



below the surface

Julian Lutzka

below the surface



(armen's story
exclusion



*My friends.. they would
plan things...*



Seeing the photos afterwards.

*I never saw them talk about it. They
didn't talk about it in the group
chat, which means they created
another. They never said, hey, we're
going to go to the club, I know you
can't come because youre too young,
but just letting you know.*



It hurt. It hurt being left out.



Seeing what they got up to...



Yesterday was so fun!

We must do it again!

Absolutely!!

Remember when-

That was so funny!

I know!



That's a day I'll never forget!

Hearing about how much fun they had
without me...



They were technically there with me and 'for
me'... but it didn't feel that way...
That's when I realised, I was truly alone.



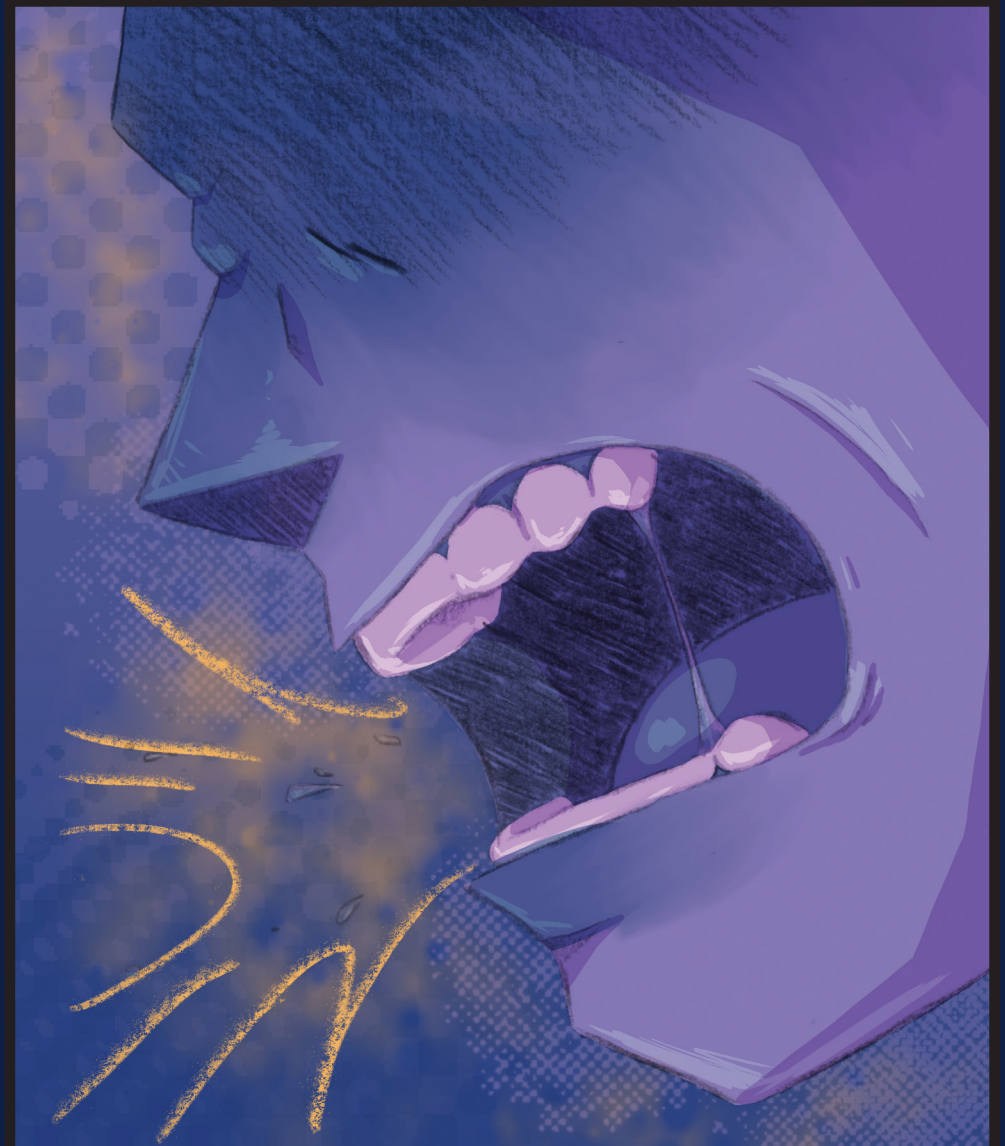
Riley's story
conflict



It started with a small issue in my friend group and it was never addressed.

