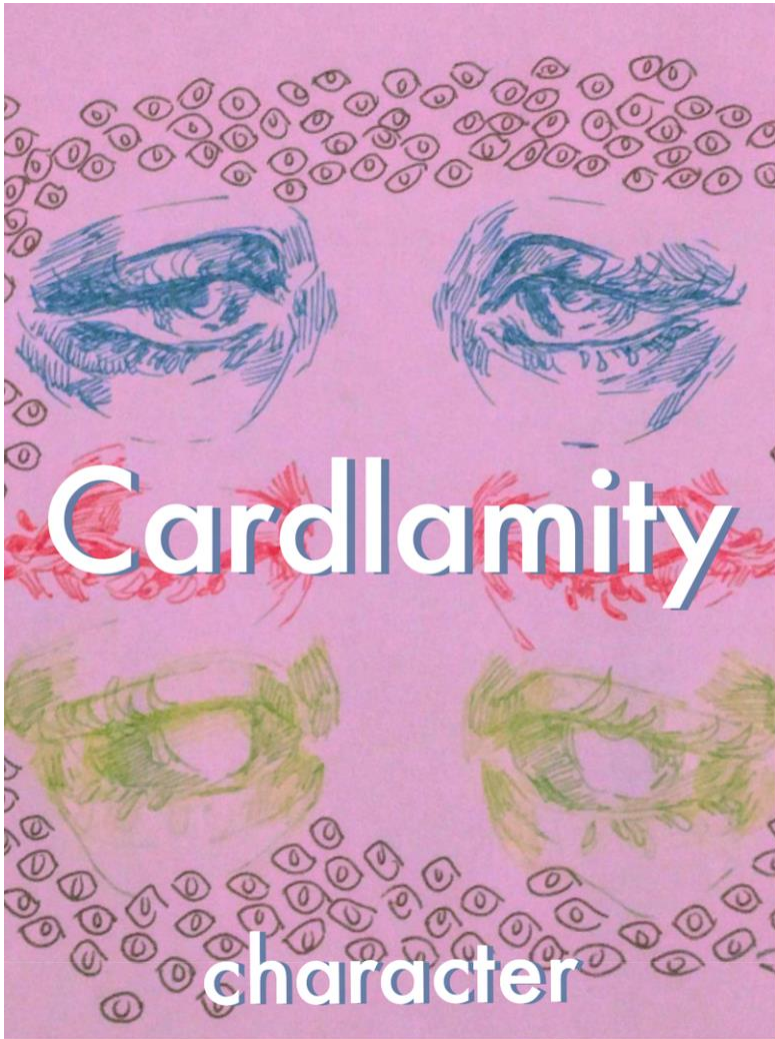
Everyone: draw your character's favorite outfit.

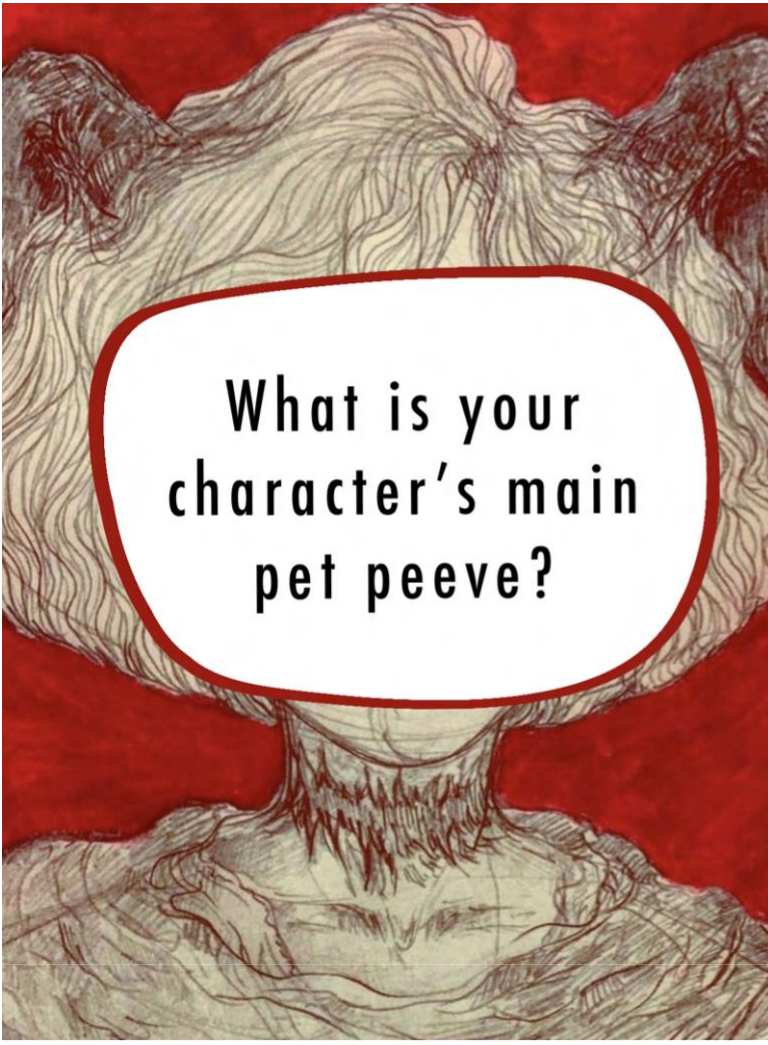


What race/species is your character?

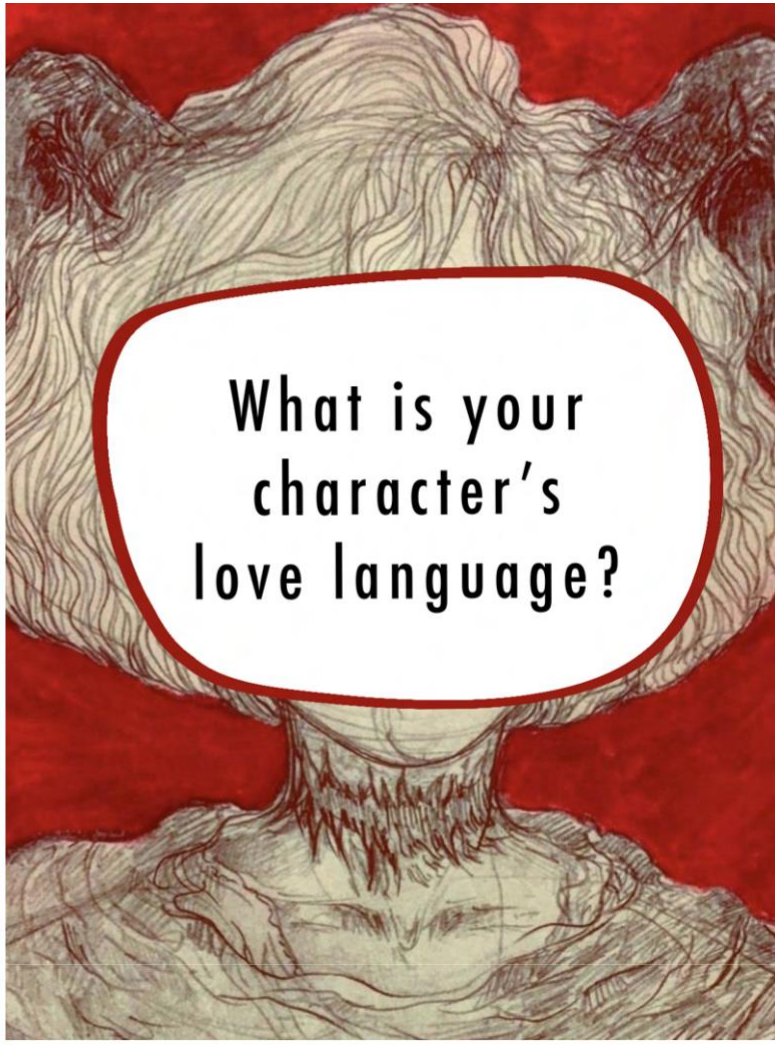


Your character has one fatal flaw. What is it?

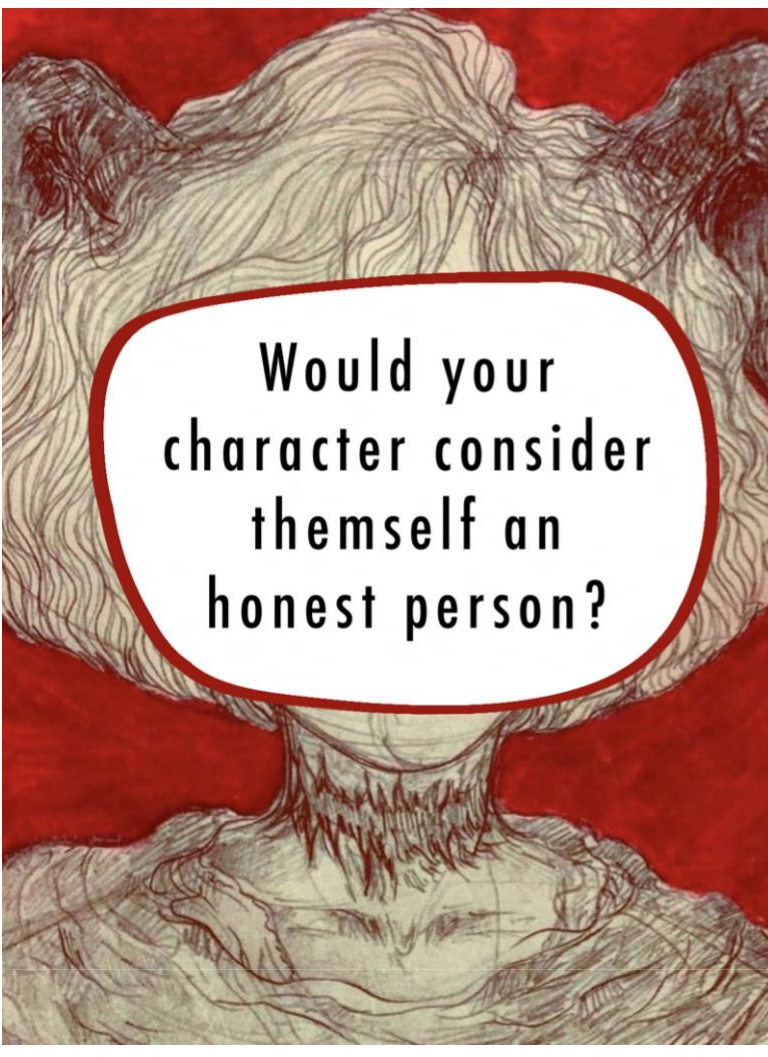




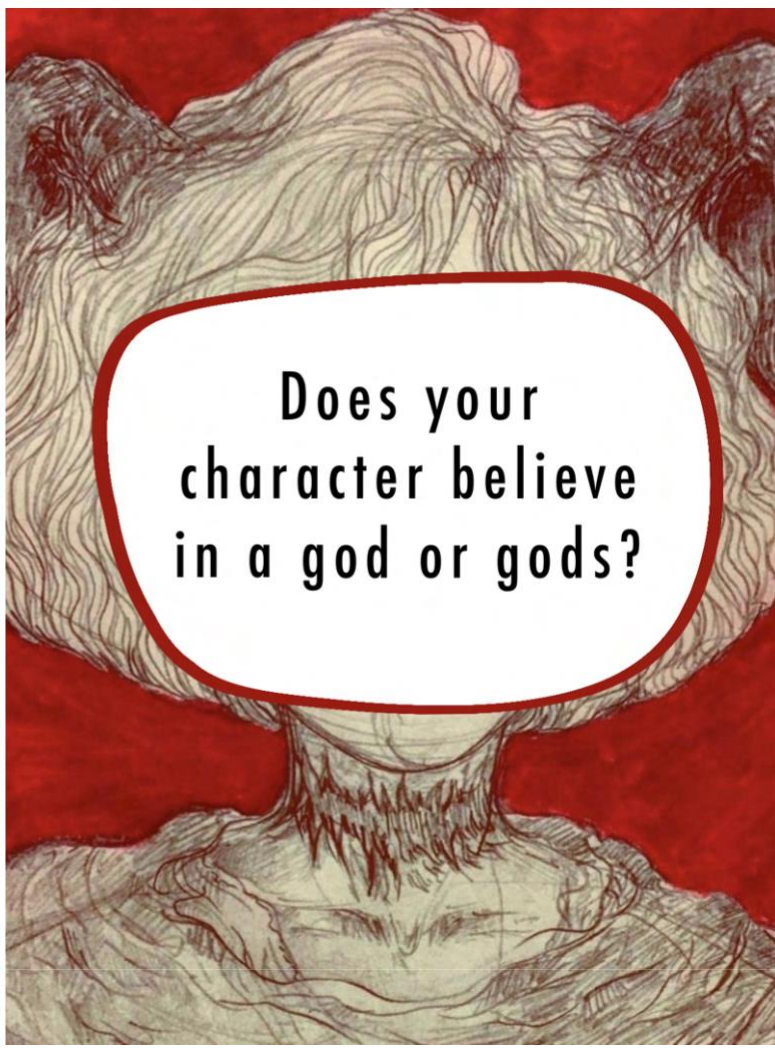
What is your character's main pet peeve?



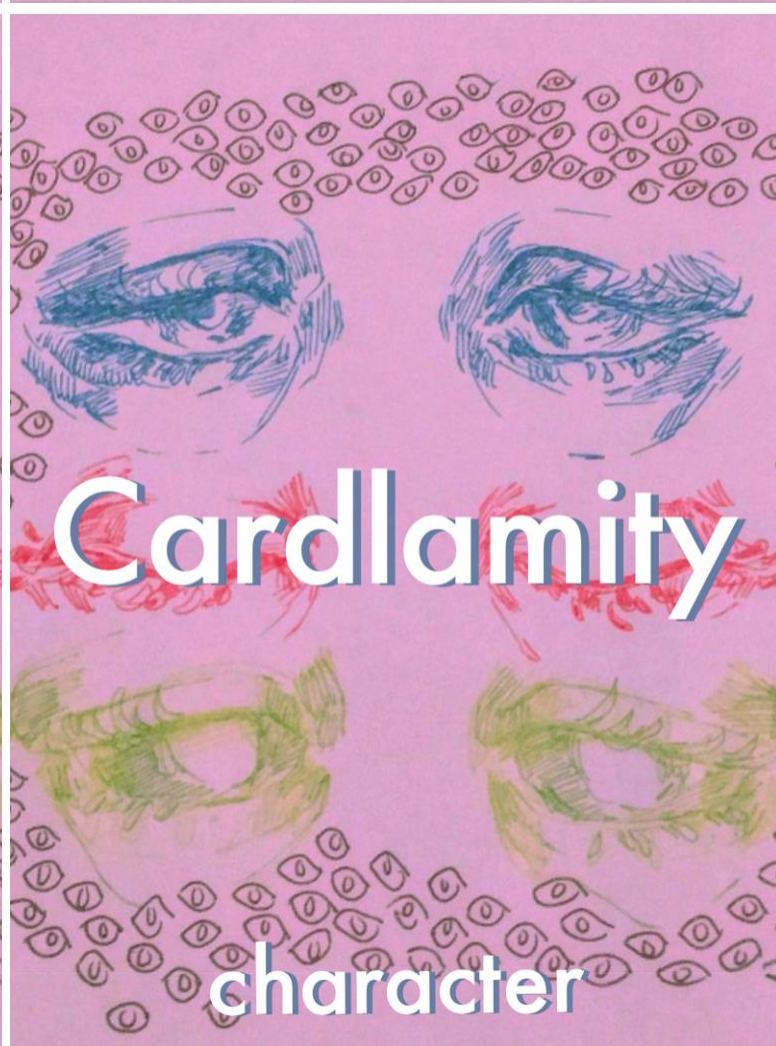
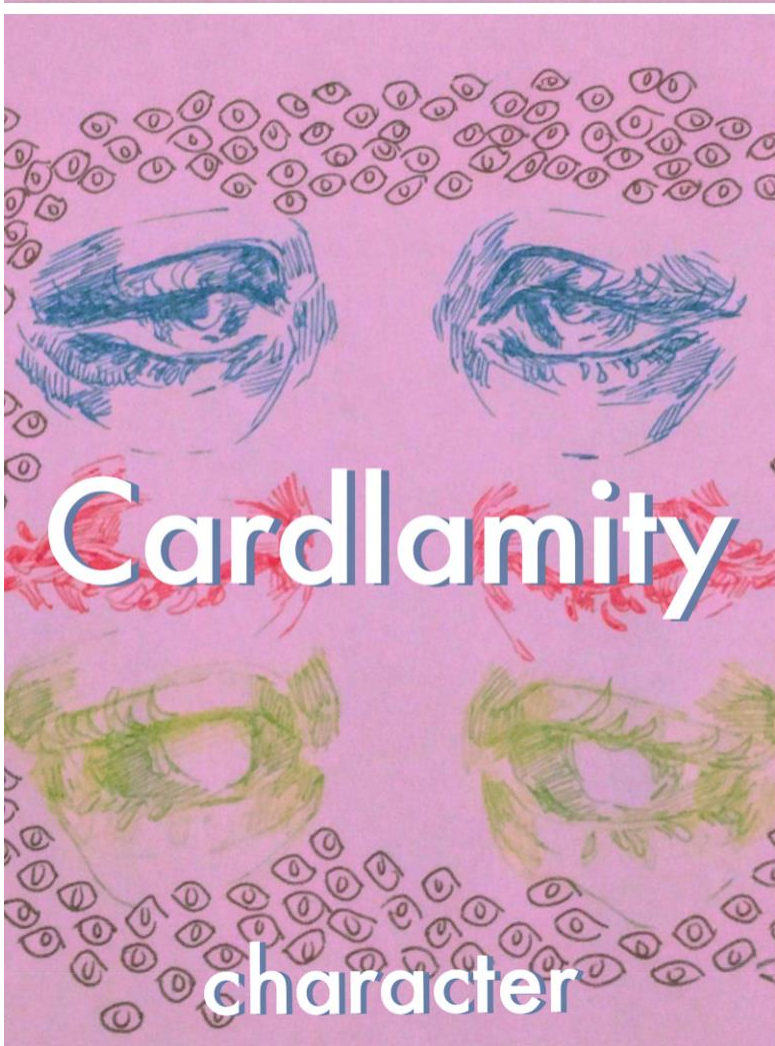
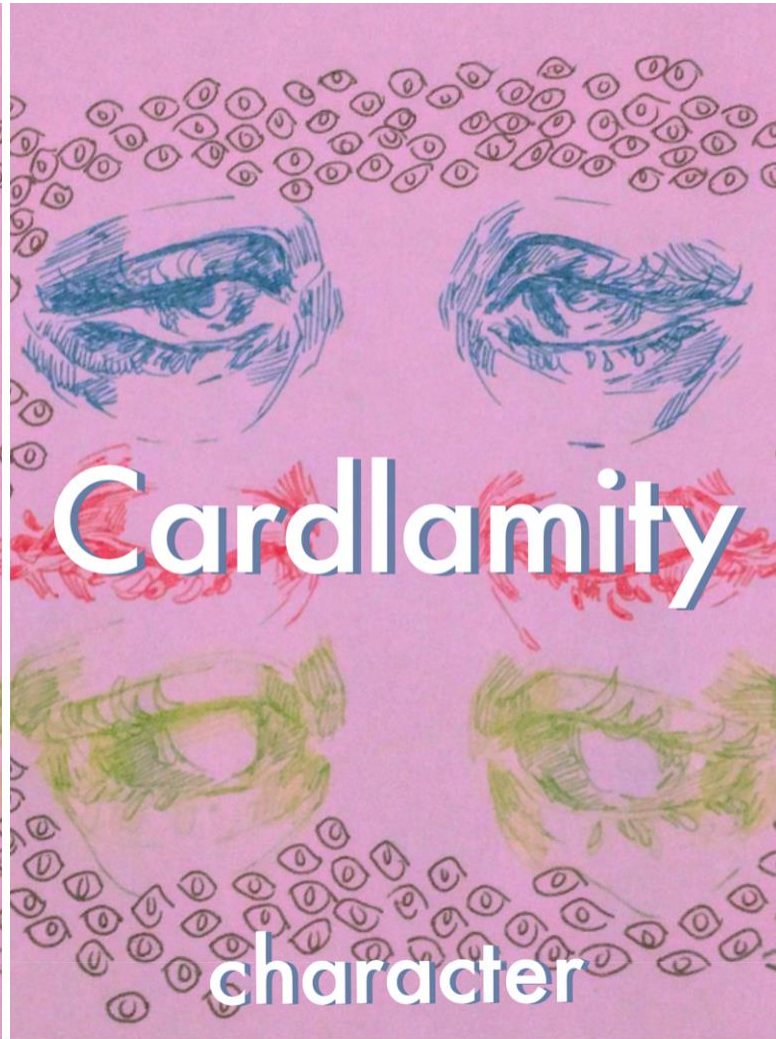
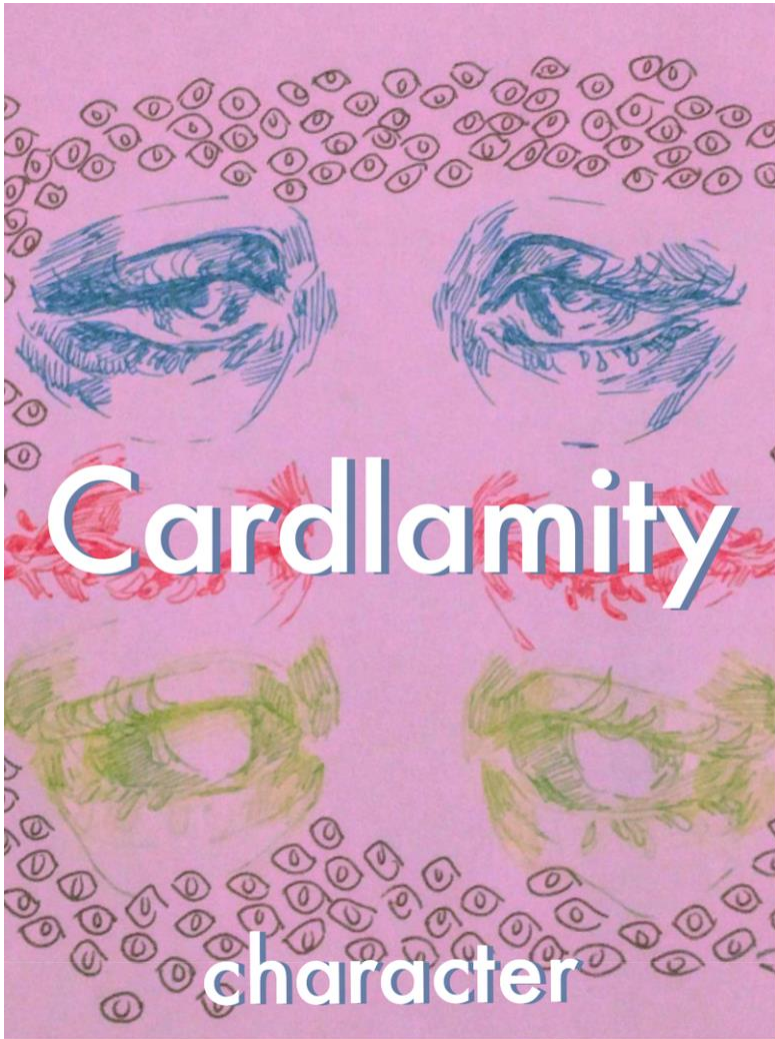
What is your character's love language?

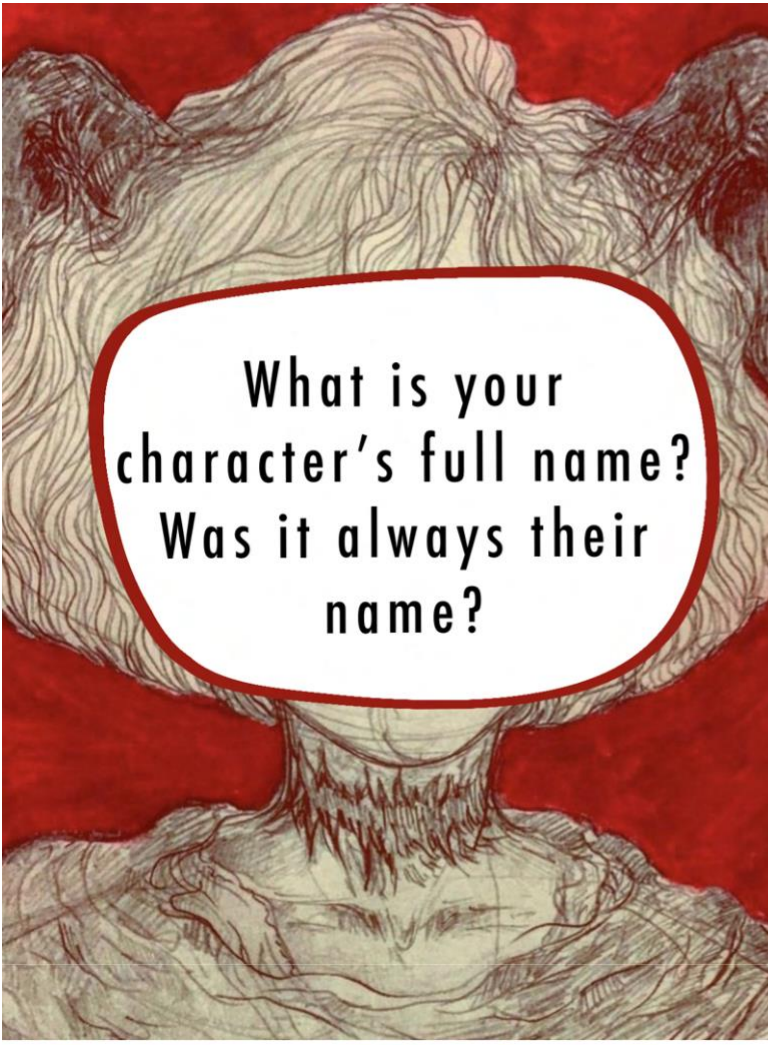


Would your character consider themselves an honest person?

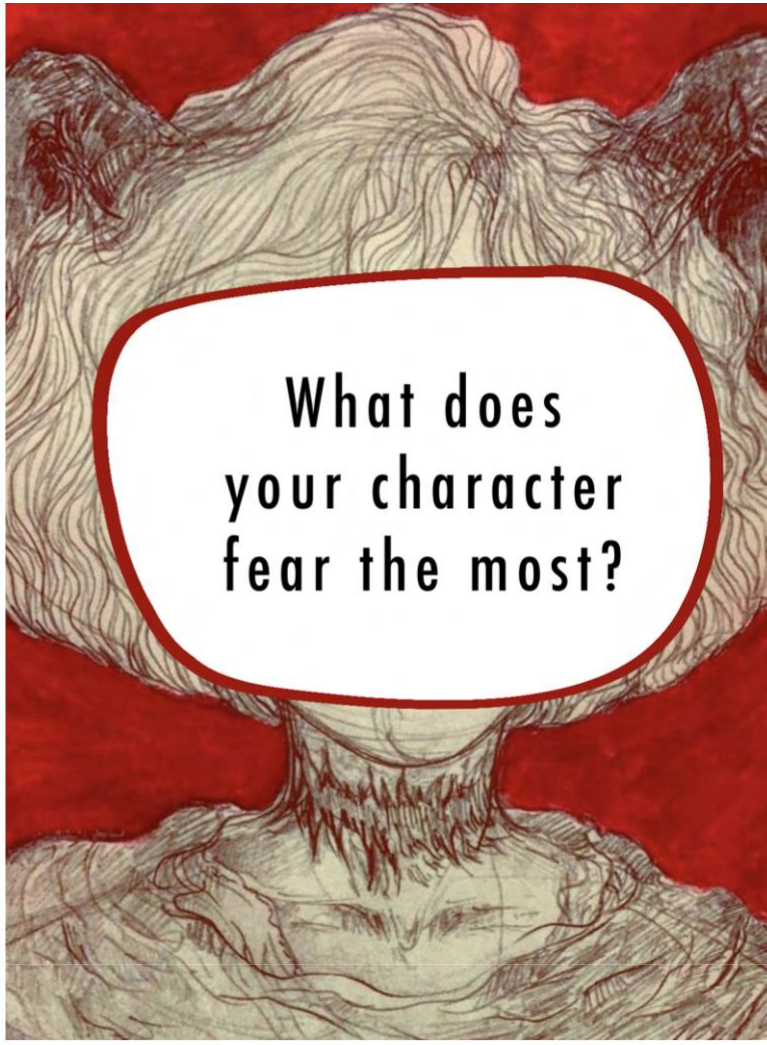


Does your character believe in a god or gods?

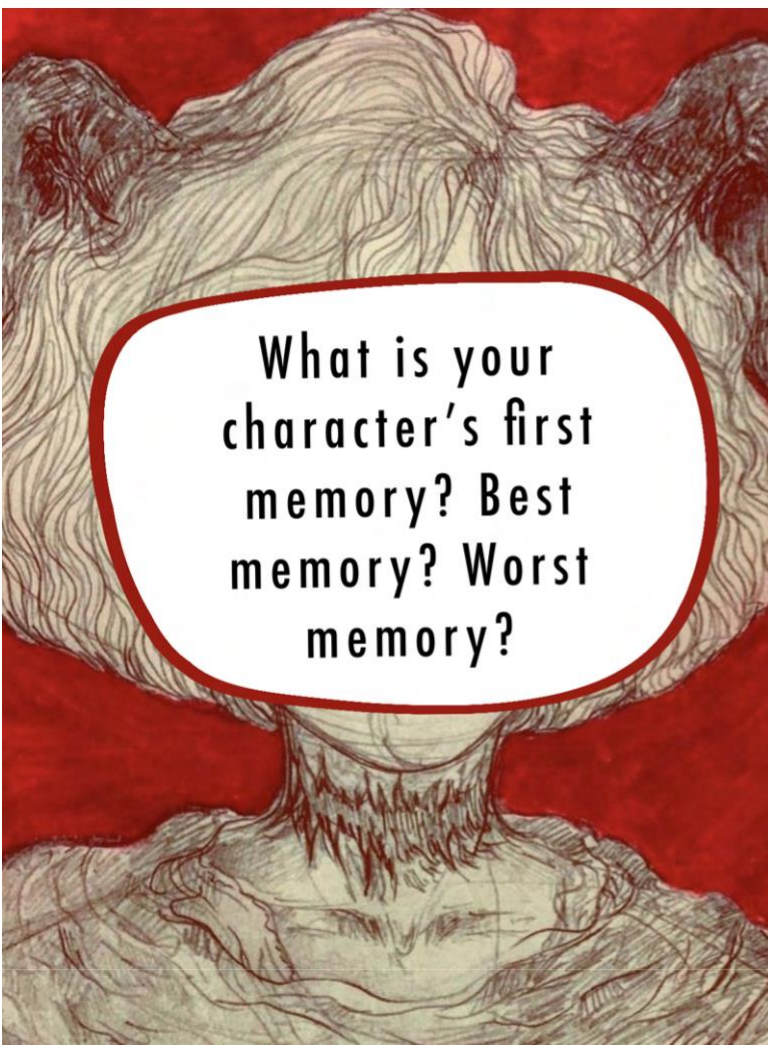


A detailed pencil sketch of a character's head and shoulders, rendered in a textured, cross-hatched style. The character has long, wavy hair and a beard. The sketch is set against a solid red background. A large, white, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a red border is positioned in the upper center of the image, containing text.

What is your character's full name?
Was it always their name?

A detailed pencil sketch of a character's head and shoulders, rendered in a textured, cross-hatched style. The character has long, wavy hair and a beard. The sketch is set against a solid red background. A large, white, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a red border is positioned in the upper center of the image, containing text.

