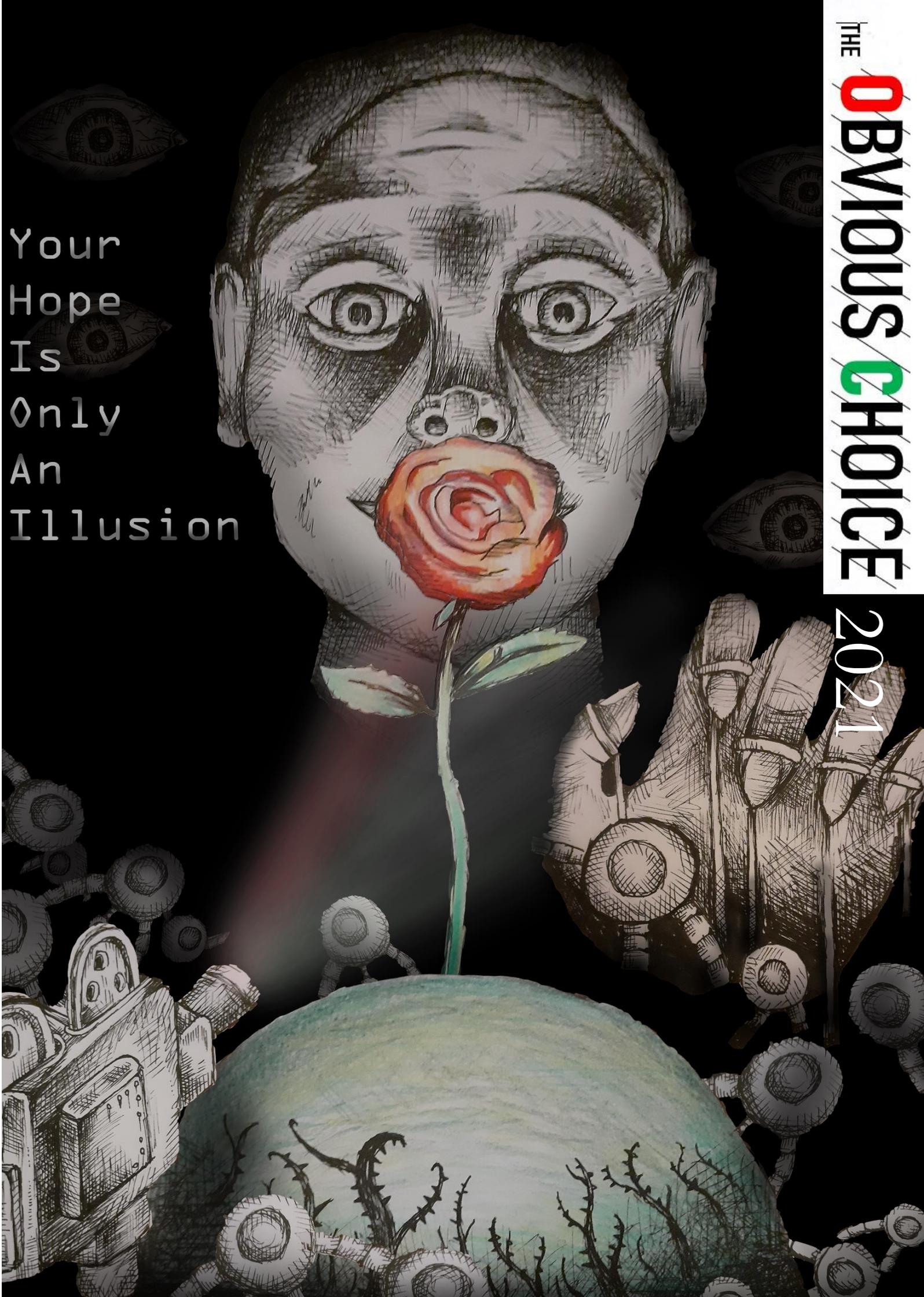


Your
Hope
Is
Only
An
Illusion



THE **OBVIOUS CHOICE**

2021

Nau mai, haere mai ki tenei makahīni tua wha o te kāreti o Onslow.

Welcome to the fourth edition of *The Obvious Choice* – a magazine of work by students in the English Learning Area at Onslow College.

Open these pages to find mirrors and sunbeams, aliens, whatsits, and the mesmerizing lives of earthworms.

Read about the power of pets and infomercials, beauty standards and school dress codes.

There are thoughtful letters to Jacinda Ardern and the British Museum; scathing critical responses to *The Bachelor*, *Us*, *Birds of Prey* and *The Dark Knight*; and careful deconstructions of childhood classics *Thomas the Tank Engine*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Shrek*.

Enjoy the imagining, thinking, design and doodling of this year's students. Ka rawe!

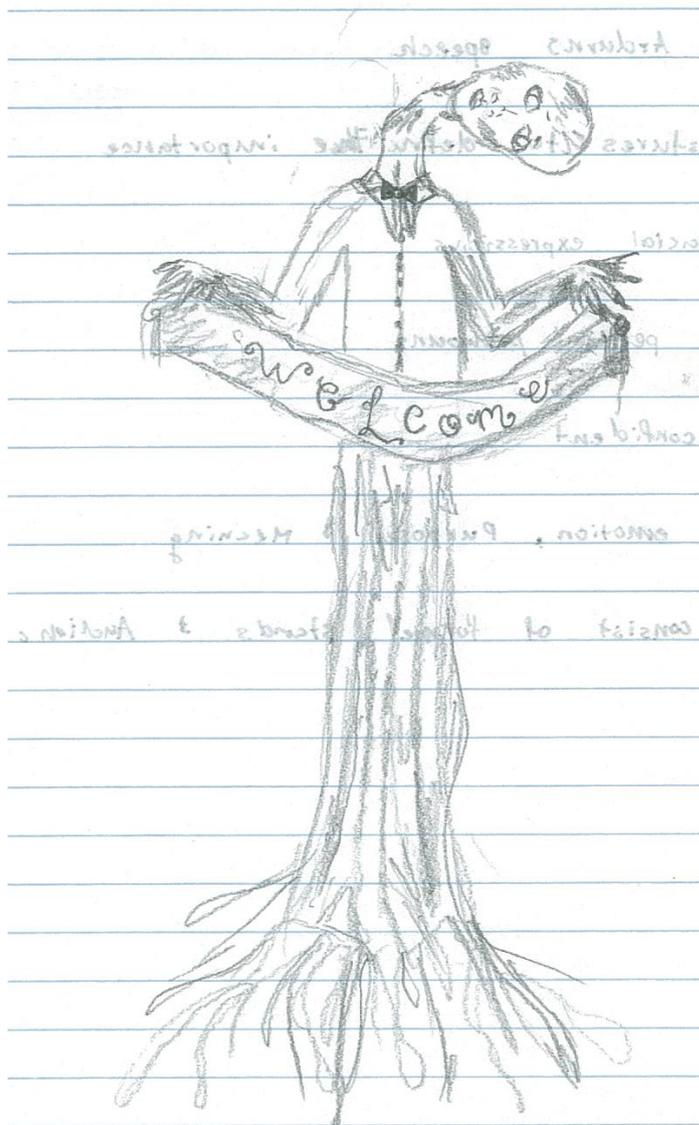
Acknowledgements

As always, thank you to everyone whose work appears on these pages.

Our fabulous cover is by **Henry Ludlow** (Y11), who was inspired by the Truman Show. Check out his writing and more fantastic images in his story *Bob the lonely alien* on pages 21 and 22.

The dramatic final pages of our magazine are images from a graphic novel by **Sophie Papps** (Y10).

Thanks to our 9PBR doodlers: **Poppy Albertson** (pp. 57, 62, 70 and 91), **Rebekah Duflou** (p. 63), **Edea Kidu** (p. 14), **Shivam Jamwal** (p. 24), **Madi Leach** (p. 60), **Sean Masuda-Morgan** (pp. 28, 33), **Saffron Morrison** (p. 55), and **Amberley Woods** (p. 12), and one of their peer supporters **Louise Anscombe** (p. 85).



Ngā mihi nui to our prolific year 10 doodlers.

Tessa Thornley's stunning images appear on pp. 2, 8, 9, 11, 20, 25, 30, 41, 48, 50 and 94.

Tumanako Waa's beautiful work appears on pp. 7, 10, 18, 19, 23, 29, 36, 39, 40, 47, 74 and 76.

Thanks to Mark Cleary who as always helped with formatting, and Diana Bradley who sorts out the printing every year.



Contact us

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CREATIVE

WRITING



Person in the mirror

Melissa Goodman Y9

Ever stare into the mirror
Wondering who that person is?
They reflect your appearance
But is that all there really is?

Eyes glimmer and shine
Full of wonder and hope
But you know deep inside
There is more than you could cope

Staring into the mirror
Your identity a question
Like an interview is in place
Perhaps a therapy session

Breathing in sharply
The mirror a scatter
It lies broken on the floor
All pieces a shatter

The person in the mirror
Was there no more
But you know too well
This isn't the end of the war.



Jay Gavin-Scott Poetry Y9

Lockdown

You don't realize how much you miss people
Until your best friend is right there
But you can't get close.
No matter how much you want to,
You can't hug.
You can't even see their full face until it's blurred by distance and car windows.
The awkwardness of standing barefoot in the driveway
And exchanging goods,
A mask and a plate,
Vowing to drop off baking,
Moving like magnets that have the same charge:
One goes forward as the other moves back.
You can see their smile as they wave goodbye.
You don't actually know when to stop waving,
Just keep waving until the neighbours stare,
Then immediately run inside to go back to texting.
The rush of serotonin fades as fast as the car disappears down the street.
It was over as soon as it started.
But it was worth it.

Was she scared?

Was she scared?

She must have been,

Enough to have texted me.

Almost a desperate plea.

Was it because she looks like a he?

Or was it because of the ADHD and the constantly bouncing knee?



I was scared,
I didn't want to lose my best friend.
Luckily, she made it home.
Although many don't.
I still wonder,
Was she scared?



Welcome to the Internet

Madi Leach Y9

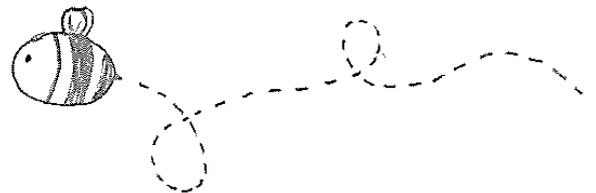
Welcome to the internet,
Can I interest you in anything?
Here's a few websites to get you started,
Tell us everything you're thinking.

You thought your favourite celebrity was fine?
Well, what about these racist tweets from 2010?
You believe in equality?
Tell the internet that, see what that means to them.

We have quite a variety here,
Only if you want to see.
We have politics, sports and famous people galore!
Just let us stalk you and we can show you your fantasy.

You like a song from Tik Tok?
Fake fan, basic, poser.
Wait what's wrong with your face?
We can tell you, just come a bit closer.

You think you know enough about social issues.
Bam! One comment will ruin it all for you.
You are suddenly 'uneducated' and a misogynist?
It's either you know, or you don't, and you don't get to choose.



How many likes did you get on your last post?
Only 69? That's not good enough.
Numbers, statistics and views measure self-worth here.
They get in your head but it's just tough love.

If you steer away from the trends, that's ok.
Except you're now a try hard and a 'pick me'.
But when you try to join in,
You're basic and have an internet personality.

So welcome to the internet!
Do you like it now?
Yeah, the rest of us don't either,
But once you're lost, you won't be found.



On the edge

Jannah Mexted Y9

My heartbeat thrums in my ears, drowning out the hum of fellow swim students' noisy chatter. The curved edge of the rubber boat is my uncomfortable chair; it slides oddly underneath my shivering body, swaying with the chlorinated water below.

"Three!" The sudden yell snaps me out of my tranquil state, forcing me to face the reality of what will happen.

"Two!" You can hear the authority in the shouts, yet there seems to be a hint of smugness as if the young swim instructor is a lion with its prey cornered.

I draw in as much air as I can muster and wait for the 'one!' that will send me and several other year

twos down into the pool, which at this point is rippling with excitement. But the final call never comes. Instead, the boat tips, sooner than expected. The water becomes a monster, ready to devour me as I try to grip onto the only thing keeping me afloat. The boat keeps tipping.

I forget about the grainy, damp lifejacket clasped around my torso; I forget about the sugary reward I will receive once this is over; I forget about the reassurance that this drill is completely safe.

All of these facts are neglected as my body leaves the boat and slams into the water. The bath-like pool becomes a lethal mess of tangled limbs, all *needing* to get back to safety in an imaginary ocean

The struggle

Poppy Albertson Y9

She stretched out as far as she could. She stretched herself to breaking point trying to cover the whole world with her beauty. She spread her fingers and wiggled her toes. She pushed hard, against the forces that tried to contain her. She forced her grasses through the cracks in the concrete paths that suffocated her, making it hard to breath.

They were silly, she thought. The foolish humans that had once simply adorned the planet were evolving, wanting more and more with each change of the seasons. She wouldn't go without a fight. They should know that. But they were clever. They dug into her soils to find tools for themselves, weapons to use against her. It was silly. If they just accepted her as she was, stopped trying to change her, and morph her into something she wasn't, they would save a lot of energy. And she would too. She could focus on providing for them, and beautifying their land, rather than trying to work against them in order to save herself.

She was so beautiful, so valuable, so precious, and they didn't even notice. Autumn was a good look on her, she wore it well. Its earthy colors and tones. The orange leaves that fell gracefully from the branches of the trees, to cover the ground, like a blanket preparing her for the winter ahead. Though, spring looked pretty good as well. The blossoms on the trees, the new life at every turn. Winter was also nice, in its own, unique way. With life, seemingly stopped for a moment, frozen in time with a cold white shawl embracing the change in seasons. And summer wasn't bad either. The sun reflecting on the water, the golden beaches. She really was beautiful.

They just were unable to see it. Too busy wrapped up in their own little worlds, in the little devices that they held in their hands, a world that was full of hate, one that was brainwashing them into thinking that they needed more, and more, and more. They used to be grateful. They used to be polite and thank her.

She missed that. She really did.



History's worst betrayal

Gabby Joffe-Devoy Y9

I threw my head back and howled like a wolf. My teachers tried to restrain me, but I had already unleashed the beast. And while my banshee shriek shattered the glass of the room, my mother escaped. Which was bonkers, considering I had tied her to a chair with my sparkly skipping rope. She was Hulk. That was the only possible solution. I had been betrayed, abandoned, deserted, like an ice cream, lying on the pavement in the scorching sun.

The four imposters stood before me: Sue, Toni, Trish and Sandra. Daintily, I stomped on the

floor and screeched, like a ballerina (with the grace of a turkey on stilts.) "Come on, Gabby, let's go and read a story!" coaxed Toni.

"NOOOOOO!" I bellowed, louder than the roaring crescendo of thunder.

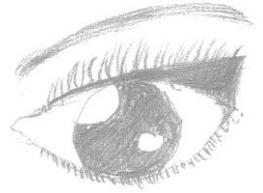
Just as I was about to blow the heads off all the other children, I was dragged off to the dreaded quiet corner. "Your mum will be back before you know it!" reassured Toni. "Now, let's try and find the rabbit! Where is he hiding?"

Oh I don't know, maybe under the blatantly obvious flap on the page.

She lifted the flap. It was the rabbit. "Gasp," I said sardonically.

But alas, I could not concentrate on the overwhelmingly idiotic story. What a pity. All I could think about was Mother double-crossing me. The traitor! I felt as though my very soul had

been ripped from my being, like I had suffered the Dementor's kiss. I was doomed. Doomed to a life of constructing intricate lumps out of play-do and singing ridiculous songs. I was doomed to a life of monotony. Why mother, why?!



The sunbeams danced

Theo Dawson Y10

The sunbeams danced through the barred opening. They languorously made their way down and eventually the light settled, fleetingly on a simple wooden table. The light flickered and settled on a furiously scribbling quill. The quill's feather stroked at a gold bracelet which adorned a wiry forearm. Further up this arm was a shoulder clothed in simple grey cloth. Above this was a face. It had pointed ears below which was a well-groomed beard. This face belonged to a man, a curious man. He sat in a simple room with nothing but paper, a quill, a candle, a chair and that same simple table which the light had settled on.

The man was writing when he paused and looked out his barred window at the rolling hills beyond and even beyond that to the sea. This was his country. This was his land. He bent down over his work and began writing once more. He was writing about the country which he had just looked out on. He wanted change. He was about to turn over the page and continue when he heard a shuffling in the corridor outside. It was the abbot; the man hastily shoved his papers under his desk. The shuffling went past outside, and the man took out his papers again.