Resentment started to form... It got bigger and bigger...

Until it exploded.

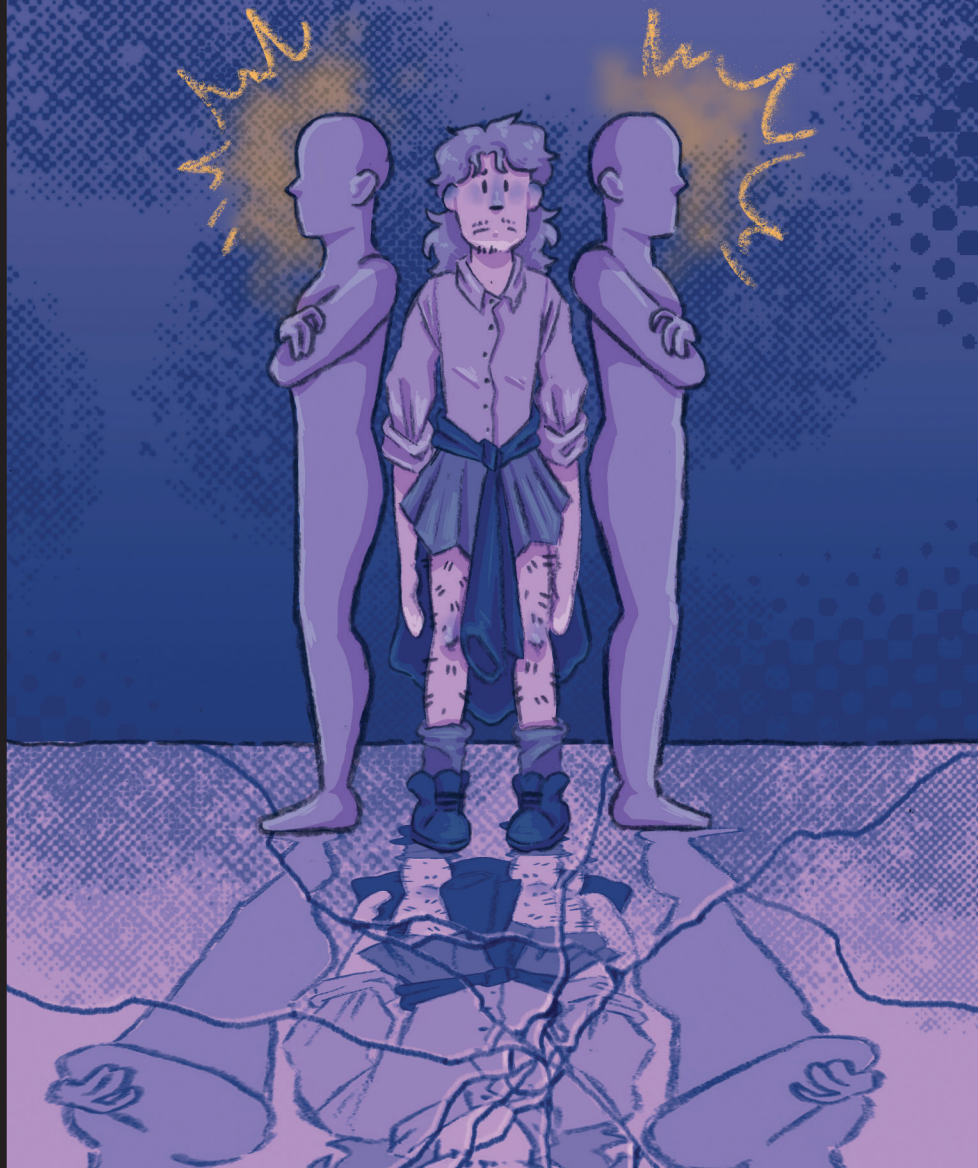


Daily arguments.