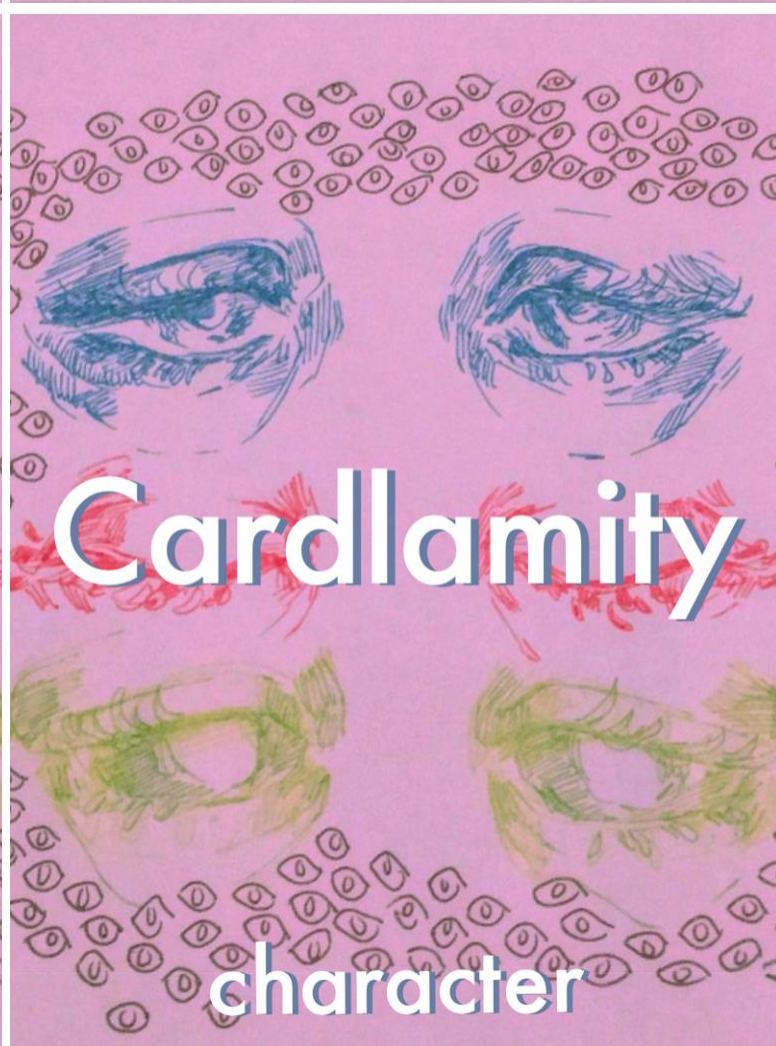
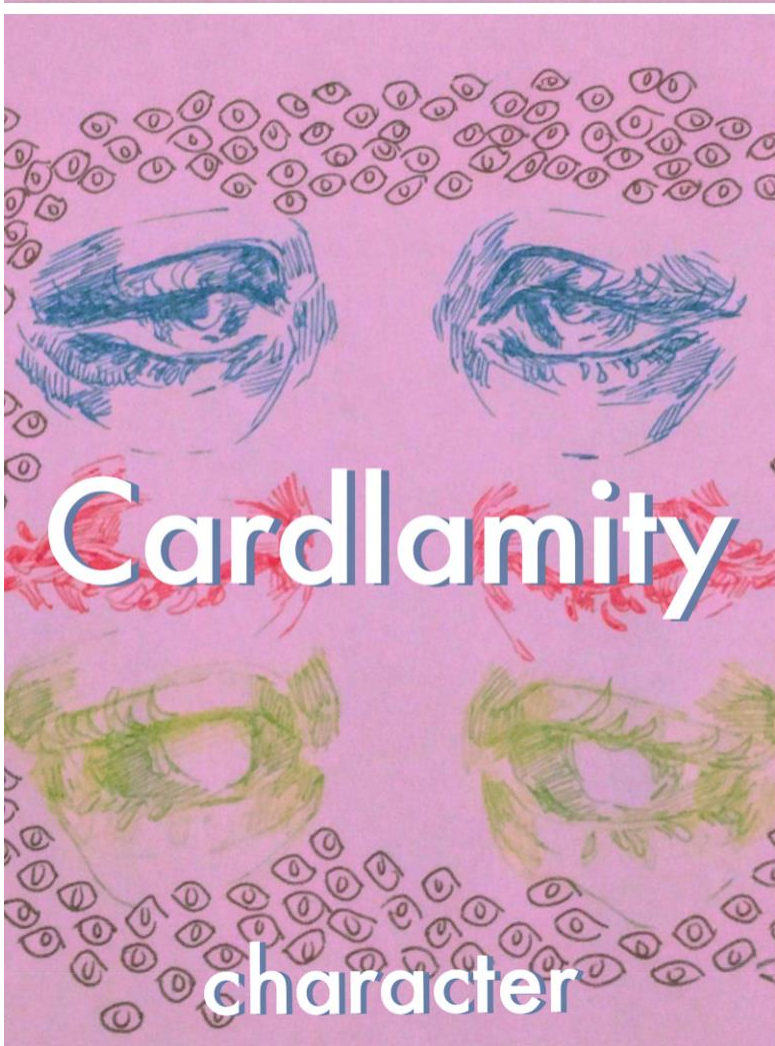
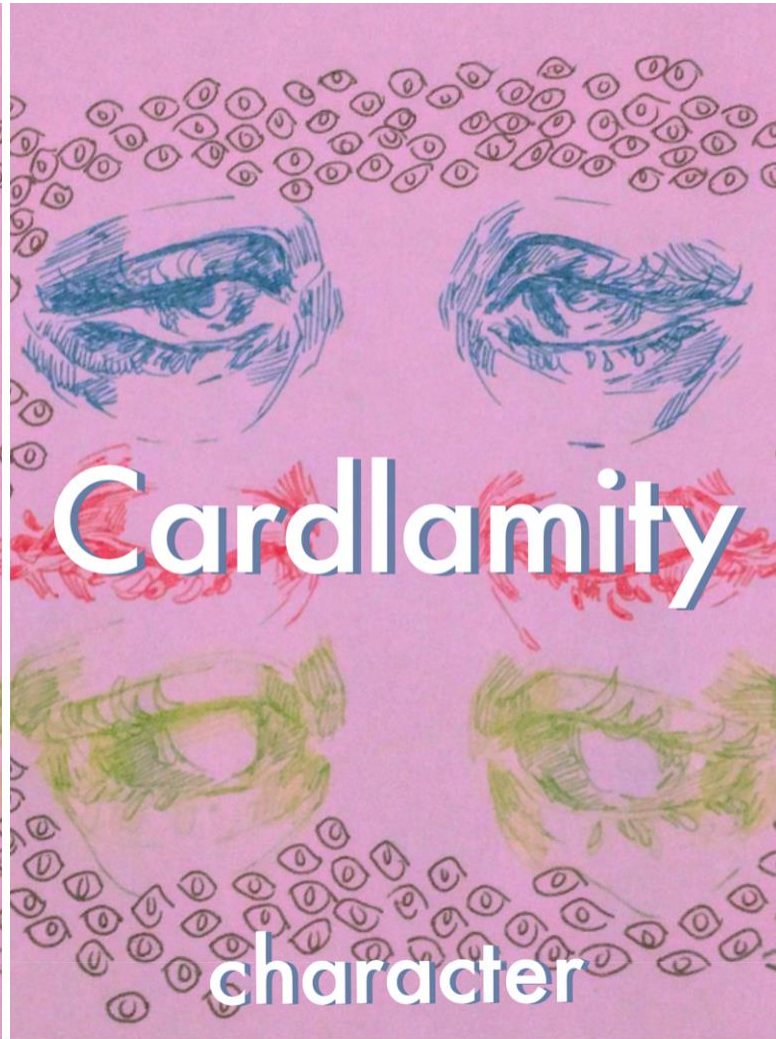
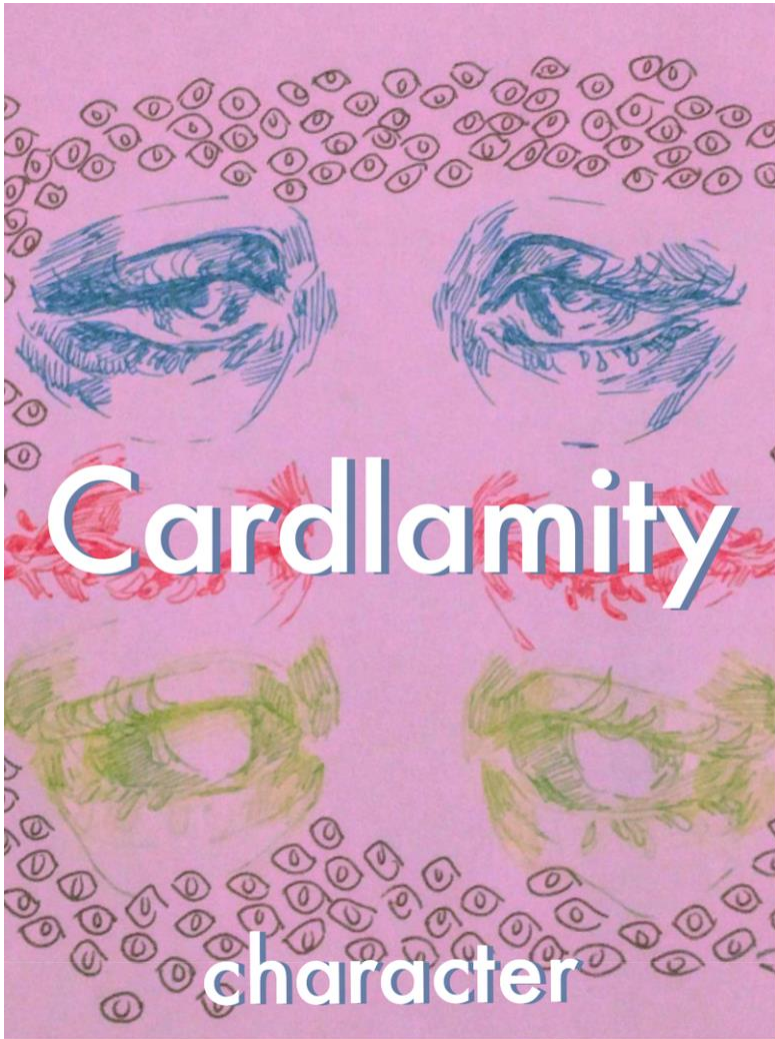
What does your character fear the most?


A detailed pencil sketch of a character's head and shoulders, rendered in a textured, cross-hatched style. The character has long, wavy hair and a beard. The sketch is set against a solid red background. A large, white, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a red border is positioned in the upper center of the image, containing text.

What is your character's first memory? Best memory? Worst memory?

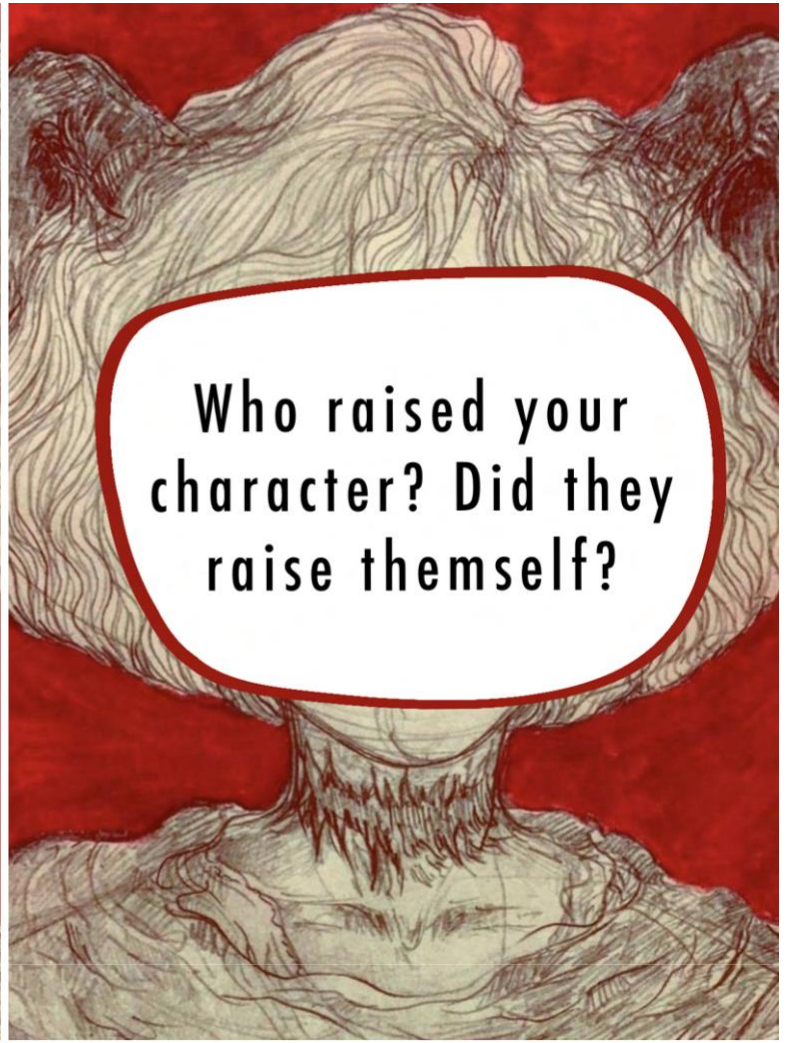
A detailed pencil sketch of a character's head and shoulders, rendered in a textured, cross-hatched style. The character has long, wavy hair and a beard. The sketch is set against a solid red background. A large, white, rounded rectangular speech bubble with a red border is positioned in the upper center of the image, containing text.

Has your character had their first kiss?






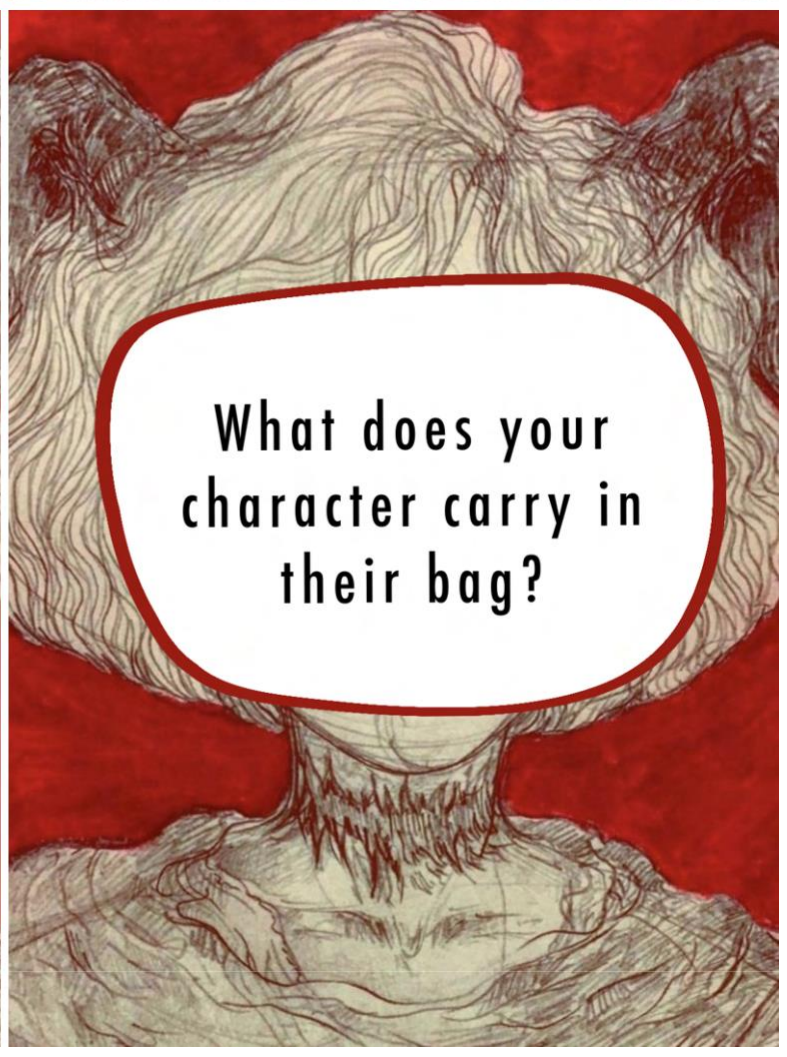
What is your character's biggest regret?



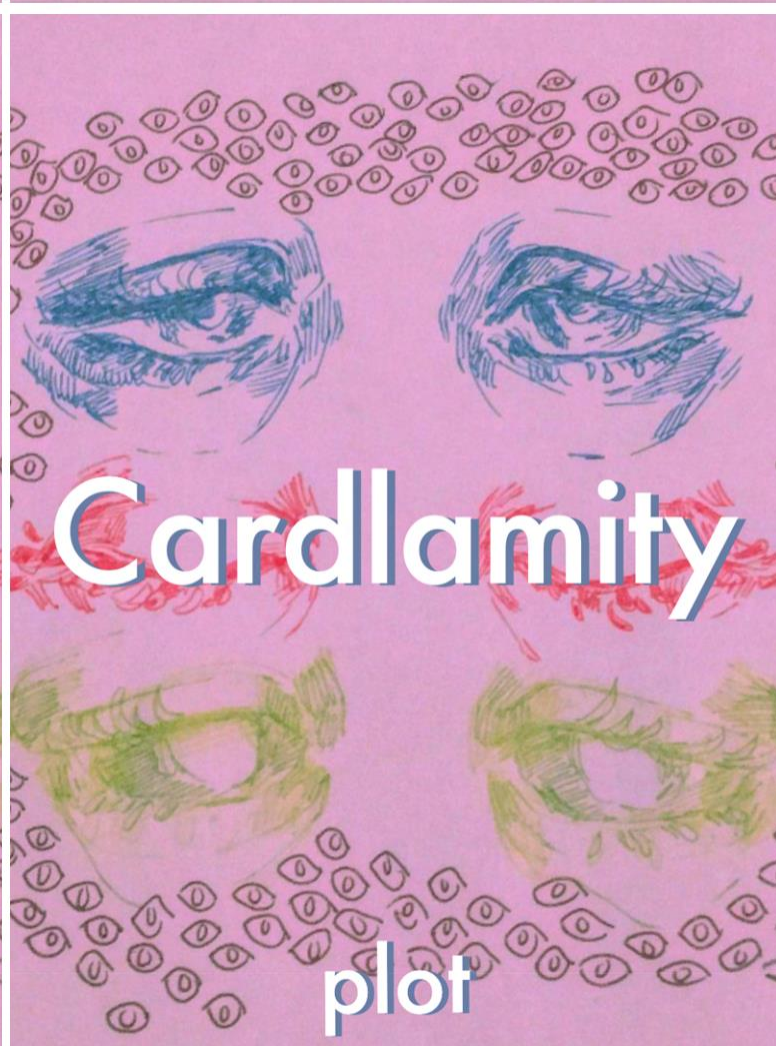
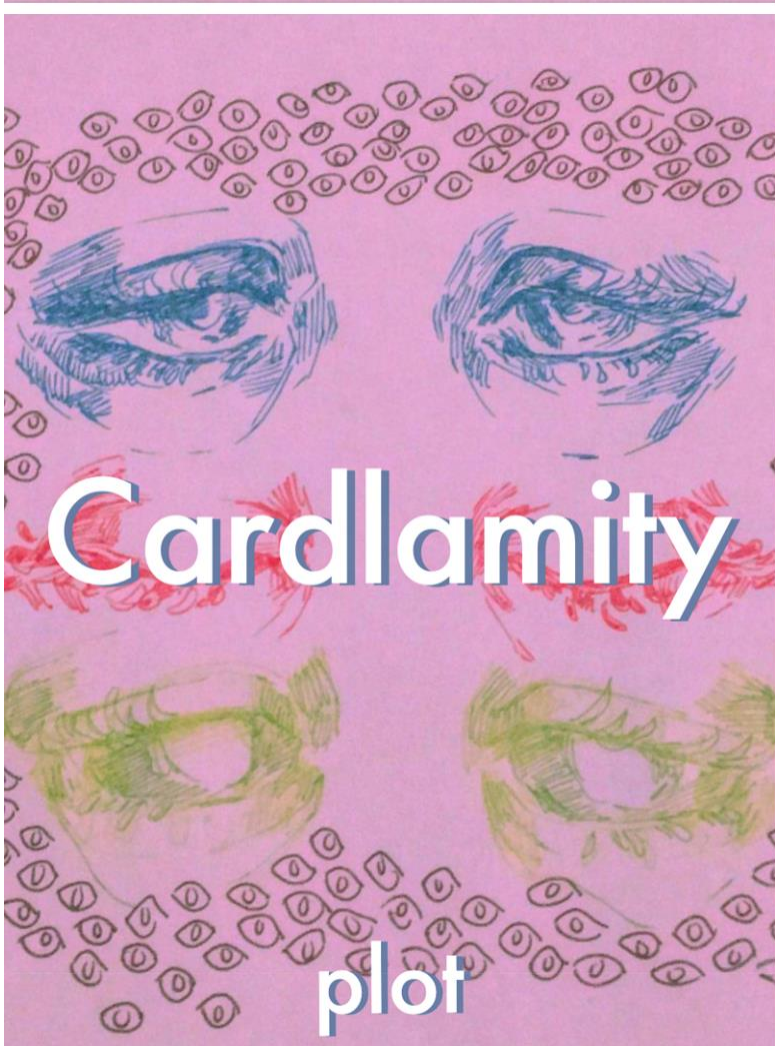
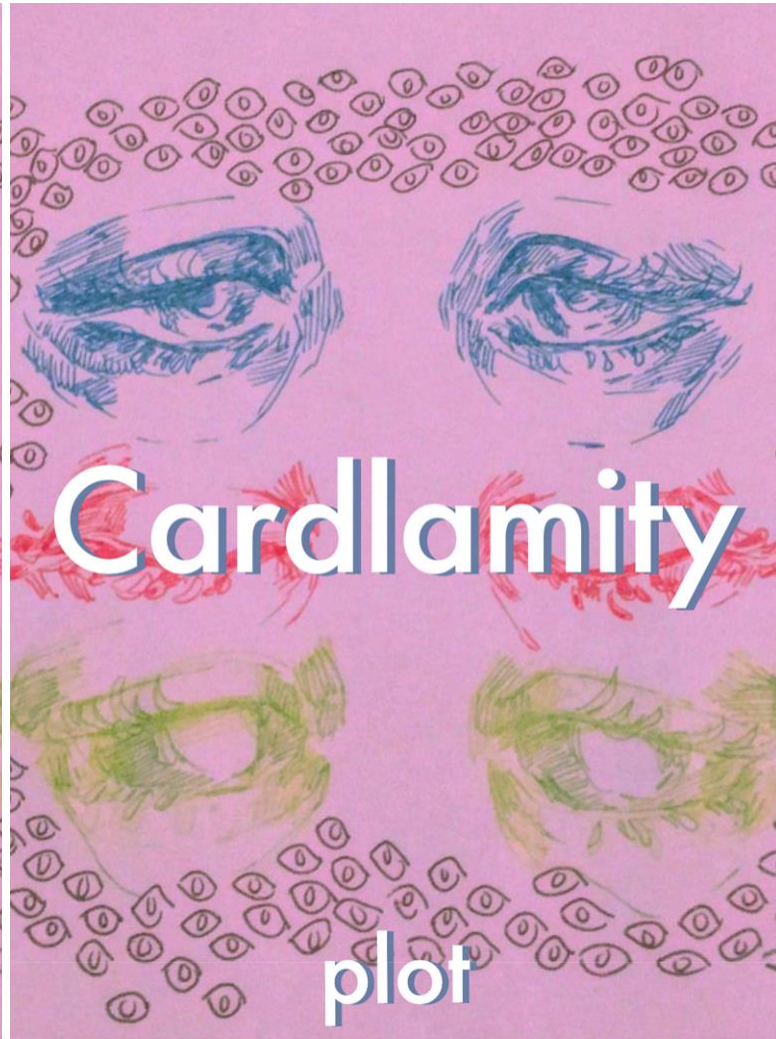
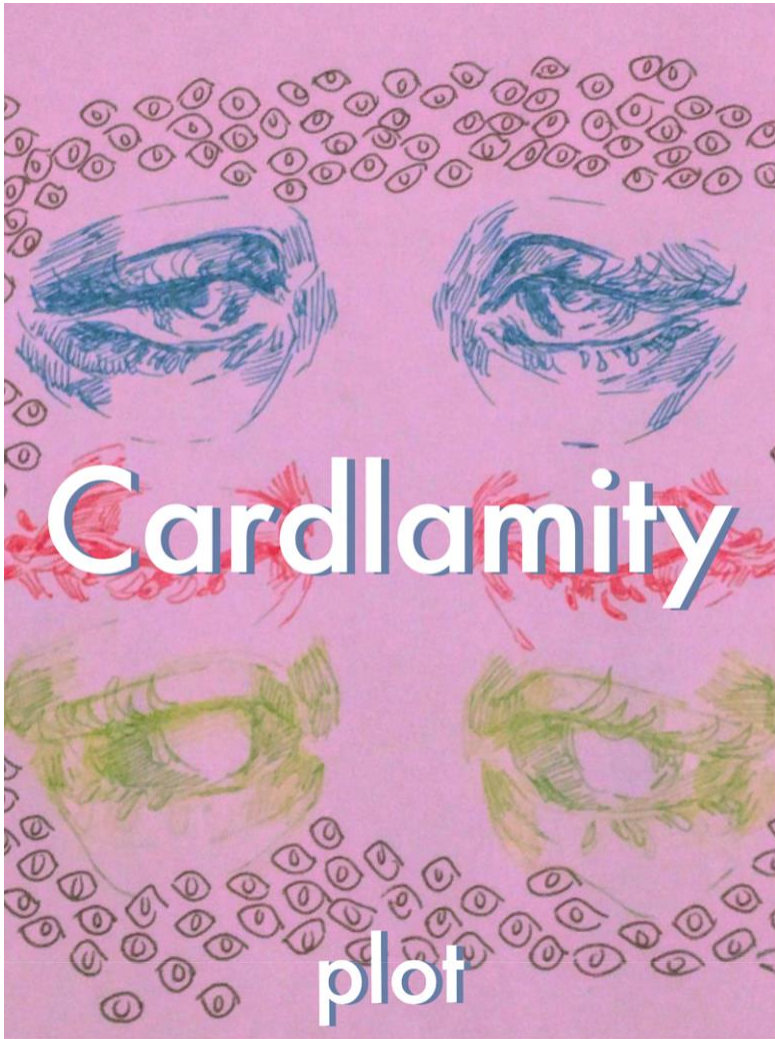
Who raised your character? Did they raise themselves?

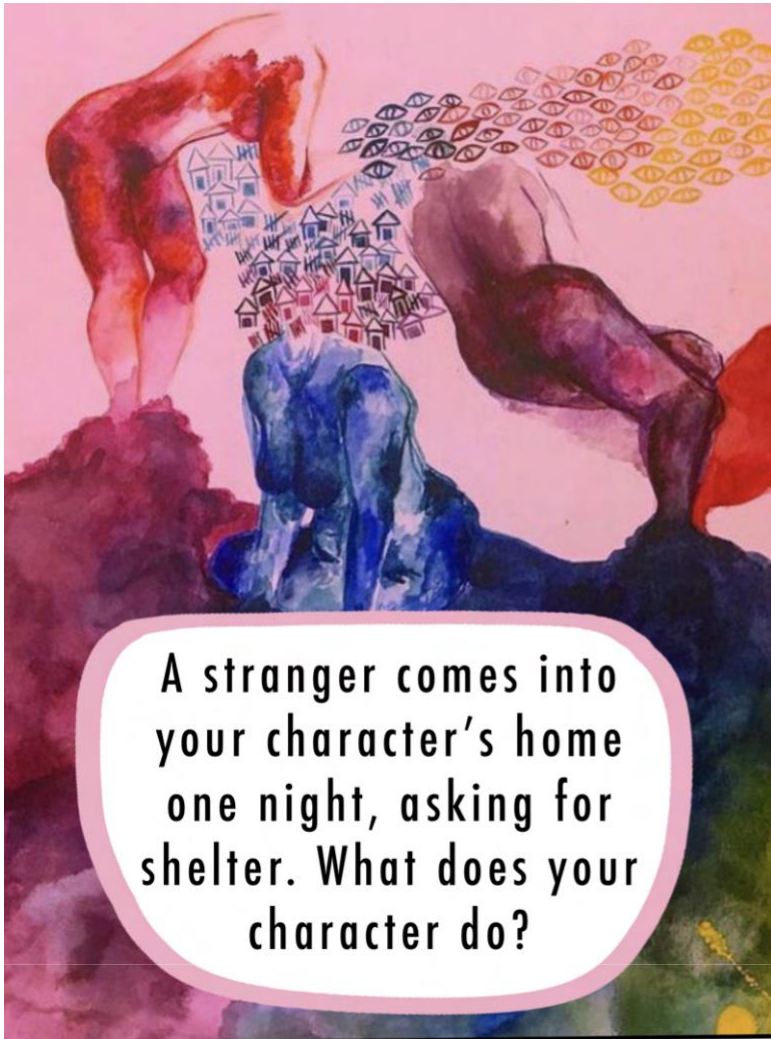


Describe your character's childhood home.

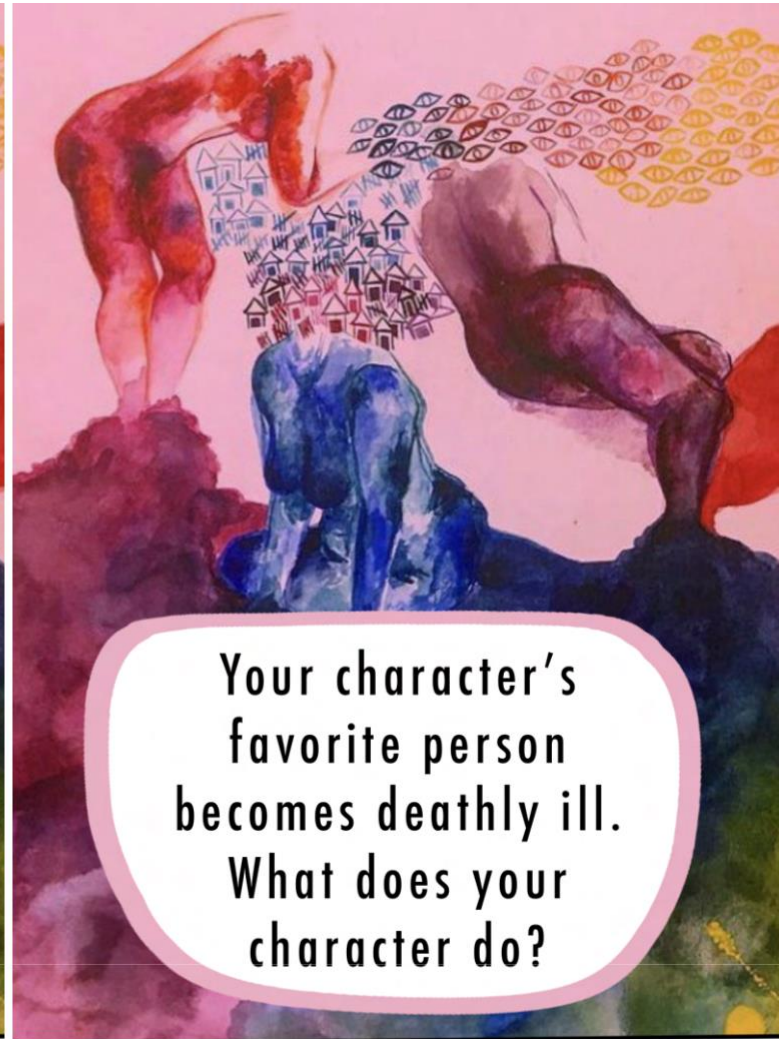


What does your character carry in their bag?