The man hastily shoved his papers under his desk

This monk was writing his vision for his country. A country where all were equal, where all had freedom and, most importantly, where all had freedom to use their powers. Their powers given to them at birth, their magic. Suddenly as the man wrote he felt something familiarly fleeting yet strangely strong stir in his mind, he stamped it down and continued writing. When the words imprinted themselves on to the page, ideas were bound down and held. As soon as they were chained, they cried to be let out. They bayed at the window and battered the door. The ideas wanted to move.

This man had a lot of ideas. He had had too many ideas when he was young, that was why his parents had sent him to the monastery. They had been afraid the king's men might take him first. That hadn't stopped the ideas coming though. In fact, if anything, it had intensified the trickle into a steadily flowing stream. The stream had gone beyond the point where it could be dammed or exhausted. The stream of ideas had begun to carve its way out, into the great beyond.

He remembered when he was at the market in his hometown, he had seen a fruit stall and he was hungry. Something stirred in his mind and, quite opposed to his usually shy demeanor, he went up and asked for fruit. The merchant stared at him, incredulously for a moment. He had concentrated his ideas, he crafted them, and, suddenly, the merchant's eyes glazed and he

handed him a piece of fruit. The man wasn't quite sure what had happened, but it had felt good and he had something to eat. He had told his parents about the incident. Their faces danced between expressions of shock, anger and disbelief. In bed that night he heard a lot of talking. The only things he picked up was "not his place" and "the king". The next day he was sent off to the monastery.

That had happened 27 years ago, but he still remembered. He remembered, he wrote, but most of all, he resented. He resented the fact he had to constantly suppress the things which moved inside his head. He resented the fact his ideas were not tolerated. He resented the fact he was told what to think every day. But most of all

he resented the people who made him suppress his powers, the intolerant ones, the ones who told him what to think. This angry monk with unorthodox ideas resented the king.

The man wrote. His ideas becoming more powerful every word that appeared on the page. His ideas retained the power they had held in the marketplace of his youth. But now the seed of knowledge had been planted in the fertile ground provided by the power of his resentment and watered from the stream of his ideas. And so grew a tree of change that was destined to bloom not only in his mind but throughout the troubled nation that he called home.

The man's name was Mercurio Touchblade and his river of ideas was about to burst its banks.



The colony

Liam Evans Y10

Lucas crouched silently on top of a once-clean white building. The building in question had since become derelict, with bullet holes and scorch marks covering the exterior. Shattered glass covered the street ahead, seeming to glow in the light of the double moons. The buildings were well-tailored, designed by master architects. Huge glass windows, with complex geometric designs made to stand out and withstand the test of time, now lay in pieces. Lucas adjusted the grip on his rifle and watched as human men clad in black body armour and helmets that obscured their heads stroll through the streets, flanking a large armoured truck with wheels that were larger than he was. They weren't expecting trouble. They had no reason to expect it. This was their territory, after all.

But just because they weren't expecting trouble, didn't mean that trouble wasn't expecting them.

"Lucas, do you copy?" a voice sounded from the comms device on his ear. Lucas brushed his unkempt brown hair from his ear and put a hand on the device to answer.

"Copy, sis. Intel was correct. These bastards won't know what hit 'em."

"We're in position. When I give the signal, move on the convoy."

They had no reason to expect it.
This was their territory, after all.

Waiting was the worst part. To sit there in silence and know that, in a few minutes, chaos would ensue. Lucas sat in silence, waiting for the right time to strike. He surveyed his surroundings, taking in the area around him with his sharp green eyes. He suddenly noticed every detail, every footstep from the convoy in front of him, the distant sounds of combat from the districts nearby. He heard the yells of celebration as scavengers scored hugely and the whirl of

machines rolling through the streets. All artificial. No wind, no insects, no birds.

Lucas missed the birds.

As this thought flitted through Lucas' head, he saw a faint light, from roughly where his sister was hiding, flashing in morse code. N – O – W. A little basic for a signal, but it did the job. Lucas lined up the shot and fired. His gun made a quiet click, and a loud humming noise followed the bright purple projectile through the air as it slammed into the tyre. The exterior might be armoured, but the tyres weren't built to withstand plasma. The tyre exploded with a pop. As the truck began to slow, the soldiers turned on Lucas. Blasts of energy flew towards him, one slamming him in the shoulder. Unlike the tyres though, his shoulder pads were made specifically for stopping plasma. They could take a few hits.

"Ah, hell!" Lucas yelled as he crouched behind his cover.

His armour could take a couple hits, but it still felt like he'd been stung by a bee.

More clicks followed by loud hums. A full-on firefight. Lucas shook off the pain and peeped over the cover, firing on the soldiers. The rest of his squad were in the thick of it. A blue-skinned woman wearing light body armour danced

around, her long dark hair flowing behind her and her sword slicing clean through the soldiers' armour as they attempted to shoot her, narrowly missing her every single time. A huge man in full heavy gear, a helmet obscuring his face, sprayed plasma at the soldiers, laughing maniacally as they were cut down. And, of course, Lucas' twin sister. She looked strikingly similar to Lucas, with brown hair and green eyes. Her hair was shorter than necessary, with the excess pulled into a bun behind her. She peered through a sniper scope and took out soldiers with single shots, firing slowly and patiently. The fight was over relatively quickly, with the two Exords on the ground clearing out the brunt of the soldiers, Lucas and his sister providing covering fire.

The area was once again silent. The truck was now unmoving, with the bodies of the soldiers laying on the broken glass, now tinted red. New burn marks had appeared around the whole area, showing where both squads had missed their shots. Lucas dreaded what could have happened if a blast had gone a few centimetres to the left.

Headshot. Dead instantly, no returning, no recovery.

They had been incredibly fortunate.



Shifting hands

Ben Fabling Y11

The pulsing waves of midday sun bathe the school in glowing light. Shadows that play across the faded walls and concrete floors have grown meagre under its gaze. The sounds of joyous screams and the patter of running feet echo in the corridors. Down past the classes, a playground stands in gleeful yellow. The painted bars and boards are vibrant beneath bright beams.

A youthful boy strolls beneath the buckling verandas and peers through stained windows into the classroom within. Ancient lino and frayed carpet lie interspersed upon the ground like a patchwork quilt. A broken clock hangs dutifully among the inspirational posters, a marker of memory rather than time. The boy stares with curiosity a moment longer, before sprinting cheerfully back to play.

Beyond the messy classroom a jungle of a field sprawls. The green grass blades are wild and uncut. A bird perches on the branch of an

enormous tree. It sings a few sparkling notes, and flits away.

The years fly by on swift wings, and gradually the birdsong falters. The sky now billows a dark rumbling grey. Paint peels off the playground bars, sickly and decayed. This place of joy has become shrunken and neglected.

The old rooms have grown monstrous under new renovation. They tower up into the darkened clouds, friendliness turned to foreboding. Inside, everything is neatly in order, tables lined up like rows of soldiers. The lights shine above with a now sterile white. On the wall, the broken clock has been replaced. It's successor proudly strikes the hour.



Poppa

Cameron Pryde Y11

The hunched figure leaned on the balcony railing, staring into the distance. Between his aged and frail hands sat a steaming mug. The old man stood, unmoving, his face weathered and covered in more wrinkles than one could care to count. Behind tired and sunken eyes lay sadness. From the outside he looked calm but disconnected. There was a certain hopelessness about him. No emotion made an appearance from his dry, cracked lips, not even the trace of a smile. Pushing himself away from the balcony he grasped his walker in his gnarled sausage like fingers. The liver spotted skin looked almost translucent as he gripped on tightly to the structure. Gait now steady, he was able to retreat inside.

I knocked on the door even though I knew he wouldn't hear, then let myself in. I found Poppa etched into the living room couch, eyes closed. White, wiry hairs stuck out of his ears, similar in colour to the dust that blanketed the room. Up close his clothes looked even more unkempt than I had first noticed from the balcony. Rips and tears adorned his cardigan making it look like the used play toy of a house pet. His pants were a deep, ugly red and contrasted sharply with his shirt that was once white but now resembled the home of his last meal.

The one shelf in the room not overrun by dust was that which housed the things Poppa valued

most. Pride of place was a photo of he and grandma on their wedding day, looking youthful and happy. The rest of the ledge was littered with bowling trophies, war medals, an OBE and the treasured classical records.

Pride of place was a photo of he
and grandma on their wedding
day, looking youthful and happy.

Eyes suddenly open he stared blankly at me as I moved to sit in the chair opposite him. Not one word was uttered. Poppa rarely spoke. 'A man of few words,' was how my mother described him. Muttering under his breath a reluctant greeting he proceeded to heave himself off the couch, wheezing audibly as he did so. An ashtray sat next to the coffee table. It was overflowing as usual, beside it a half empty box of cigarettes. With his forefinger he motioned for me to follow him into the kitchen. As I did so I passed, for the umpteenth time, the framed medals of service and friends long since passed. The daily crossword in the paper sat on the kitchen bench, completed. He reached for his box of biscuits out of the cupboard, his thick eyebrows furrowed as he struggled, trying to undo the clasps that secured the container lid. He gave up, defeated and for the first time during my visit an emotion was visible on his face; frustration.

The sound of the front door slamming downstairs startled me. Grandma was home. She

shuffled noisily into the kitchen, holding a brown bag laden with groceries in her hands. Her face lit up as she saw me. Dropping the bags on the Formica table she gripped me in a tight embrace, almost knocking the wind out of my sails. I offered to help her unpack. As she began putting the bounty of produce away my grandfather grew angry, “Oh you, useless woman!” he bellowed. “You are putting everything in the wrong place!”

Grandma abruptly stopped mid action placing a pear back in the bag. Head down she left the

room muttering under her breath, ‘Grumpy old fart.’

Poppa stared at the cupboard with contempt. He began to rearrange the contents as he saw fit, oblivious to the fact I was still there. I decided that my visit had been long enough. Hastily I ran down to the front entrance and called out a goodbye to grandma.

The door shut behind me with a familiar thump. I made my way back to the bus stop across the street to catch my ride home.



If you were to look down on earth

Flynn Hogan Y11

I *f you were to look down on the earth, you might take notice of the huge, misshapen landmasses. You recognise some of them as continents and countries. Africa, Greenland, and Russia. Some parts of this ruined earth are cruel, scorched wastelands. Huge, jagged mudcracks divide the barren landscape, waiting patiently for rain, like the hands of a beggar, cupped and expectant. An immense scrap of land that was possibly once South America is dotted with great, cavernous depressions, their rugged walls forming steep mountains.*

You look closer, intrigued yet horrified at what the world has become. You see huge clusters of iron domes and towers on the frozen crater floors, spewing horrid black smoke. Crowds of people walk amongst these strange buildings, going about their day-to-day lives. One such person catches your eye. It's an old man, perched by a window, patiently waiting for the right moment to pull the trigger.

José's long, slender forefinger rested delicately on the trigger. He was shivering, and not just from the sharp, biting cold of July. He only had one shot at this, and if he messed this up – He tried not to think about what would happen if he failed. He pulled his warm, scarlet coat up around his neck and watched his breath form great clouds of steam, like smoke from those silly old factories.

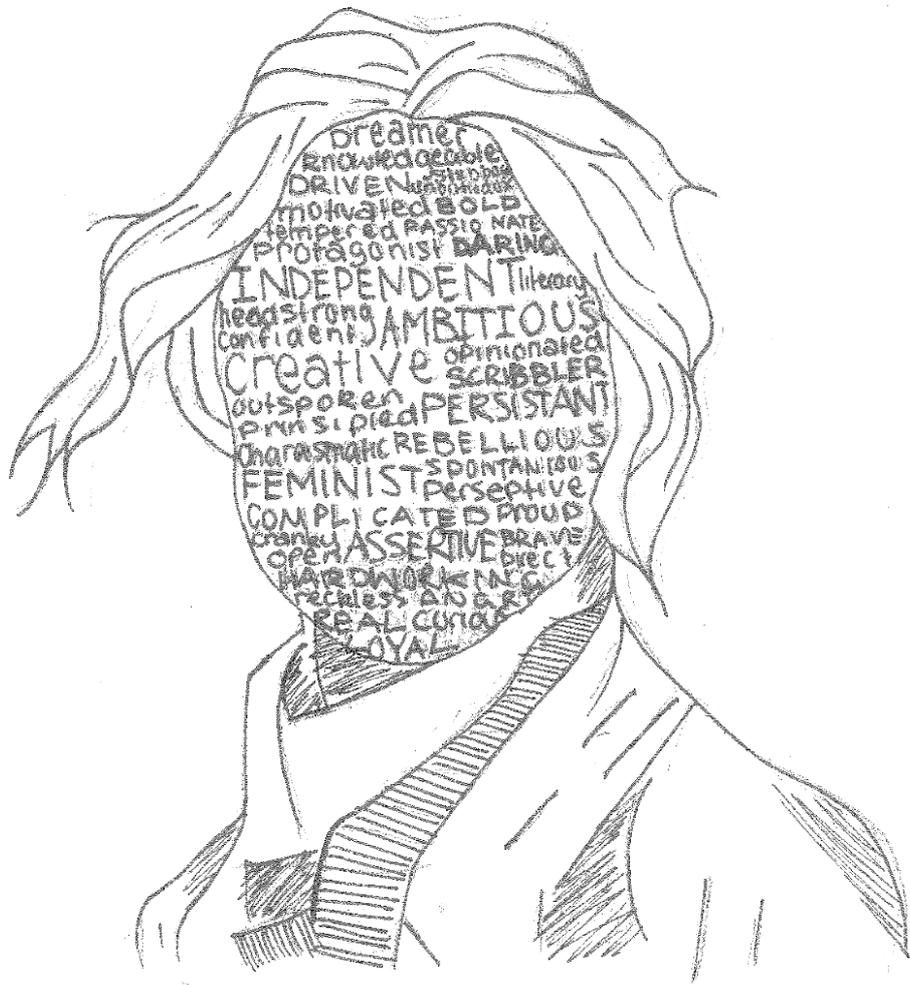
These clothes were great luxuries; Only the most skilled gatilhos – Mysterious itinerants hired to kill or abduct certain people without leaving behind a trace – were wealthy enough to wear clothes like these. That's what distinguished them from the grubby uniforms of merchants, miners, and factory workers. Of course, even the most foolish gatilho would seldom wear these clothes in public.

José sighed and quietly wiped away tears with the back of his shaking hand. It all seemed so unfair. Given the many terrible people whose deaths would benefit the world, his own family's seemed a cruel injustice. What had they ever done? He momentarily considered refusing to shoot them, but quickly dismissed the thought. He'd already agreed to kill them, and if there's one thing gatilhos valued, it's honesty.

He had killed many people before, but this was different. It's always different when you know you're never going to see your family again. It's different when you're saying goodbye to your own children, different when you're abandoning your loved ones. It's different when you're the one staring down the barrel of a gun.

A sickening wave of guilt ran down his spine as he slowly tightened his grip on the trigger and fell.

JO MARCH ~ main character in Little Women by Louisa May Alcott



Scarlett Anderson Y10

If you ignore the problem

Aimee Masuda-Morgan Y11

If you ignore the problem, then the problem does not exist.

From the edge of the city, you could only see clouds. A film of unmoving clouds, hiding the ground below in a thick blanket. Sora would sit there for hours every day, hoping for a glitch to catch a glimpse of the world down below. She never could see through the clouds. The glass covering the city prevented her from seeing clearly.

Around her, people went by; going to work and coming home from work. Faces blank, clothes neutral. They were told to work, so they did. They were worker bees for their queen. The trains ran silently on railways in the sky. Unnoticeable. The only sound to be heard this early in the morning were footsteps as people hurried off to work. Everyone at the same pace, like an organised choreography. There was no birdsong in the mornings. Though she supposes it's too high up for birds anyway. The scorching hot sun was dimmed by the glass. But the city still looked the same. The buildings towered over the sad city. All made using the same five designs for efficiency, and the same materials. Glass, steel and concrete. As if the city was computer-generated. It made Sora feel cold. There were still roads, but they were empty. No one dared to walk on them.



There wasn't any conversation about it. No curiosity. It was like it didn't exist. Never existed. This unnatural way of life, no one knew anything else. There was no information anywhere about the past. People ignored it. The government didn't force them to. They just did. Everyone thought and did the same thing. Everyone ignored the same thing.

Faces blank, clothes neutral. They were told to work, so they did.