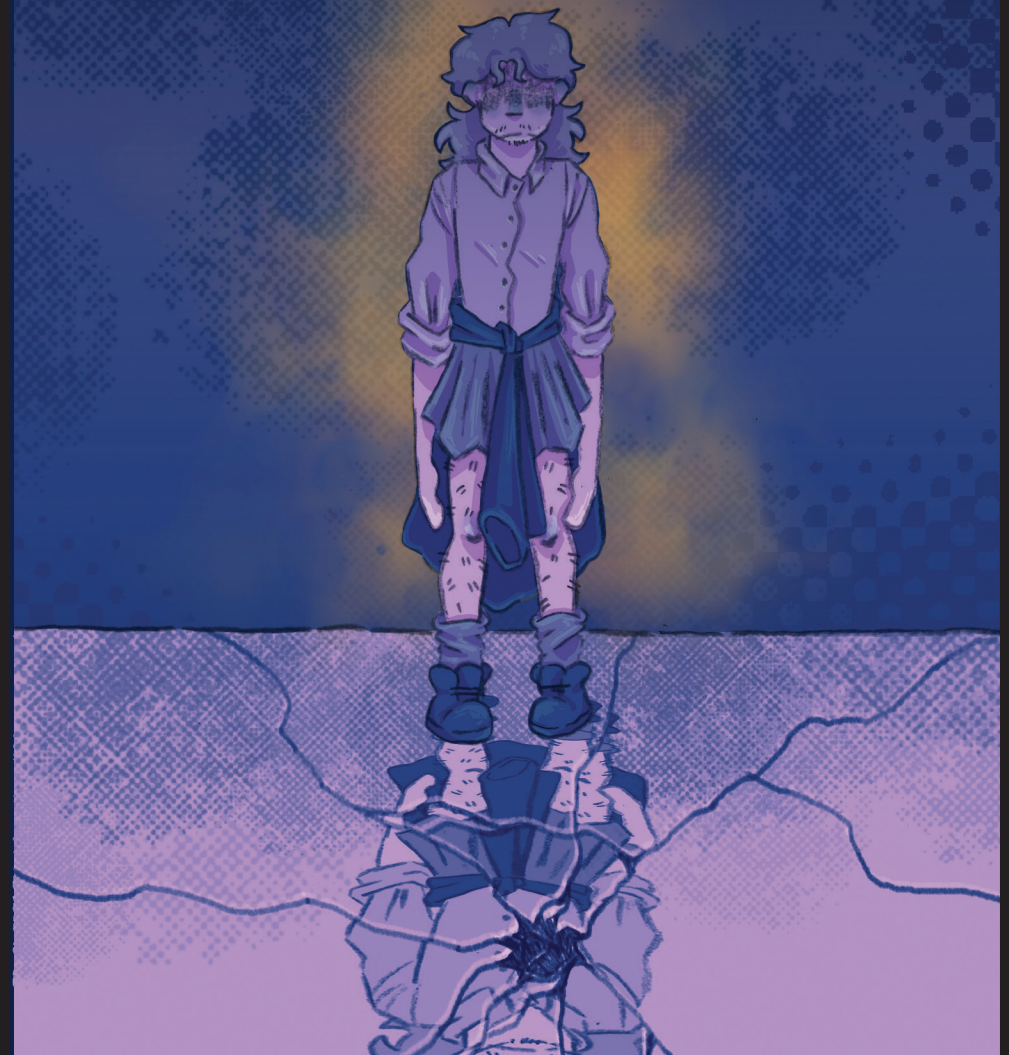
Petty Comments.

It went on for so long. 'He said' 'She said' conversations.
My friends all chose sides...

And with everyone chosing sides...