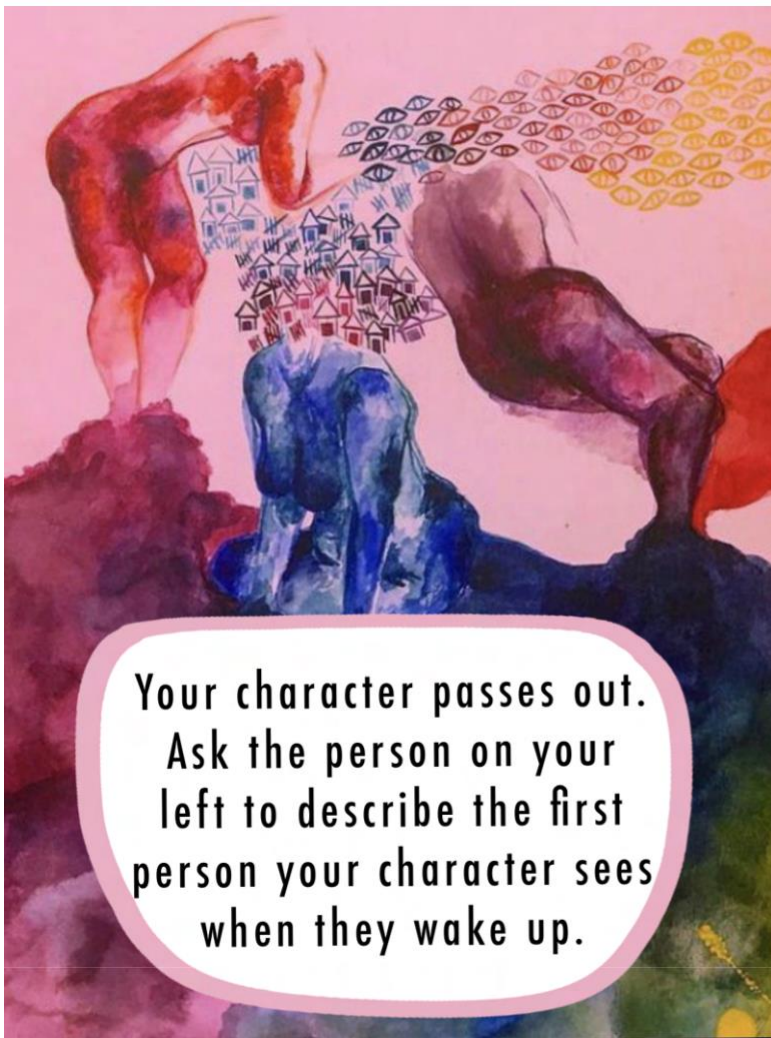




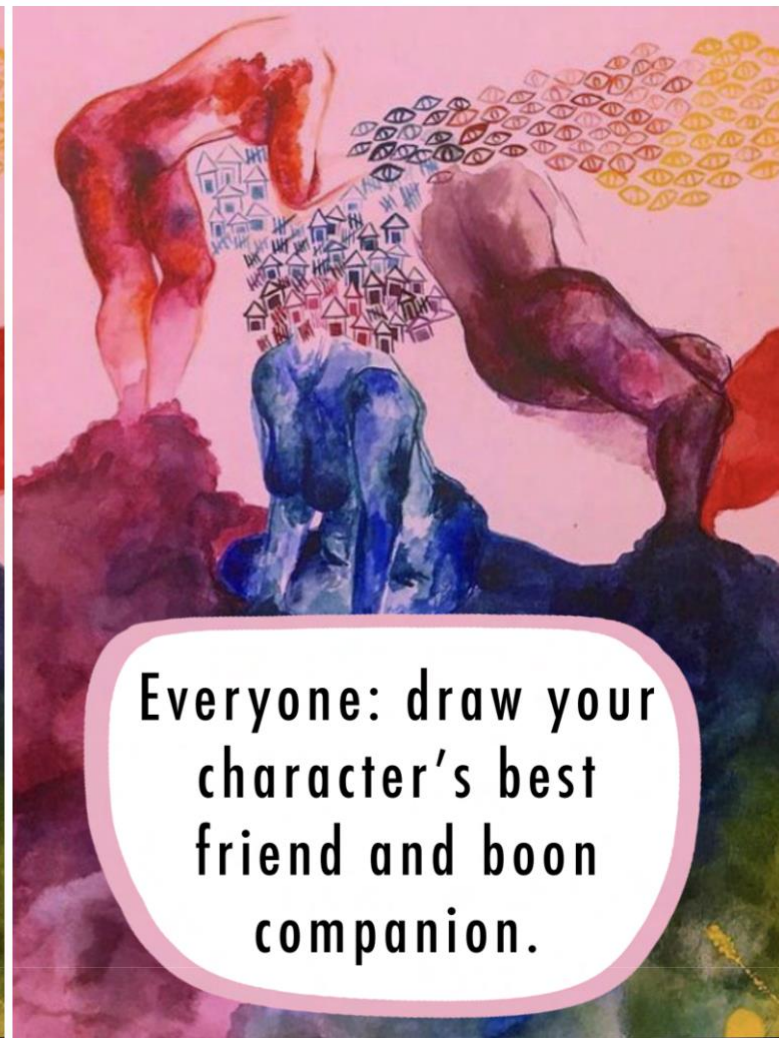
A stranger comes into your character's home one night, asking for shelter. What does your character do?



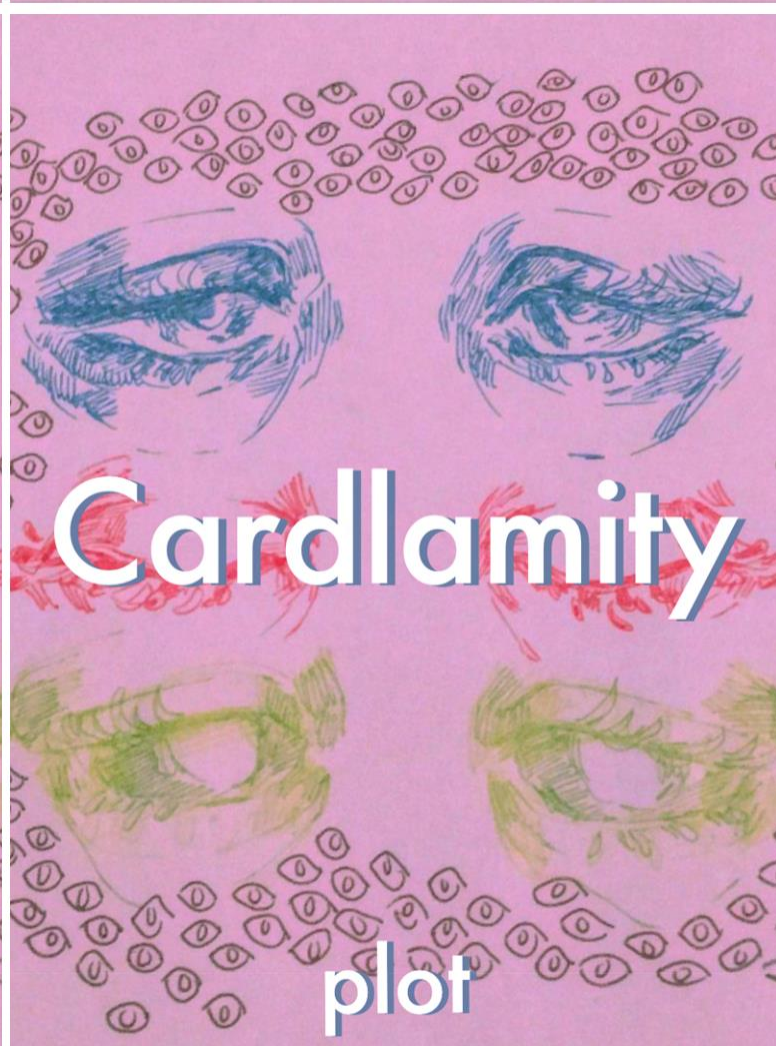
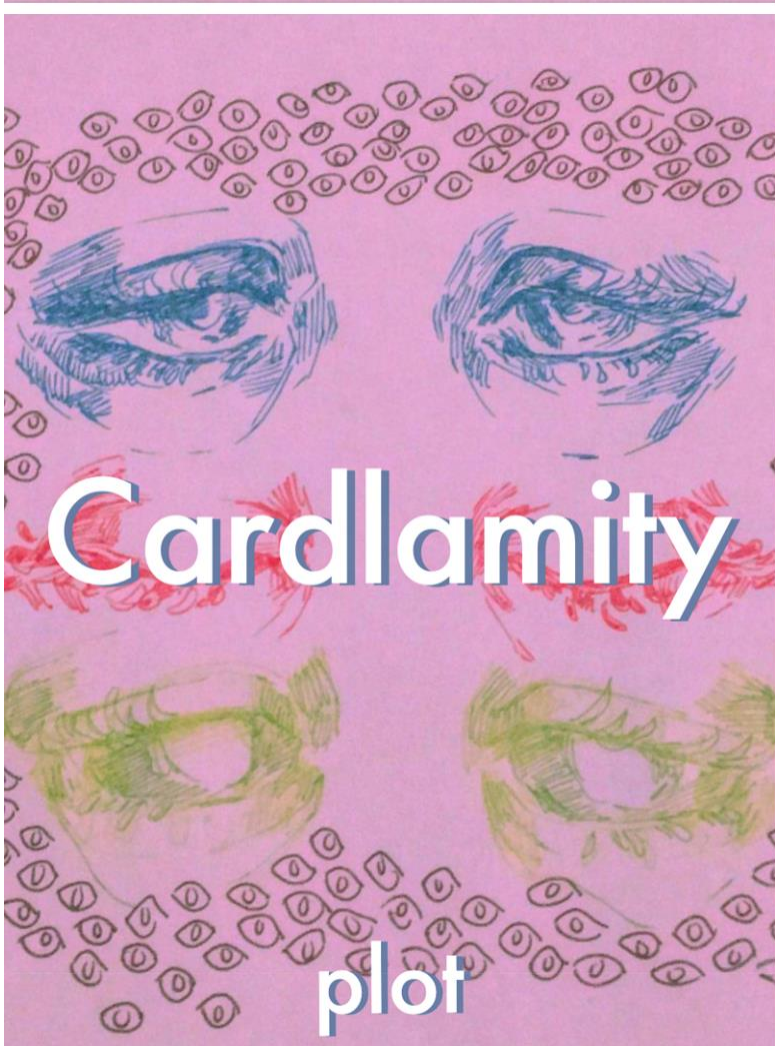
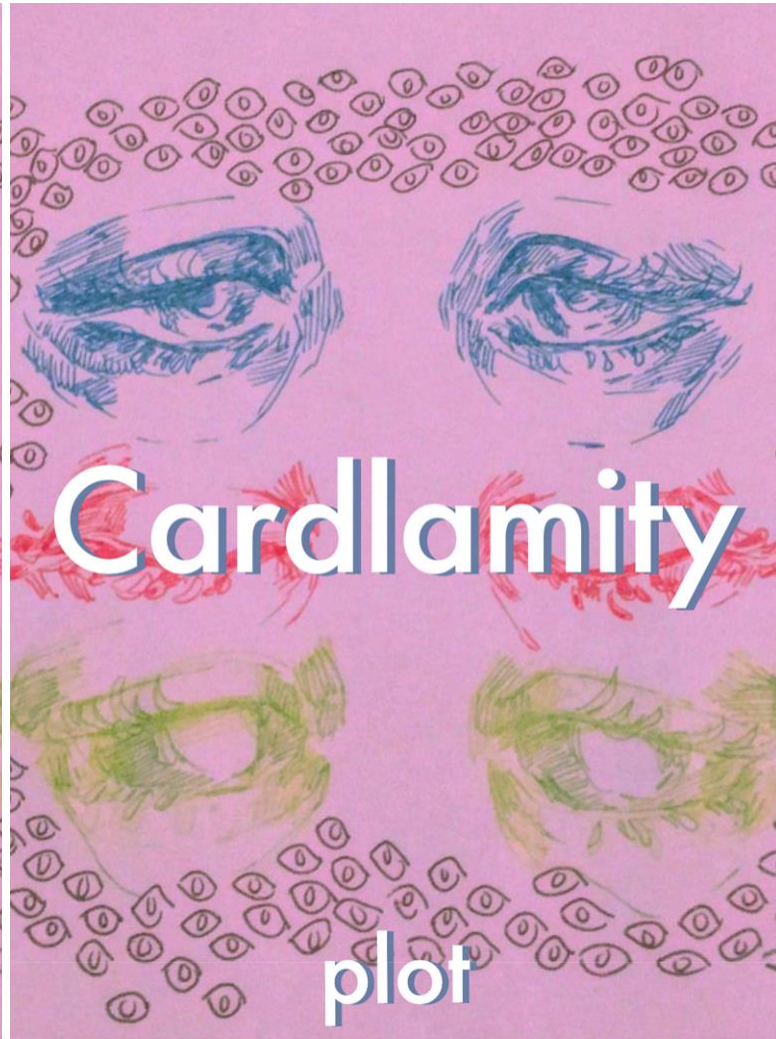
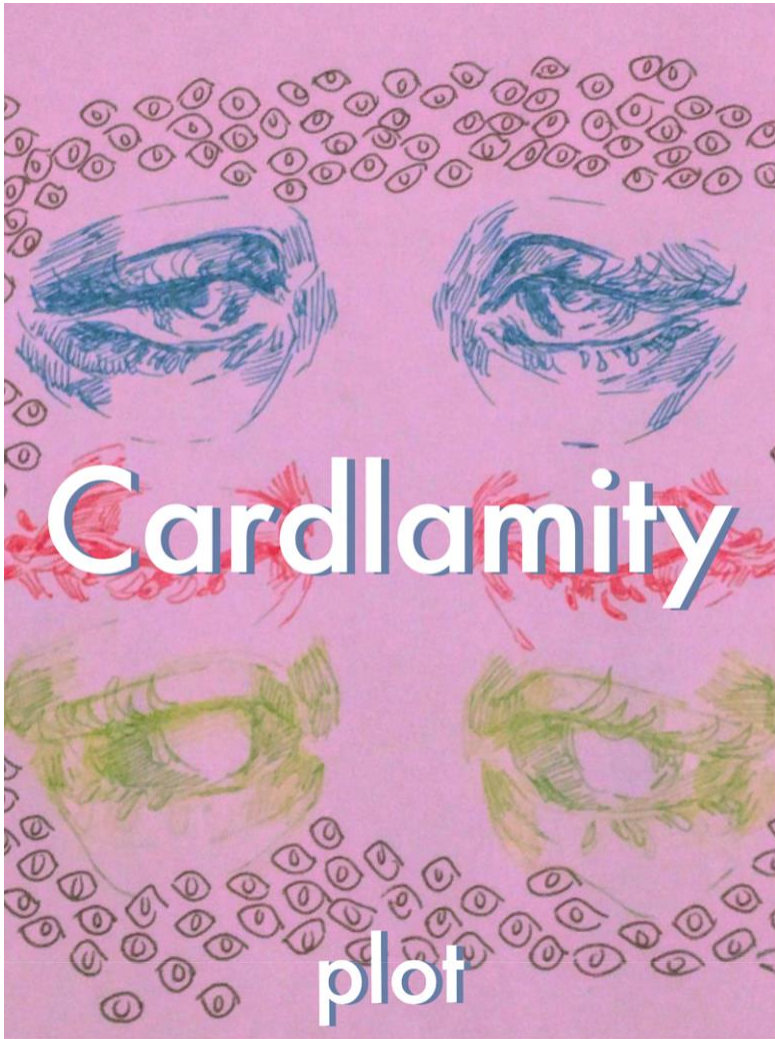
Your character's favorite person becomes deathly ill. What does your character do?



Your character passes out. Ask the person on your left to describe the first person your character sees when they wake up.

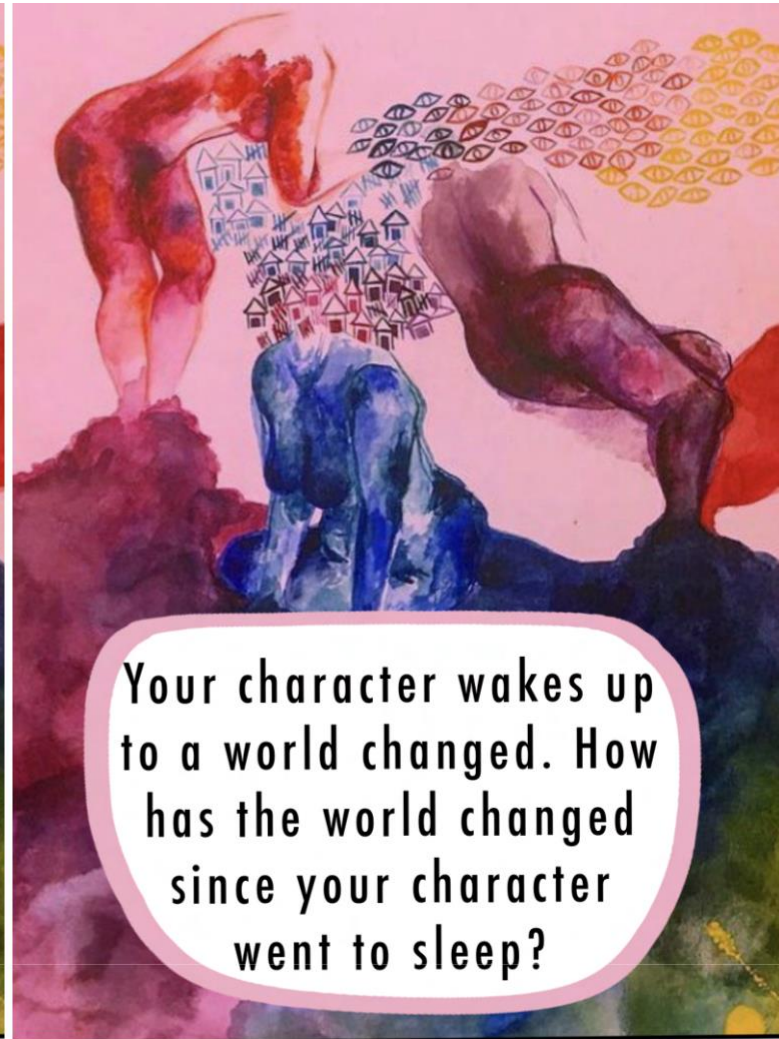


Everyone: draw your character's best friend and boon companion.

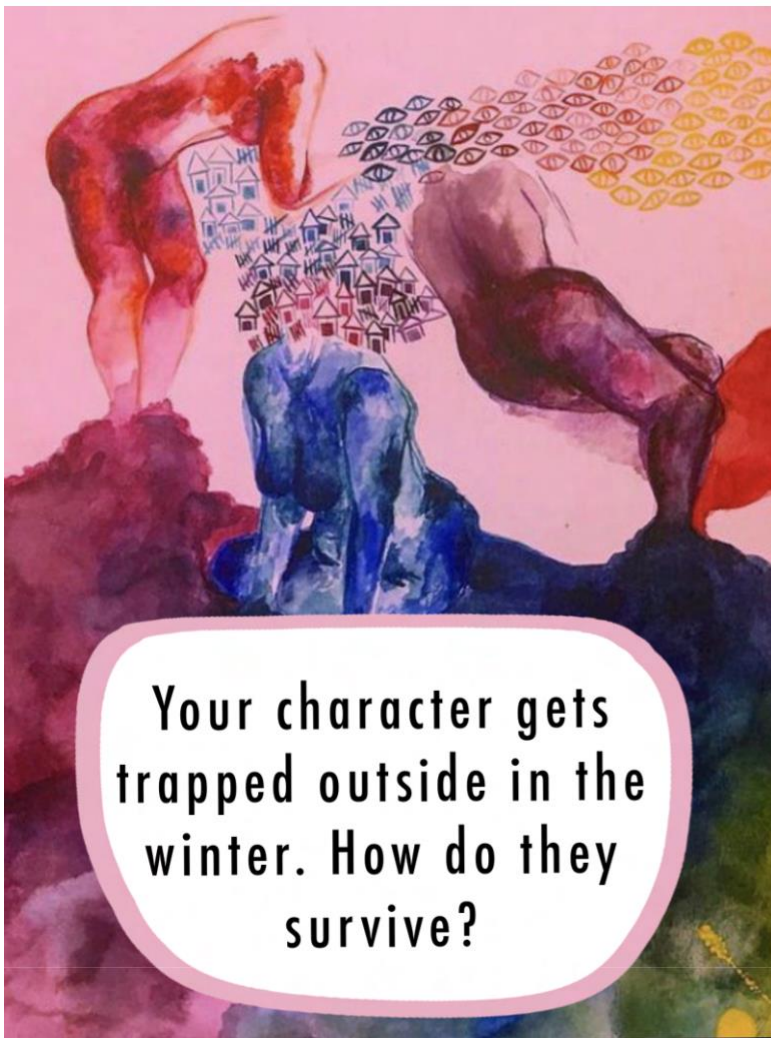




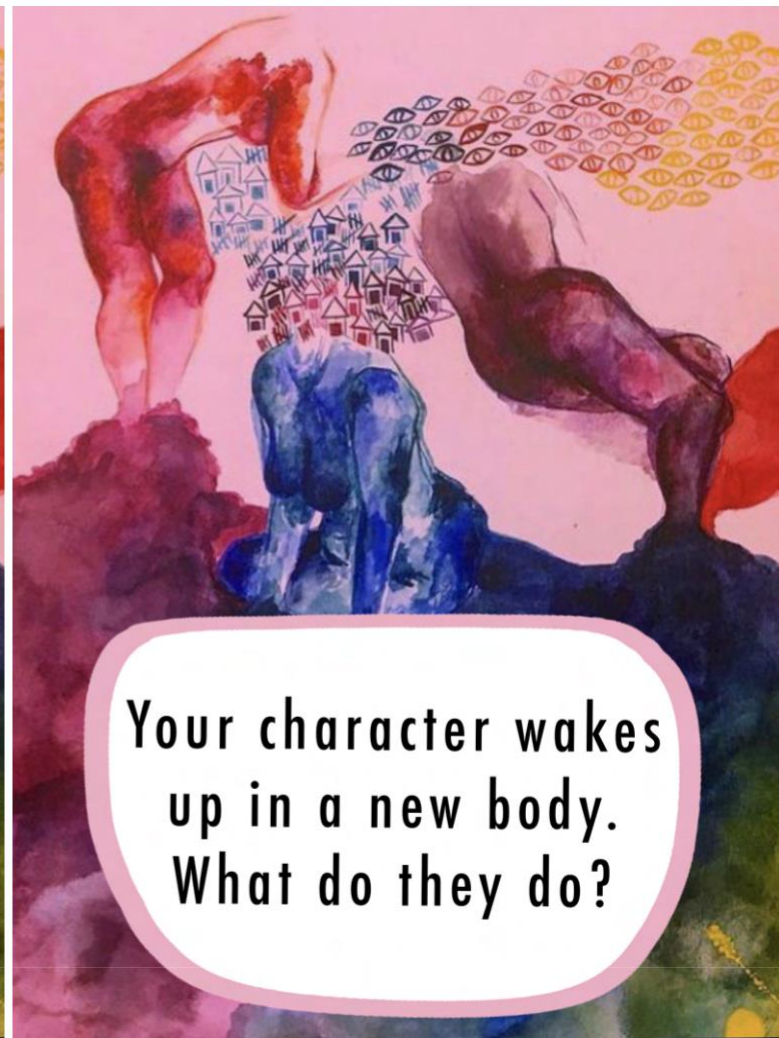
Your character discovers an old artifact in their childhood home. What is it?



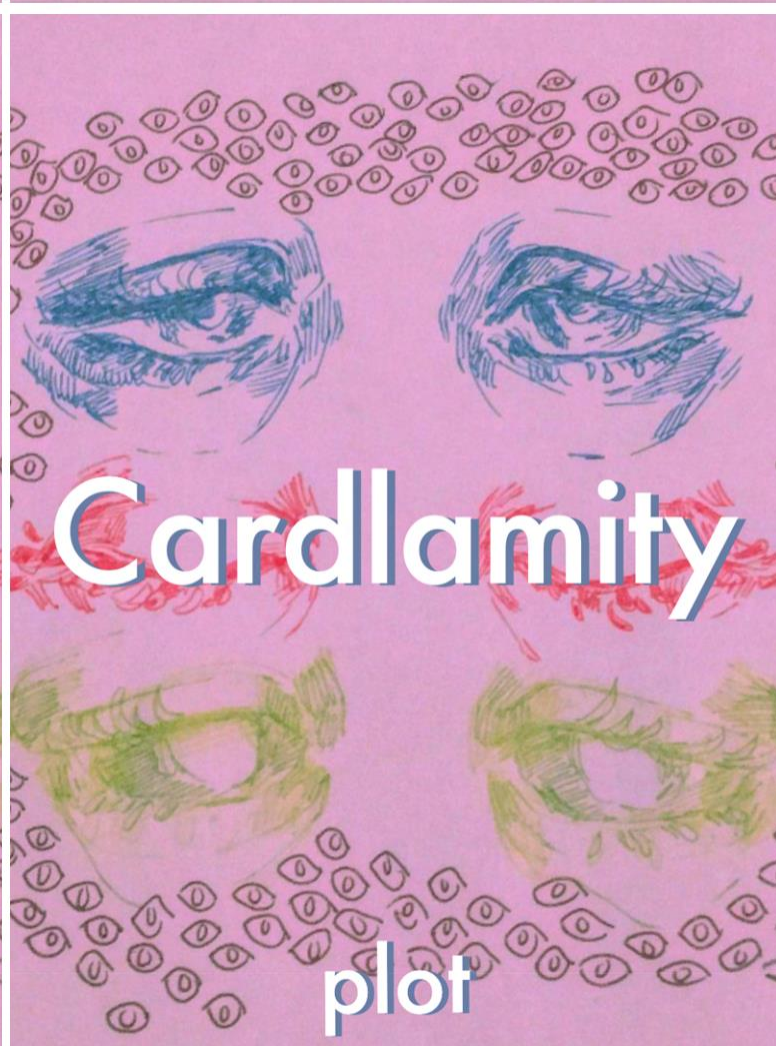
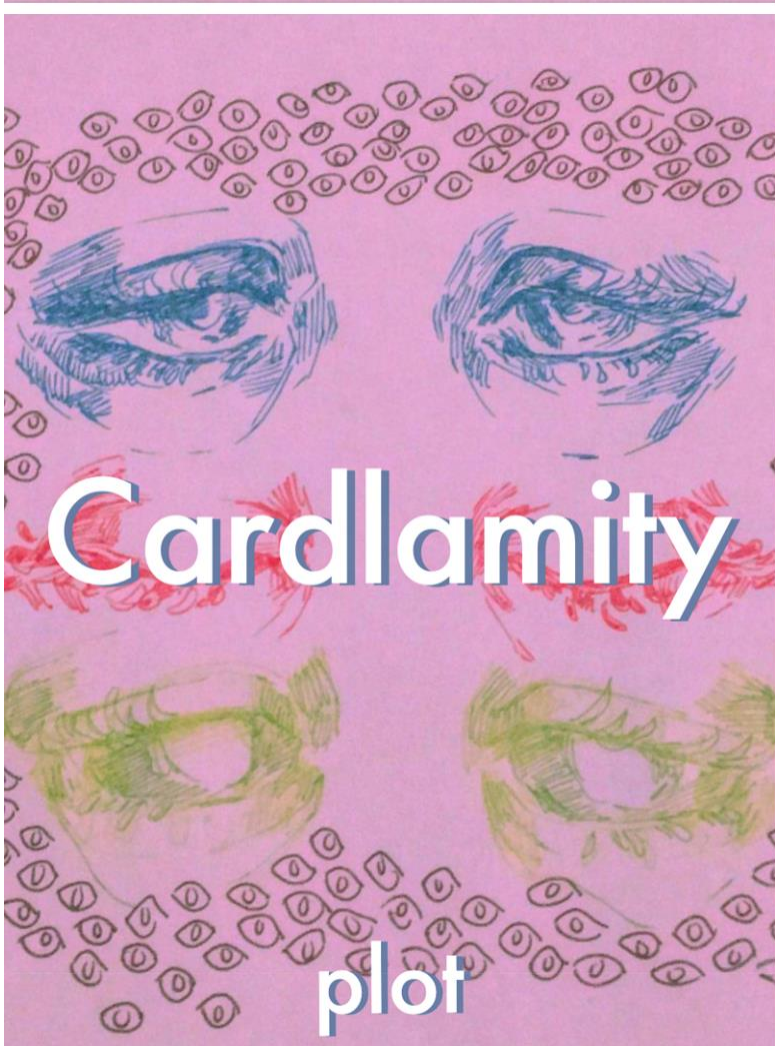
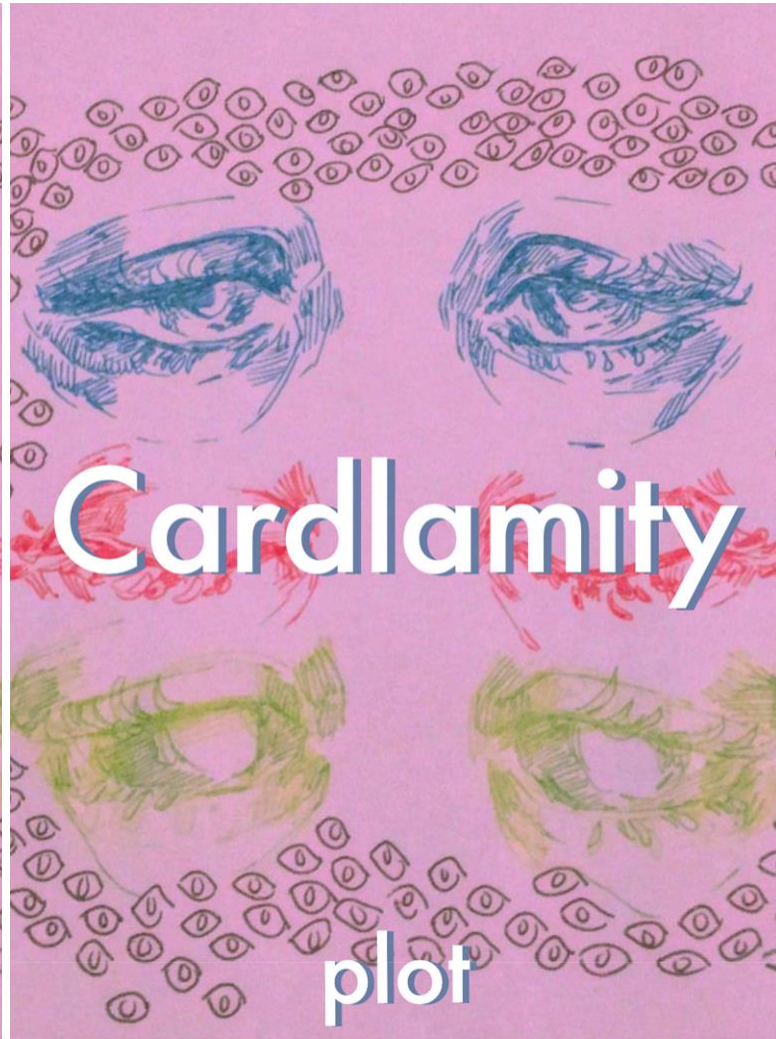
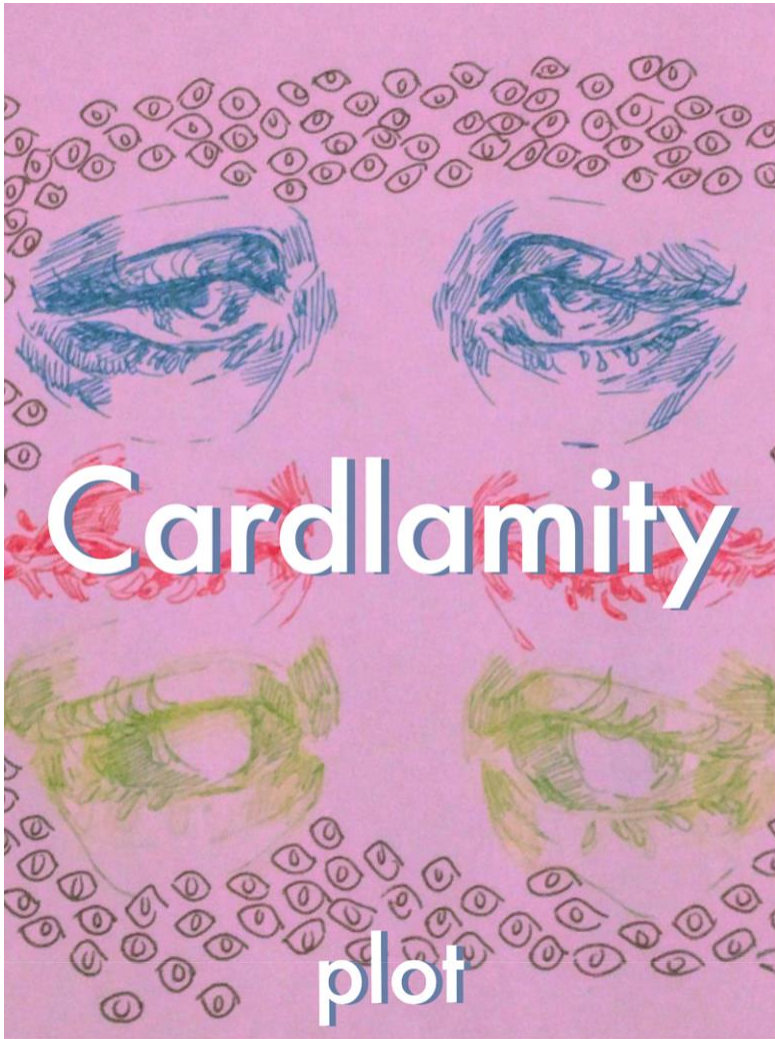
Your character wakes up to a world changed. How has the world changed since your character went to sleep?