Sora picked a flower from a nearby bush. The petals were shiny and red. The pistil perfect as it was yellow, was functionless. She smelt it. *Odourless*. Made to seem like it had a function. A purpose in society other than vanity. The trees were too green and shiny. The grass was cut to 2 1/2 inches. The city was lush with nature, but it never rained. There was no wind. It never felt too hot or too cold. The temperature was unnoticeable. The consistent weather meant that no one had anything to complain about. But Sora wasn't satisfied. It felt unreal. Unnatural. She wanted to know what the world down below was like, but she could only imagine how real it was.

Still, Sora was alone. Not one person dared to glance at her. Shoes off. On the ground behind her. Standing on the ledge, she waited.



Zombie apocalypse

Chase Rickit Y11

I woke up with the biggest headache ever, I sat up really dazed and confused not remembering anything from the night before. I patted down my pockets looking for my phone, RING. I got startled as my phone

ringtone went off, it was Marley. I picked up but I didn't even get a chance to say anything before he whispered into the phone "Joe...Joe you there?"

I replied with “Marley why did you leave me in the field bro?” What Marley said next I will never forget until the day I die.

“They found me.”

“Who found you?” I replied confused but also scared. Marley screamed into the phone in horror. Bang. Bang. Bang. Three-gun shots were the last things I heard as the phone call ended followed by a repeating beeping sound. My mouth dropped as I wondered if I just lost my best mate. I got up and opened the phone app and I tried calling everyone on my contact list: Mum, Dad, Lachey and even my country national emergency number. The same beeping sound filled the silence every time I tried to call someone. I struggled to stand up as I started walking towards the road, my car wasn’t there. I did not think much of it since I was on my phone trying to get answers.

“They found me.”

I started to walk up to the bar since it was only up the road like a seven-minute walk away and I had no other choice. While I was walking, I kept trying every contact in my phone, no luck. I finally reached the bar, and the street was completely dead, no people, cars rolling on their side, glass, and blood everywhere. I walked into the bar and there was no one at all in this bar. The lights were off, no one was behind the counter. Silence. Every step I took I could hear every little detail of the step, that’s how silent. I went behind the counter and into the kitchen towards the main food supply for the whole kitchen. I took a bag of grated cheese and a pre-cut loaf of bread. As I was eating, I heard the bell from the bar door go off, which only goes off if

someone or something walks through the door. After not hearing anything for about 40 seconds I went back to eating, not even a second later I see someone walk past that one gap behind the counter that illustrates the kitchen. My heart sank into my stomach as I quietly hid under the equipment table. Once I got under the table, I debated whether it was a worker, the manager or someone confused like me. I peeped my head over the table, the person did not look right, they had a weird stance and were making groaning noises. “Zombie?” I whispered to myself.

I looked over the table staring at this weird figure while it is making odd noises, I accidentally dropped my plate. I do not know how. I sat there in shock and looked back. The figure was looking my way. Half of its face was completely torn off. Next thing I know this thing started charging at me full speed and I mean sprinting at me Usain Bolt style. It jumped over tables. His saliva was flying everywhere like a police dog. That’s when I knew I had to get the hell out of there, I looked behind me and saw an emergency exit door

I shut the door behind me, but this thing charged right through the door breaking it off the hinges like it was nothing. So, I started running for about 30 seconds before I turned around and see that a horde of people had joined this freak in chasing me.

Oh my god the luckiest moment of my life. I ran around the corner and there were people. Real people. I started screaming “Hey!!! Help me!” What they said next made me feel hopeless and betrayed. There were five of them. Three of them said “He’s a zombie, shoot him!!!” The other two raised their guns at me. Bang. All I felt was a killer headache as I fell backwards and passed away.



England

Arabella Tries Y11



England, 1924

The shout and clatter of the bustling kitchen rings out, full of loud noise and delicious smells. A maid rushes out to light the fires, her footsteps muffled by the thick rugs, a stark contrast to the noise made on the bare flagstones

deeper in the mansion. The servants may have to wake before dawn to prep for the day, but that doesn't mean the wealthier inhabitants of the house should. However, eventually they do (albeit slowly) begin to wake and go about their business, which mostly consists of prepping for the soiree that evening.

As the sun begins to set, the guests begin to reveal themselves. Strutting up the winding driveway in their finest attire, they are drawn towards the sound of laughter and bright light emanating from the mansion, like moths dripping in velvet and gold drawn to the bright flame of wealth. The night passes quickly, in flashes of bright clothes and glasses of champagne and expensive food. The dancing and dining spill out into the gardens, with laughter and gramophone music playing until the early hours of the morning. Down in the valley below, the people of the village will gossip about what happened up in that mysterious mansion, simultaneously disapproving immensely and yet knowing they'd swap places in a heartbeat. The mansion is a place of wealth and prosperity, where the rich gather to drink and smoke and celebrate their good fortune.

Later

The house is strangely empty of human life, with not a butler nor a lord to be found. Two years ago, when the owners fled in a desperate bid to

avoid drowning in debt (which was no doubt helped along by the expensive parties and questionable financial decisions.) Like frivolous swallows following the drama and the gossip, the others eventually followed, leaving the house empty. The servants left soon after, and quickly what was once a myriad of colour and life faded into the background.

First came those who wished to gain what the previous owners had, the precious stones that had adorned thin necks, the heavy silver cutlery, the beautiful rugs that had been shipped at great cost from overseas, even the heavy expensive furniture. The years passed at a leisurely pace and the house was emptied, until all that was left was that which the thieves deemed worthless or immovable. After a while, there was nothing left, and so they stopped coming. The long winding driveway grew over until it was hardly recognisable from the road. Gradually the nearby village began to forget, until the mansion stopped being an actual place and became a story old souls reminisced about in pubs.

Somehow the emptiness has almost added to its grandeur, despite the fact it is overgrown and desolate. Bustling servants and decadent décor have been replaced with crumbling walls and a mossy carpet. The gentle light shining through the windows is now tinted a soft green as it falls upon the thick carpet of moss. Once-polished stone pillars that formerly kept company with twisting dresses and whirling jackets now have only the quickly encroaching ivy and the gently waving leaves as well as the quiet mice in the wall cavities and the inquisitive birds. But despite this, the walls of the house still stand, even if the brickwork is cracked and ivy-covered. The world has less interest in mansions nowadays, far more preoccupied with fast cars and townhouses. The mansion has finally been forgotten and left to rest. A place riddled with ghosts of the past, ultimately peaceful.

Bob the lonely alien - The end of the beginning

Henry Ludlow Y11

There are no clouds in the sky on Bob's planet in the middle of nowhere. His planet is far from its star and has no moon. Bob is the only creature on his planet. He's short, stubby and has no friends. His planet is so small that he could walk around it in an hour if he wanted to. He makes little stick figures with twigs that help him cope with his appending loneliness. Bob gives them names. This one he will call Pebble as it's a circular shape. On Bob's planet, days are short, and it would be night soon. He has a tiny house on top of a hill. The roof is constructed of rusty red bits of corrugated iron and is anything but sturdy. The house has two levels placed unevenly upon each other with copper walls. At any moment it could tumble over. On the left side of the house, next to a lopsided window is an old, crippled satellite dish. He built it himself. Bob headed towards the mount. He had built a steel letterbox next to the entrance. It would probably never be used and was creaking in the slight breeze. He opened the wooden door with much effort. Then stumbled inside dragging his newfound friend behind him. Inside his home, he had four rooms, his bedroom, a workshop, a kitchen and an odd room with a table and a fireplace. Bob strode into his room and put Pebble on one of his many, many shelves. Bob was beginning to feel sleepy, so he hopped into bed. He didn't bother shutting his curtains. He likes to look out into the night sky and watch the stars gently whisper to him. Bob soon fell asleep.

He was building a spaceship out of old, forgotten bits of metal.

The next day arrived and Bob was up early. In his clunky workshop, he had something brewing. He was building a spaceship out of old, forgotten bits of metal. Bob thought it would be a good idea to try to contact other creatures. He was sure there was more life out in space, and he wanted friends. In his

workshop, he had all kinds of random objects. Ranging from bicycle wheels to a harpsichord. These are piled up in some dusty corner next to some rusty shelves. By the chair that Bob had made was a workbench with all kinds of levers and buttons all beeping and buzzing. This connected to his satellite dish outside on the second floor. Every single day Bob would send signals hoping for someone to respond. He would usually input a sentence or two. An old



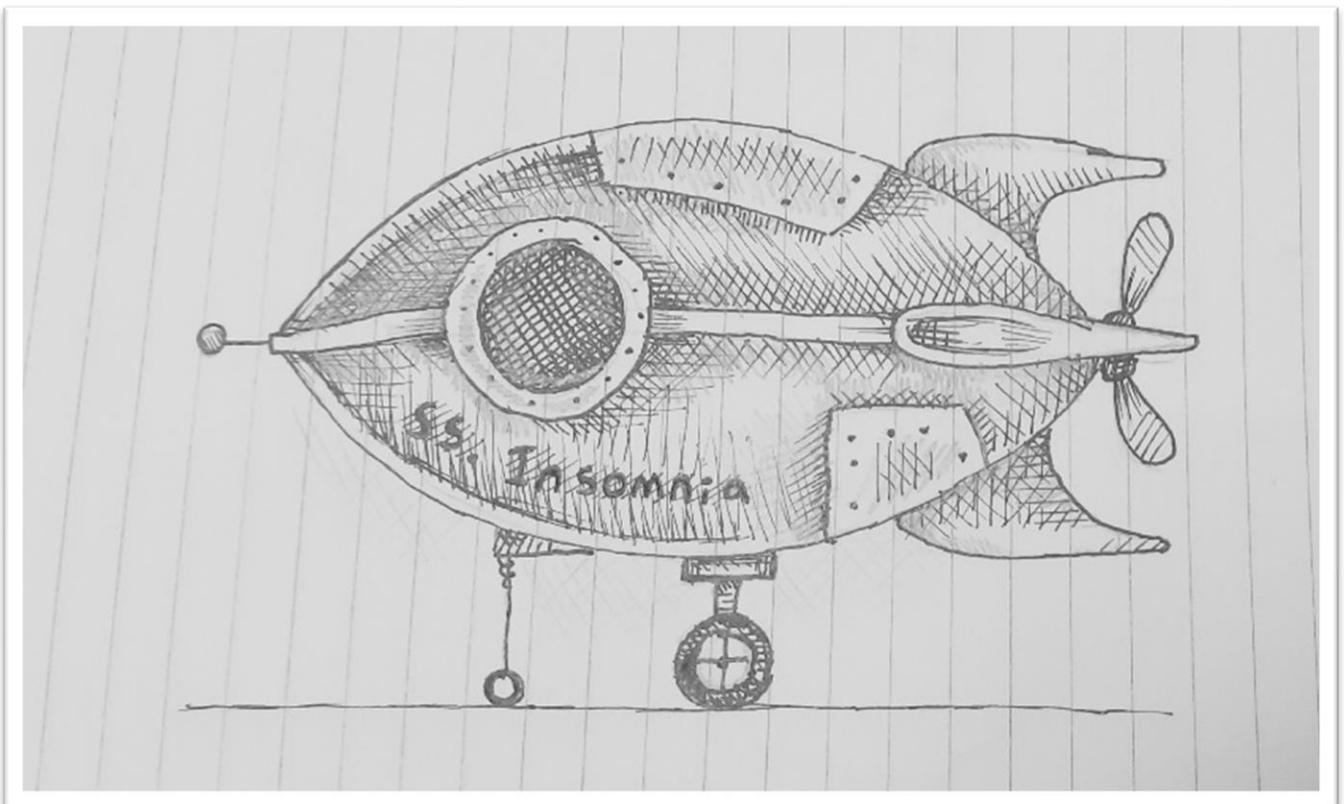
computer is wired up to the bench. He began to type a message. "Hello, it's Bob again. Is there anybody out there?" He pressed enter and sat there watching the three dots continuously strobe from 1 to 3. He believed that one day he would get a response and hoped that day would be soon. The chair creaked as he stood up, almost beckoning him to stay. Instead, he waddled over to his spaceship and started to work on it. The spaceship looked like a walnut welded into two sections. There was a bronze propeller on the back. The back wings of a plane were bounded haphazardly to the ship. He had almost finished it. On the inside, it was

almost the same as his workbench but made a much louder droning side. A few hours had passed, and lastly, Bob painted the ship's name on the front, SS. Insomnia. He checked back at his computer eagerly. Which was the same as he left it. The dots still strobing back and forth. Disappointed, he headed up to his room on the second floor and hopped into his bed. He gazed at the stars shimmering in the night sky through his open window. That night Bob dreamed of meeting new people and exploring new planets. One day.

That night Bob dreamed of
meeting new people and
exploring new planets. One day.

It was the middle of the night when Bob awoke. He felt the urge to set sail into the ocean that was space. He skipped down the stairs and entered his workshop. He sat down at the

ragged chair and sent another message into space. "Once again, it's Bob. I have decided to voyage into the great beyond. I hope one day I will meet you and your planet. I'm off." He pulled the lever, opening the garage door with a crash. He filled the spaceship up with petrol, opened the hatch and jumped in. The engine spluttered like a dying cow and the ship rolled vigorously down the hill. The wheels were squeaking as they gained momentum. It rocked with one last pop to the engine into the sky. The ruder at the back shook spontaneously as Bob started to lose control. Red lights inside the ship began to flash as loud sirens went off. The propeller came to a halt then the spaceship stalled and started to fall. Bob frantically pulled all the levers. It was still falling. In an instant, he pulled the emergency throttle. The ship was once again stable, and the propeller began to spin. He heard a ping and looked to his left. On his computer, it read "Hello Bob, Good luck on your voyage. We'll see you soon. - Boris."



Dream catcher

Tess Mainwaring Y11

I feel my heart thudding in my chest as I make my way to the Royal Academy of Ballet. It's audition day, the most nerve-racking day for any young dancer. And the expectations I have for myself are a heavy weight on my shoulders.

A breath of wind strokes my face, and my hands go automatically to my hair, which is cemented with bun pins and hairspray. It's all in place. I close my eyes, and quickly go over the movements in my head, moving my arms as I walk, practising again and again. When I glance up, a few people give me strange looks, which I ignore. They don't know how long I've worked for this. How much I have given to ballet, sacrificed, gone through, proven. I need to be perfect today. I won't let myself down.

Turning the corner, the academy rises against the sky like a castle, beckoning me, daring me to enter. I take a deep breath. *Come on Lilia, this is what you've been working for! You have to do this.* And so I clench my fists, hold my head high, and march up the steps into the academy.

The foyer is packed with people, boys stretching out their legs, girls walking through their new pointe shoes, teachers shouting instructions. I find myself a corner, taking off my jacket and adjusting my leotard. Some of the other girls are looking at me, and I feel a small glimmer of pride. I got the lead last year, in *Sleeping Beauty*. They must recognise me.

I sit to tie my pointe shoes, then rise and begin stretching. My muscles extend with ease, my legs rising above my head effortlessly, my arms

encircling my face, my body. I relax my face, but my heart is pounding in my ears.

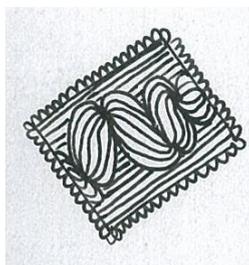
The girls around me are mirror images of each other, long slender limbs, graceful necks, small faces. We all look so alike, are so alike, yet we are not here to be friends. I feel the eyes burning into me and my movements, but I don't look up. I must concentrate. I must be the best.

After a few more minutes, the first group gets called. They file in, some confident, some anxious. Once the door to the studio closes, I rush to the bathroom. Miraculously, I am alone. I turn to the mirrors and walk through the dance once more. I feel more confident now I am away from the stares of the other girls. I watch myself in the mirror, and for one perfect moment I see the girl I always wanted to be, the prima ballerina, the shining star.

We all look so alike, are so alike,
yet we are not here to be friends.

I smile, and walk back out into the waiting area. The other girls are looking a little green, but I'm feeling good. I know that I can show all I am capable of. In the studio, the music stops, and the girls come back out. One of them looks as if she is about to cry, but she holds it in. We don't cry here. We always stay professional.

"Group two, you may come in." the judges voice rings through the air like a gong. The girls in front of me straighten their backs, raise their heads, and walk in confidently. I hold myself high, with grace and poise, and follow them into the audition.