I was left out... it felt like
they'd all given up on me



Abi's story
spiralling

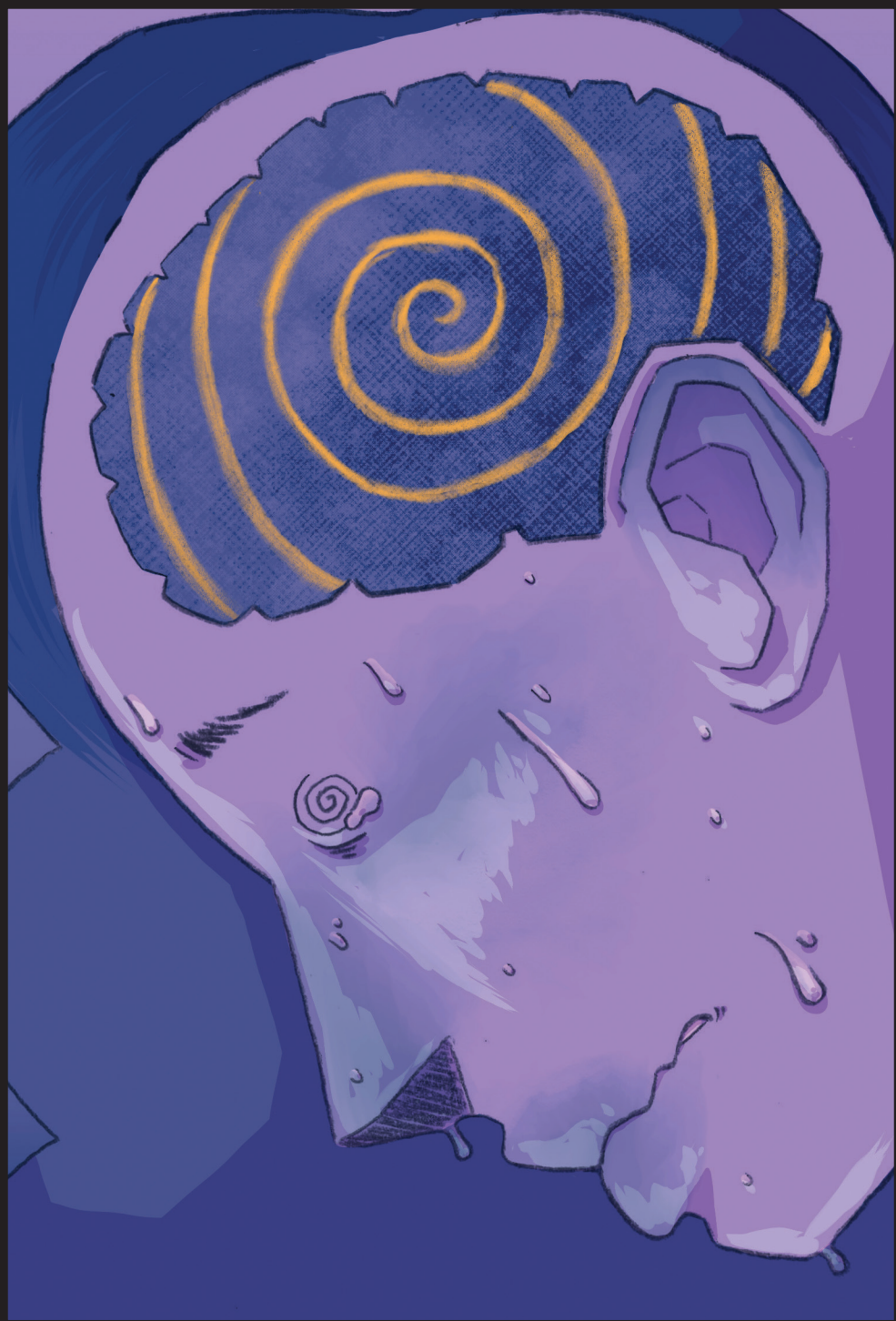
I'd just go home and sleep
and not really talk much
to anyone.

I fell into probably the
biggest depression I've
been in my life so far, and
hope to ever be.



I definitely felt a spiral occurring
where you start to convince yourself
that, this is a result of your choices or
actions and these people aren't seeing
you for a reason.