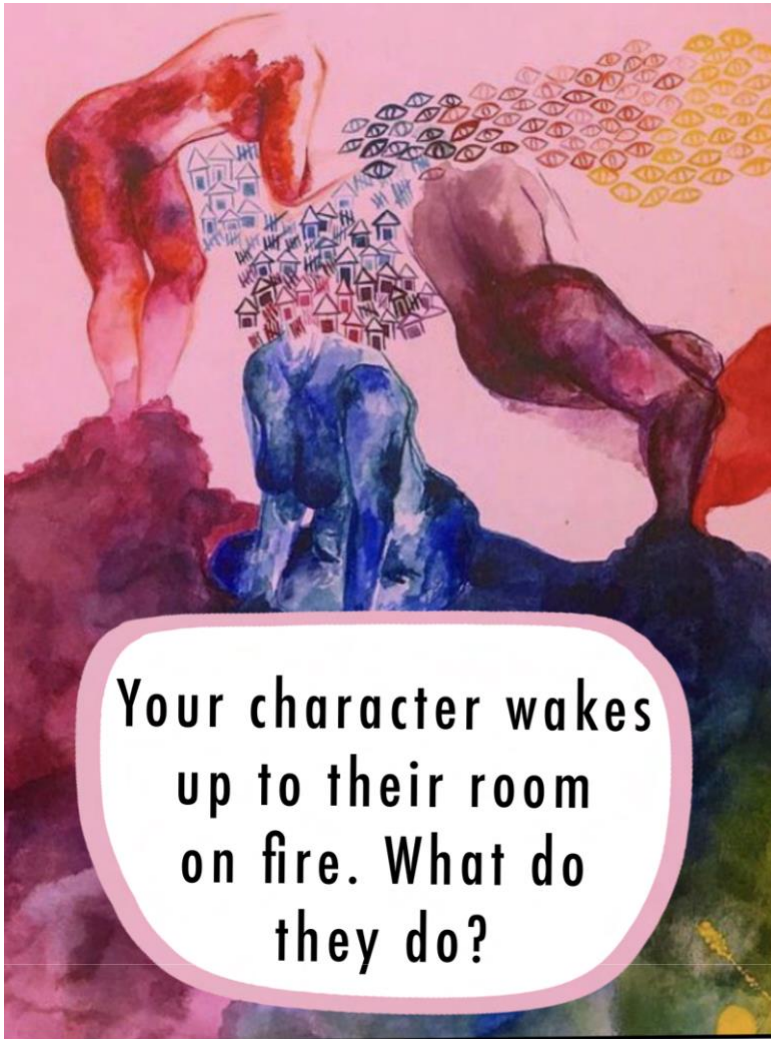


Your character gets trapped outside in the winter. How do they survive?

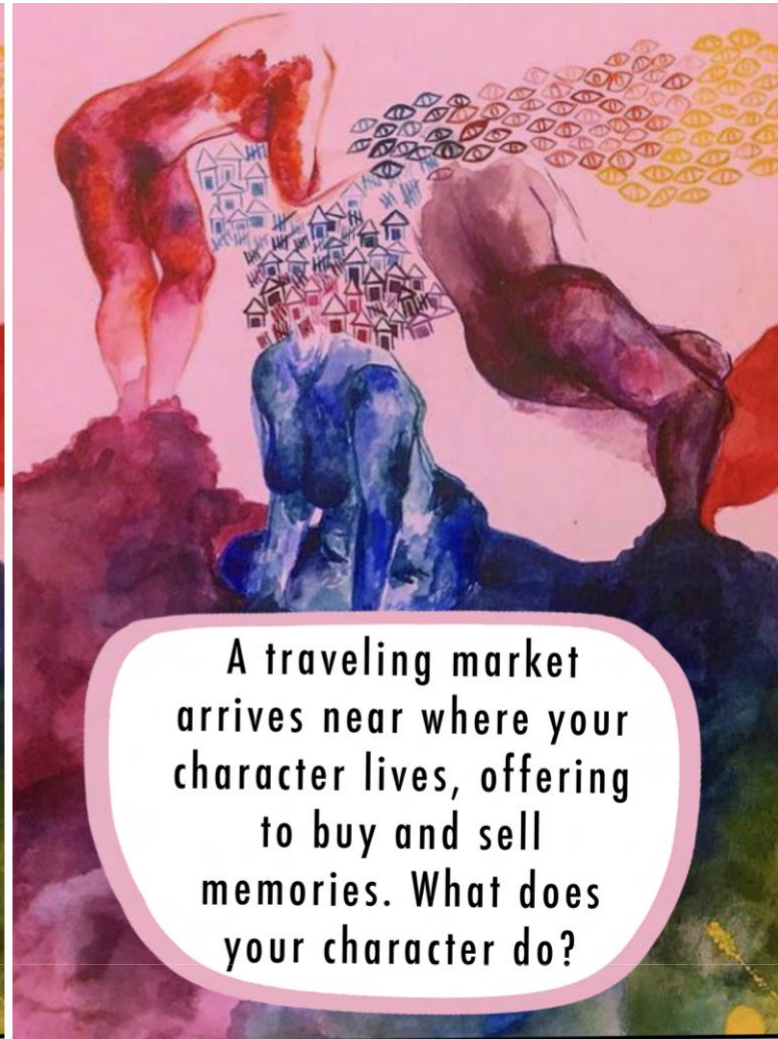


Your character wakes up in a new body. What do they do?

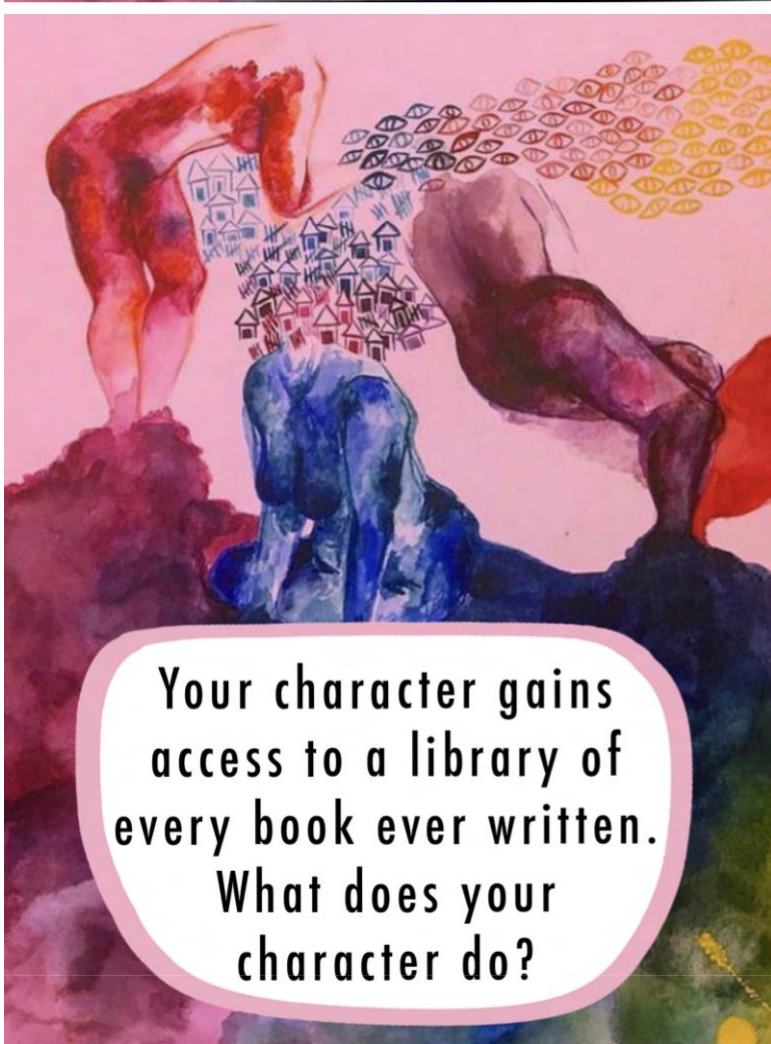




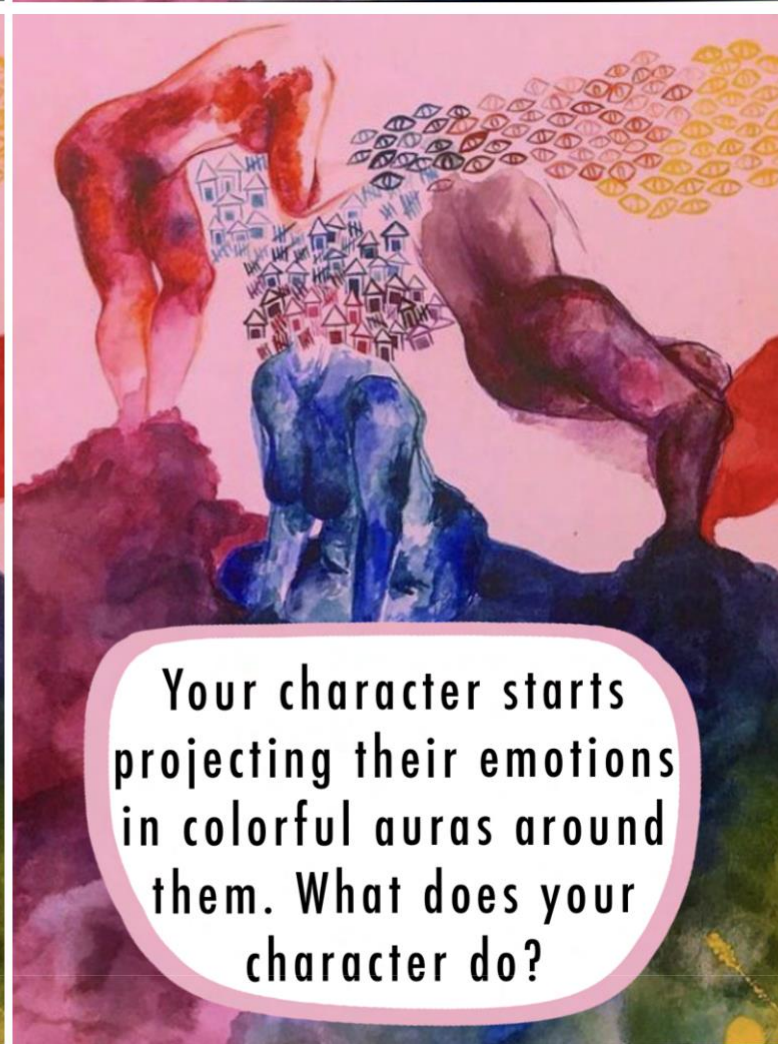
Your character wakes up to their room on fire. What do they do?



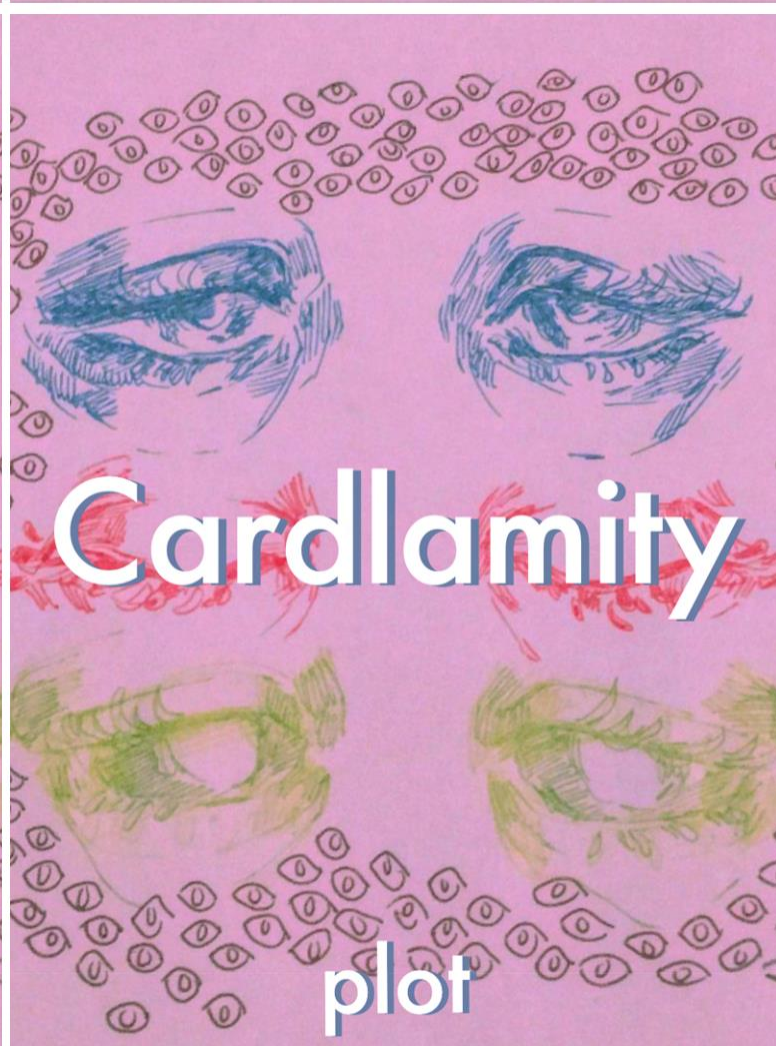
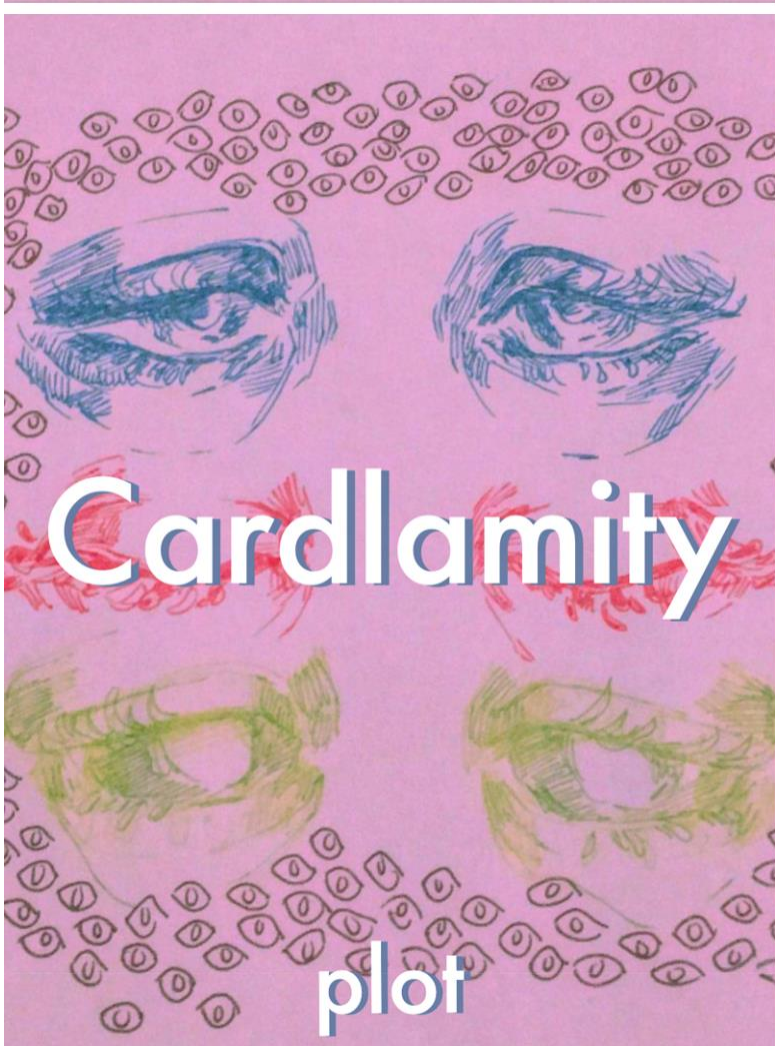
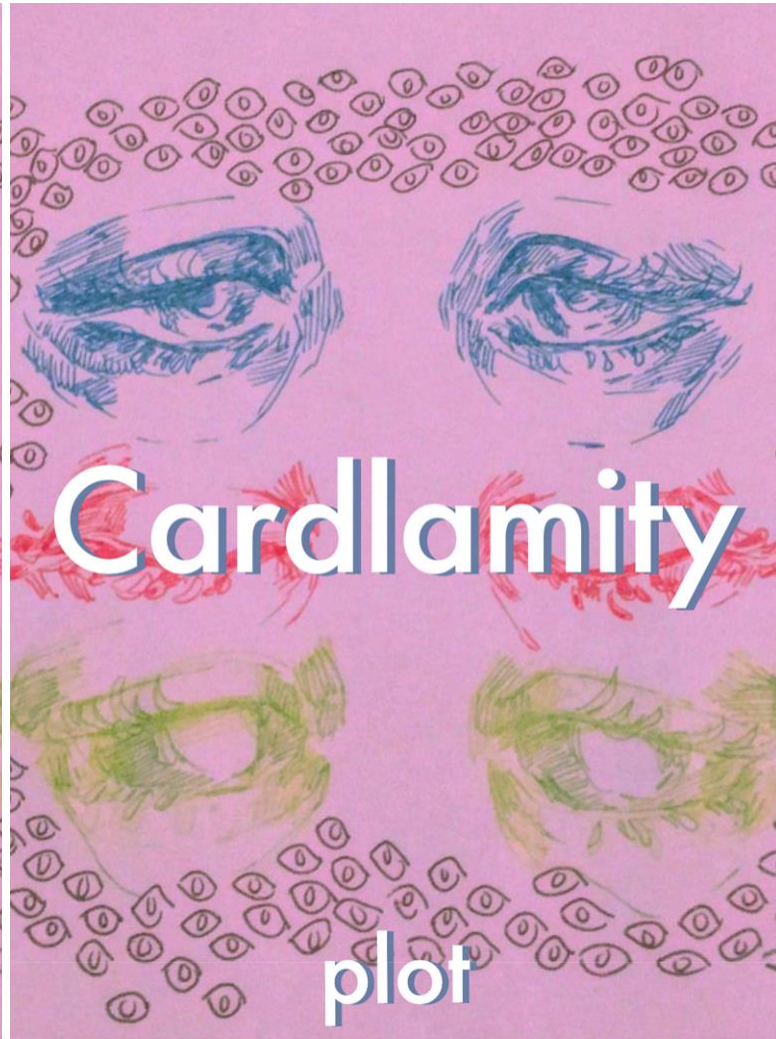
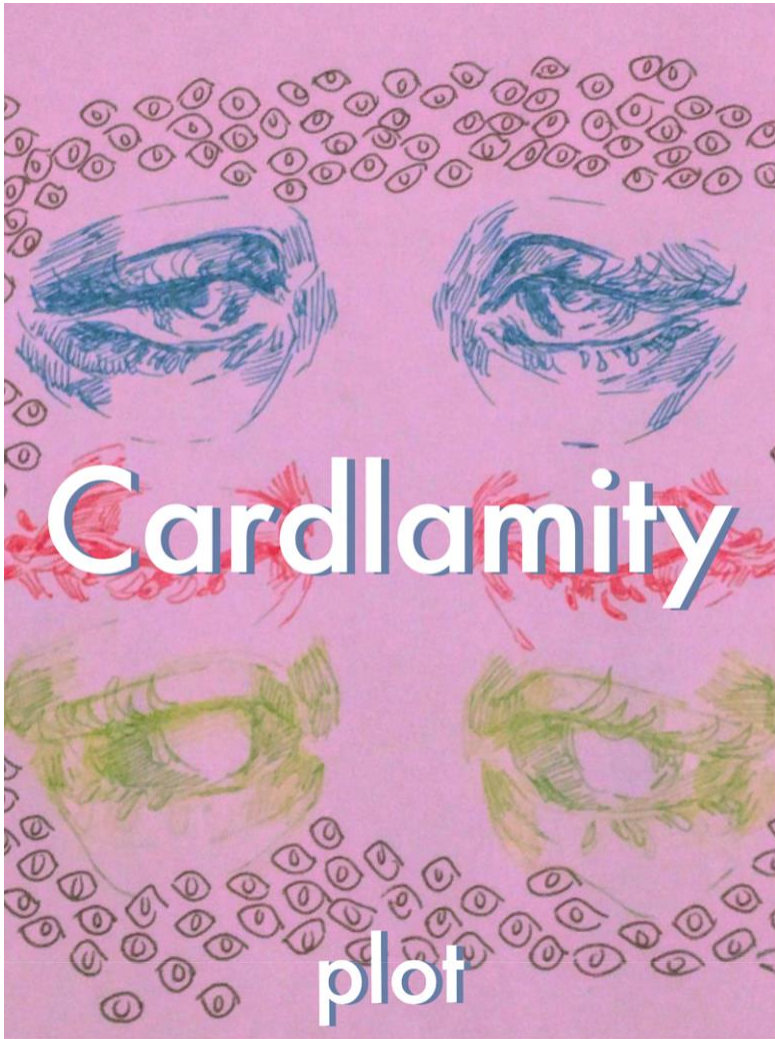
A traveling market arrives near where your character lives, offering to buy and sell memories. What does your character do?

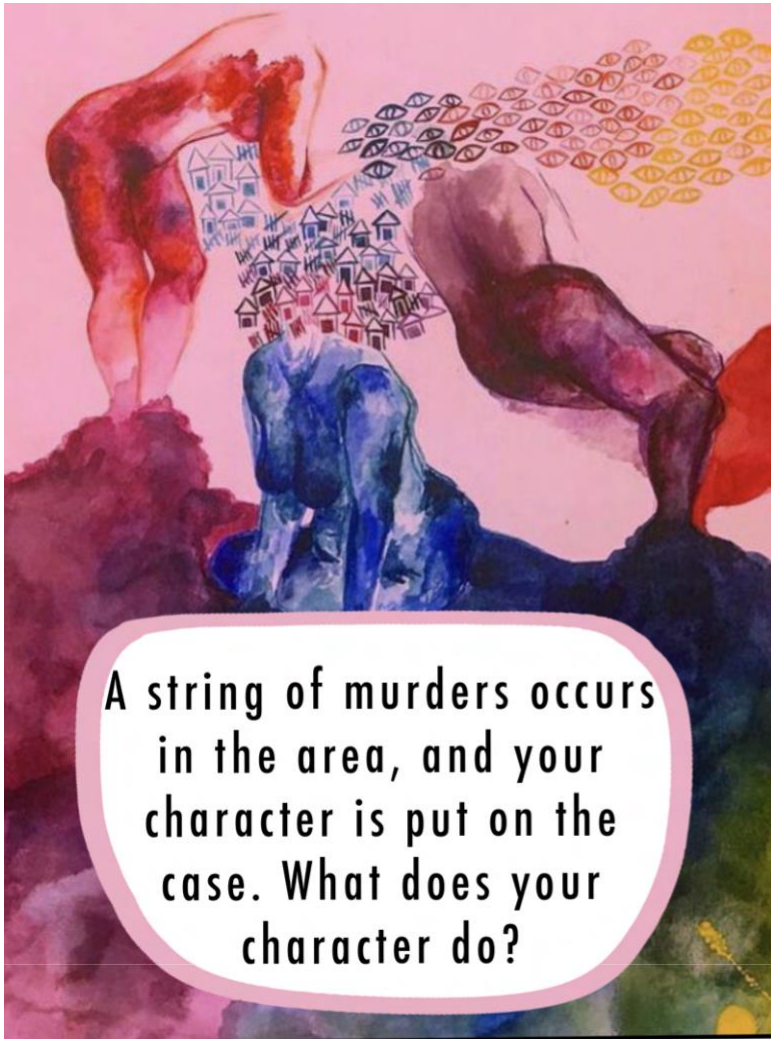


Your character gains access to a library of every book ever written. What does your character do?

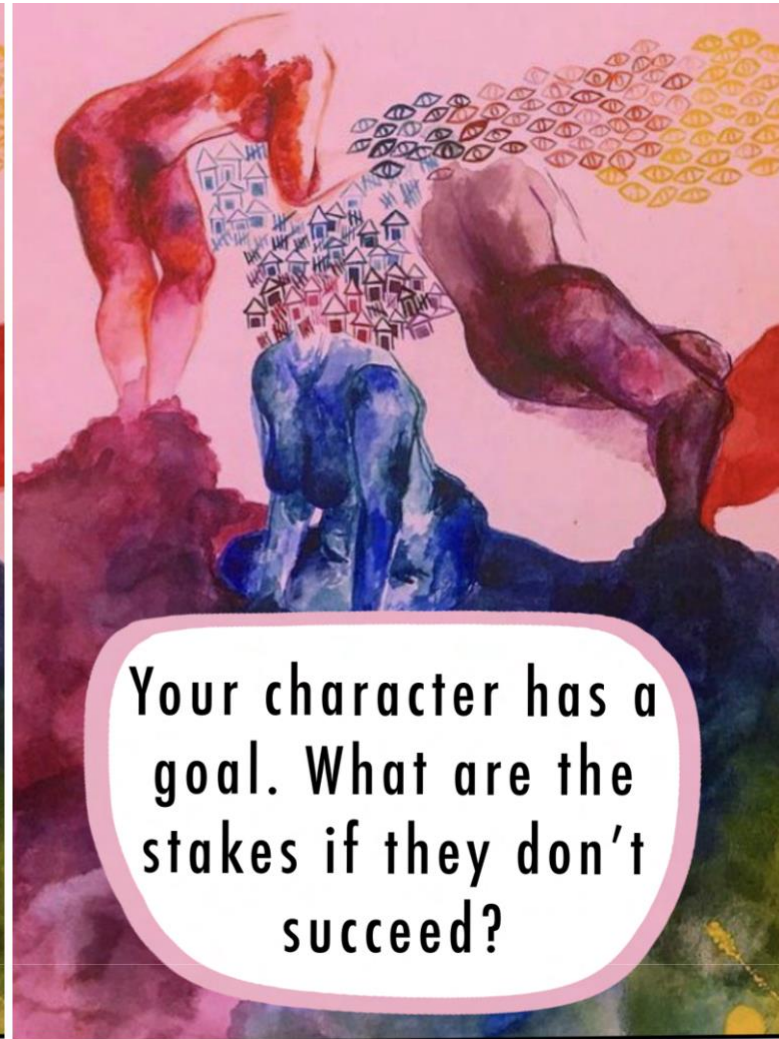


Your character starts projecting their emotions in colorful auras around them. What does your character do?

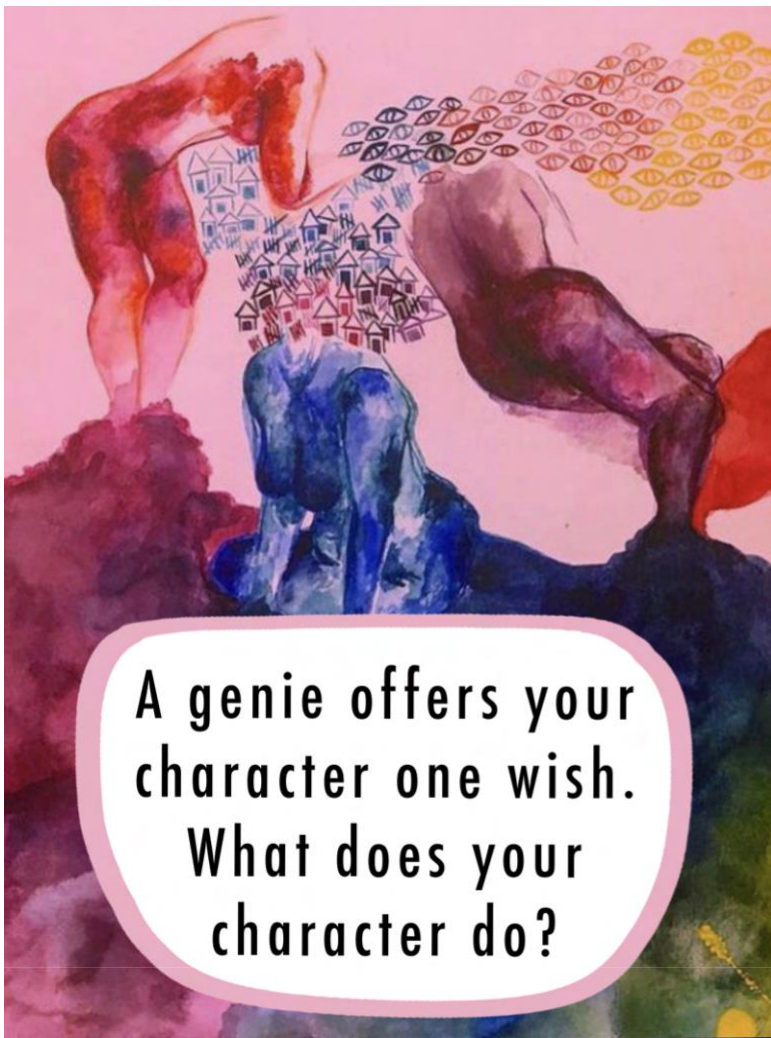




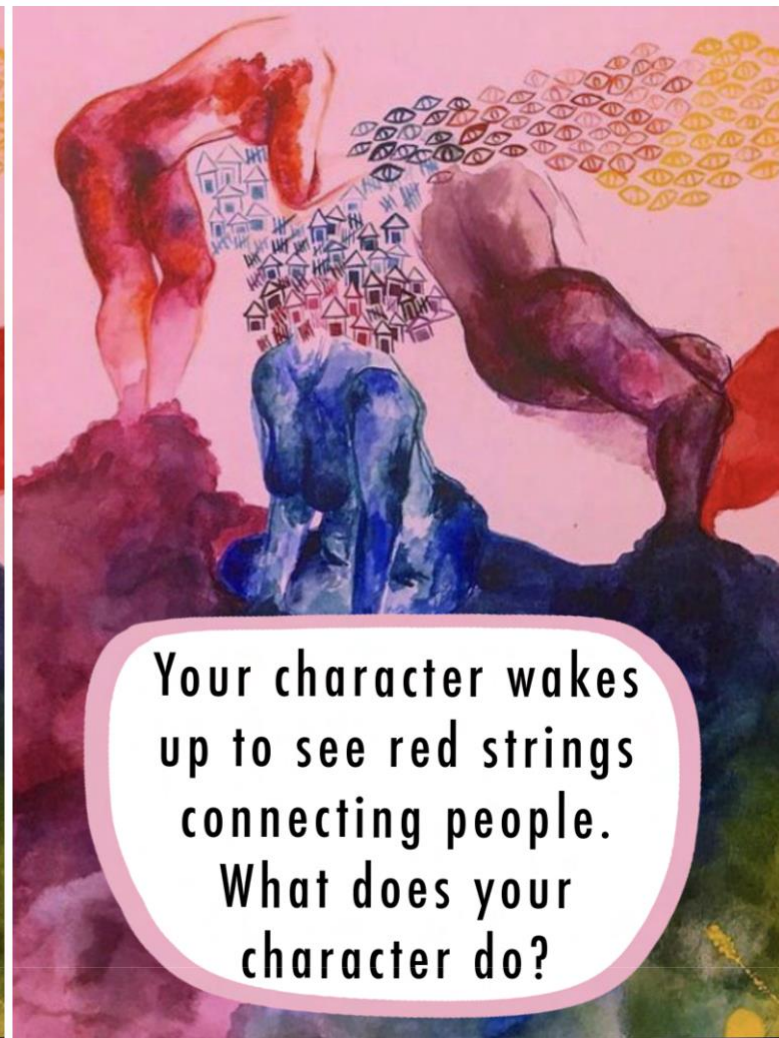
A string of murders occurs in the area, and your character is put on the case. What does your character do?