Route 26

Sophie van den Eijhoff Y11

With a deep breath I stepped onto the bus. In a daze, I met the driver's eyes and dropped my handful of coins into his outstretched hand. Not registering his cheerful greeting, I walked down the aisle to take a seat. With a hiss we pulled away from the curb and rumbled down the busy road. Planting my bag on the seat beside me, I stole a glance to my left. The woman across the row turned at my gaze and gave me a questioning stare. Quickly I looked away and craned my neck to scrutinise the rest of the passengers. Just old people with groceries, no apparent threats. It was midday after all, and broad daylight. This was just me being ridiculous. I stared into my lap embarrassed. I must have looked like a nervous wreck inspecting everyone on the bus. I definitely needed a distraction to get through the trip, or I would bail, again. Reaching down to grab my phone from my bag, something caught my eye. The sudden realisation made my heart stop. In disbelief, I traced the faint scratches on the seatback in front of me. It was my initials with the barely decipherable SOS I had etched. In a panic I counted the rows ahead of me. Row 11. I remembered every vivid detail about that night; where I sat, what I wore, even the gaudy pattern of the upholstered seats. It was the same bus. There was no doubt about it



I had been surprised when he sat next to me on the bus that night. I'd jumped when I felt his leg brush against mine, as he pushed his bag down

between our feet. My eyes had been closed, head against the window, air buds in, music pulsing in my ears. I'd been completely oblivious to my surroundings. I sat up straight and opened my eyes. All the other seats surrounding us were empty. There was no one else on the bus. No reason for him to sit next to me. Self-consciously I smoothed my rumpled jeans and discreetly attempted to fix my flattened hair. It had been a very long day, and the bus was the last place I'd wanted to be. I glanced to my left and pulled out my air buds, waiting for him to say something or acknowledge me, but the only noise was the clunking engine. I wondered if I knew him, or if he had mistaken me for someone else. Although, the lack of words had unsettled me, and the darkness outside did nothing to calm my nerves. Surely if I knew this person, they would say hello. Lowering my gaze, I stared at the hard plastic of the seatback in front of me. Names and symbols etched from years of bored passengers stared back. But I wasn't bored anymore. I was alert. As we neared my stop, relief flooded through me, and I began to rise from my seat. But just as I was about to ask him to move, a cold hand wrapped around my wrist, yanking me back down. "Don't make a sound." A hard ball of dread clenched in my stomach as I fell back onto the seat. We sat in silence until the end of the route. "Up", he said. "Leave your bag." But little did he know what I'd scratched with my key. That, coupled with the ID in my bag, had prompted a search, and I was found. 3 years later.



Within the land of whatsits

Maia Patete Y11

He knows he isn't allowed on this side of the island. So, he'll have to be quick to not be caught. The young boy can see no difference between the two sides; both hold piles of whatsits, nothing new. As he takes a final glance at his surroundings, something catches his eye. Just

three piles away, a structure is submerged by whatsits. The boy can already tell it is not the usual building you would find in your local town. So as curiosity takes over, he starts to wander through. How long before they notice the young boy is gone? He lets his fingertips brush over ancient magazine covers, clothing pegs, rusted chairs, teddy bears, plates and many more

inventions. Occasionally he stops to play with old toasters and the buttons of remotes. Flipping a bottle cap between his fingers, he finally reaches the structure. A shed. As he takes it in, he realises it is made of wood. Only once has the young boy experienced such a thing, and that is from a book he picked up from a pile of whatsits. He never thought it was true. Well, now he has to go inside.

After digging through to the door, he cautiously opens it. As light sprays through the room, he peers in and can make out a single picture inside. Propping the door open, he eagerly enters. The wood creaks under his feet, a very unfamiliar feeling to him. As he approaches the large picture, he can make out that it must be filtered. No one could capture the look of a brushstroke without a filter. And it sits in a gold frame, which tells him it's not worth much. But what is it a picture of? Along the canvas, trees dance with the breeze, green grass rolls over hills, and a small stream flows between them. White birds float in the sky. A soft smile starts to spread on his face as he realises it is only another photo of one of those fantasy lands. After all, there is no such thing as a bird flying! He leans the portrait forward and tries to make out the sticker on the back. His eyebrows furrow as he reads Kapiti Island, 2020. 2020? His great, great grandparents would have been around his age then. He reads over Kapiti Island again. A familiar name as he is living on it. But as the boy looks back out at the familiar land filled with whatsits, he can see nothing that could even resemble the photo. He begins to haul the print up from the dust, and as he does, a small letter falls out from within.

Kneeling, he picks it up. The note feels delicate within his hands as he starts to read: To whoever's eyes lay upon my painting, here is a little background story for you. My painting shows a landscape of Kapiti Island on one of its sunnier days. My

efforts were to try capture its natural beauty before someday, perhaps, it is all gone. Filled with rubbish, I suppose. I hope you enjoy. - Jana Green. The boy's eyes widen as he realises that the fantasy photos are all true. He wonders how the land turned out this way. He is also introduced to a new word, rubbish. Well, it's not entirely new for him. There was once a theory that whatsits were called rubbish. Everyone in the town heard the theory, and it grew so big that the government had to shut it down. They called it absurd and reassured people that rubbish really meant worthless. Now the young boy is not so sure. Like most young people, he wants answers, and so he put it upon himself to bring the painting back and ask.

With the painting now under his arm, the boy steps out of the shed. While making his way back through the whatsits infested land, he stops. To his left sits a plastic bag, but that's not what caused him to stop. Written in bold letters across the bag was Rubbish Only. Underneath was pictures of milk in boxes, vintage glass bottles and cans of food. The boy realises that if that is deemed 'rubbish', then the whole island, everywhere he knows, is filled with it. Most importantly that the theory was true. Standing there with one hand supporting a painting and the other holding the plastic bag, the boy's mind starts to turn. He places the painting gently down, scared that it might turn to dust from its old age.

Opening the plastic rubbish bag, the young boy starts to pick up a whatsit, and instead of seeing a "decoration of the world", he sees a destroyer. So, he places it in the bag, ready for it to be joined by another one. At this moment, the young boy vows to himself that he will restore beauty in this land, no matter how long it takes. So, he continues until the sun goes down, and when it is ready to rise again, he will be too.



The mesmerizing lives of earthworms

Alex Thompson Y12

Earthworms are great! Earthworms are interesting! Is what a self-appointed earthwormologist would say about the beautiful, hairless pink monstrosities that they live to love. They would pronounce to the world in their inevitably grey lifeless wheezes, about the wonders that these worms perform for human society. About the graceful way that they suck in dirt, secrete mucus, then ooze their processed food out via pores along their sides. They might impress upon you the angelic way that they contract, shrink, contort, then extend, using many an unshaven bristle in order pull themselves along. Squidging and squelching their way along their very own tunnel of food.

Upon meeting one of these curious individuals, you might stop their droning for just long enough to ask the one thing that you are interested in. "Hey, is it true that if you split a worm in half, the two halves will grow into individual worms?". And these greyed-out personalities will look deep into your eyes, squinting their own behind thick half-rimmed lenses. They will stare at you as if you were the only ape in a world of humans, and say: "no", shaking you to your very bones and deeper, into your soul, leaving a scar never to be healed.

From this moment on, just the thought of those hideously pink tubes will bring back those feelings of self-doubt, embarrassment, and like a thick layer of cold, grey-ish gravy over everything: boredom and disgust.

You will go through school, avoiding biology, skipping those classes as they have started to teach about the natural, beautiful cycles of dirt: cultivation through to irrigation, and rejuvenation, all done by the least natural looking of all animals and their amazing operations, functions, and systems. You will miss the start of the "DNA & other biological structures" module, and so, the bulk of the content. You will have to do catch up during English and Maths as you have no other time. The writing portfolio is

due in a week. You are 4 weeks behind. You stare down at the equations lying on your desk, and your mind is blank. The rest of the class has been working on them for half a term, and now your teacher wants to move on to Trig.

You have two choices at this point;

Give up and fail about a third of your standards and almost undoubtedly fail NCEA this year. Thus meaning, that you will need to get those credits next year, and you won't even be considered by any university. You will hang out with your friends, most likely bringing them down with you. Transporting and distributing substances will become your only income. You will get caught, tried, and prosecuted. Sent to prison. Five years later, you will get out, having been disowned and disinherited. With your friends gone, and no life or academic skills to get you back on your feet, there will be nowhere to go apart from substances and smokes to keep you going. You will develop a breathing problem from the cigars, and the substances you've been taking have affected your eyesight considerably. You steal some glasses from an old senile librarian, but you still can't do any more than squint.

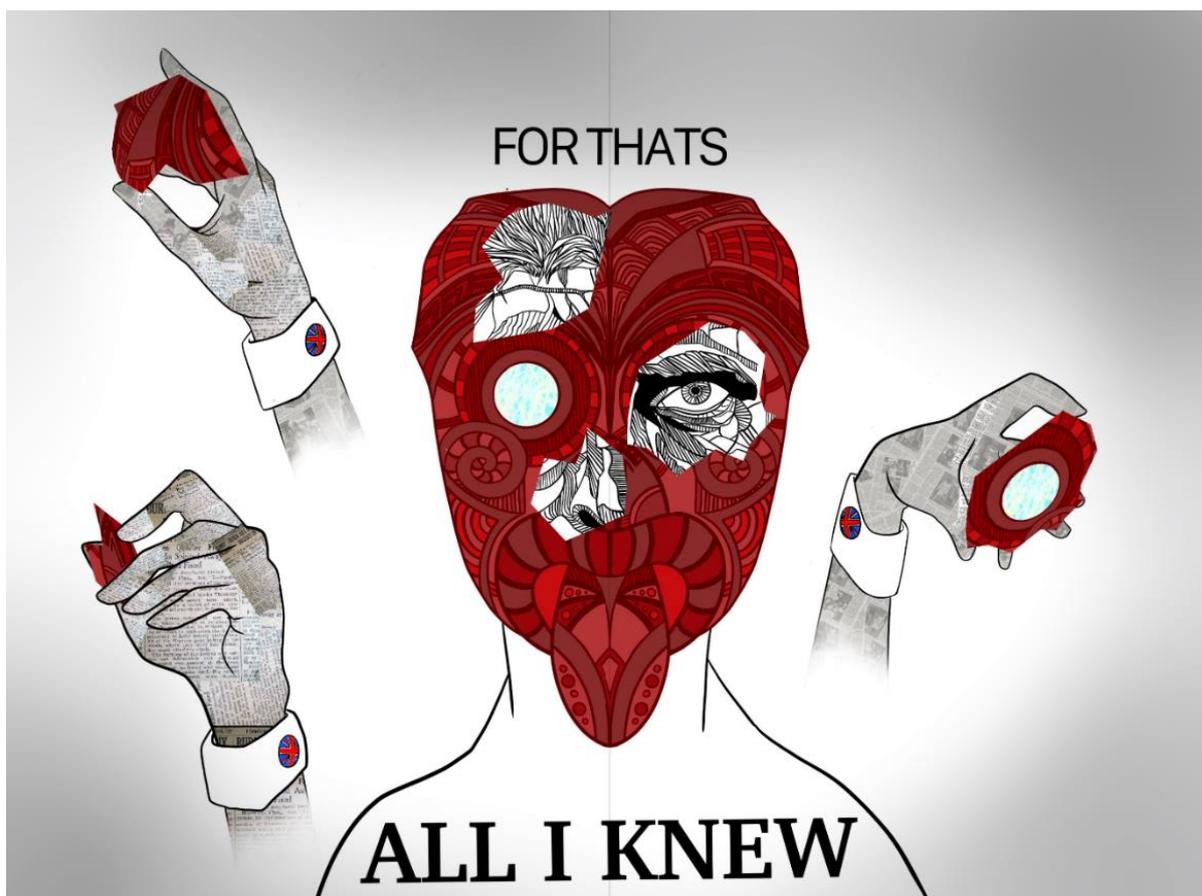
You have two choices at this
point

Alternatively, you could spend your morning teas and lunchtimes with your teachers, you would fill up your afterschool and weekend timetable with catchup work and tutors. At the end of the year, you would get an Excellence endorsement in almost everything. You would stop meeting/hanging out with friends, drifting away and isolating yourself from them. The entire school would see you as someone to avoid, throwing you looks, making jokes, and laughing about your intelligence. "Look at him, imagine needing all those tutors", they would say. Not even behind your back. This will wake something up inside you, something feral and something you will embrace and cling to, as your fortress of

solace. You will begin to despise your school mates, to despise all humans. And so, you turn your back on them and focus everything you have, everything you possibly can, on learning. You will get your doctorate, your master's, and your bachelor's degree. You would get a great job or invent something revolutionary, ultimately becoming rich, and famous, but never liked. You buy thick glasses to make yourself look smart. They hurt your eyes so much that you get half rims, so that you can look over the top of them. But you still have to squint looking through them. You take pills for sleep, sustenance, and happiness. You rely on them so much that you end up overdosing, causing permanent damage to your throat, creating a constant raspy wheeze that just doesn't leave.

After everything has happened, in your 50's, you discover teaching, as a way of making your

knowledge useful. You wish to help children grow up to lead fun, interesting lives. You want them never to have to go through the same things you went through as a child. You hook on to teaching, you divert all your energy and time into it so that you don't need to think about the loneliness of your home life. The only thing that is holding your torrent of anxiety and depression at bay is the wish to teach and pass on your now worthless (to you) knowledge. No schools need math teachers or social sciences teachers. You want to be different, so as to really stand out in students' minds. Stand out so you can help them and they will remember your advice. So you, squinting through your thick half-rimmed spectacles, with your wheezy small voice, and your dull depression-ridden brain, find the perfect thing that you want to teach. It's not sad, not happy, but the mesmerizingly ordinary lives of earthworms



Isabel Quinn Y11

Autopsy

Stirling Hart Y12

Warning: this piece includes graphic descriptions of using a scalpel and death.

“So, what’s the deal with this one?”

“Female, late twenties.” She sighs deeply before continuing. “Overdose on a new drug of some sort for treating infection, but foul play is possible. No sympathy from anyone involved here huh?”

I can hear her shoulder click for a moment as she stretches back away from her desk, brushing against the faded “Wash Your Hands!” poster behind her on the wall.

“If you want to air some grievances that badly you think you could just stab someone, nicely cut and dry.”

“Christ Anna, that’s awful,” I reply, not able to fully remove the slight smile from my voice.

“Well, hopefully we can wrap this up quick. I pity the people who run a graveyard shift like this as a usual thing.”

My footsteps click on the cold linoleum as I duck back into my operating theatre, and in the centre of this cluttered room the table stands. On it the blue sheet with the unmistakable impression of a person beneath it. A sombre sight, but not unfamiliar. I start whistling to myself as I prepare, but not long after I hear whirring from the other room, accompanied by some mutterings involving “cacophony” and “no respect for the dead”. Immediately the intro to *Don’t Fear the Reaper* is recognisable, and I have to admit; she’s got taste.

Heading over to the cadaver, I pull down the sheet and begin. She’s bathed in the cold glow of strip lighting, further accentuating the slight tinge of blue to the skin. Small cracks mark her lips, her closed eyes sunken slightly. A seemingly

peaceful rest. Tilting her head to the side, her muscles don’t give much resistance. My brow furrows.

“Hey, what was the time of death exactly?” I call out.

“15 or so hours ago according to the report.”

Strange indeed. The emergency services must be getting horribly lax at keeping their corpses at a nice cold temperature, rigor mortis lessening so soon. I guess all the more reason to get her back in the fridge quick. I continue a more hurried initial check; no bruising or cuts, no points of injection, no asphyxiation... probably a heart attack at this point.

Access to the heart’s limited, so, check the stomach for traces of other things she may have taken, then liver for prior substance abuse? Sounds like a plan. Fetching a scalpel, I take a deep breath. I carefully watch my hand still, and press the scalpel into the skin.

“Hey, what was the time of death exactly?”

The clock ticks. Tauntingly, as it’s been ticking every second for 15 luckless minutes. Each cut only finds more questions. Low concentration of plasma in her blood, no other drugs in her system, not like any case I’ve worked before. Stepping away for a moment, the water splashes loudly off the edge of the blade and into the sink. It collects a pinkish colour as it swirls now into the drain, hypnotic almost, and I pause to watch it all wash down. As the last of it disappears, the tap creaks closed and I stifle a yawn. Peeking out of a drawer a sheaf of papers tempts me. Autopsy reports. The clock ticks one more time and the thought of writing “Inconclusive, foul play undetermined” seeds in my mind, the thought of crawling into bed. For an instant it wins me over.



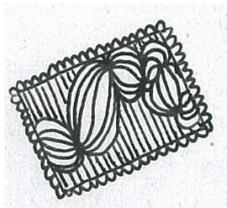
But as I go to grab the sutures... my hand hovers. The pathologist in me is still curious. It wouldn't hurt to go do some of the preliminary stuff I skipped.