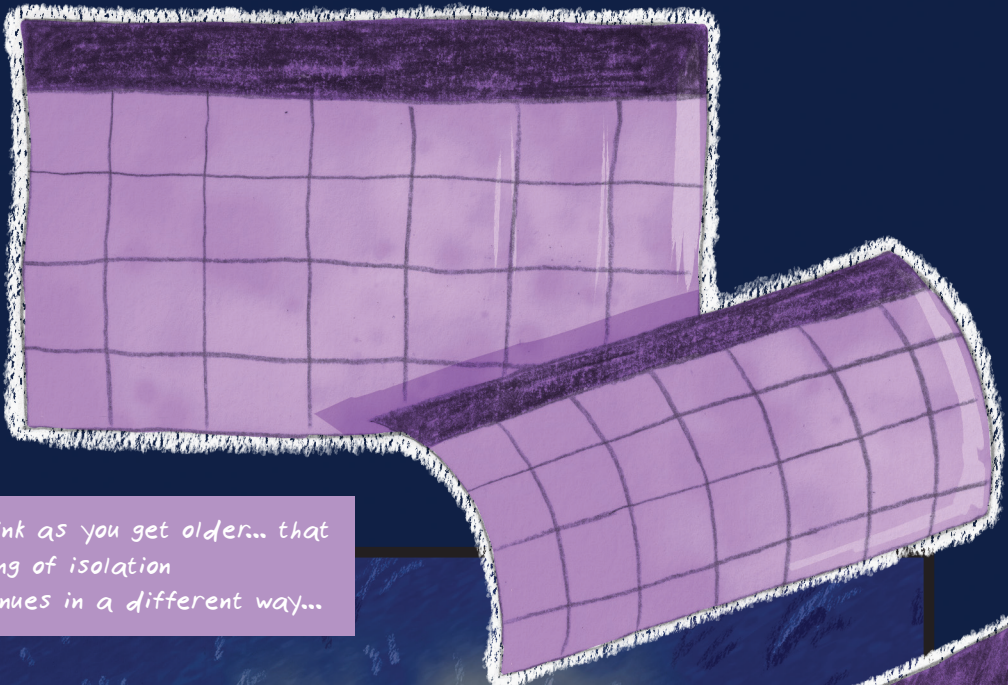




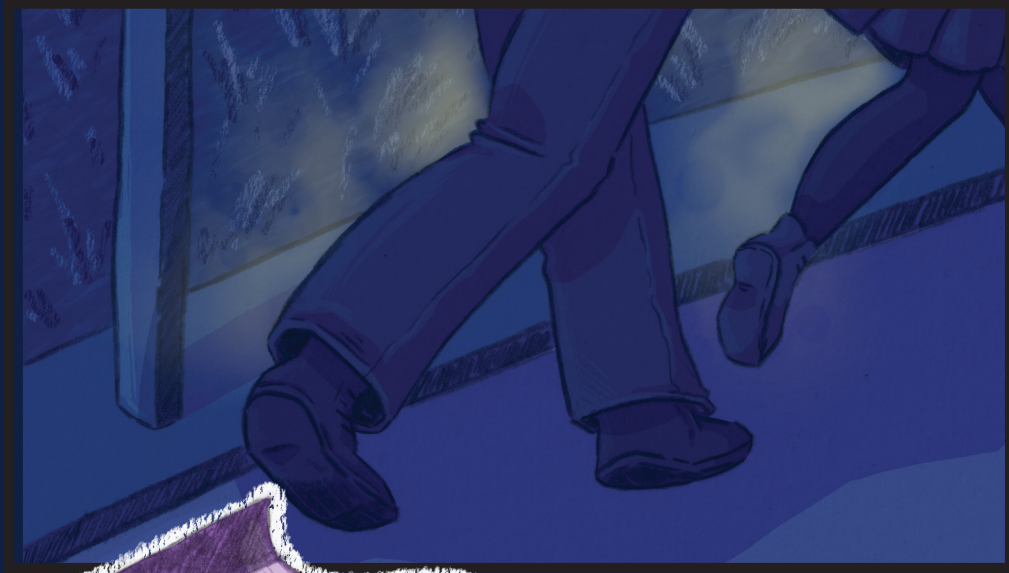
*Maybe there is something wrong
with me...*



Luke's story
growing up



I think as you get older... that feeling of isolation continues in a different way...



When we're older... we get busy.
Studies. Work.
Independent life...



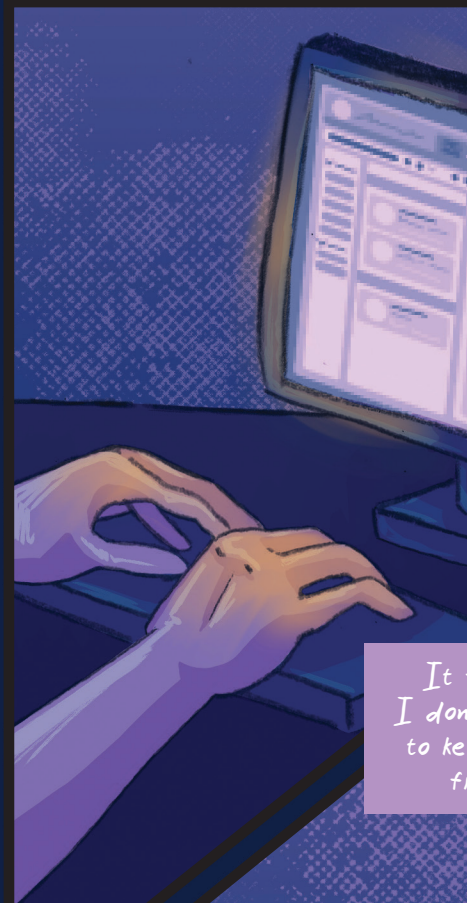
When we are young, we are constantly together. In school, extra curricular activities. **We** had limitless free time.