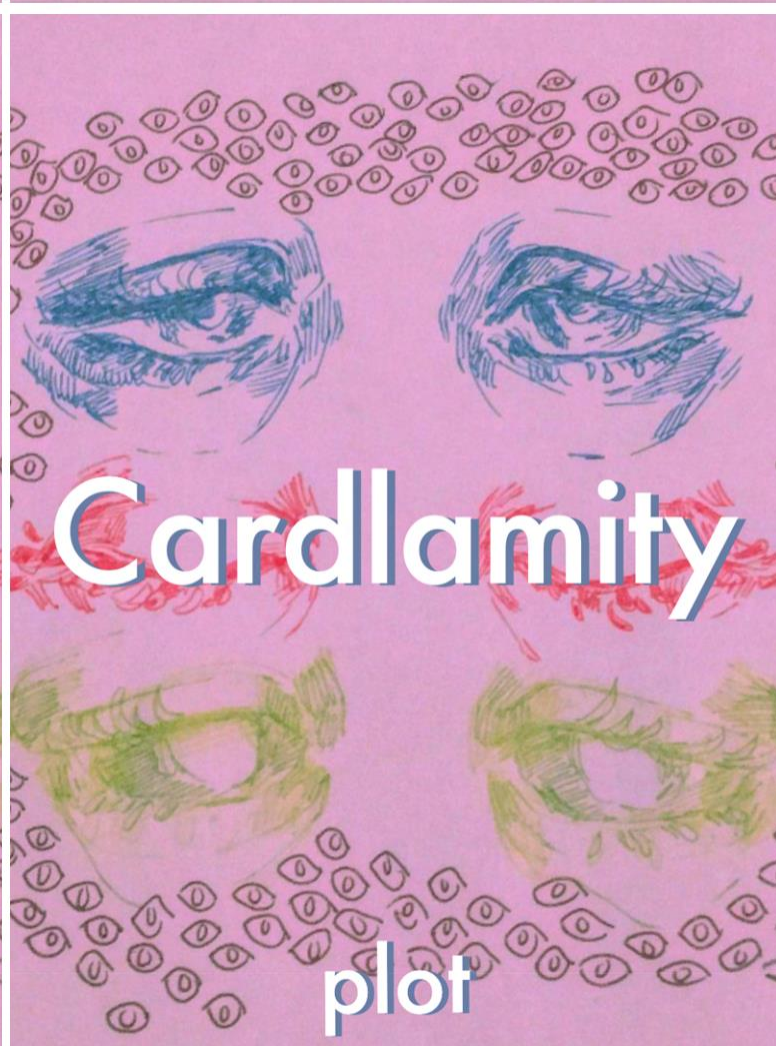
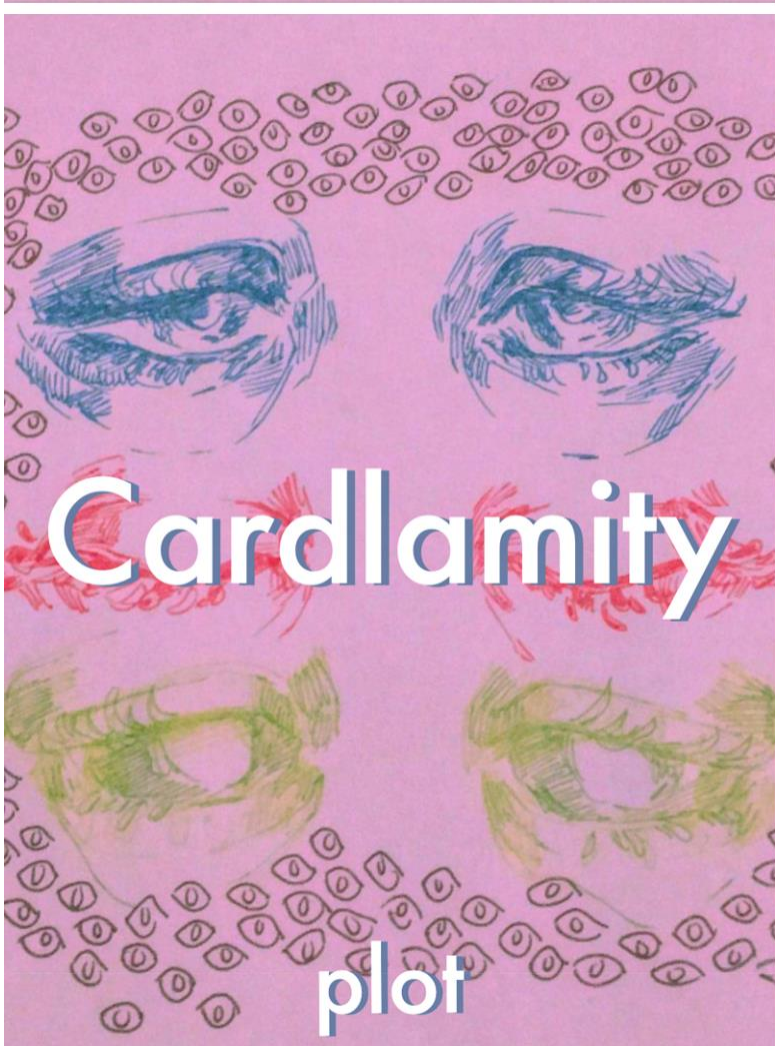
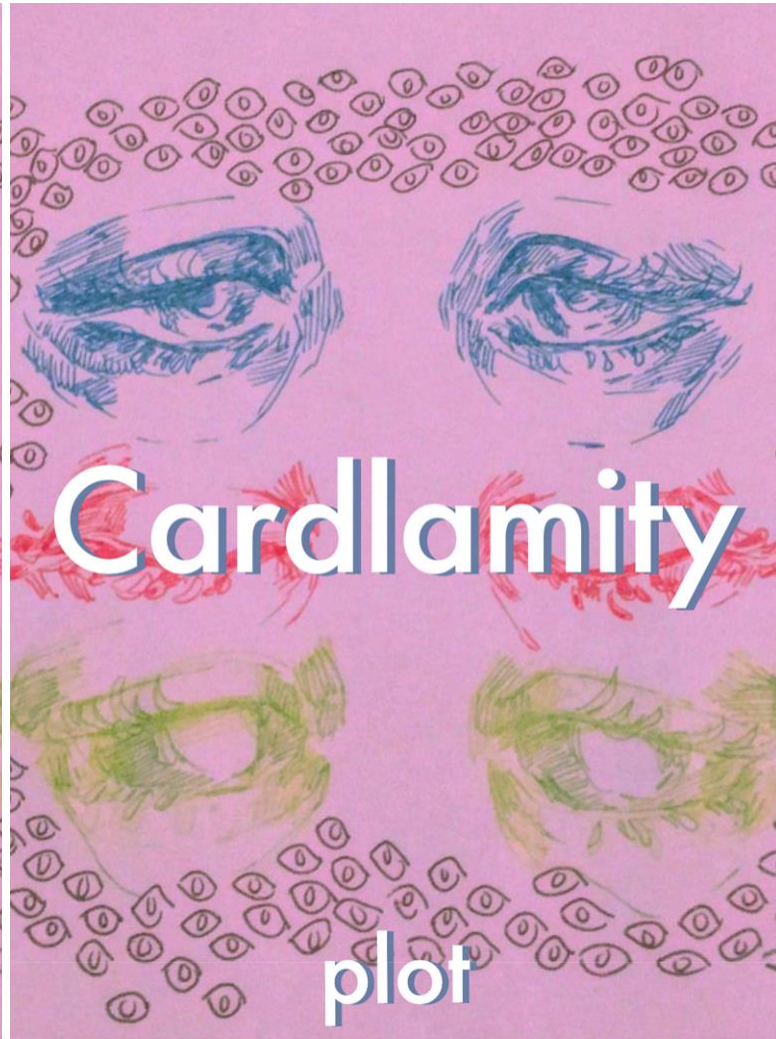
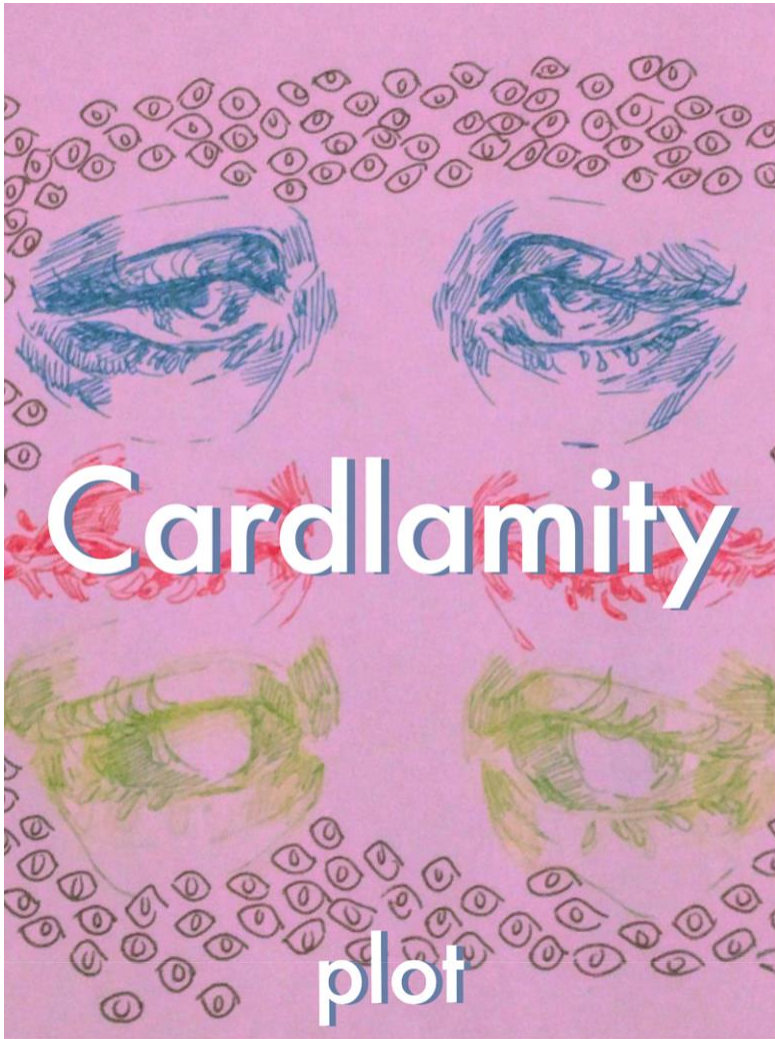
Your character has a goal. What are the stakes if they don't succeed?



A genie offers your character one wish. What does your character do?

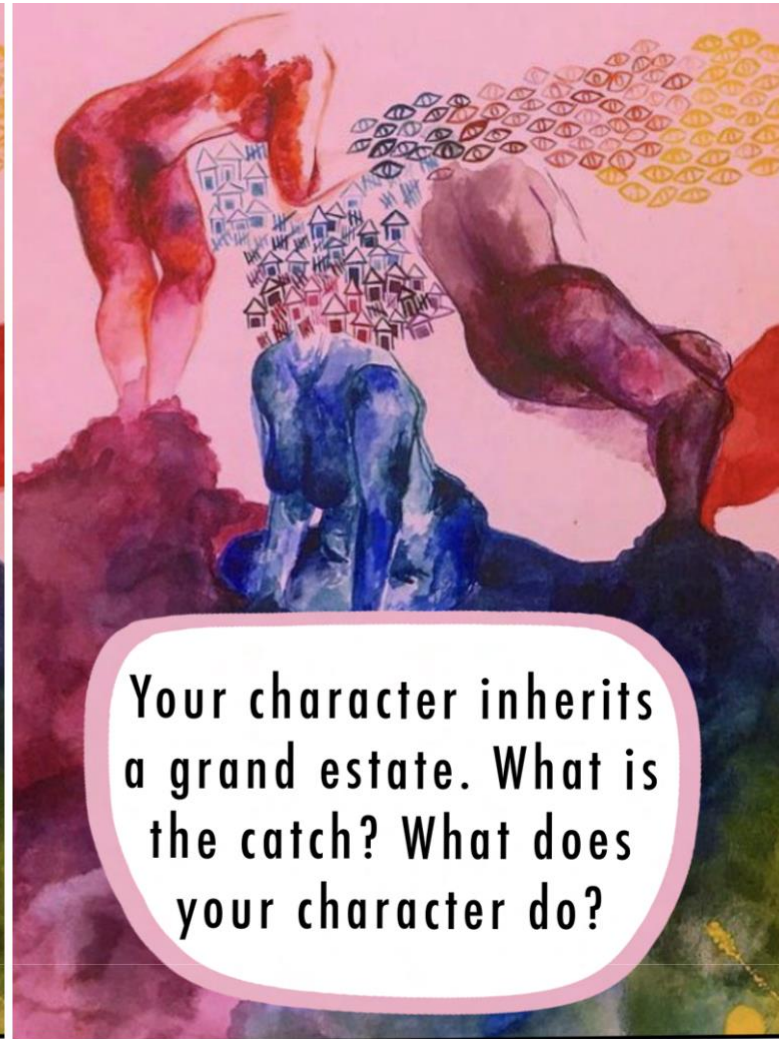


Your character wakes up to see red strings connecting people. What does your character do?

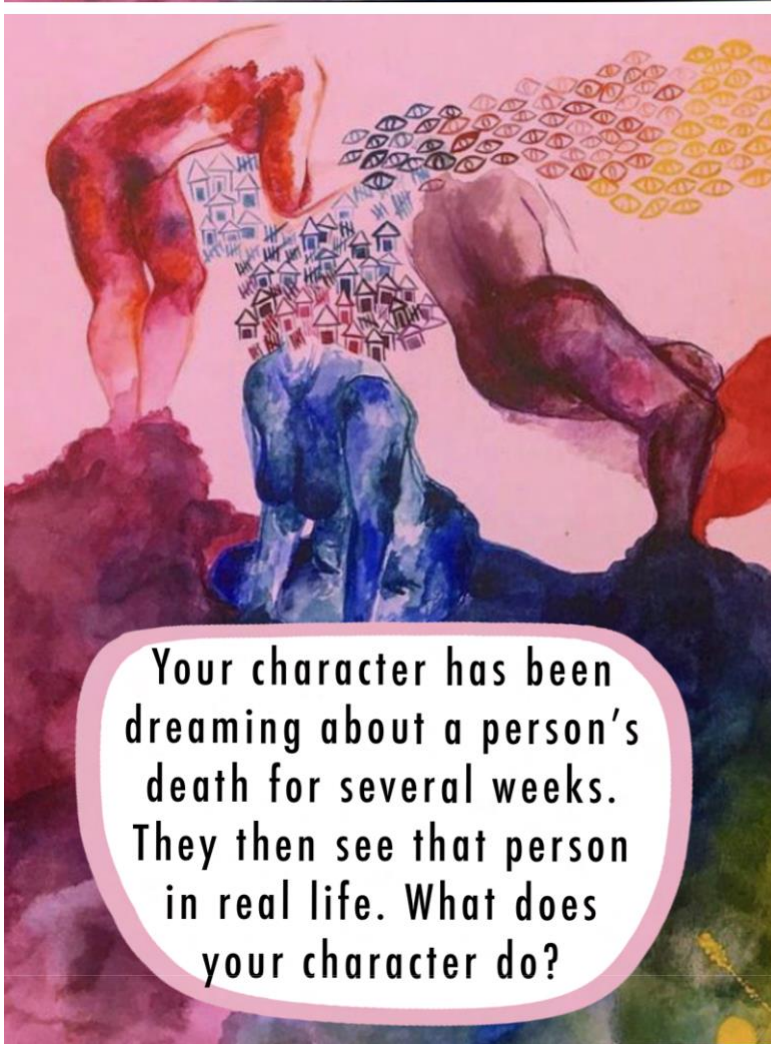




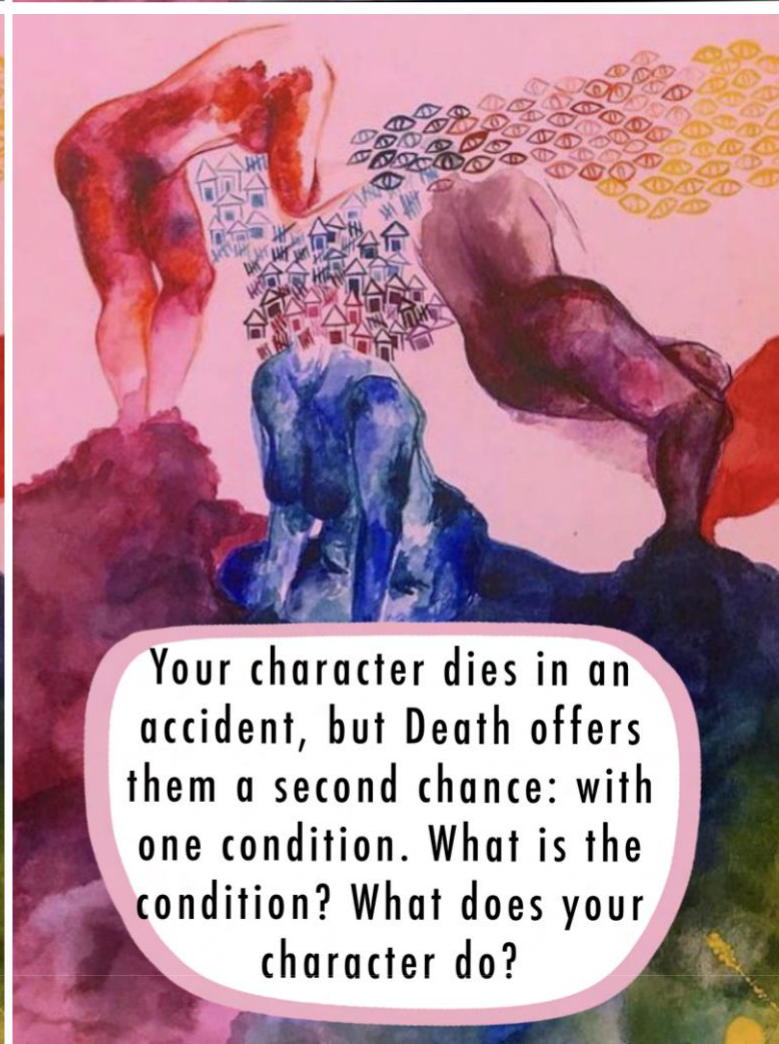
Your character finds a new door they've never seen in their house. What does your character do?



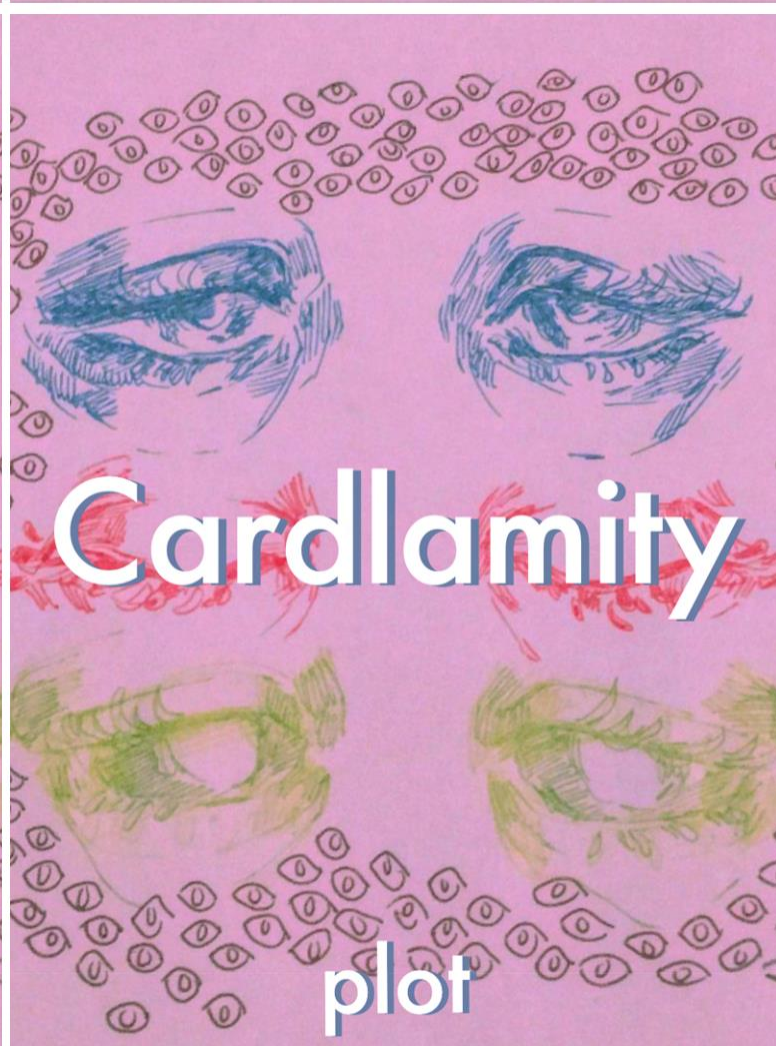
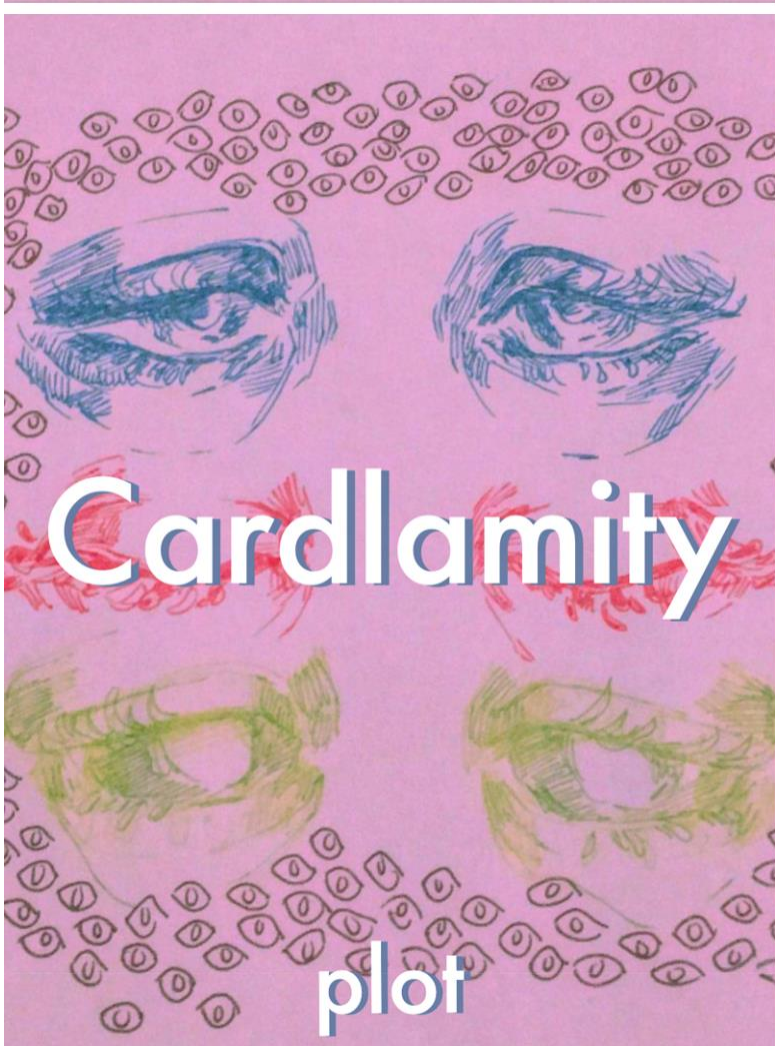
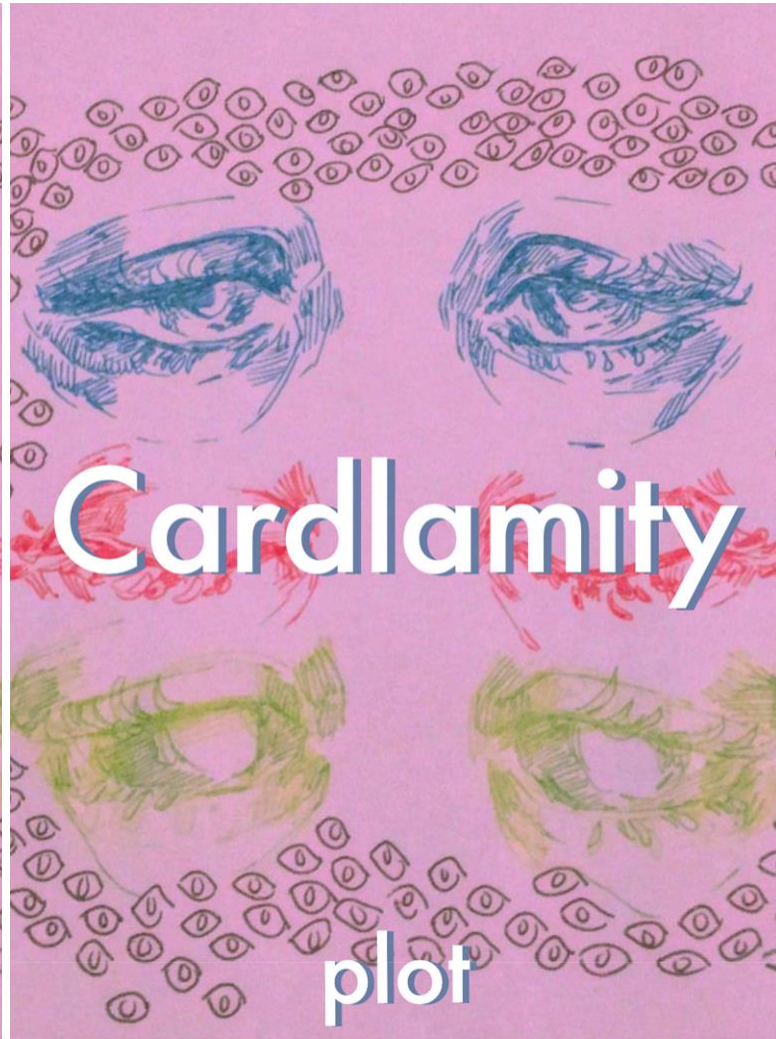
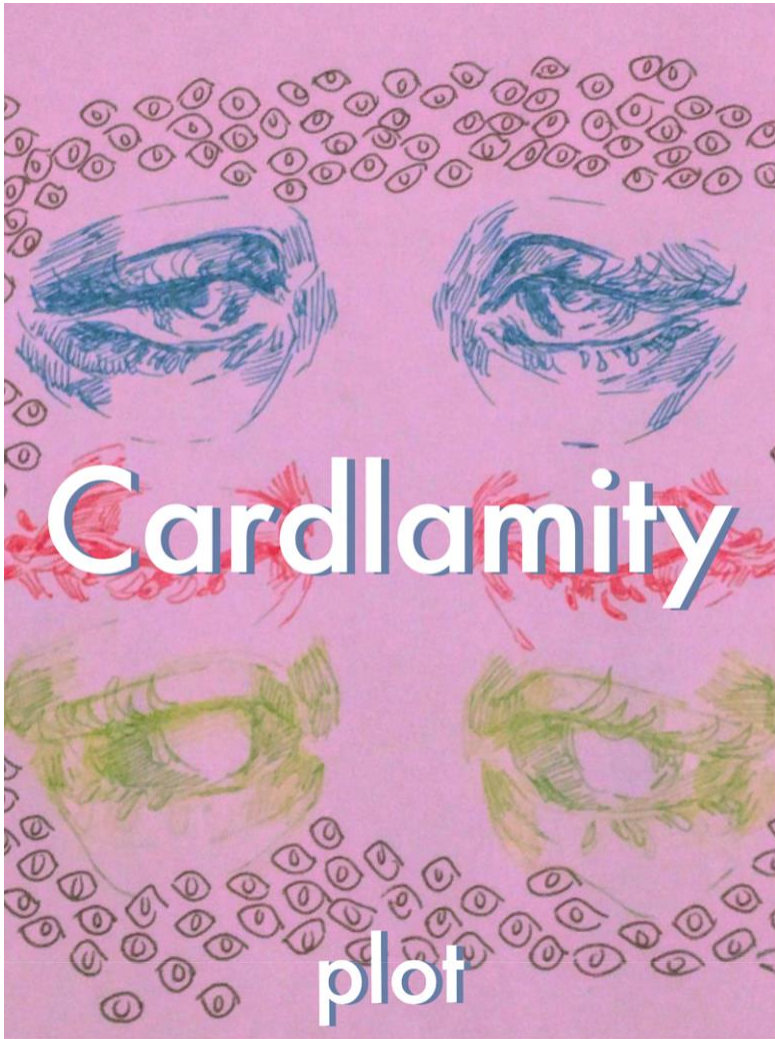
Your character inherits a grand estate. What is the catch? What does your character do?