I check the tongue, dry as expected. Not opiate. Take a tissue sample for later, a few swift cuts. Then finally the eyes. Pulling back the eyelid from the eyes. Something about the eyes. They glisten, in the pupils my reflection stares back at me. I'm silhouetted against the halo of the overhead light, but my expression is just barely noticeable; a stare of dawning horror? That's strange. Pulling the lids back down, I'm left pondering what that could mean, for a time I can't quite seem to gauge.

I drag my feet a little as I turn, heading back to my notes. To reassess.

Curious. How the reflection expanded outwards as her pupils, ever so gradually, dilated.

A nausea bubbles up from the pit of my stomach, as my legs begin to buckle beneath me. My train of thought veers uncontrollably, twisting and winding as it pulls inevitably closer to the truth. Each breath I draw seems harder than the last and the room leans in around me, far too cramped. The signs were there, but I was too... tired? Negligent? I couldn't have known.



Signs of some kind of barely perceptible hibernation. That that woman is still alive.

The clock ticks on the wall. A countdown. I recall taking my Hippocratic Oath, in this instance seeming almost funny to me. The scalpel on the bench next to me. The woman bleeding out on my table. Anna behind a single door, the police in suspicion, their gazes boring knowingly into my back. A cold has encroached in here, lending an uncontrollable shiver from head to toe.

There is just one more thing I need to do before closing shop. For the sake of the patient. For her.

I find myself back standing above her, equipment in hand. My vision slides off her and I attempt in vain to swallow, before I press the scalpel into her neck.

Scribbles on a page, written by a shaky hand. Far too shaky for a surgeon, a watcher would think.

Final Autopsy Report

Date of birth: 3rd August 1949

Autopsy No./ ME09-81

Date of death: 14th May 1978

Manner of Death: Accident

Cause of Death: Overdose from self-medicated drugs, not allergenic.

No foul play suspected.



Rooms

Max Connolly Y12

He blundered into the room. Looking down at his feet, his steps were heavy. Filtered light, dim, flickered in the dusty air. He rubbed his eyes and opened a microwave, banging it open on his second attempt. He tossed in a frozen burrito from his fridge, slumping on the kitchen counter after

closing the microwave. He could smell his own breath, and his shirt reeked of stale beer. He waited, listening to the hum of the microwave permeating the sickly silence. Another noise came through the air, a sharp rapping on the door. He shuffled towards the sound, his head rocking on his shoulders as he slid the chain off and opened it, bent over and bleary. The next

thing he saw was hands, slamming towards him and his thoughts fading to nothing.

Darkness filled this room. Not black, but shadows hiding on the edges of the room, surrounding his vision. He felt hard metal beneath him, and a strong, sour smell. He rubbed his face and sat up, looking through the gloom of the bars in front of him. His wrists ached from metal, which had been there a while. Remnants of pain echoed throughout his body from the day before. He picked through the recesses of his mind, trying to find an answer to his predicament. Pulling his arms towards him, he could feel the weakness in his body. Wetness flowed over his face, from his eyes and nose. He hated how dirty he felt, the gross floor and room disgusting him. He tried to shrink away from the floor, pulling himself up. But dizziness struck him, and he slowly fell to the floor, stumbling back into sleep.

He was woken by the aching of his feet, dragging unevenly along a grey corridor. A man he couldn't see held his wrists, the metal cuffs digging in and cutting into him. He tried to get his bearings, his head and vision foggy, but as the dark clad men marched him down the hallway, he couldn't make out his surroundings. This time, the lights he saw were loud, blaring into his eyes, his legs wouldn't cooperate as they bumped along the hallway, his head and senses still muted as he was dragged to the back of a van. Daylight screamed into his face, his eyes squinting shut as the overwhelming sunlight streamed through his face and attacked him. A man stood over him as he slumped against the side of the van, peering down at him with a disgusted look. The man placed his foot down onto his chest, slowly crushing him into the bumper. He got closer, and spoke. "Do you know what you've done?" The slumped man didn't respond, his brain not comprehending, his mouth closed and his eyes too painful to open

"Do you know what you've done?"

The other man angrily grabbed him, pulling him up and forcefully grinning. "Doesn't matter now. You killed him". The man paused, looking like he was going to continue speaking, but instead brought his knee up and smashed it into the ribs of the slumped man, before passing him to his cronies. Then, the metal floor accepted him as he was lifted into the back of the dusty van. An earthy, metallic smell entered his nose as his face was pressed into the floor, and his eyes were finally opened by the startling crash of the doors slamming shut behind him. His ribs and body ached, pain flowing through his body as sleep came to him again.

The last room he was taken to was black. He was awake now, sober, lucid. But he had no senses, no sound came from any place in the room. His eyelids were open, he could feel harsh cold air in his eyes and an icy floor under his hands. He slowly stood up, blood rushing to his head and shapes flowing through his vision. He spread his arms out, feeling nothing on his hands, nothing around him except shadow and that cold, unwelcoming floor. This room was for him, he knew. And he did not know whether he would ever escape alive.



A ballad

Kate Hemsley Y12

His eyes are on me the second my foot hits the threshold of the ballroom. He's here, lurking in the shadows somewhere. My insides twist because I know he is eyeing me up. Scanning me. Assessing the threat so subtly and silently, you wouldn't notice at first. I cast a delicate eye around the assembly as the band strikes up a ballad. The finest nobility in all the land gathered at this tedious ball to celebrate the "Life of the King", it seems slightly premature to celebrate the life of someone still breathing. Karma shouldn't allow this. Unsurprisingly, the King's court are decked out in all their finery. Ball gowns swish around the ladies' feet, as they turn to take in the sight of the court's newest arrival. Three seconds and I've already made an impression. Intricate patterns, designs, and shapes grace the women's bodies. Every dress fights to take center stage, and I'm not underdressed. The ocean blue of my gown fans out broadly around my feet, shimmering in the dappled light of the chandeliers. It falls gently off my shoulders, exposing my collarbone and anyone paying attention can see the soft necklace resting at my neck. I know I look stunning. Innocent, beautiful, inviting. Just how I want it. I want them to be caught off guard. To not see through my facade. I want to look like just another woman attending just another ball. Yet, almost as soon as they've arrived, the watching heads turn away from me and back to one another. No doubt whispering about how glorious I look.

My legs carry me elegantly into the throng of people in the magnificent room. The ballroom is bright as day. Every detail of the frescoes on the ceiling is visible, every complicated golden sculpture entwining the stone pillars is sparkling, reflecting off the twinkling chandeliers that swing from the arches on the roof. The art scattering the walls of the room tells our stories. Narrating

the legends of our country and our Kings. An orchestra along the left is playing the gorgeous rendition of the old ballad I don't know but recognize easily.

I ease my way through the royal crowd, small talk bouncing like a bee hunting for pollen. All the usual gossip of who eloped with who, who's captured the eye of the prince, who got wound up in the recent scandal. Meandering through the gossip, my ear is absent-mindedly listening for the only important piece of information the evening has to offer,

"Who's the handsome stranger brooding in the corner?" I know every girl in the ballroom has forgotten the prince, now they've laid eyes on him. I know his gaze is still trained on me.

After years of hunting, searching,
and prowling, I've found him, yet
I know deep down that he's
found me.

After politely meeting the eye of Lords, Dukes, Counts and whichever other rich bastards are here tonight, my eyes slip to the far corner. There he is, watching me. He's dangerous, but I refuse to give him the satisfaction of seeing my worry. No, absolutely not. I stay cool, calm and collected, only offering a subtle nod in return for his attention. Flirty, mocking, and threatening. Before I can turn away, he moves, and not the direction I'd hoped for. He's coming for me. My breathing becomes jagged, each irregular breath catching before it can surface. I've got this. If he gets too close, he isn't going home tonight. I steel myself slightly, refusing to drop his challenging gaze as he makes his way through the crowd. No less than three girls swoon dramatically as he's crossing their path. He merely steps over the swooning beauties, his face cold as they crash to the ground in a way less elegant state than their well-practiced faint. Their weak minds wouldn't

be able to handle him anyway. It feels like an age as he walks, commanding attention without even batting an eyelid. As the orchestra reaches the final chorus of the mysterious ballad, he materializes. I hadn't realized exactly how near he was; his presence gives me a fright, but my face refuses to betray my worry. Here he is, tall, neat and still ridiculously handsome. My enemy. After years of hunting, searching, and prowling, I've

found him, yet I know deep down that he's found me. His head leans to one side, offering a villainous smile. My sinister eyebrow is the only recognition he gets before I avert my eyes once more. Waves of anger are radiating from him. Good. He has no idea just how well he's foiled my plans, so the longer I can keep him busy with his own emotions the better. Now all I have to do is get rid of him.



Timeless

Zoe Allen Y12

There were many things that ought to have killed Gabriel Green.

He should have died during that sailing holiday in 1998. It was supposed to be a magical trip spent touring Europe by yacht with a group of tightly knit friends, where not one of them was mature enough to be doing such a thing, until they cruised into a violent storm. Then it was supposed to have been an unbelievable, deeply tragic death story for distant relatives to weep over. Maybe something to brand as a warning to their careless children when in need of a lesson. Yet by some scrap of a miracle, (mostly a lot of screaming, clinging to each other and sheer, dumb luck), they made it through the crushing darkness and howling gales to simple blue skies and land on the horizon. It's an exhilarating tale, but there was no doubt that dying because no one checked the weather forecast would have been embarrassing.

Then there was also that time he was hospitalised for pneumonia and shouldn't have lived. His lungs were never hugely resilient, so it shocked everyone to their core when his body fought the battle and won. The whole ordeal nearly gave everyone else their own health problems too when the doctors discovered that his lungs were miraculously healthier than before. But what can

he say? He's a people pleaser and evidently, he has an affinity for magic.

Gabriel had survived other things he shouldn't have as well, such as a great white shark attack in 2000 when he went to Australia. He was surfing at the Gold Coast when the toothy, rubbery, beady-eyed beast tried to take a chunk out of his torso. The scar it left was epic. The memory was admittedly less so. But it remained a wonderful conversation starter, and also something to keep him wary. His mum told him he needed the reminder.

Overall that trip was quite memorable, all things considered because two weeks before the attack, Gabriel was bitten by a Coastal Taipan. He was still haunted by the snake's slitted black eyes, the menacing look that froze Gabriel's insides before it lashed at him, fangs dripping in poison. It was probably one of his more traumatising experiences.

But it was only marginally worse than that one time his sister had charged after him with a knife in hand, chasing him around the house for a treacherous four and a half minutes before blessed parent intervention. Granted, he was only 4 and she was just 6, but it was absolutely horrifying and he'd never felt so close to death.

After all the harrowing events he had lived through, all the times he had thought he would live to see another day, Gabriel had finally learnt

how to hold his head high. If deadly animals or the brunt of mother nature couldn't wipe him off the earth, something even bigger would have to kill him, right? It had become obvious dying wasn't going to be an option for him, at least for a while.

So, it's fair to say that he hadn't started out scared. But then the world started turning a little bit too fast. He sat idle on the sidelines as more and more people that surrounded him inched closer to their end. It was clear everyone was going to have something that would take them out. Something that would kill them, for lack of better words. This was certain because, unlike Gabriel, they had not fought off death, even when it had them tight in its clutches. They had not survived the impossible, five times over.

The fear only started as a passing thought. It was when he started to grow older, his health remaining absolute and his mind young as ever, that the notion began to stew. He watched himself turn 50, then 53, then 58. Gabriel had tirelessly been batting the thought away all those years. It made sense that at some point, he would have to crack. It was unfortunate that the day before his 60th birthday was when he did. Gabriel had woken up to the chilling sound of his phone ringing from the other room. It was an unusual noise; no one ever called him. The ringing was muffled, creeping underneath his door and splitting the thick silence of the house. He dragged himself from his bed to find the phone and hold it to his ear.

It wasn't his mother – she was dead. It couldn't have been his father either, as he also died a while ago. And it wasn't his sister, because the person on the line was now informing him that she too, had passed away. Last night. At the hands of *pneumonia*.

It had become obvious dying wasn't going to be an option for him, at least for a while.

They were talking carefully, softly, laying down the news like it was a delicate wedding veil at risk of tearing. Each word was a bullet shot into his skull. After a moment, they stopped speaking, clearly awaiting a response. He should have said something. He should have grieved. Cried. Screamed until his voice was hoarse and his lungs were heaving. Instead, Gabriel placed the phone on the counter so gently, so purposefully, that it scarcely made a sound. Footsteps soft against the floor, he found his way to the bathroom mirror. He'd lost his sister. Everyone, *everyone*, was leaving him here. Gabriel could not fight off the thought any longer. The fear was bubbling, churning, spitting like fire. In the reflection, his face was leached of colour. His hands began to shake. His heart started to race.

Gabriel desperately tried to make reason. Because it was not possible. It could not be. The miracles of his past were just a fluke, an overdose of good luck. They had to have been. And he'd believed it was luck again that made him healthier than the rest his age, kept his bones strong, his mind young, his skin smooth...

But what if it was true?

Everyone around him was dying... but what if he couldn't?



The unexpected arrivals

Anuha Som Y12

I open the door to see her standing there. She holds no suitcases nor belongings, it's just her. Silver jewels lurking amongst her pristine locks. And her piercing blue eyes, followed by a reel of blurred memories.

It's been a while since mom has come here, all the way to dad's. A long, long while. Her face is slowly becoming less and less familiar. Our eyes fail to meet, as she avoids direct confrontation.

Before I can say anything, she gently moves past me, walking straight to dad's bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

...Hey mom, nice to see you too. And uh careful with that door, the hinges are still as old as the house.

I could go back to what I was doing, but... I really can't help myself. And with the medley of curiosity and confusion, it all urges me to follow her, down the hall, to dad's bedroom. I crouch down by the corner of the door, pressing my ear against the slab of wood.

"Meg--"

"Hi, Wren. I'm not here for long, but I need to talk. The school keeps blowing me up."

"Uh -- the school?"

"Yes Wren, you'd have no idea now, would you?"

...The school? Now would you look at that, guess I have to stay now. Pfft, eavesdropping. What has my life come down to? Not like there's anything better to do anyway.

"Wren, is Luca happy? Does he sleep? Does he eat? Ever? --- Wren?! What about school? His Grades? Have you met his teachers? Homework? -- What about his attendance?"

...Well... Kind of? Not really. Depends. Hmmm. Woah mom you're going too fast. Um, I don't really go. Crap. Dad didn't say anything, so neither did I. Pointless; don't do it. Not very high.

"You have no idea... do you, Wren?"

...How would he? Ask him about the alcohol percentage in his drinks, I'm sure he'd be able to answer that. Ha ha, kidding... not really though. Although, I never expected mom to turn up like this and start spitting out questions left, right and centre. Almost like a good old judge in a wig, almost... not quite though--- you get the idea.

"Is he Wren? Or are you playing a classic, only seeing what you want, pretending that everything is good, that he is okay. Just like you did with us. Tell me. When you were his age, how were you? Wren!" ---

...My goodness! Give the old man a chance to speak. He's a bit of a slow one.

"I know you had no choice, no guidance, no support, or anyone who loved or cared for you. You had to be happy." ---

"You're pushing it, Meg. Don't."

...Wait huh? What was dad's life like when he was younger? He's lived in this house for like forever now. Ma met him when they were in college... they did the whole wedding thing and she moved in.

...I did know grandma was completely out of the picture from the start, woman one day woke up and chose disappearance... But pops... wait... I actually don't even remember the last time I heard anything about him, since he packed his bags and legit left a while ago, fully abandoning us.

...Slowly starting to see a theme of abandonment in this family. A gnarly situation I've been cooked up in.

"But don't go ignoring him Wren, don't just avoid his feelings. He doesn't deserve to experience and live the same dysfunctional childhood, you went through."

...I am taken far back, all the way to Australia, at the silence that follows. Dad says zilch. Nada. See Spanish did pay off for something. Anyway, how can someone just sit there through being attacked? Instinct would be to channel an inner hyena, right? Dad seems to be

channelling his inner, bloody... goldfish. And... I am okay... aren't I?

...How did mom know and why does she care? She left us. She left me. She started a new life, far away from here. She can't come back thinking she knows everything, knows all about Dad because she doesn't. He's miserable, I even know that. And me?

"I know Wren, and I truly feel for you. However, just because you went through a fu --- flawed childhood doesn't give you the right to disregard and hide from Luca and his feelings."

...Hide? Pfft. At least he's here, and um sorry where are you? Wait, I actually don't even know. You just left. Point blank. After that one day, I heard screams and cries, you just took off like a bloody crow. Leaving dad and me behind, all alone.