It gets hard trying to find the time to fit a simple hangout...

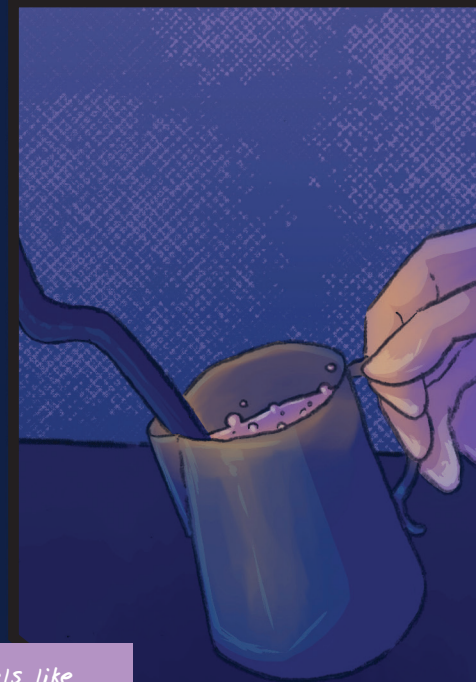
Hey! Do you guys wanna
meet up on Friday?

I have an assignment due :(
What about Saturday?

Can't. Working all day :/



It feels like
I don't know how
to keep up with
friends.



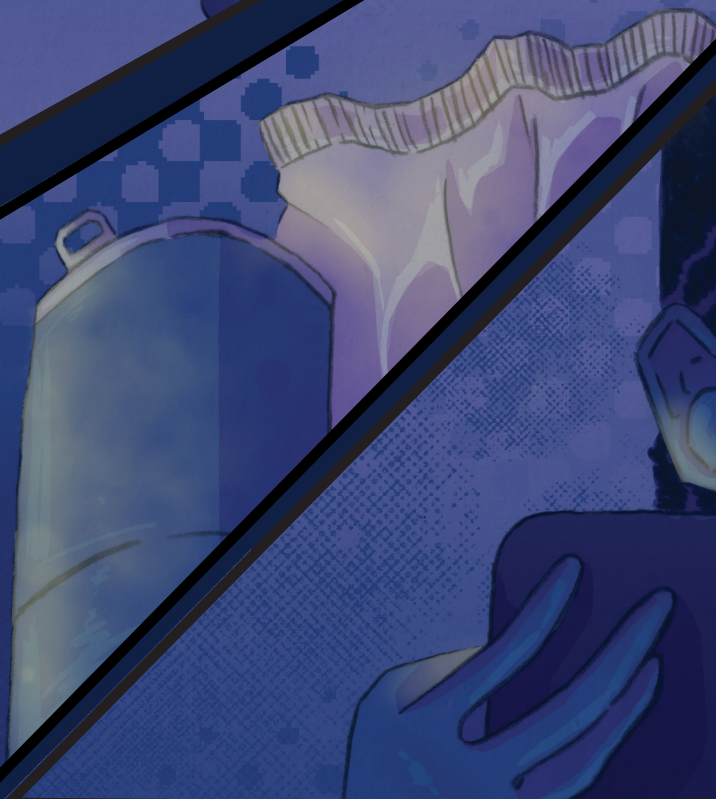


Keith's story

distractions

How I cope with being lonely?
...I don't really,
I distract myself and the thoughts
eventually go away

I play games. I find that playing games helps
me because they take place in a fantasy set-
ting. It forces me to remove my headspace from
the current space that I'm in and be immersed
somewhere else.





In these virtual worlds, I get to forget my real life worries. I'm escaping into these fantastical worlds and playing as someone I am not... and I can fall into these worlds for hours at a time.

I know it's not the healthiest because at the end of the day, I'm just like distracting myself... but I think in the short term, it will do.