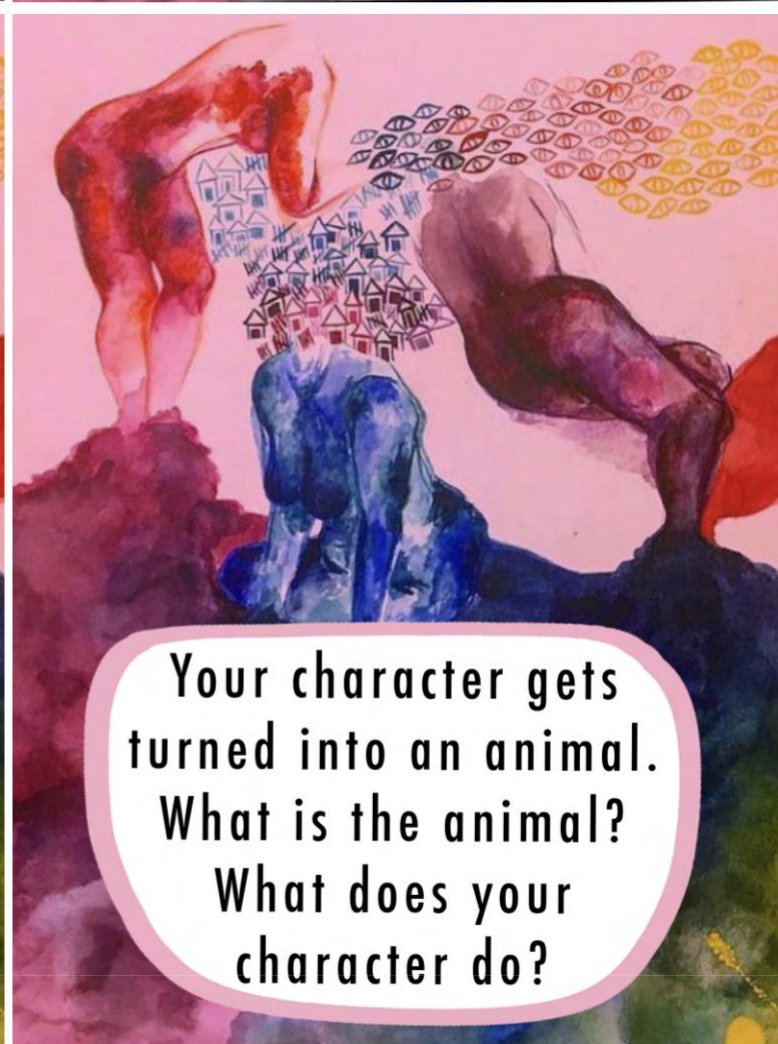
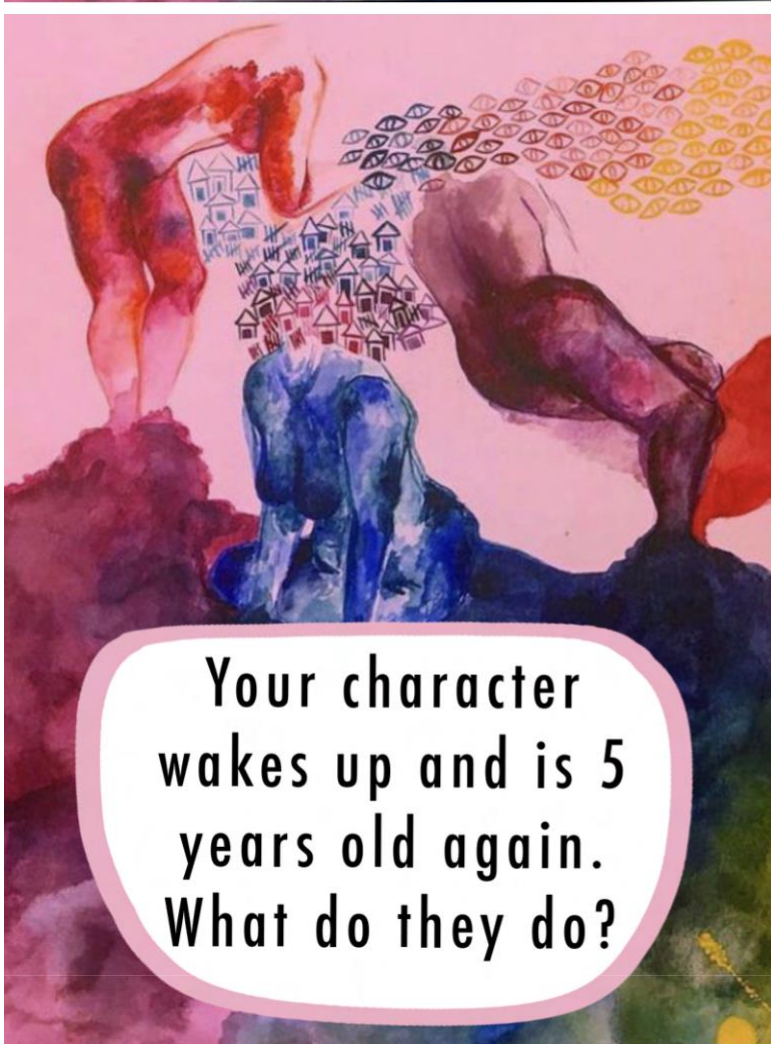
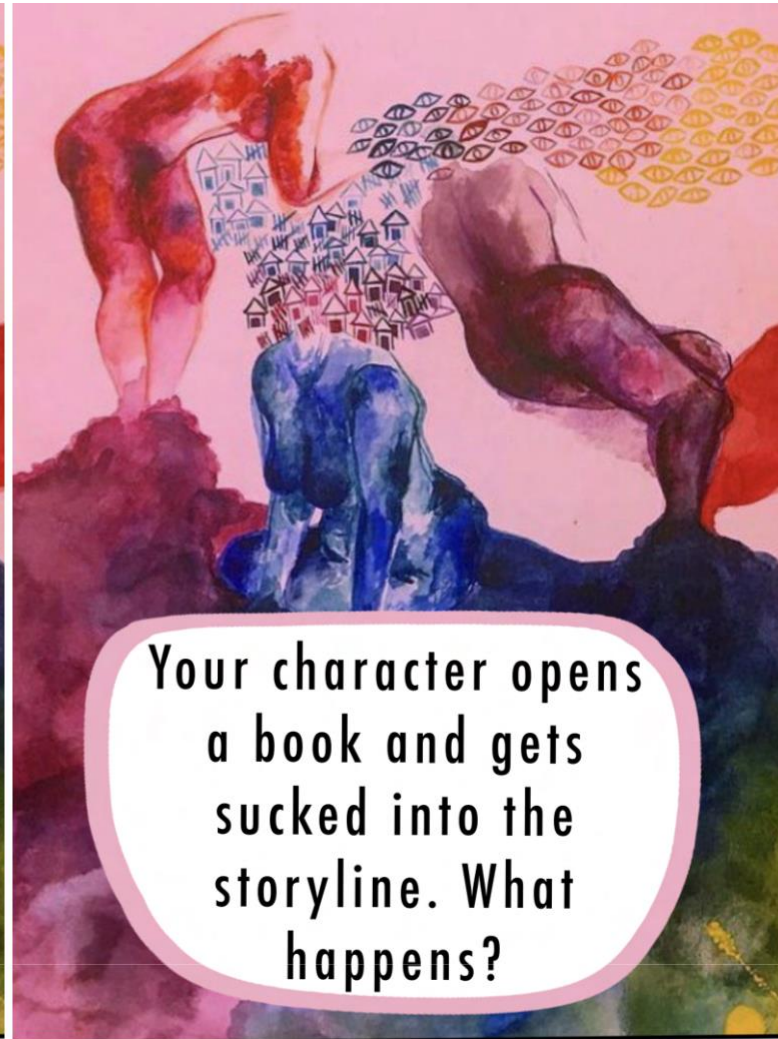
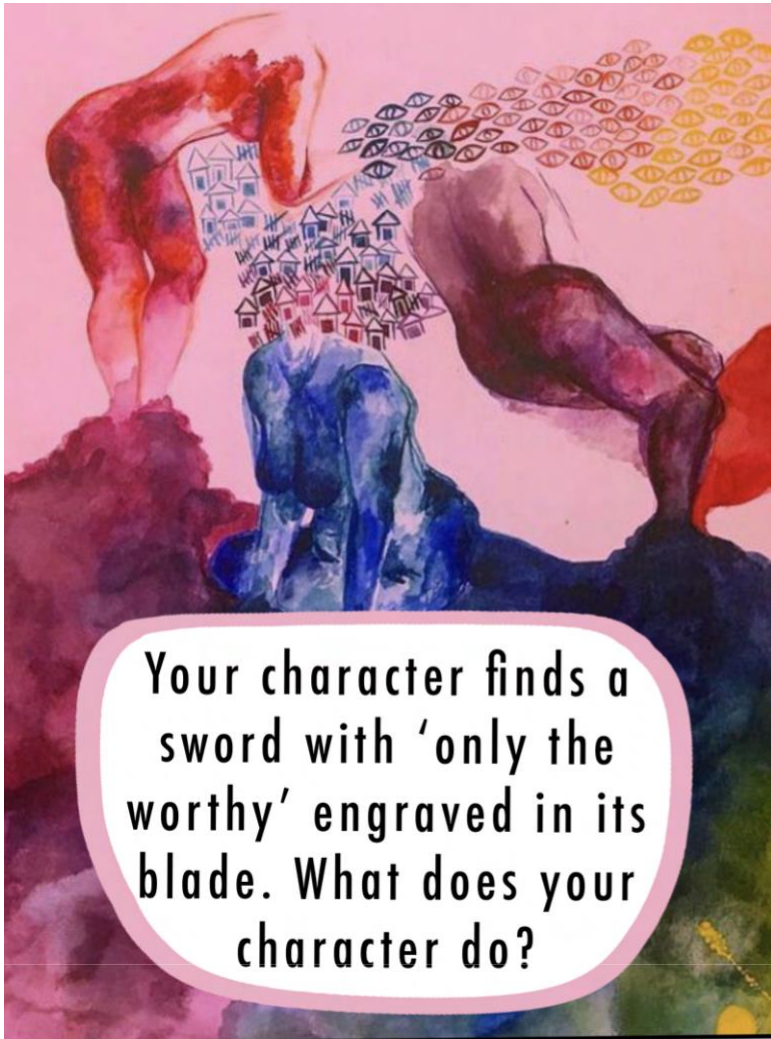


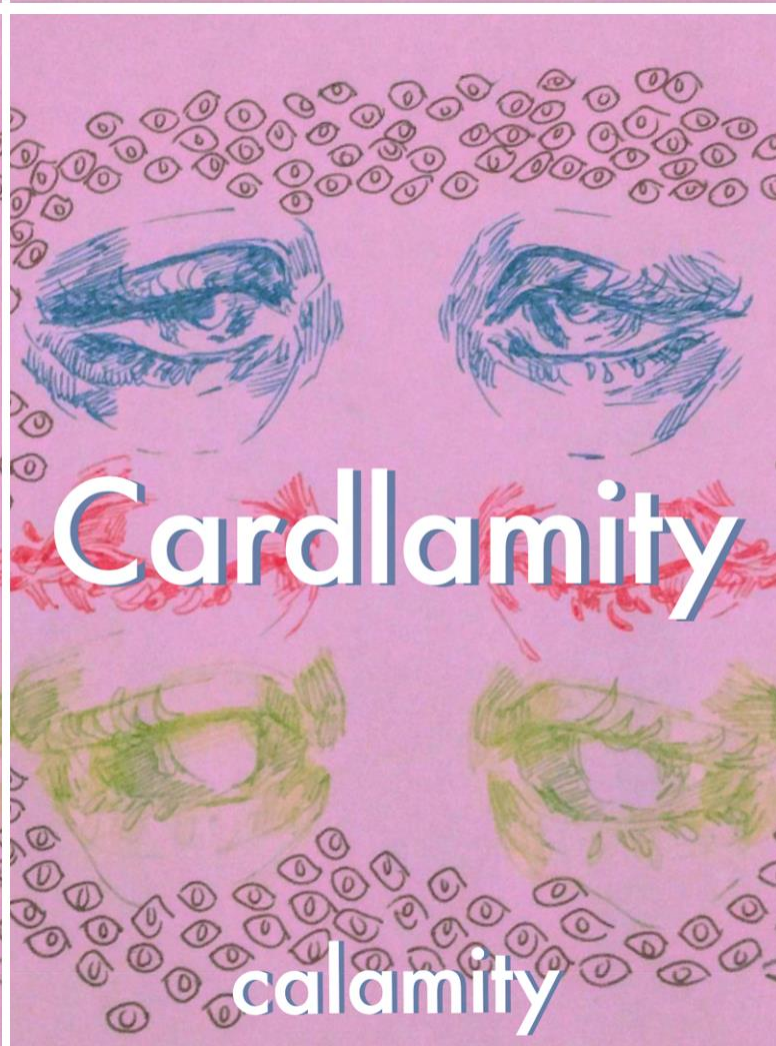
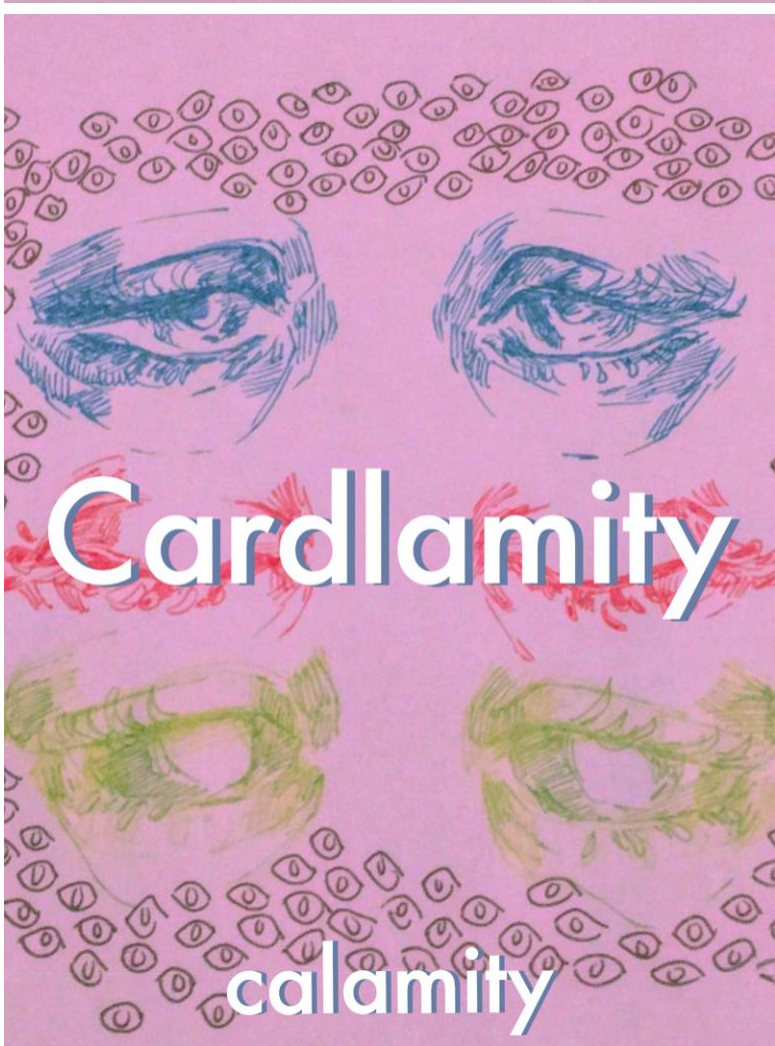
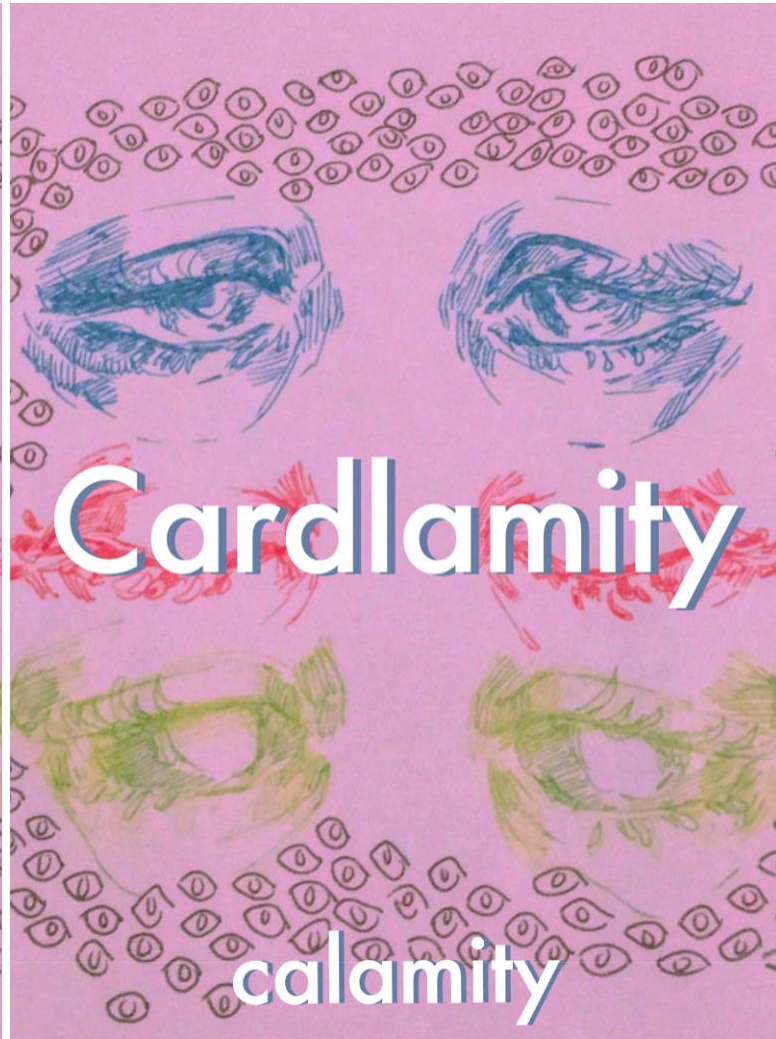
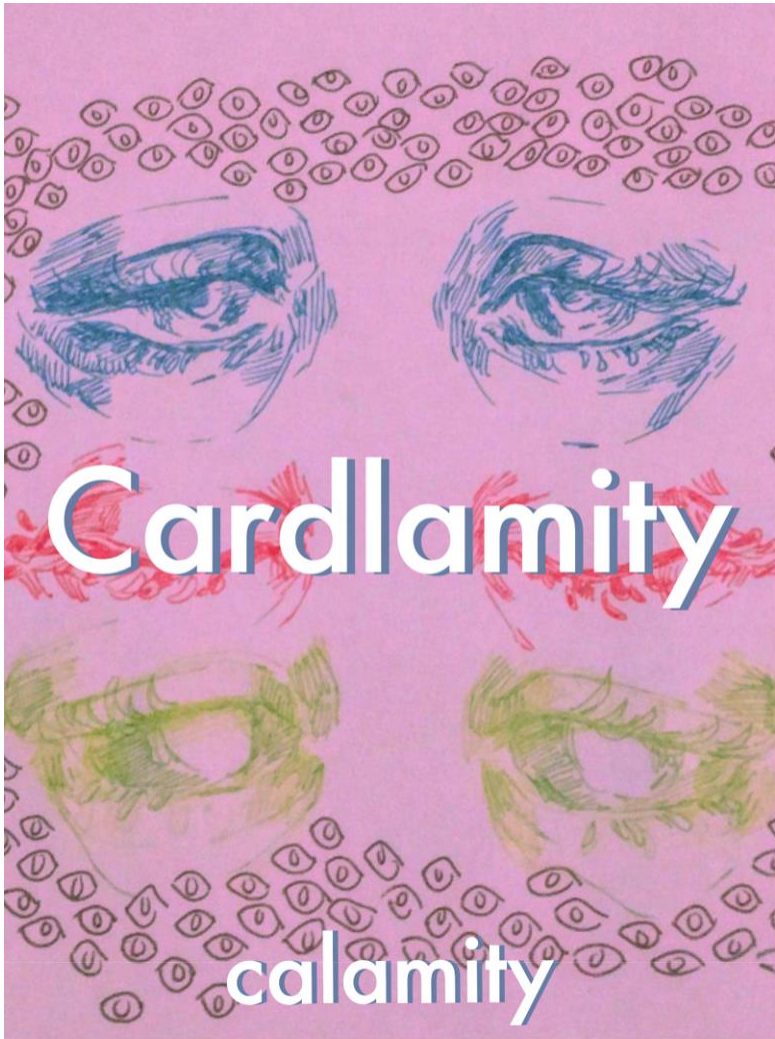
Your character has been dreaming about a person's death for several weeks. They then see that person in real life. What does your character do?



Your character dies in an accident, but Death offers them a second chance: with one condition. What is the condition? What does your character do?





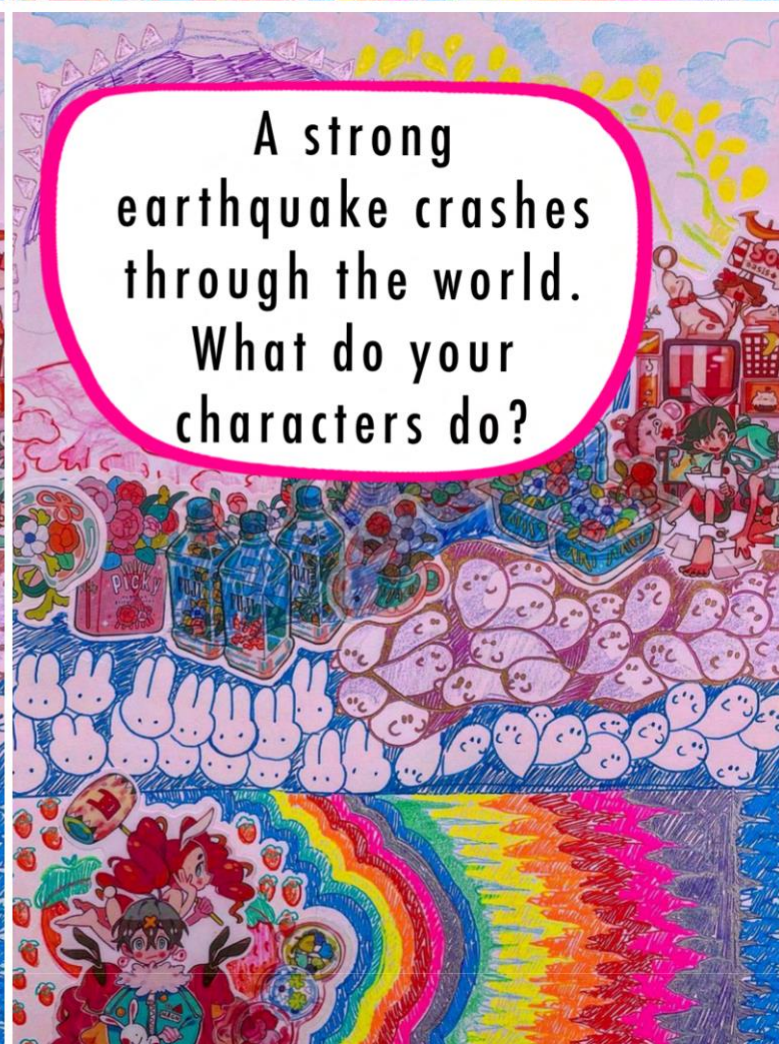
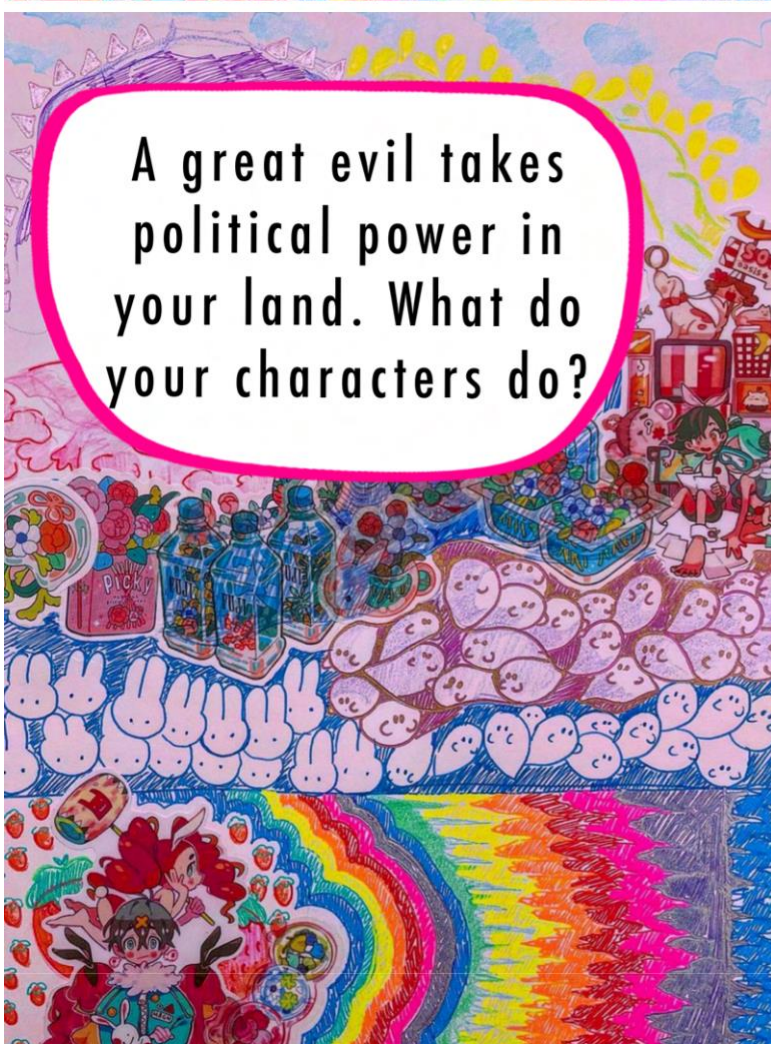
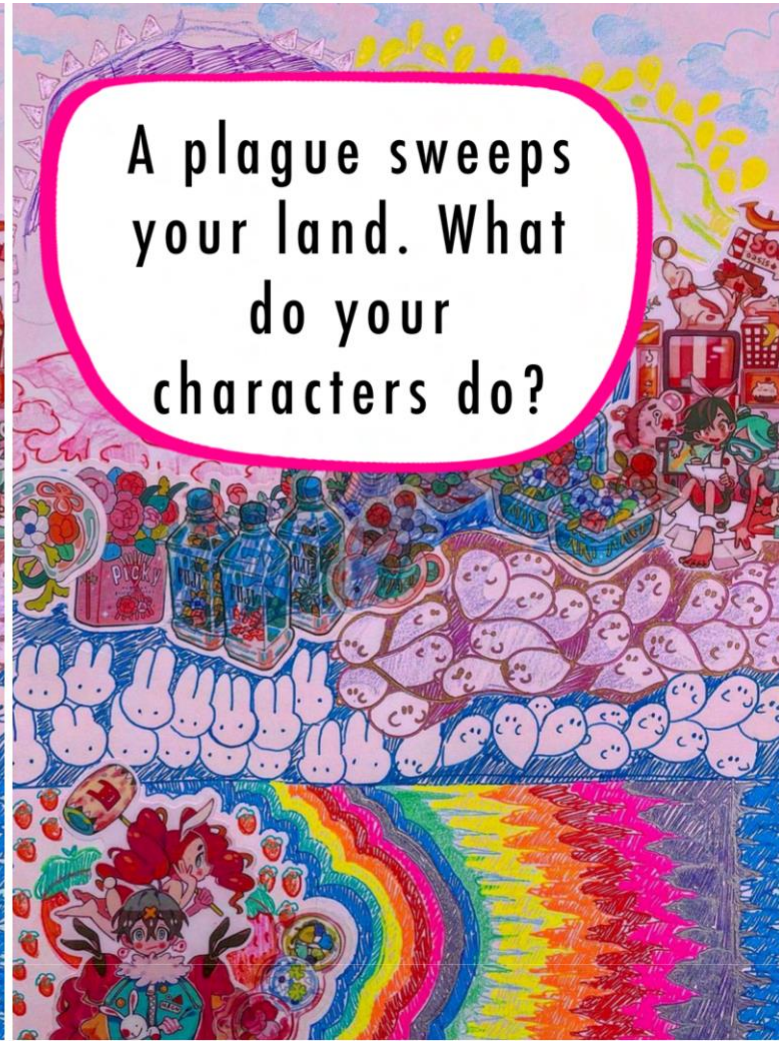
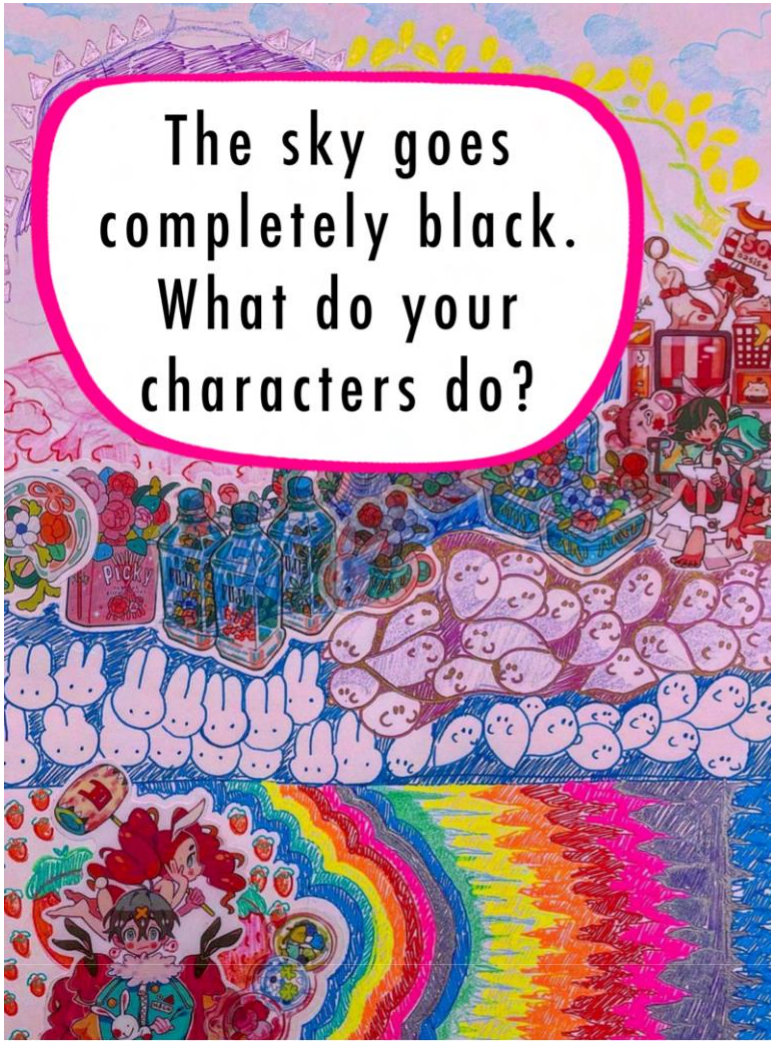


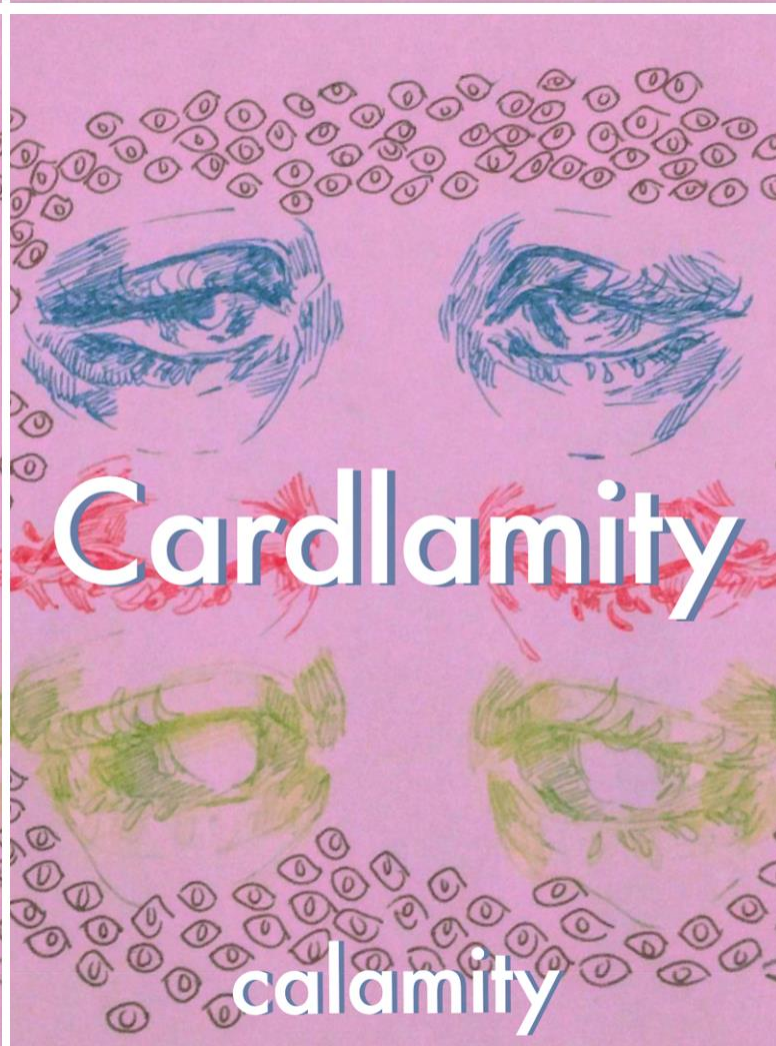
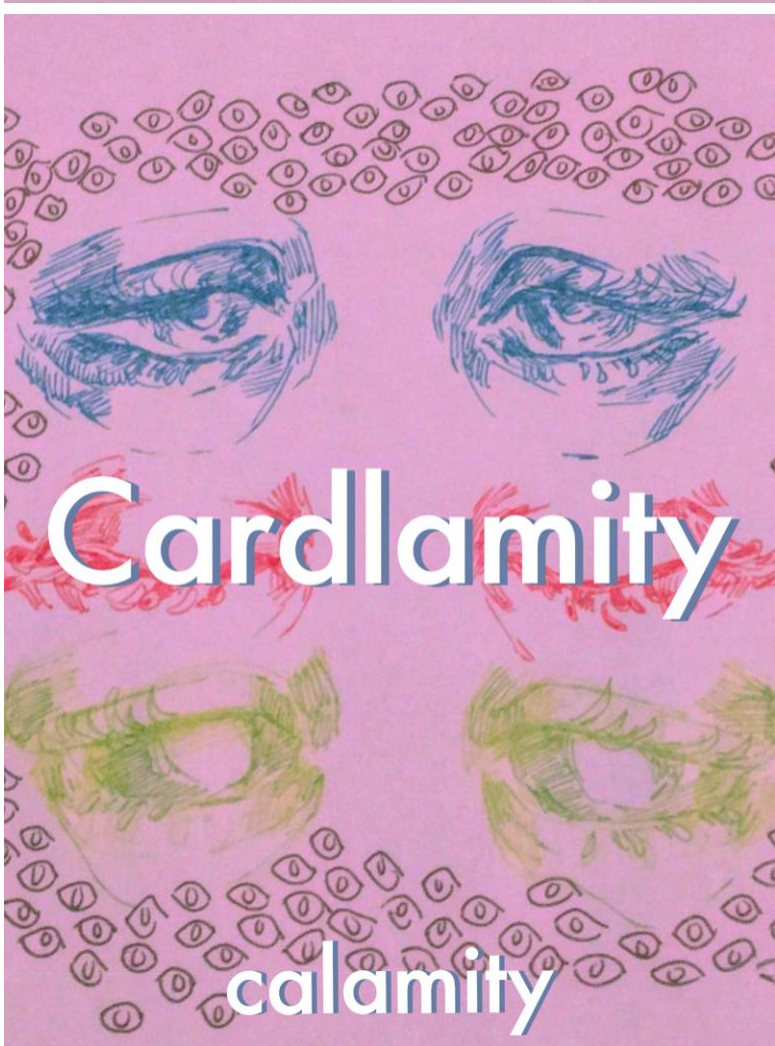
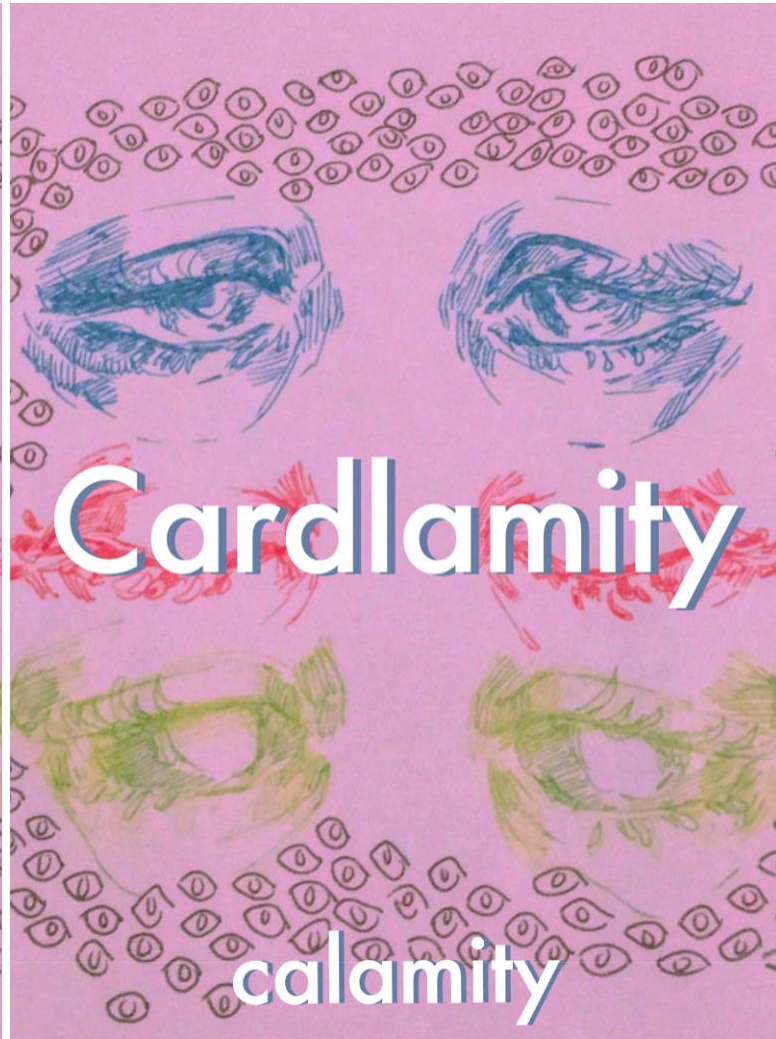
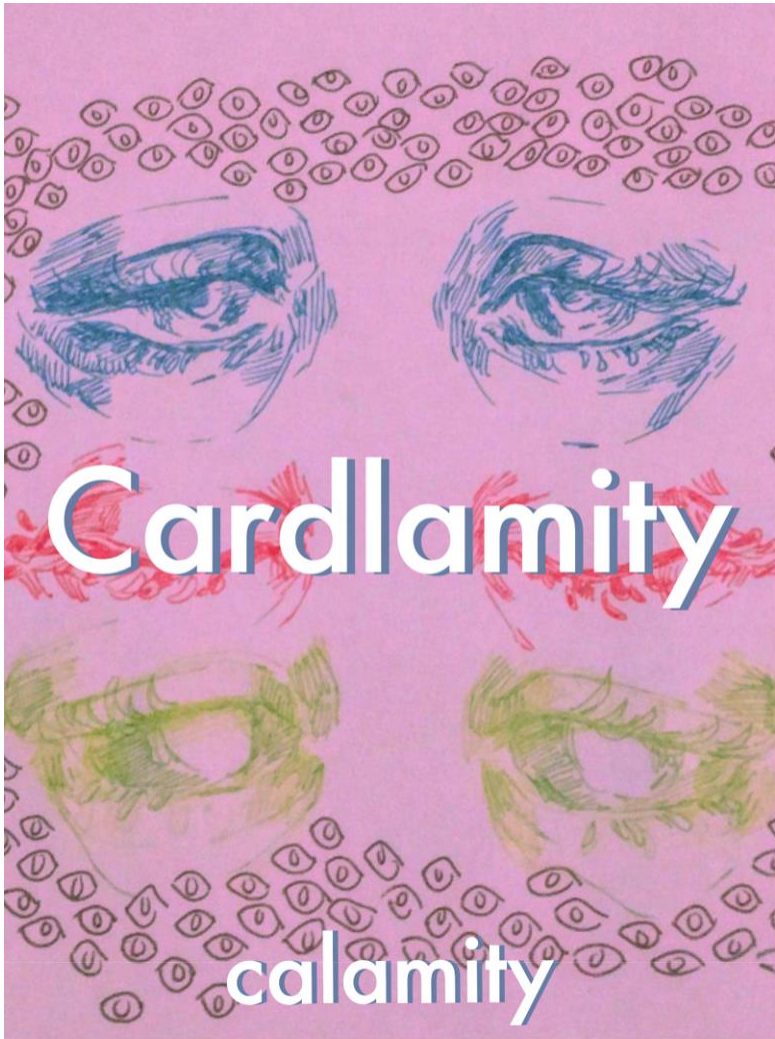
The sky goes completely black. What do your characters do?