"He is only a boy, only 16. He is still a child. Our child, Wren. When will you start seeing the importance of raising him here?"

...Our child? I think not. 'Our' means both, shared, together, family. You didn't meet the 'our' expectation. The word 'our' holds significance mom, however, doesn't seem to match the situation very well, now does it.

"You left. Just like my good ol' man did."

"Wren, I---. I can't do anything; Daniel wants nothing to do with him."

"Mm."

...And Daniel? Oh yes, the man dad was grouching about that night. But just because he doesn't want me, why does it make you feel the same? Anyway, no point questioning the questioner now. Don't want anything to do with you or the stuck-up prick you're with. So, leave while you still can.

I go to haul myself off the floor, poor knees suffering the tragedy of getting impaled by the bloody grains of the wood. But before I can...

"I know. I know I have failed my job as a mother and raise him like I had been taught to. But remember Wren when he came into this world unexpectedly." ---

...UNEXPECTEDLY?!

"...You promised me two things – to never ever let go of me and that you would give our child the life they deserved. You broke the first one, long ago. You gave up the world for the bottle, choosing the bottle over me, over the family. Do you really want to break the second one as well? When he is under this roof, he is your responsibility, Wren. I can't do anything when he's half the country away from me. Please, Wren, say something for God's sake!"

*...Help me? You don't know anything about me, or dad, or the lives we live now. You could have helped instead, you walked away. You could have worked things out with dad, he loved you. You God damn well knew that. You chose to leave the old man, helpless, only to drink his sb*t away. You started a new life, saying you needed space, dad wasn't 'emotionally available,' enough for you now, was he? I'm sure Daniel's money is buying you all the time and happiness in the world. Go stick with what you've built and leave what you've destroyed.*

A million pieces fell right through me; I felt my heart break; shatter.

Dramatic yes, I know.

"Fine. You just sit there silently, murmuring God knows what for the rest of your life. But I am sending him away. I am sick and tired of the endless train of absence emails and phone calls. If you can't be his parent and take responsibility, neither can I. This is the best and only option at this point."

...A million pieces fell right through me; I felt my heart break; shatter. Dramatic yes, I know. You try and stay all bloody solemn when you've just found out that you're just a mistake, an accident and that you're now being sent away, cause the two people who're meant to love you the most in the world, decide they can't anymore. I knew it was true. I could see it coming. Just didn't expect her to utter those very words. I'm trying to keep it together, to hold everything in, but once you've just found out that - 1. your whole life was a lie and 2. that your parents can't

bear the responsibility to have you anymore, there's really nothing left... to hold.

“Mammoth Falls Boarding House. Once he's 18, he'll be.” ---

...I couldn't stop myself...

“I will be what? Tell me, straight to my face, without beating around the bush. Tell me!”

Dad turns to face me, jaw drops.

“Luca... wh.” ---

Mom's silhouette against the window.

“Wow, so nice to see you again ma. Oh, and I am great, thank you for asking, but pfft, the parents you are. 16 years and this is where it ends aye? Disowning your own child. Am I an embarrassment? A problem? A mistake?... An accident?”

...I was hoping for one of them to interrupt me, stop me, tell me I wasn't. But the silence carried.

“You were right mom. I'm not okay. Dad can't show that he cares and you hah, gave up on everything. And now this? No talking? Nothing? ---. Well, thanks.

You've both taught me a lot. Provided real-life examples of parents, stooping to the lowest of lows – a level, I vow to never ever reach with my kids. Hah, me thinking about kids. Pfft. Imagine. Only because I never ever want to be caught red-handed repeating the same mistakes you both made raising me. You screwed my life, tangled me up in a good old gordian knot. Thanks. Thanks a lot.”

I turn away, before letting the anger get the best of me.

“Oh, and don't ever, I repeat ever, repeat the 'love you forever,' bull to ANYONE else. Just don't.”





Nikki Harris Y11

Man and machine

Artem Maksimov Y12

A distant speck disturbs the inky blackness. It slowly grows into a point, then a dot, a small pinprick of light. It grows and grows until a star becomes clearly visible, radiating its dazzling blue rays into the surrounding darkness. Computers begin to buzz with excitement as they signal the ship to prepare for its long-awaited arrival. After 50 years of silently cruising through the vast interstellar void at a quarter of the speed of light, complex mechanisms and machines rumble to life. Colossal sections of metal begin to shift and shudder as if awoken from a deep sleep. Six giant trusses extend from the ship's enormous hull and a golden sheet begins to unfurl and expand into a massive sail. The ship lurches and groans as the solar sail is bombarded by intense solar rays, slowing the immense vessel.

Countless automated instruments
carefully prepare the human
bodies for re-animation

As the ship's velocity continues to fall, the computer arrays direct their attention to six small pods within which six brave astronauts lay frozen, wating patiently to be awakened, as if hibernating through a long winter. Countless automated instruments carefully prepare the human bodies for re-animation, complex chemicals are pumped into their hearts and brains with unparalleled precision, better than any human surgeon ever could, kickstarting their circulatory and nervous systems. One by one the travellers open their eyes and breath for the first time in years. Through the first ever interstellar ship, Helios' small portholes they see their destination floating noiselessly outside; its thick, mysterious purple atmosphere flows like a liquid, filled with complex swirls and patterns. A vast ring system wraps around the planet, twice as big

as Saturn's. It reflects the star's light and scatters it through space like a brilliant gemstone.

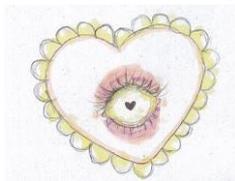
As the crew make their way through the twisting passages of Helios, an overwhelming sense of dread anguishes them from within. Their stomachs are filled with butterflies. Even after thousands of simulations and years of training, the mammoth task before them is terrifying. In order to reach the habitable inner atmosphere of their new home, a turbulent descent through 80km of violent atmospheric soup is unavoidable. The crew know that one false move, a minute error, could result in their bodies being turned into charred pancakes, smeared on the soil of an alien planet. Failure would be an injustice to the decades of effort and support spent on their mission. The preparation for this journey had been a global feat which had united humanity on the rapidly deteriorating earth in accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of becoming an interstellar civilisation. Colonising this distant, alien planet had become not just a matter of exploration, but a precaution to ensure that even when earth is permanently damaged, human civilisation would persevere off-world. With such monolithic stakes, success is imperative.

The overbearing anxiety is briefly interrupted by the sight of the very craft which would be responsible for keeping them safe during the violent plunge into chaos. Securely berthed to Helios is a machine like no other, the first of its kind, a mechanical falcon, eagerly waiting to cut through the murky purple haze. From nose to tail the spaceplane is crammed with technological miracles. Its underside is covered in layers of black, heat absorbing sheets to shield the squishy astronauts inside from the searing heat of re-entry, giving it the appearance of an orca with a dark belly contrasting with its pristine white fuselage. The cockpit and nose converge to a sharp point, capable of piercing through the

thickest, densest atmosphere. Two giant triangular swept wings protrude from the cylindrical body, their sharp, knife-like leading edges ready to withstand thousands of degrees of re-entry heating. With a wingspan of 50m and long arrays of powerful engines, the lander makes airliners look like children's toys.

The group finally reach the bulkhead which separates Helios and the lander. The thick metal door begins to slowly swing open, leaving the astronauts to once again contemplate the crucial task before them. One final circular door swings out of their way and the crew enter the cockpit. The interior is almost perfectly smooth with no openings or windows. No physical buttons or levers protrude from the chamber's jet-black walls and only six small panels of switches and joysticks are visible. The pilot and co-pilot squeeze into the two front command chairs, each individually moulded to perfectly accommodate the occupant's body. The other four crewmembers also strap themselves in and prepare for departure.

With a few flicked switches and pushed buttons, the cockpit comes to life. Instantly, the smooth, black, seamless surfaces light up. The nearly indiscernible screens covering the entire interior switch on. As a replacement for fragile and easily damaged windows, the spaceplane's exterior is fitted with dozens of small cameras, all broadcasting their view of the outside world to the hundreds of screens lining the cockpit. To the crew, it looks like the ship around them has disappeared, giving them an unobstructed, perfect view of their surroundings. The two pilots turn to the screens displaying the ship's controls and readouts of its various systems. After some more button pressing, the crew hear a loud thunk, indicating that the lander has detached from Helios. Hundreds of tiny thrusters on the spaceplane's exterior begin to hiss, gently propelling the lander away from Helios. The crew are truly alone. The grand



mothership which had protected them during the long journey sinks away into the distance. They are now just sardines crammed together in the tiny cockpit, yet the feeling of safety remains. Knowing how much time and effort had been spent on ensuring the machine would protect them fills the nervous crew with confidence.

The crew are truly alone.

The pilots activate the craft's autopilot and initiate the deorbit procedure. They are suddenly jerked back into their seats as the lander's engines ignite, slowing the spaceplane down so that it begins to descend lower and lower. Eventually the autopilot signals that the craft is about to begin atmospheric entry. The crew try to enjoy these last few moments of peace, before the serene and tranquil coast through vacuum comes to an end. The signs of chaos are unnoticeable at first, any air particles the ship's wings encounter are harmlessly deflected. But as the spaceplane descends, its graceful wings are bombarded more and more. The bumps grow into bounces, then to shudders. The astronauts are violently shaken in their seats. Through the screens around them they see that the empty black of space has given way to the blinding purple atmosphere, contrasting with the harsh oranges and reds of plasma formed from the immense heat of re-entry. Intense vibrations threaten to shake the craft apart. Despite this, the machine persists, and the descent continues. Slowly but surely its altitude falls.

A quiet buzz emanates from the ship's computer. Unnoticeable at first, it blends in with the turbulence and commotion. It gets louder and louder until the crew notice something is wrong. External sensors have spotted an atmospheric abnormality along their flight path, an unusual surge of air, unaccounted for in simulations. Confused, the pilots reach for their screens to examine the error. In a split second their perception of the world is eradicated. Up and down are fused into one in a gut-wrenching spin

as the craft begins to tumble. The chaos outside has spread into the cockpit, alarms blare and countless warnings fill the interior with an amber glow.

The autopilot fails and the pilots take control. Despite their efforts, nothing can be done to stabilise their tumble. The crew stare at their instruments, horrified as altitude continues to rapidly fall. 9000m, 8000m, 7000m. 'This is the end', they think, 'we've failed, we've let down our entire species', 'without another home, humankind will suffer on our dying planet'. 5000m, 4000m, 3000m, a few more seconds and their decades long mission would come to a sudden, unforeseen end. 2800m, 2600m, 2400m. The ship is jolted upwards, their vision turns blurry. Everything fades to black. All six crew members lose consciousness.

Silence. No, a subtle, rhythmic hiss, waxing and waning like an ocean swell.

Silence. No, a subtle, rhythmic hiss, waxing and waning like an ocean swell. The crew wake up. The chaos and commotion are gone without a trace. Their ship is still intact. Blaring alarms and amber warnings have ceased, all that is left is the gentle throb of engines, easily mistaken for the soft ebb and flow of an incoming tide. Even when the pilots failed to regain control, the autopilot had continued its attempts. Through sheer determination it managed to stabilise the lander, igniting its powerful engines as a desperate attempt to slow the craft down. It kept

the humans inside safe even when they had given up, exactly what it was designed to do.

Relief washes over the battered crew. Above them looms the thick layer of purple fog, full of violent storms and winds which had so nearly caused their demise. But here, in this thin, 2km high pocket of tranquil, pleasant, and breathable air they would be safe. Would the six explorers still be alive without the machine which had so strenuously carried them through the turmoil above? Had their human worries and doubts been unjust? To doubt the machine is to doubt the thousands who contributed to its construction. While the crew had been ready to give up, their fragile bodies unable to withstand the immense forces, the mechanical falcon had persevered. The automated lander worked hard, determined to save its delicate passengers. Ultimately the machine had succeeded where humans had failed.

The engines fade to a mutter and the spaceplane resumes its glide. Slowly and gracefully, it sinks lower and lower, gently guiding itself down a perfect flight path. At 100m above the terrain, its engines roar to life once again and the craft slows to a crawl. Its talon like landing legs extend as the spaceplane gently lowers itself onto the soft topsoil. The engines are shut off. Now the silence is absolute, only six faint yet frantic beating hearts remain, still recovering from their near tragedy and thankful for their reliable craft. The first six inhabitants of Novae Terra prepare to step foot on alien soil. The hatch swings open. The colonists remove their helmets, inhaling the warm air of their new home.



Sacred grounds

Meadow Bush Y12

“Hello and welcome to our humble little coffee shop! Come in, take a look around. I doubt you’ve seen anything like it before. Now now, no need to be scared. Step right inside.

. . . What *are* you holding?

Iron?! Really my dear, you ought to know better. We’ve been used to *iron* for quite some time now. Try something with a little more kick next time. No hard feelings, of course. I know our little corner of the woods can be a little overwhelming the first time. Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it

I wouldn’t accept the free samples if I was you. Fae food is dangerous if you don’t give anything in return, you know. Yes, they do smell delicious. We’ve had a long time to perfect the recipe.

Don’t let yourself get overwhelmed by the patrons. It helps if you look away from the shifting glammers of the faeries, the only constant the predatory smiles on their lips. Focus instead on the werewolves, who could almost pass as normal if it wasn’t for the bleeding raw meat on their plates. The vampires, smiles cold and still as the grave, coffee a strange reddish brown. The dryads, merged slightly into the wooden tables as they sip from bamboo cups.

Notice the shy woman at the counter (don’t mind the teeth, she’s very nice). She’s got a job interview today. Her drink contains a shot of liquid courage, gold and glittering. She takes a sip with a smile and walks away head held a little higher. Such a great thing, our coffees.

Lucy over there is sweet on a customer – see them drawing love spells in the foam on his hot chocolate. He’s a selkie, sealskin coat held tightly under his arm. Just in case. Not that Lucy would ever dream of such a thing, of course. All’s fair in love and war but this is the shadows, and we all know what it is to lose your place.

A busker stands in the far corner. (There’s no room for her on the street, not anymore.) The heavens themselves stand still before the beauty of her voice, while the shop runs on unmoved. Busy times, busy times. Give her a coin if you like, so long as you don’t listen to her song for too long. You may never want to go back.

Now then, you must give me your name. No? Ahh, you know what you’re doing. Very well, what *may I call you?*

Don’t let yourself get overwhelmed by the patrons.

Good enough, I suppose. Business is good, the taking’s less and less these days. We must change with the times. Changing, always changing . . .

Oh dear, I am getting old. Please do forgive my rambling. What can I get you?

Honestly child, I’ve told you already. Fae food is dangerous *if you don’t offer anything in return*. Don’t run out before paying and you won’t have any issue, I promise. Not that you’d dream of such a thing, I’m sure.

I can’t lie you know. Lost that particular skill some time ago on account of a bet gone wrong. So you can trust what I say. I’d be a little more careful with some of the others though. But of course, you seem to know the rules well enough.

Why, of course I could be lying about my inability to lie! Life would be so boring if it were certain. But I’m sure you’d love to find out. It would make such a good story. Assuming you leave in one piece.

Joking dear, *joking*. But you really must tell me what to get you.”



Dear Amelia,

Miles Manning Y12

It's been six years since we last spoke. I had known you so long and it ended so abruptly. I'll always be sorry for the things I did and said to you next to the lone elm stump, I was cruel and unkind, and I was confused. All the things I blamed you for and put on your shoulders, it was unfair. There are reasons, although no justifications, for what I said, I was so angry and confused about other things and about you. That year my mind had folded over itself so many times as I tried to figure out what was going on in myself that I couldn't tell heads from tails. Or love from hatred, I suppose. I still find myself thinking about you, wanting to talk to you.

I thought of you when I saw a keychain in a shop five years ago, it was that Shakespeare line you would always quote to me. I had just stopped being angry at you and when I saw it I felt like I had been punched in the gut. "Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast," you would say to me. I was always too eager and foolhardy, rushing ahead before I should have. Always running from something. It used to upset me, hearing you say that. I wasn't going too fast, you were simply lagging and should quicken your pace. Now I wish I would have heard you say it again, one more time, but it's far too late now. I did buy the keychain, it helps me remember to slow down and take notice of the people around me.

"Wisely and slow; they stumble
that run fast"

I thought of you again when I kissed that boy down by the foxglove patch at the edge of the woods half a year before I let go of my anger. There was a long time I wasn't sure why. I thought that maybe I wished I could have told you and we could've celebrated together. You would have been happy for me and we would've talked for hours, as we once did when you first

kissed your boy. I was so stupid. The boy did not fulfil my desires, not that a person has to do that, but the expectations we had for each other were so skewed, my interest in a relationship with him extended no further than appearance. I believe he wished for more from me but as The Bard once said, "nothing will come of nothing," and I had very little investment in the relationship. It is because of that I thought of you. The boy stayed by my side a while but there were many times I wished you stood with me instead.