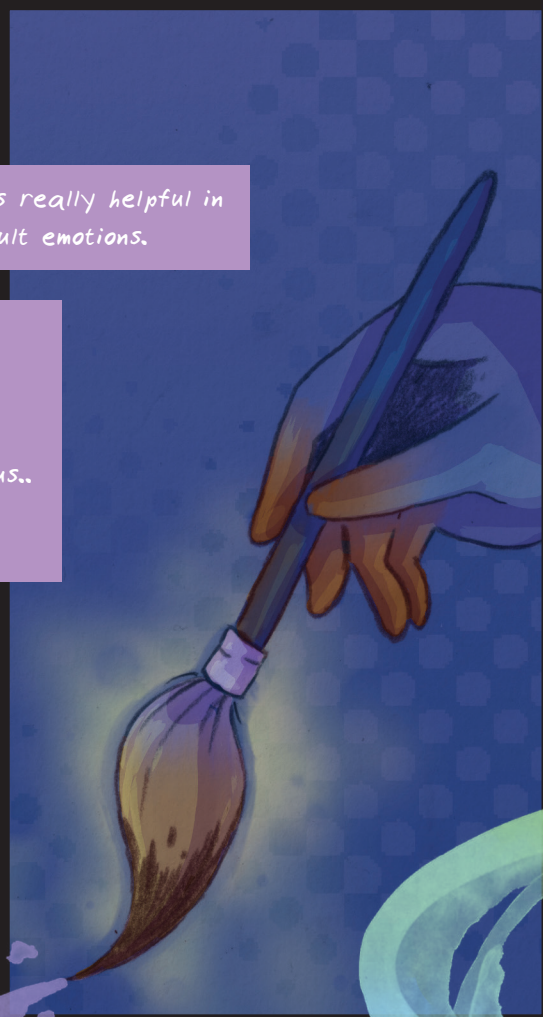


A stylized illustration in shades of blue and purple. On the left, a person with curly hair is shown in profile, holding a large, hexagonal object. On the right, another person is shown in profile, looking towards the first person. The background is a textured, dark blue.

Carmen's story
creativity

I found creative outlets really helpful in coping with these difficult emotions.

*Giving my mind something tangible to focus on.
Working on a project,
no matter how big or small.. simple or ambitious..
It keeps me driven and arguably sane.*

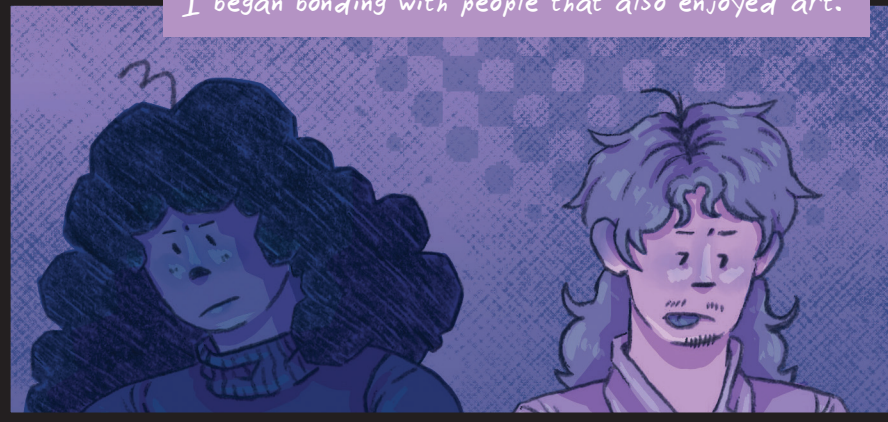


It's my safe place...