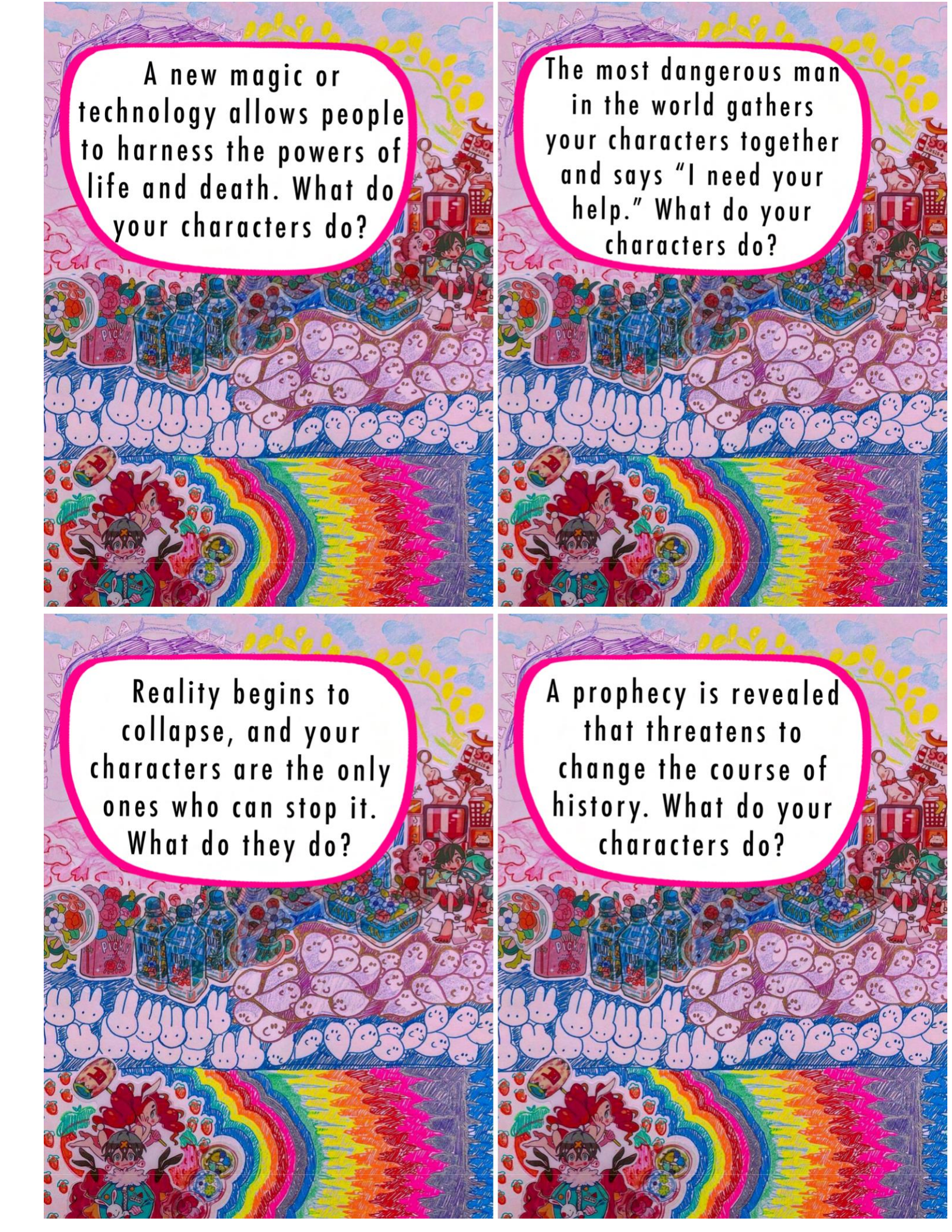
A plague sweeps your land. What do your characters do?

A great evil takes political power in your land. What do your characters do?

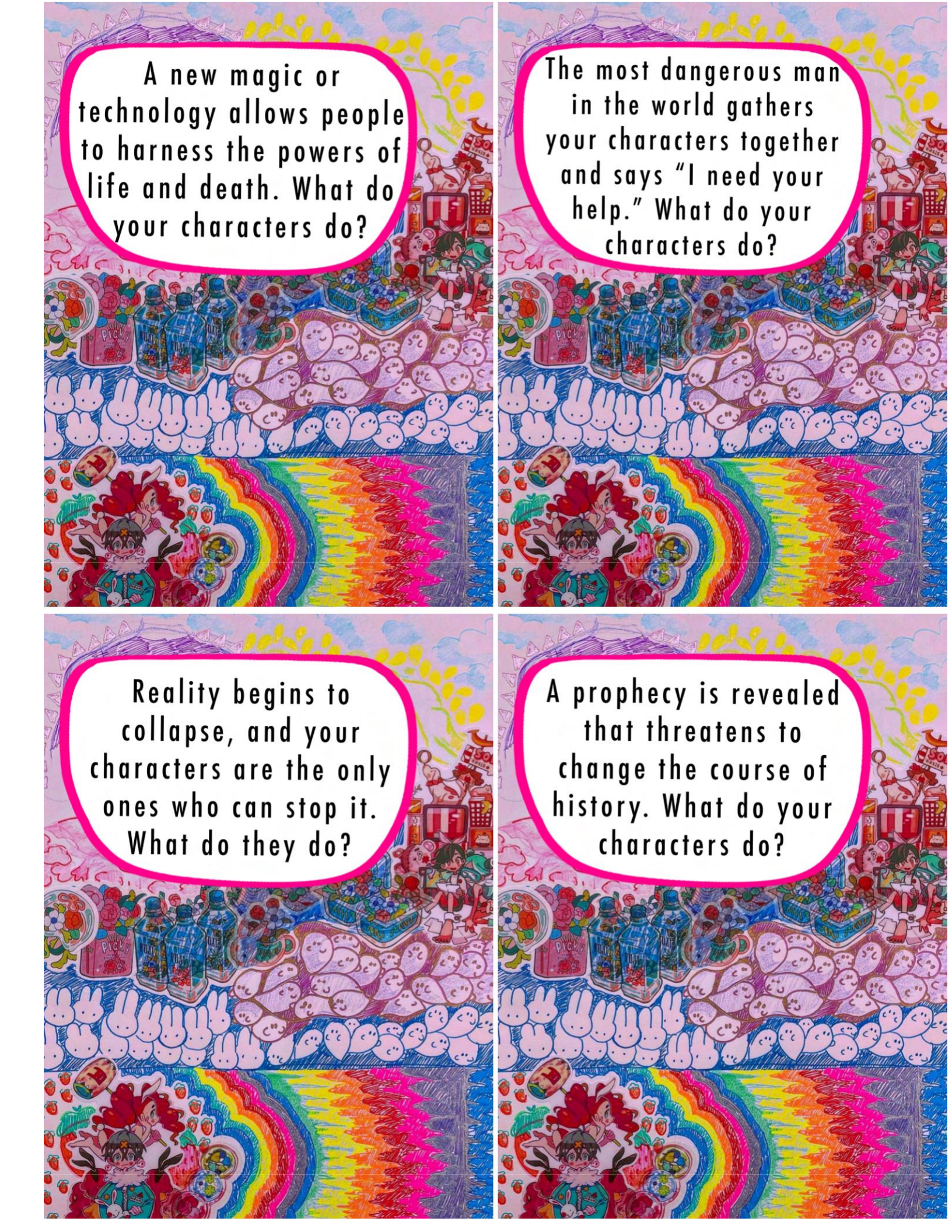
A strong earthquake crashes through the world. What do your characters do?



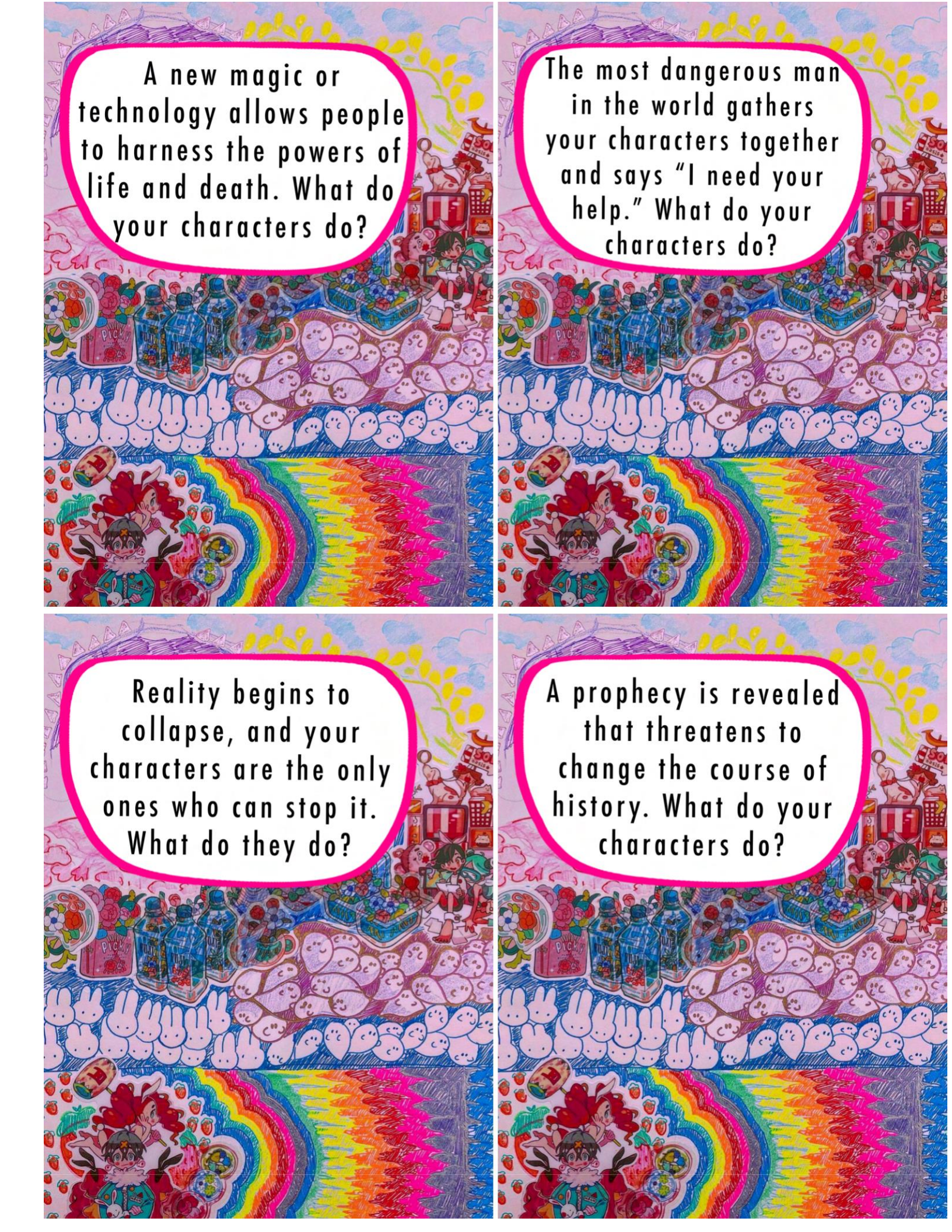




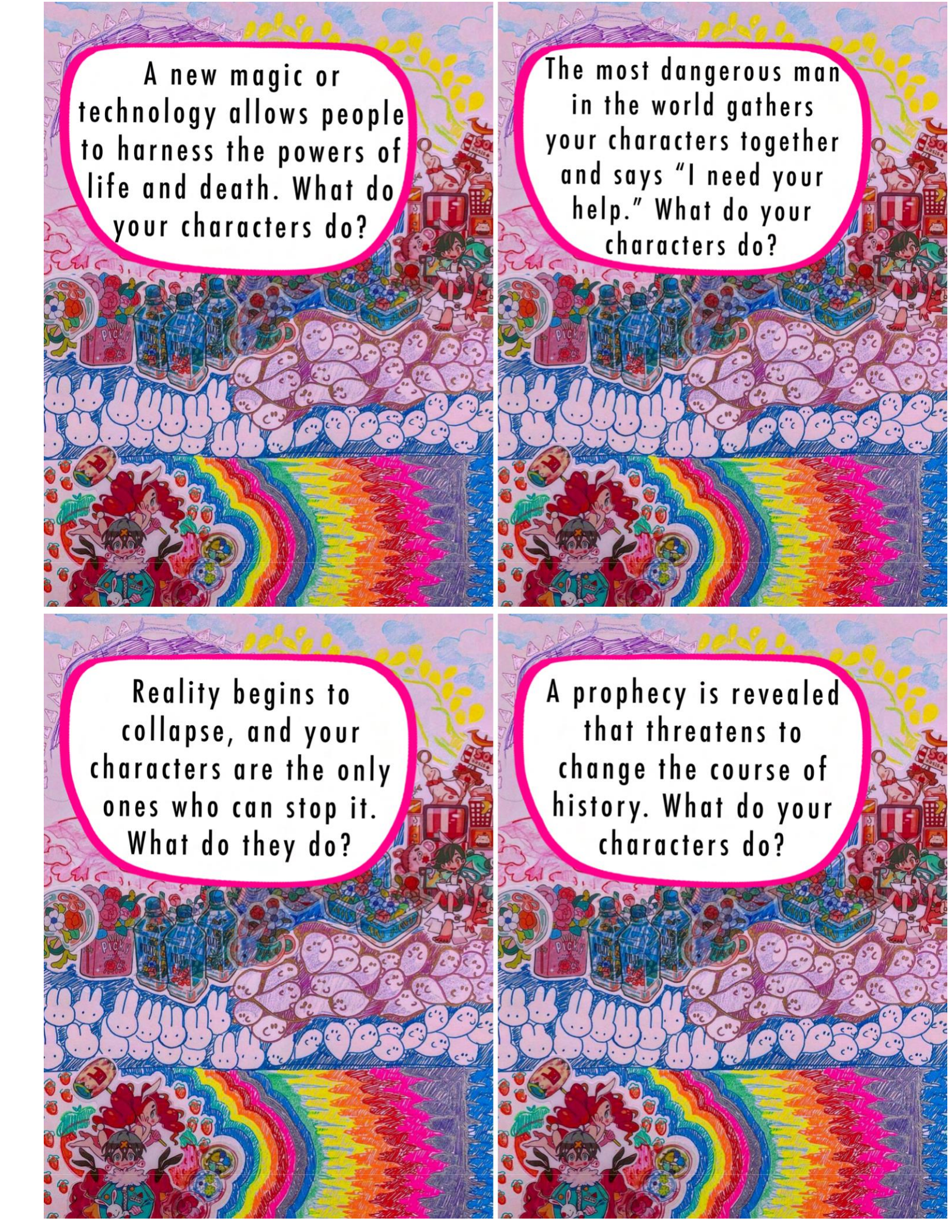
A new magic or technology allows people to harness the powers of life and death. What do your characters do?



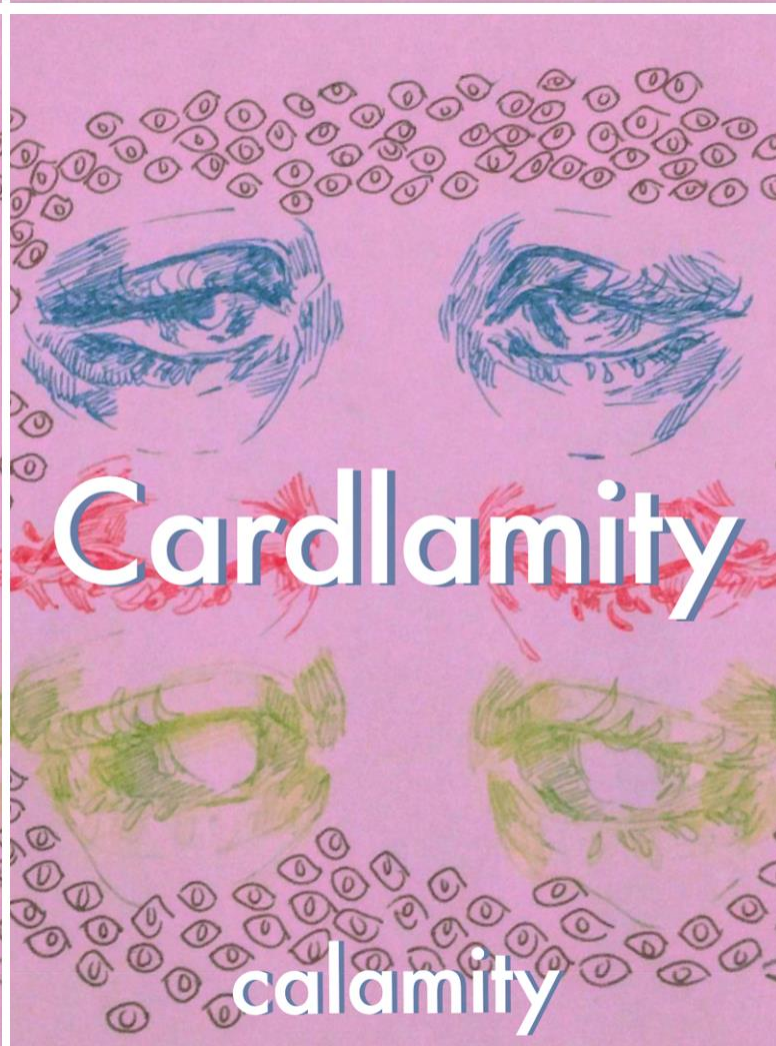
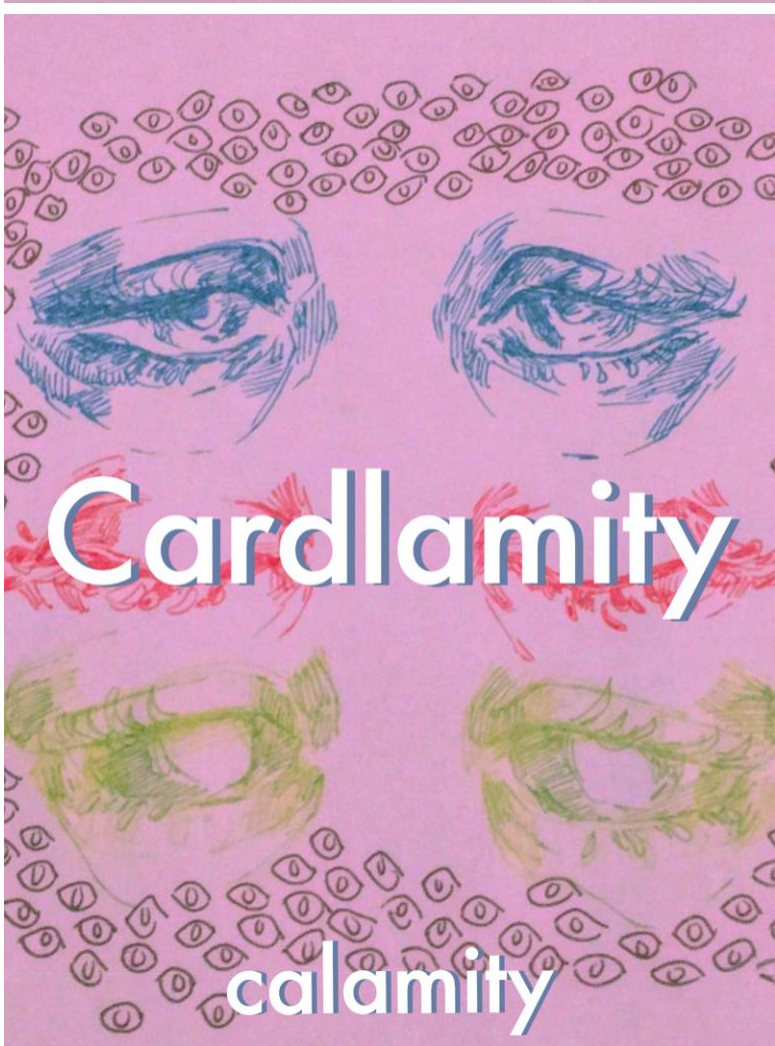
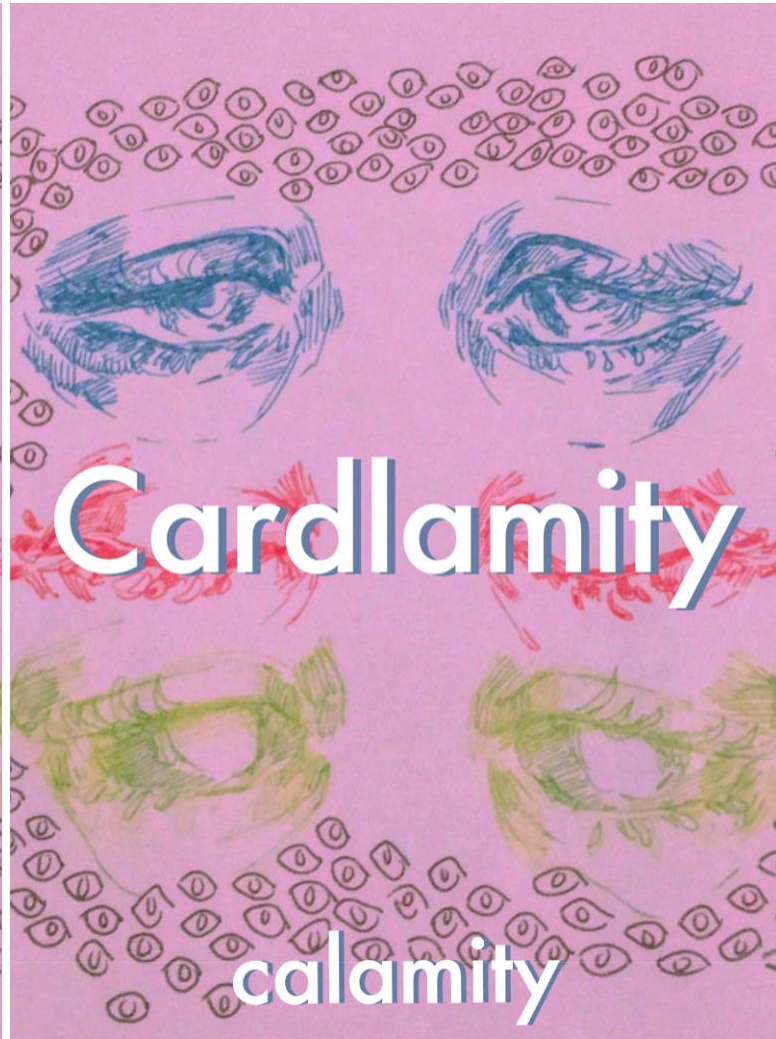
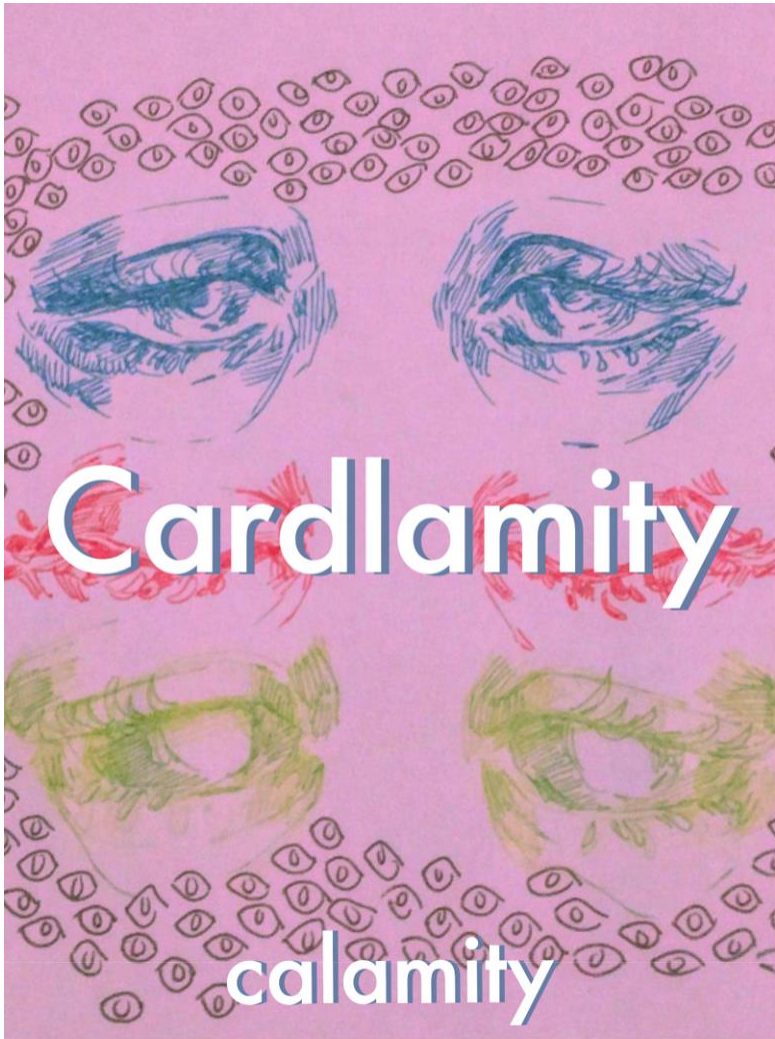
The most dangerous man in the world gathers your characters together and says "I need your help." What do your characters do?