I have thought of you so many times since that day by the elm stump. When I finally understood what I was feeling I wanted to tell you, more than anyone, Amelia. But it was far, far too late, I hadn't seen you in months and we hadn't spoken in even longer. On the hill by the elm stump between you and the amaryllis, as the rain started to fall, I said things to you that I wouldn't say to my greatest enemy. For months and years, I stewed and thought over the things I told you. I can never regret it enough. I miss the days when the stump was a tree, and we would sit, and you'd tell stories. I would complain about your love of the great works, too young and stupid to enjoy the way the words on the page would light up your face. You were brighter than the sun, moon and all the stars in the sky. When I snapped at you on a bad day, "You speak an infinite deal of nothing." using your own words against you, some of your light faded. I could never bring myself to apologize.

I have found people again who love me, who care about me as you did. It's better, in a way. You always had other people, I only had you and my pride. The friends I have made since I last saw you taught me the kindness you always held so close to your chest. They taught me how to let go of things, that when you remove the leash, the dog won't always run away. From myself, I learnt the value of anger. Oh, in the night, alone, it can bring you heat and light to follow but, in the day,

when there is light and warmth in abundance and you hold it tight, you will only ever burn your hands. You were a sun to me, with your warmth and light, so when my anger hurt me, you had to be at fault. I loved you, I think. Far more than I should have, but we were children, and I didn't understand what love felt like. I will always miss

you, miss what you meant to me, miss who you were. The girl beneath the branches of a tree long since felled.

Maybe I'll think about you forever. Maybe this will help, though I'll never send it.

I wish you the best.



They herd us onto the train

JJ Elwood Y12

They herd us onto the train like animals, shepherding us with their guns, forcing us into those cramped, lifeless carriages. If I wasn't on the brink of death, I might've almost found the situation funny, seeing as they're the ones who are pigs. They scream at us in what I can tell is German - not that that fact makes it any more comprehensible to me. A gunshot and a scream ring out above the noise of the crowd, causing a small moment of silence and a pause before they continue their work. There's no escape now. We're all going to die.

There must be almost a hundred of us in my carriage alone. There are no seats, no room, no food, no light. We are standing almost crushing each other, shoulder to shoulder, faces almost touching. The sounds of screams, crying, and people nearly coughing their lungs out echo throughout the night. They claw at the walls as they wallow in their own filth. It's horrifying to see what these people have become. They've been reduced to animals, stripped of their humanity. The wind howls outside the single barred window on the train, rattling the entire carriage and freezing me to my core. In all honesty I'm not sure I'll survive the trip, or even if I want to if it'll continue like this.

The train grinds to a stop. The wheels screech against the rusty tracks, although it's an awful noise it's a welcome break from the sounds from the inside. We have been travelling for a day now, we must be getting close. Could this be our final

destination? A small clump of people that somehow have enough strength to stand crowd around the carriage's window to try catch a glimpse of what's outside. Without the freezing wind rushing through from outside the cold feels much more bearable. I hear people exiting the train just in front of us and I expect our doors to open any minute, but it never happens. We end up just stopping for an hour or two before we continue on our way.

We're on to the fourth day of the journey now. The nights have been long and arduous, and the days not much better. Corpses line the carriage walls. Be it from the intense cold, dehydration, or injuries, somewhere along the line they dropped. Just another body for the pile. It's not like *they* give a s**t about what happens to us. We're not even human to them. It's like that little gold star on our shoulders changes our very essence. Like a sign that says, "I AM INFERIOR", in bold, sparkling letters for all the world to see. It's bulls**t.

We arrive at dawn. The sunrise is insultingly beautiful, it's almost mocking us, like it's spitting in our faces. How can such beauty be somewhere so terrifying? They throw open the doors and the sunlight spills in. It's the first chance I get to properly see the state of the carriage, and I can't say it's nice. About 100 people are collapsed, unmoving on the floor, but it's hard to tell who's dead from who's about to be. The walls and floor are stained with puke and faeces. The smell of that, combined with the reek of bodies already

starting to decompose, has resulted in the most awful thing I've ever smelled. Like a mix between a septic tank and rotting meat, just ten times as bad. The soldiers who open the doors bark orders at us in German, and those who could slowly start to file out of the carriage.

We arrive at dawn. The sunrise is insultingly beautiful.

The camp looms before us. Behind us barbed wire fences stretch for miles in either direction with no end in sight. We are forced into a line as the soldiers jab at us with their guns. They start to work systematically through the group, sending each person to one side or another. An

officer stands in front of me, takes one look at me, and throws me to the left. I fall to the mud, which seeps through my already tattered clothing, sapping what little heat I have left. I wearily take to my feet and look around. The crowd of people I've been sorted into are in a particularly sorry state. Their eyes sunken and shoulders drooping. A shout blares out behind us and we start to stumble in the direction of what appears to be a block of showers. Staying on my feet is becoming increasingly more difficult as time goes on. I just want to crawl up in a ball and close my eyes; let my exhaustion wash over me. But hey, I survived the journey, surely the worst is behind me.



Tait Keller Y11

Tui

Tyler Rowe Y13

"Oi, Tui! You getting in or what?" Called out Jonah from the other side.

"Ay? Shuddup man, I'm stretching," I hesitate. I'm not actually stretching, just buying whatever time I can get.

"What? You too scared or something?" He calls again. He's laughing now.

"*Dickhead*" I mutter under my breath not-loud-enough-for-him-to-hear. I never liked Jonah, he's always been like that. Just a bloody show pony.

"Hey wait on, you haven't even gotten in yet!" I yell back a little too late because I couldn't think of something witty enough to say sooner.

"Yea coz I'm waiting for you, man!"

Bloody liar. I don't really care though, as far as I know, I've won that argument.

I've always hated heights. I only came here to make Jonah and his mates think I'm cool and they aren't even here! Here I am. Scared s**tless. Standing on top of some random cliff next to some random lake in a random place. Trying to impress some random people who aren't even here. And I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to fake-stretch for. Feels like I've already been doing this for a good 15 minutes.

So I stand up again. This time a lot looser. Jonah looks impatient. He's waiting for something to happen. Waiting for me to do something. He yells out again, something along the lines of "hurry up you egg", either that or he called me a pussy. I stopped listening to him a while ago. Despite my stretching, my legs are aching. I tentatively peer over the edge and the ground drops away from my feet as I nearly lose my balance. Imagine that. The toothpicks I stand on start to shake again. There's no more stretching I can do for that. The witty persona I earlier tried to adorn has been well washed off now.

I crane my neck back to Jonah's embankment. It's Jonah's mates. They're all there.

"Waaaayyy! How's old mate Greenie doing!?" I hear one of them call at me. I'm not answering. I can't.

I only came here to make Jonah
and his mates think I'm cool and
they aren't even here!

"We've been waiting all day to see you mate!" Another one yells. They erupt in laughter. I know it's sarcasm, I'm not stupid. All of his mates are pricks. Most of them are at least like two or three years older than him anyway. I'm surprised they even hang out with him. Well, at least I can say I'm not the runt of the group, unlike Jonah. It's always been that way. Always living in the shadow of someone. Must be hard. I almost feel bad for him. I don't, but I almost do.

See it wasn't always like this with him. He seemed cool. You know how it is with new schools and all that, trying to find someone you can look up to. And for some reason, I saw Jonah as my person for that. He obviously didn't see me in that same way. He stole my lunch for the whole first week. Everyday. And then got his dickhead mates to do it for the next week. A few times I tried to hide from them or even leave my lunch at home to see if it would help. Nope. Not a chance. They'd still find me and find a way to take something. Funny thing about all of it is I let them do it. I let it happen. I thought if I did what they wanted, that they'd think I'm cool. Well that was stupid. Look at me now. I'm trying to impress them. Again. What happened to me?

I look away from them and bring my eyes back to the ledge. The ground pulls away from me. Gives me that vertigo feeling. They're all watching me. Intently. Like a bunch of hawks looking for their next meal. There's no turning back now. This is real. They start chanting my

name now, not my real name of course, just Greenie over and over, trying to egg me on or something. Jonah for the first time in his life looks concerned.

Back to the ledge, adrenaline fills my veins as I set my feet. I hear chanting in the background but my vision is focused forward. My breathing shallows and my heartrate soars. I steady, and let out one last breath...

I jump.

The vertigo feeling comes back and it fills my body, this time though it's not bad. Makes me feel free. Weightless. Like I'm flying. I spread my arms like wings as if I could fly and for a split second it feels that way.

I open my eyes and reality comes flooding back in. My vision starts to blur from the vertigo and tunnel vision sets in as my focus is fixed downwards towards the choppy deep blue of the waterfall. It comes closer and closer with every

moment. I flap my arms frantically to right myself but it's no use. I'm barrelling towards the surface. Head first.

The updraft stabs my eyes like knives with every gust, forcing them shut. I can't look and I don't want to. The surface arrives. I reach my arms out first to cushion my entrance as I pierce the water. Everything around me swirls and my spine crashes against the rough eroded floor. I let out an underwater cry as something sharp is driven into my back. The pain is unbearable. The water was shallower than I thought, until I try scrambling back to the surface. I'm in deep. I'm losing feeling in my legs and my arms get heavy. I can't do it. I let out my last cry for something, someone, anything...

Suddenly it's all still. Everything stops. The world around me goes silent. Peaceful. I gaze into the blurry sunlight, shimmering against the water's surface. I feel nothing. No pain. No emotion. No struggle. Everything just fades into darkness



Story 3

Del Huang, Shakeel Morar, Sean Mackiewicz and Min-Sung Jung Y13

Once upon a time, there was a house.

It was quiet, too quiet, not a squeak from a mouse.

Inside the house, a fireplace lay,

And in the fireplace, a bed of straw, and hay.

The bed belonged to a witch girl, wicked to the bone,

She had three cats, and a stepmom (to be) in her home,

She hated her stepmom, she was a clean freak,

Not only that, she also had quite a mean streak.

Whenever she asked if she could play outside,

Her stepmom would reply "Your time you must bide."

So she sat in her chimney, a sulk on her face,
She wanted to leave, find her own special place.

'Twas almost time, for a marvelous marriage.
The beautiful bride stepped out of the carriage
A stepdaughter to be, in a drought of despair
But alas, she could not dilute the love in the air.

The groom's love, snatched by the bride
her stepdaughters rage she could no longer hide
But they would not listen to her, being so young
All she could do was bite her miserable tongue.

After the wedding, among the gifts
Was something that slithered and stalked and hissed.
The father went to the pile with glee
The guests have left, "quickly to me".

The first gift he went to, shaped oddly like a cage.
The danger realized, with the witch's skill as a mage.

The wife and daughter hurried around
The father moved quietly giving up ground
The venomous snake, hidden in plain sight
Would end the father's life, quick with a fright

The stepmother held her breath, the moment was at hand.
Where she could off the father, the cost, a golden band
Soon to be hers, were riches untold,
Then she would live comfortably, until she grew old.

The witch faced a decision, which choice should she make?
Would she save her father, or let him fall to the snake?
She opened her mouth, ready to shout,
"Oh father, oh father, please, Watch out"

In the nick of time, she cast a spell,

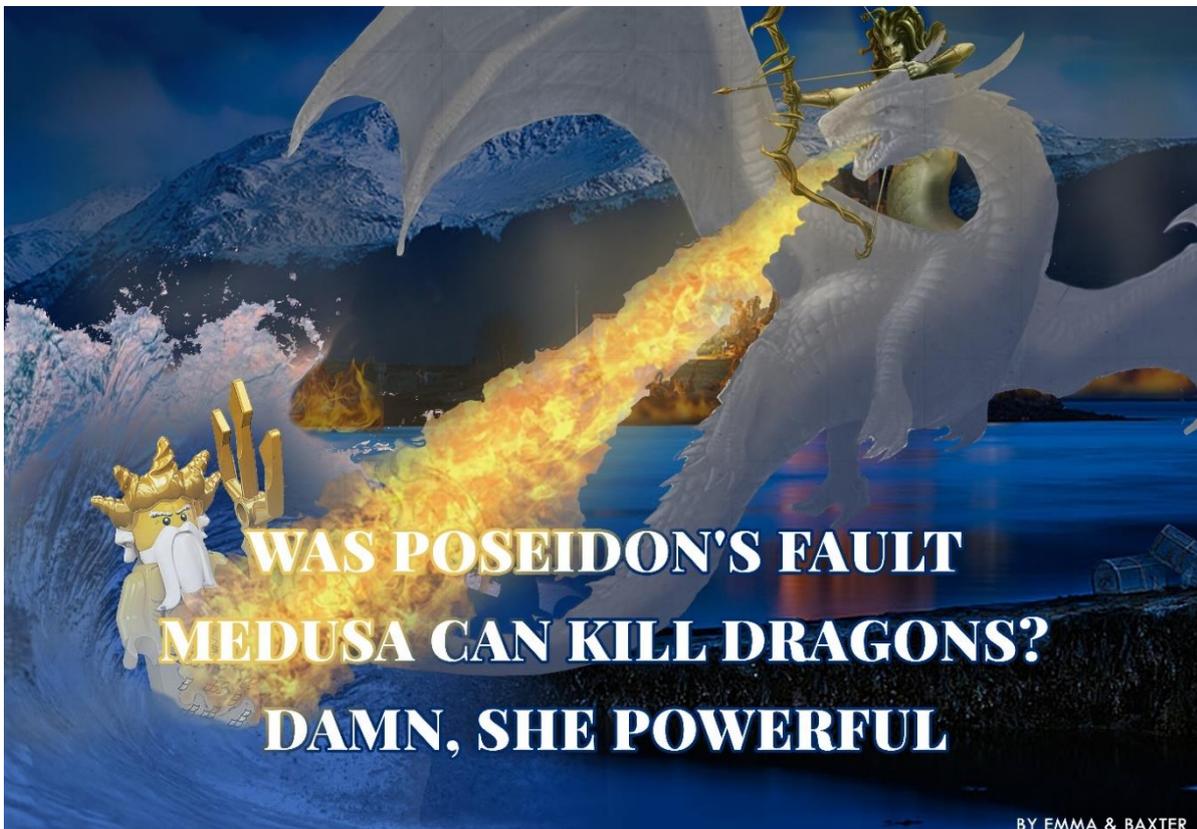
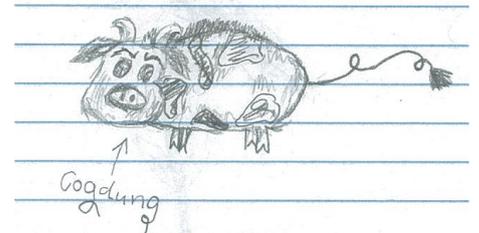


And turned the serpent into a bell

The father caught onto the rouse, looking at the cage,
Before he turned to his wife, with a gaze full of rage.
His wrath was furious and swift,
The marriage fell apart, quick with a rift.

Father and daughter would live happier than before,
Now that his marriage was right out the door,

He cast out his ex-wife, into the cold,
In the wilderness she would survive, if she were bold.
With nothing more than the old clothes on her back,
The woman would meet her end,
croaking with an “ack!”.



Emma Hardy and Baxter Alexander Y13

Snafu elusion

Jayden Everest Y13

“So, when did you start seeing these...

glitches in reality?”

“9 months,” I reply.

9 months, about when I had brought my first VR headset. At first, the pixelated and semi-blurry window was nothing more than a gimmick, intriguing but only that. However, as I continued to play, slowly my mind began to bridge these disparities between worlds. I had always loved adventure as a child, the thrill I would feel when I would come across something new, undiscovered till now.

However, as I matured, I grew to realize a fundamental fact about this world; nothing was unique to me. That dinosaur bone I discovered at six, an oddly shaped rock. The crystals, just pieces of glass smoothed by waves. Maybe that’s why a news article on Oculus, a cutting edge VR manufacturer, caught my eye. Maybe that’s what compelled me to click BUY NOW on their page or to then wait eagerly for it to arrive in the mail. The idea of an alternative world, filled with stories and journeys unique to me, seemed ethereal, almost too good to be true. At first, it was just that, a tool allowing me to explore new and undiscovered domains. I could venture into ancient temples, fight mythical beasts, or fly to places never before seen.

Then the *glitches* began.