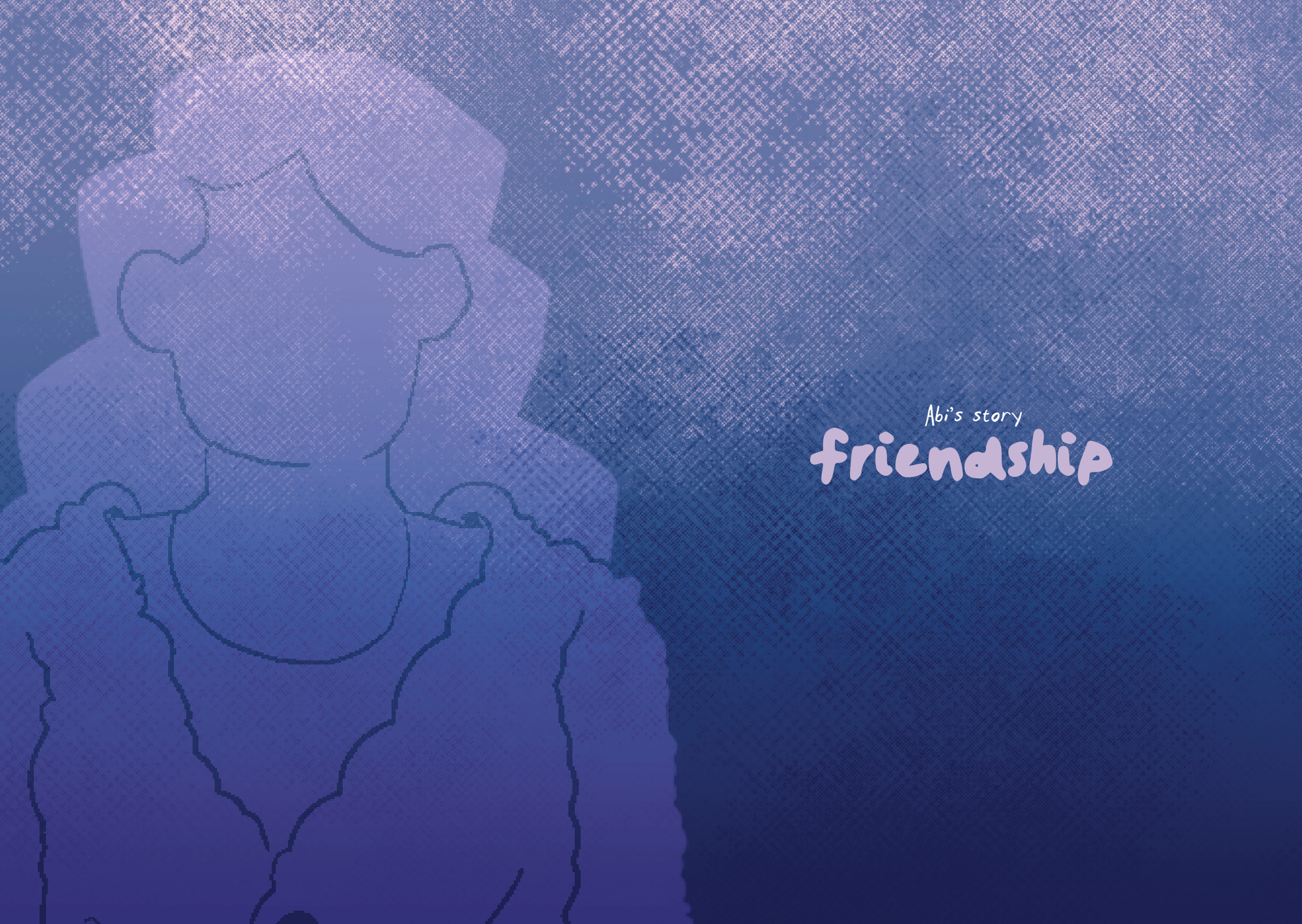
I found it also helped me deal with my isolation.

I began bonding with people that also enjoyed art.



It was a neutral thing that we could enjoy together.





Abi's story
friendship

Eventually, I started to find people that wanted to spend time with me. Not out of convenience or to fill up time.. but truly get to know me.



That feeling of isolation started to leave once I developed meaningful friendships.

I'm able to talk to them about my issues and they truly listen. These relationships allowed me to begin to process my previous issues and experiences.

That feeling of isolation isn't completely gone... but with them, it's begun to feel more manageable.

Beyond that surface level.





about the author



Raised in West Cornwall, Julian Lutzka is a multidisciplinary illustrator and animator whose practice is shaped by a strong commitment to social justice and communication. From an early age, he developed an interest in equality and representation, which led him to work with **RJ Working** while still in college, supporting his role as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Representative on the student council.

This experience evolved into an internship during his gap year, where he contributed to restorative justice projects across secondary schools and further education institutions. In **2023**, he became a trustee of **RJ Working**, continuing his involvement in community-led initiatives and advocacy.

Julian later moved north to pursue an undergraduate degree in Animation and Illustration at the University of Greater Manchester, where he has developed a strong visual language focused on storytelling, accessibility,

Carmen, Riley, Abi, Luke, Keith
A story of 5 young people navigating isolation and how they
overcame it.



*Isolation is a pressing issue in our society,
an indiscriminate condition.*

*Although many have experienced it,
its invisibility makes it tough to navigate.*

*From interviewing 5 young people, Below the Surface shows snapshots of
these difficult moments and the process of how it got better.*



RJ Working
Restorative Approaches to Harm