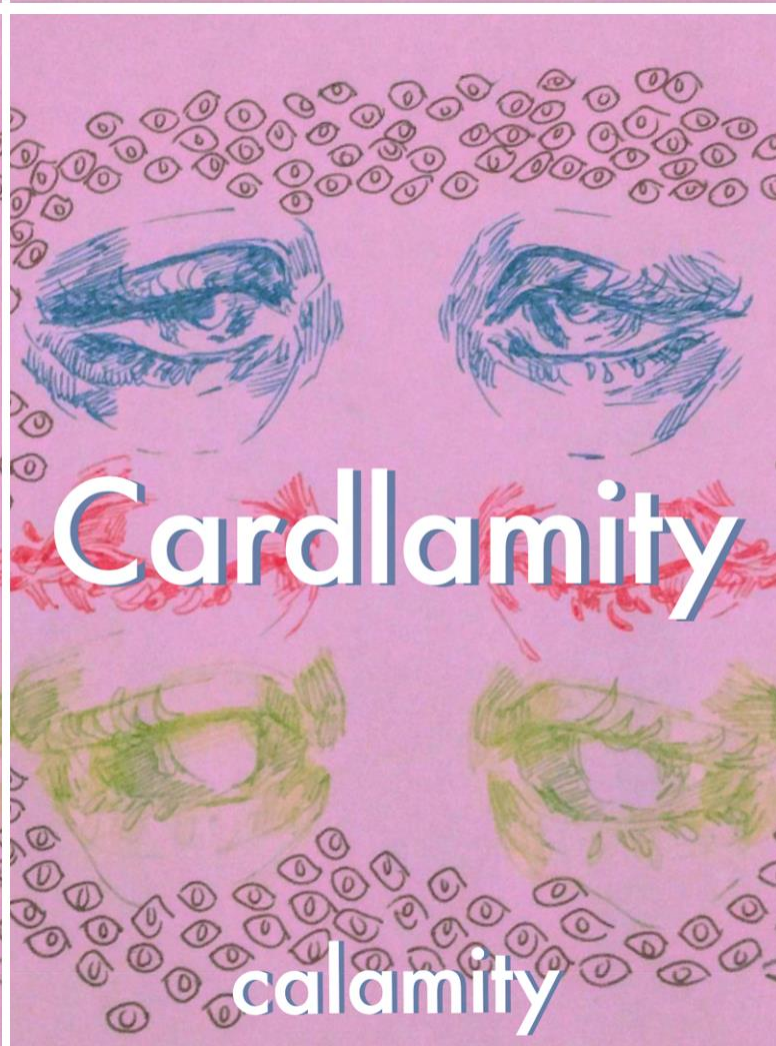
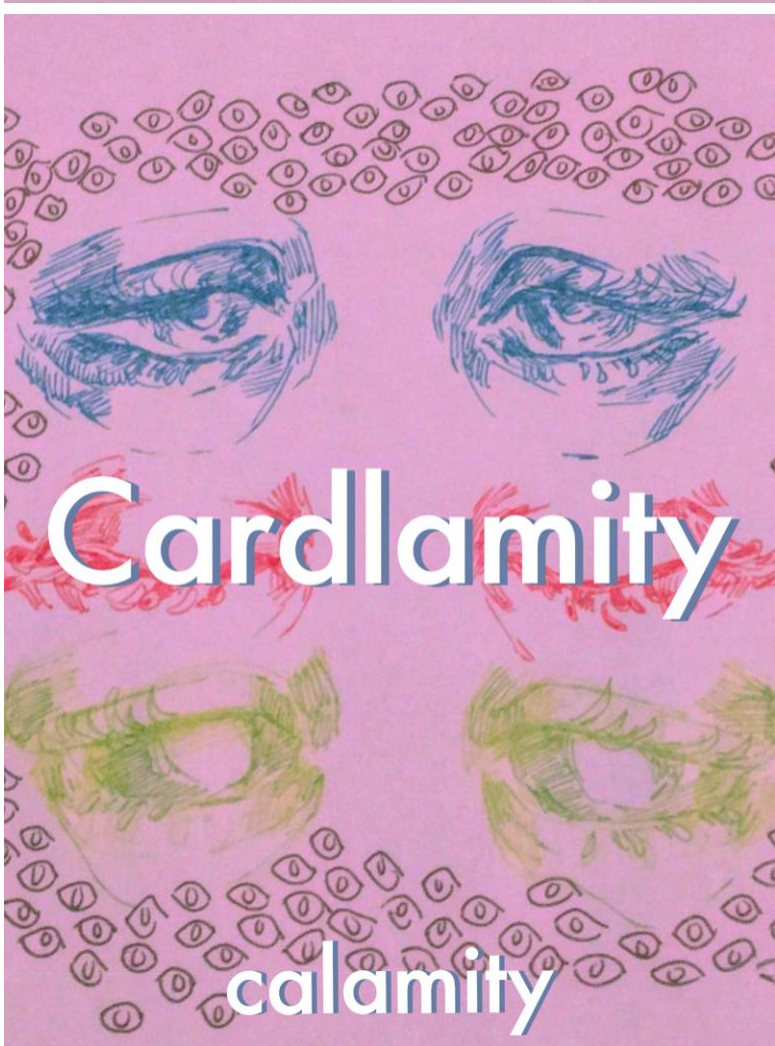
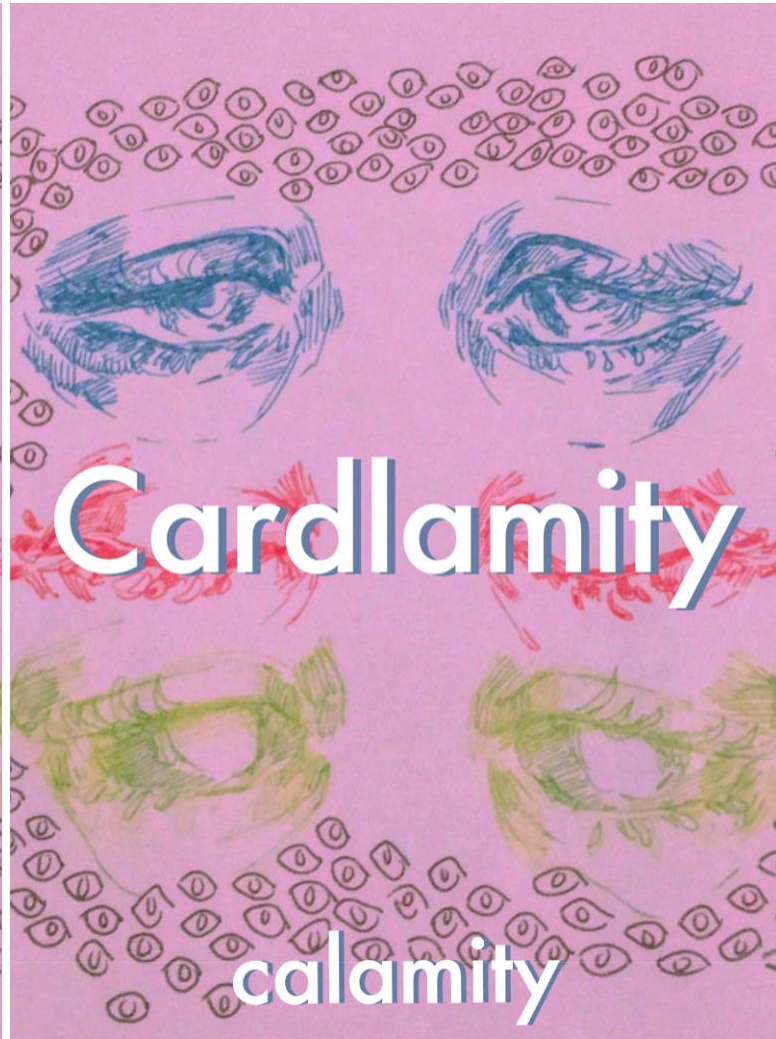
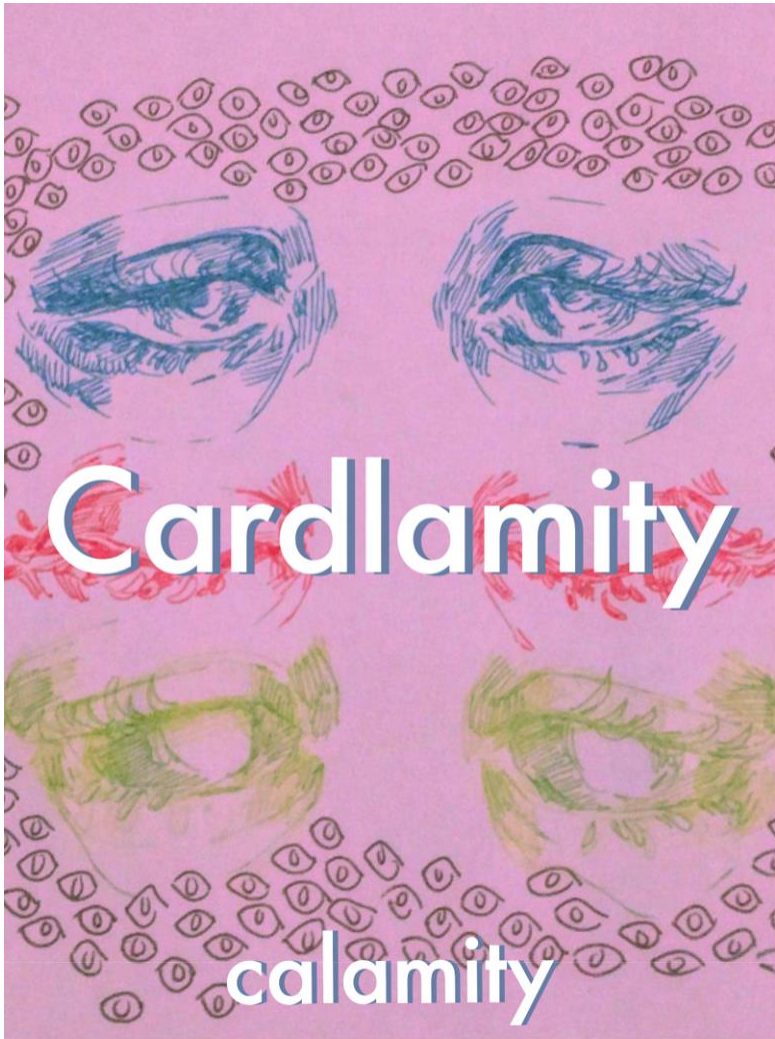


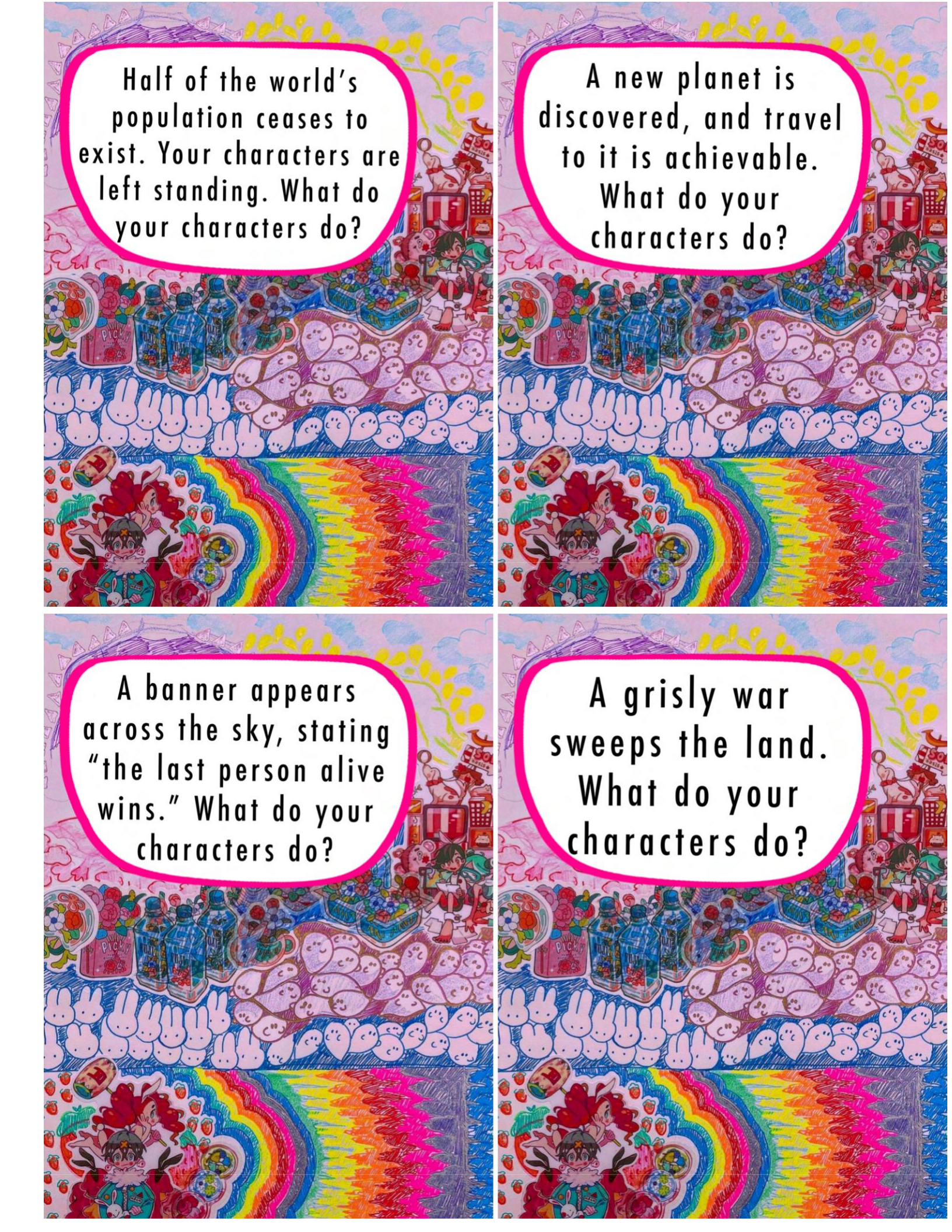
Reality begins to collapse, and your characters are the only ones who can stop it. What do they do?



A prophecy is revealed that threatens to change the course of history. What do your characters do?





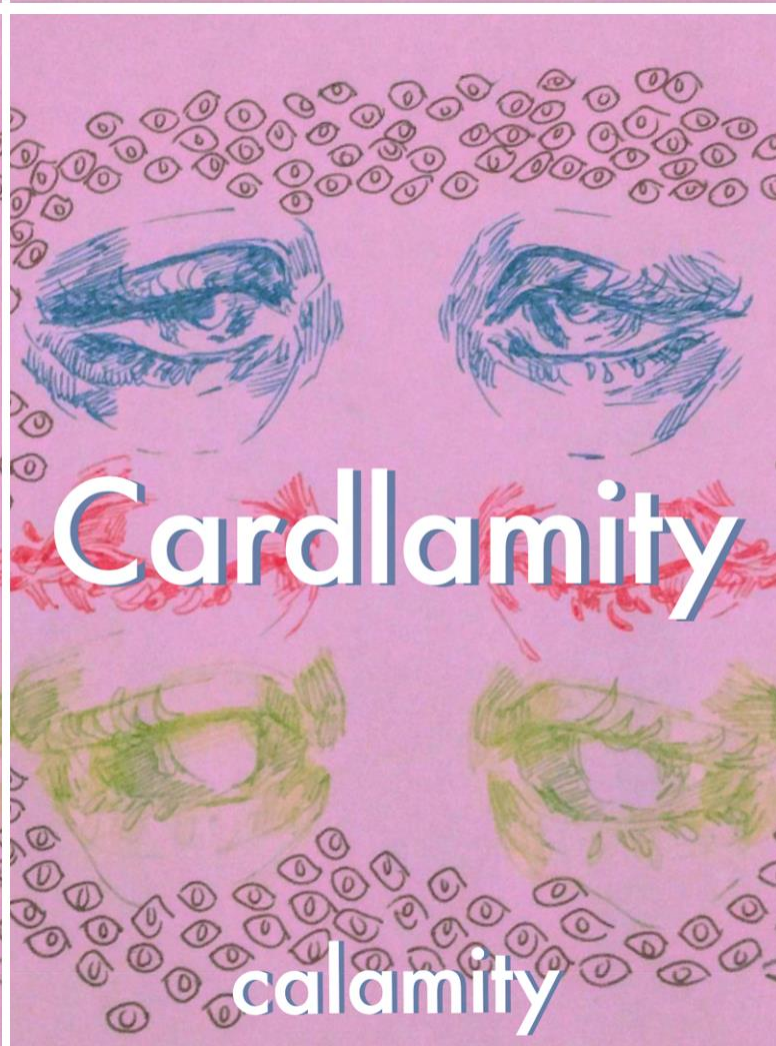
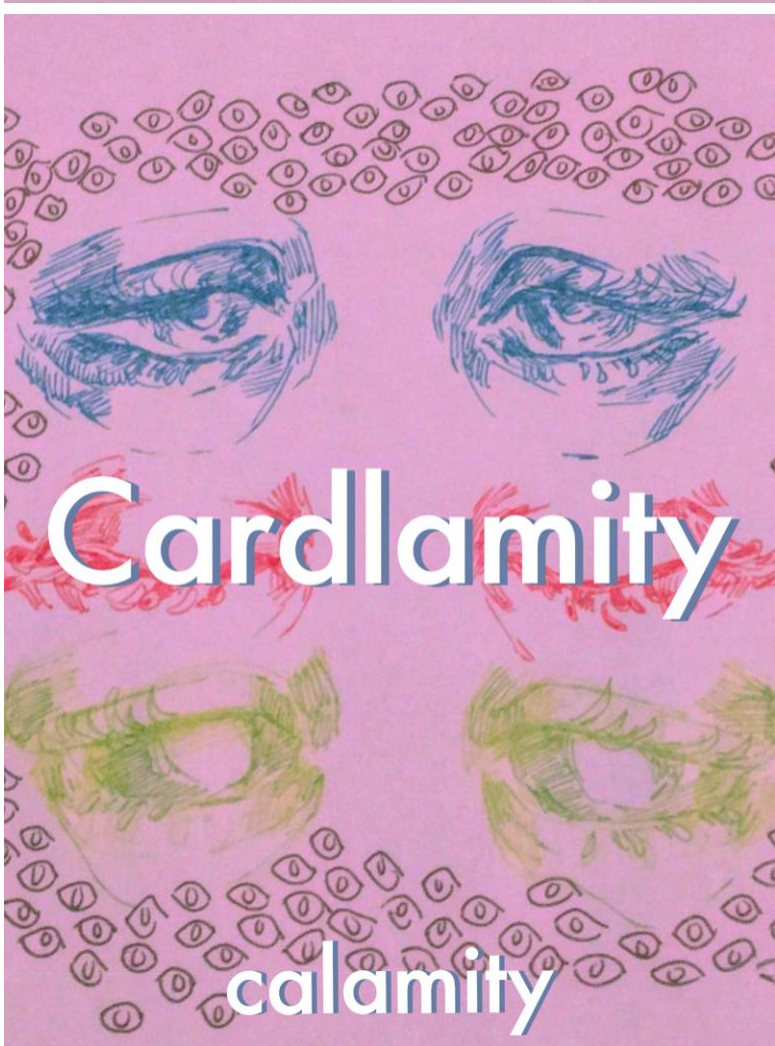
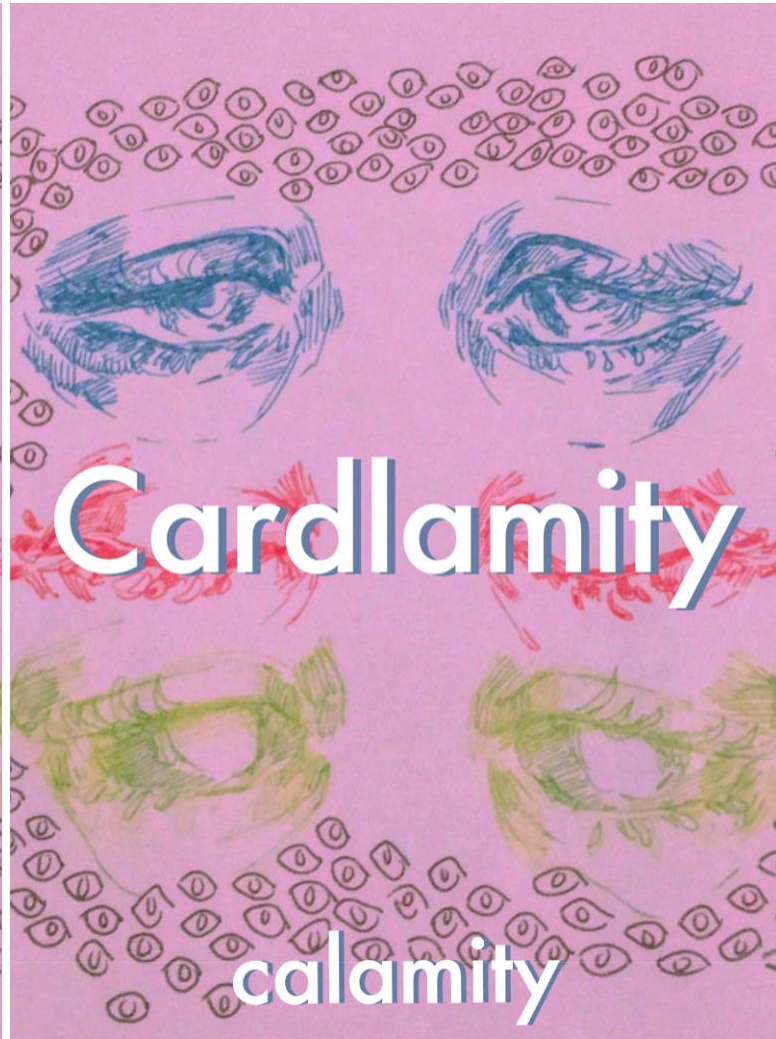
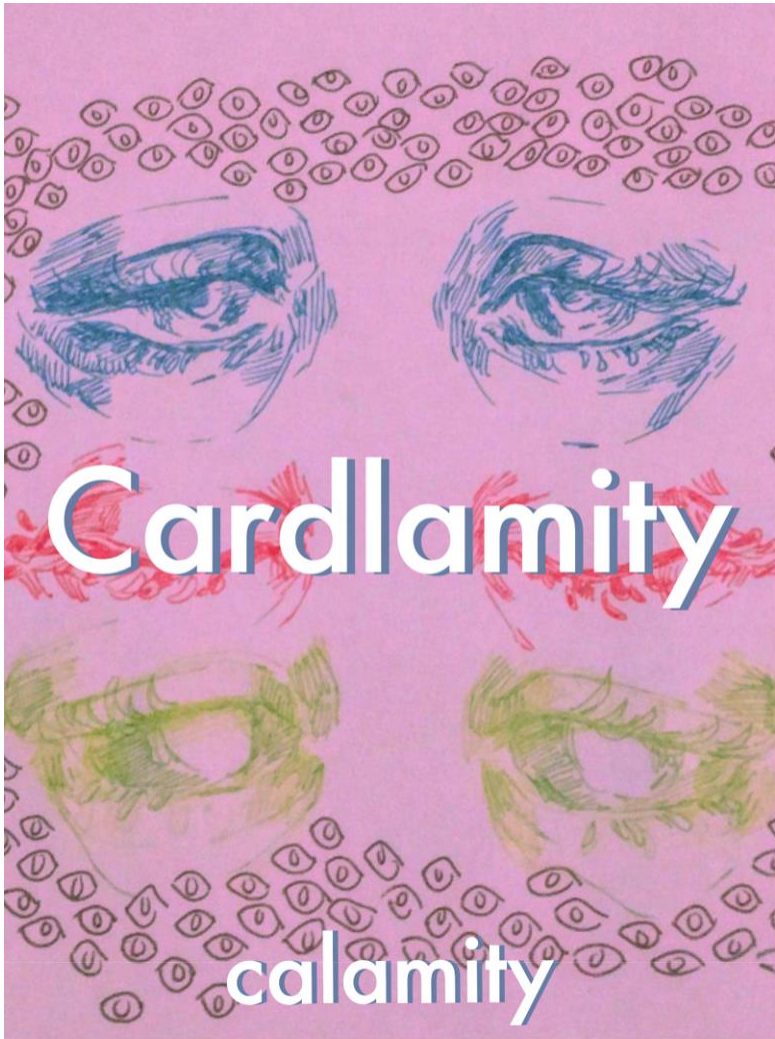


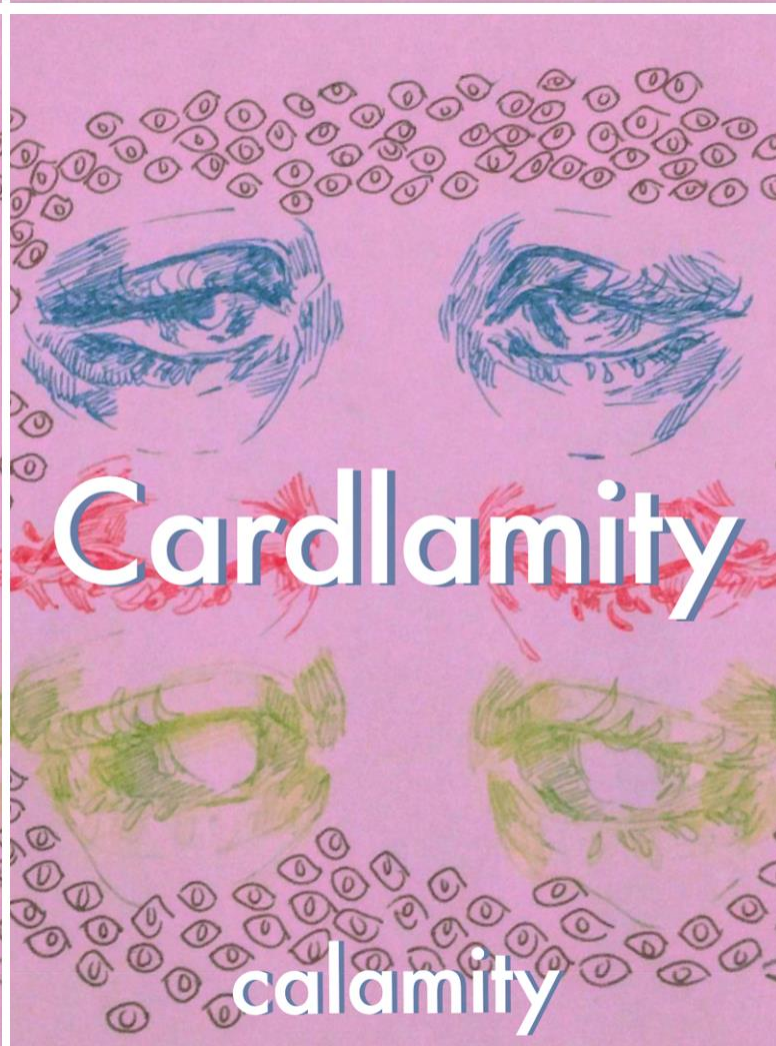
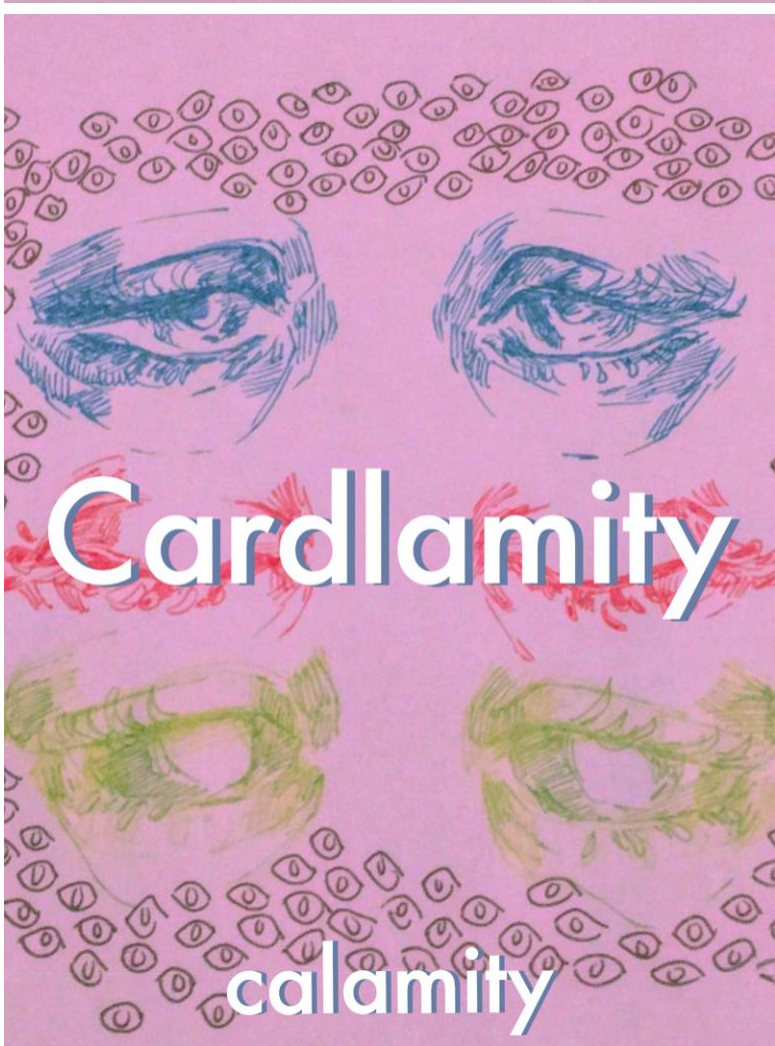
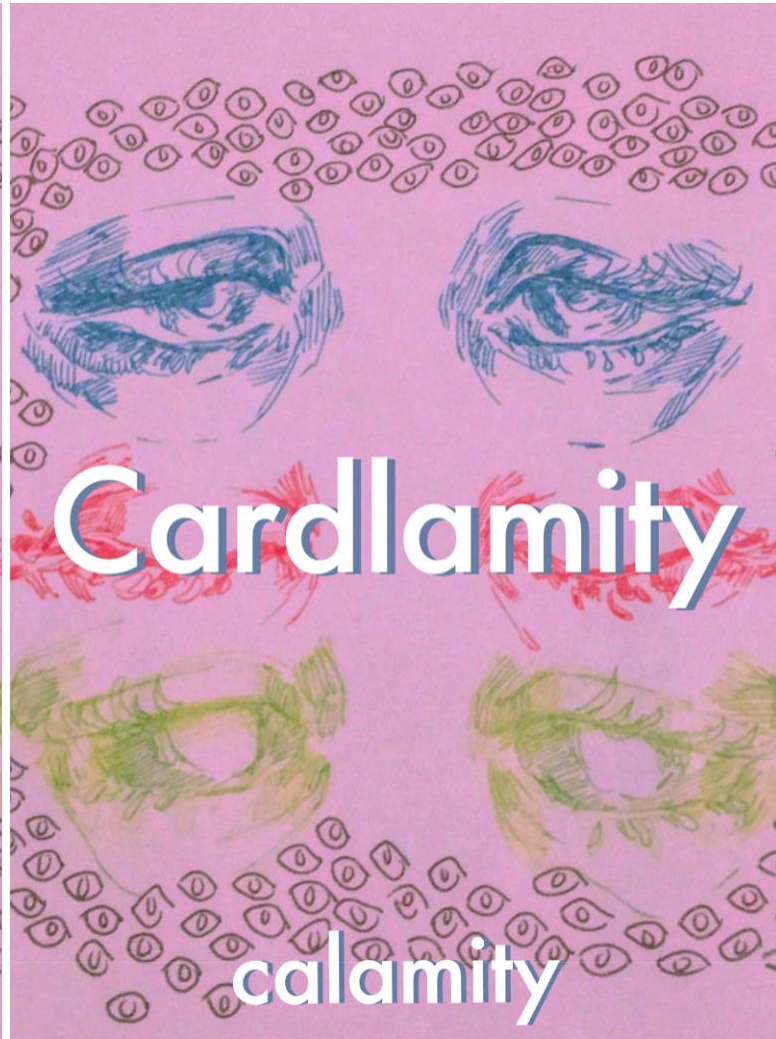
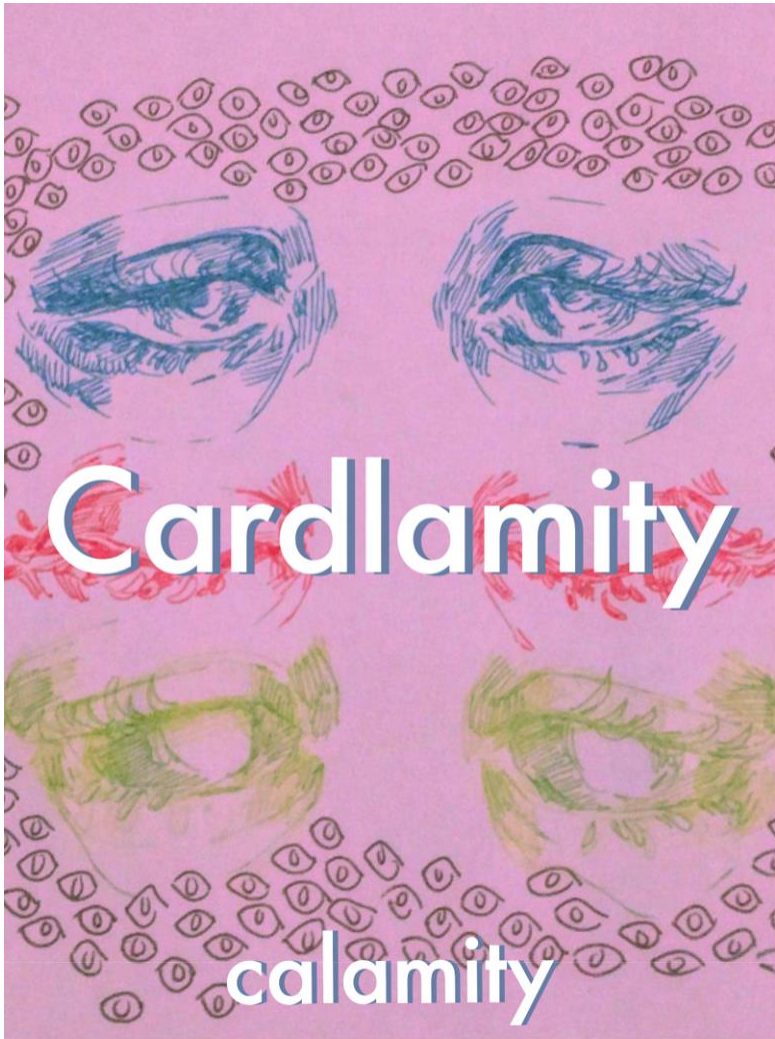
Half of the world's population ceases to exist. Your characters are left standing. What do your characters do?


A new planet is discovered, and travel to it is achievable. What do your characters do?

A banner appears across the sky, stating "the last person alive wins." What do your characters do?

A grisly war sweeps the land. What do your characters do?







A meteor approaches the world. What do your characters do?

Imaginary friends and creations become real. What do your characters do?

Older people begin aging backwards, while younger people begin to age more rapidly. What do your characters do?

It is revealed that the moon is haunted. What do your characters do?