At first, I would notice flaws in reality, like a sunset being duller than I remembered, or my day-to-day schooling feeling more *e x h a u s t i n g*. Funny, how I could remember all 400 items in an MMO video game, yet struggle to remember the first 5 elements of the periodic table. Eventually, it seeped into every facet of my life. I viewed interactions in Default as multiple-choice dialogue and study as obtuse grinding.

“Default?”

“I mean...

the real world.”

Soon, I started to hear static, akin to a radio without a channel, every once in a while. Whenever I heard this static, it felt like Default was just another world among many. That the sheets on my bed were just polygons, sickness just a negative debuff and death, only a momentary setback. It was as if the world, and my existence in it, was simply data.

I experienced Deja Vu constantly, as if Default was starting to lag behind me. Maybe it was my imagination, but it felt like I was listening to pre-recorded conversations, as if I had heard it all before. I began to note down dreams I had been having. One recurring dream was about a psychologist. I dreamed I was talking to him about these changes to myself.

“Can I see this note?”

I nod and give him the semi-tattered paper.

14/04/2022 - *Dream E*

Name: *The Psychologist Visit*

Note: *Had that dream again. I need to talk to someone about this.*

Transcript:

The curtains part as a dark silhouette approaches me, grasping a slip of paper while gently sitting down next to the IV drip.

“Hey, I’m Dr Turner. You wanted to chat about som...”

He pauses, panic flashes across his face as he further inspects the slip of paper.

Repositioning himself on the bedside chair, he continues, tone slower and more deliberate.

“So, when did you start seeing these, uh, glitches in reality.”

“9 Months,” I reply.

“Can you elaborate?”

I describe how escaping into VR seems to have distorted Default.

“Default?”

“I mean the real world.” He nods; I continue.

I begin to talk about my dream journal, specifically my note about the psychologist.

“Can I see this?” He requests, a hint of forced placidity in his voice.

I nod and give him the note.

After reading it, he sighs in frustration and glares at me.

I wake up.

After reading it, he sighs in frustration and glares at me.

“It appears you have found yet another bug in the tutorial,” the psychologist, or rather, the administrator states, voice monotone yet still

dejected. “Unfortunately, this means you must enter recovery mode. All remnants of this reality will now be reset. Keep calm.”

I stare at him, frozen, as the world around me fades into a bright blue. My body becomes heavier and a cold metallic surface presses against the back of my neck. I try to yell, but only a whisper emerges; “Wait.” Slowly, white symbols appear in front of me, contrasting against the all-encompassing blue. They read as follows:

:(

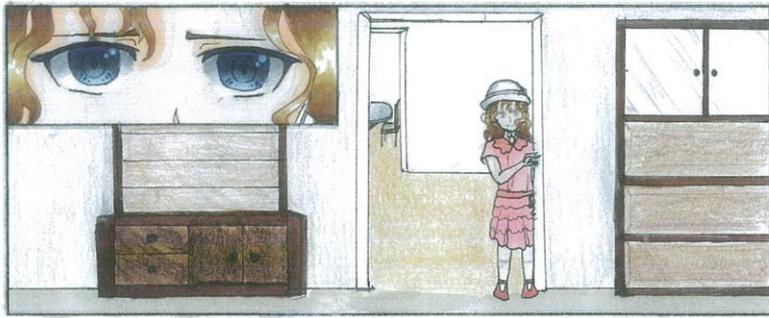
Your PC has ran into problems and needs to restart. We’re just collecting some error info, and then we’ll restart for you. (16% complete)

***If you’d like to know more, you can search online later for this error:
INHIBITOR_FAILED***

The percentage slowly rises until reaching 100%.

The world goes black





Come here girl
fatman
no take of
our bonnet



If I
say don't
wear your
bonnet inside
then don't
wear it
fatman

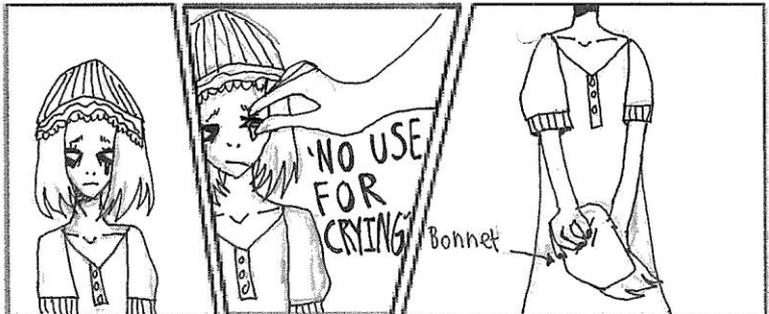
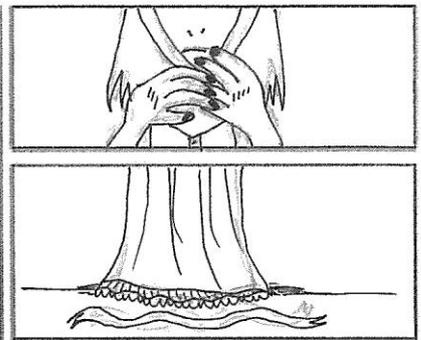


No use
crying
fatman

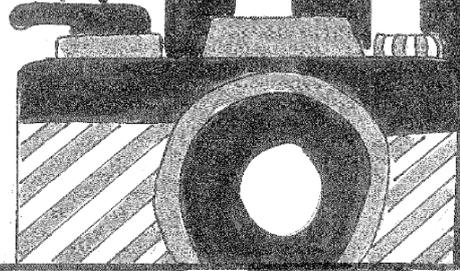
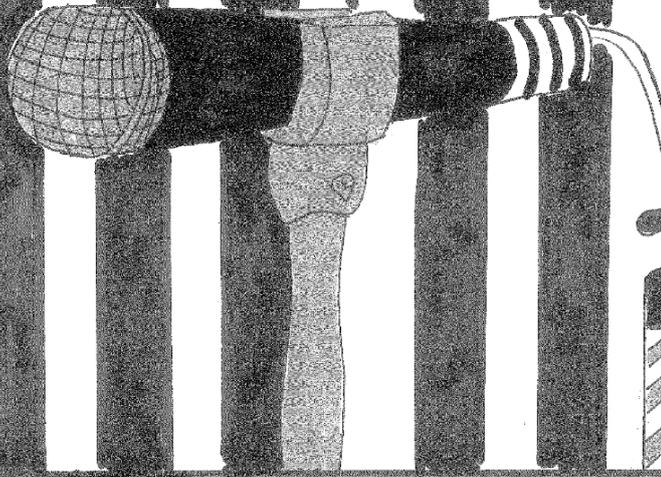
So take it off
fatman!

Good girl
fatman

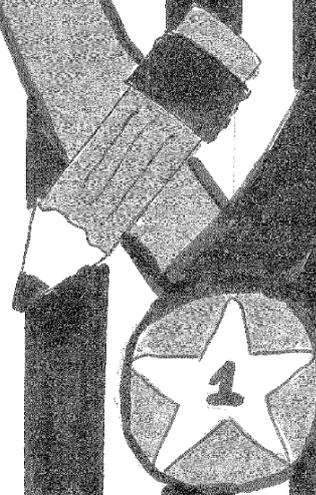
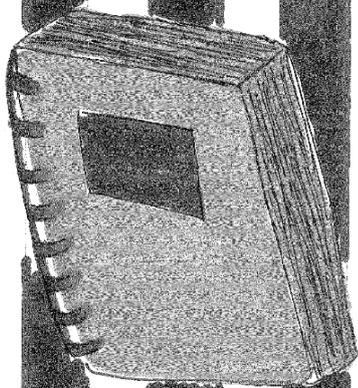
'So take it off'
Verna trembled but
obeyed.



Grandma Potter said
'Oh, the poor little
thing.'



FORMAL Writing



The power of pets

Manon Lavigne Y9

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains un-awakened.” ~ Anatole France

Have you ever come home after a long hard day at work in a really bad mood, just wanting the day to be over? Have you trudged up to the front door, scowling as you unlocked it, thinking there is no way the day could get better? As you walk through the door you see your beloved pet sitting there, looking up at you, waiting for you to acknowledge them. Then amidst all the frustration and annoyance of the day, you start to feel a warm feeling inside your chest, like the dark clouds clustering over you are clearing and you feel less stressed and even happy. This warm feeling of well-being is the result of a hormone called oxytocin.

Oxytocin has been called the “love hormone” or the “cuddle chemical”. This is because of its effect on the human body and its role in human bonding and relationships. Studies have shown that when people hug, fall in love and when mothers breastfeed their babies, higher amounts of oxytocin are present in the body. When oxytocin is released from a gland at the base of the brain, this hormone enters the bloodstream. This is how it can work on different parts of the body. Research shows that oxytocin has an effect on the heart to lower your heart rate and blood pressure and it works on the brain to slow the release of stress hormones like cortisol. This is why we feel relaxed when we give and receive hugs from people we care about. We see the same effect when we cuddle our pets. That warm feeling of comfort that makes us want to break out into a smile. There’s nothing quite like it.

Scientists have proven that just looking at your pet and making eye contact can cause higher levels of oxytocin to be released in your body, decreasing your stress and making you feel good.

Interestingly enough, this effect is mirrored in your pet, with their oxytocin levels going up as well. We know that interactions with our pet make them feel good too.

If you are stressed, anxious or have mental health problems, having a pet around can help you calm down, relax and feel connected. Caring for a pet and having them care about you can improve your mental state. Therapists and volunteers bring support animals to retirement homes to help calm the residents and make them feel more stable and relaxed. Support dogs are used in the same way for young people with disabilities, anger management struggles and those on the autism spectrum. This can be a life changing relationship for them. An Otago University Study published in 2015 showed that while more and more New Zealanders are being prescribed anti-depressants, there was no evidence that this was reducing suicide rates or improving mental health. I believe pets could be a safer, healthier choice for people facing mental health issues. They get the benefits of a healthy, calming connection for the price of pet food and with no additional side effects that have an impact on your health. In fact, if you have to walk your dog as well, you might even get fitter which is also good for improving your mental health.

Caring for a pet and having them care about you can improve your mental state.

Adults often see pets as a liability and just something else they have to take care of. They think there’s too much effort or mess involved, and they don’t have the time. But the truth is, animals almost always give back what you put into them. Yes, they do take some time and effort to look after and this can definitely cause an inconvenience to some people, but they can also save you a whole heap of time, money and energy. Animals can help us in our day-to-day

life. The chemical effects of oxytocin make us feel more secure. This leaves us time to focus on other important aspects of our lives, such as our jobs and family, rather than being stuck worrying. Instead of spending hours and hours stressing over an assignment that is due or a late project, you could sit down with your pet, have a cuddle and reset. Rather than spending hundreds of dollars on a therapy session or seeing a counsellor, you could spend time with your pet. When spending time with your pets you can just focus on feeling better without them judging or

questioning why you feel this way. They can help you work through hard things, and they always want to help you. To quote George Elliot, "Animals are such agreeable friends – they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms." Tell them your deepest secrets and fears and know you won't be judged. This is where the real power of pets lies. We know they make us feel loved, connected and reduce our stress on a chemical level. The power of pets is life changing and stress free but most importantly it brings happiness.



The debate around mātauranga Māori and scientific methods

Ted Henderson Y9

The British first came to Aotearoa in the 18th century. From then on, they began overhauling the country in more ways than just guns, death, and war. The colonisers came with the Christian religion and ideas. They believed these superior to mātauranga Māori. Up until this day the ideas of the Christian religion and now science have been held superior in the western world. Mātauranga is the Maori world view and knowledge, of the country we are gifted to be living in, Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Now, what is mātauranga Māori and science? Well, mātauranga Māori is widely known as just the knowledge of the Māori people, but it is more than that, it is also their values and cultural practices. However, science is understood to be the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of both the natural and social worlds by following an efficient methodology based on evidence. Basically, science deals with legitimate, undeniable facts. However, as said by an expert on the subject, "mātauranga Māori is metaphorical, spiritual, but physical all at the same time." So, while there may be parts of mātauranga that challenge with the western way of looking at the world, there are certainly other parts, such as the navigation of the early settlers

coming down from the Polynesian islands for example which replicate aspects of the scientific method.

"Mātauranga Māori is
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physical all at the same time."

Mātauranga Māori has been used in many positive ways over the years, of course, only when it suited the western world. Melanie Mark-Shadbolt an indigenous environmental sociologist, had this to say on the topic, "Existential issues have been enhanced and addressed through the application of indigenous knowledge, it's kind of mind-blowing that somebody, that anybody would say that indigenous knowledge and mātauranga Māori haven't featured in peer-reviewed publications or science publications, it just says to me that you haven't looked." Even recently mātauranga Māori has been used to combat issues such as climate change by their innate knowledge of healthy agriculture. Her focus is to use mātauranga in help of biodiversity but there are many other things that it can help us with. As mentioned in a Stuff article, flash floods in Matatā, 2005. This caused many homes to flood and be ruined but not one of the three marae in

the area were not even remotely affected. The Māori in the area say that a huge lizard lives in the river near the area and that this caused the floods and is also the reason for constructing the Marae where they have been put.

Some people believe that there are reasons to not incorporate Māori into science and the school curriculum. A letter from Auckland professors to the listener said that "Indigenous knowledge may indeed help advance scientific knowledge in some ways", to accept it as "equivalent to science is to patronize and fail indigenous populations". Meaning, they believe that mātauranga Māori and science aren't comparable and therefore shouldn't be brought into the same category. Now although this letter was about mātauranga, one of the authors said, "Our main purpose was not to explain mātauranga Māori, our main purpose was to complain about the fact that kids are being taught that science is colonizing and evil." Now according to this author, they didn't believe that they were explaining mātauranga but only expressing concern over the fact that this may lead to science being taught as colonizing

and evil. I mean he shouldn't need to be worried about this if science wasn't colonizing and evil but that's beside the point. So, they have no evidence or anything to prove mātauranga should not be incorporated into science, they just have personal agendas which say that it shouldn't.

A couple of quotes from professor Rangi Mātāmua really sum up the whole argument for me, "What's underpinning this whole argument is race, and I think there is a racial, political and social agenda by a group of people, who are spreading a little bit of fear the likes of oh my god these Māori are going to come into our classrooms and replace the periodic table with a karakia, they'll remove the Bunsen burner and put a haka in its place," and "When it's done from a western perspective it's scientific truth when it's an indigenous idea it's myths and legends." I believe that mātauranga Māori should certainly be incorporated into science because as the professor said, "there is no attack from indigenous people on science, on what we understand to be modern, western science."



Beauty standards + the way they are represented in art

Keara Glumcic-Wishart Y9

When beauty standards change, so does the way it is represented in art; proof of this can be shown in old and new pieces of artwork. Although we cannot 100% rely on art to show us the ideal person throughout different eras, it gives us a rough idea on what it may have been.

Looking through some different eras, we can see the differences on how Men and Women were portrayed. For example, in the ancient era, it was quite difficult to determine what facial features a person had as most of the art from back then was 2D and the person in subject would be facing sideways, therefore showing things like depth



was difficult to achieve, I gathered this evidence by looking at different ancient Greek artworks, such as "Victory of Theseus over the Minotaur in the presence of Athena"

We can see that in different eras where such things like the 'Black death' and the 'plague' were prominent. Take the Italian Renaissance for example, back then the women were drawn 'chubbier' than what would be depicted as 'average' in 2021. There may be two reasons to this though, it has been said that back then, signs of wealth and comfortable living would be seen in chubby women and men as they had enough money to spend on themselves.

When you look at art from modern day, you can see there is a lot more diversity amongst different pieces. Statistics show that in 2018, New Zealand has become more diverse over the years, with 1,271,775 people in NZ that have come from overseas. Although New Zealand cannot show

for the whole world, it is an improvement in general.

It is time we stop putting a label on what is beautiful, as it can change, will change and is changing very quickly, and that you are beautiful, and have been in every time period.



School dress codes should be banned

Sophia Nevard Y9

Dress codes. You either hate them or have not dealt with them. Me? I hate them. There are numerous reasons why I believe strict dress codes should not be allowed to be implemented and enforced in schools, but the grounds of greatest importance are as follows. Dress codes contribute to the enormous issue that is victim-blaming, they teach girls that they should be ashamed of their bodies and use appalling justifications for the whole thing such as paedophilia and possible harassment.

The first reason that I believe dress codes in schools should be banned is the culture of victim-blaming that accompanies it. While the dress code rules and regulations themselves are not especially awful, the thought behind them is. The idea that certain items of clothes are distracting to boys and therefore should not be worn, is laying blame on the female students at the school. Clothes shaming may not seem too awful at first but what many people do not think about is the close link between shaming someone for clothes that show skin and blaming what someone was wearing for what happened to them. By stating that girls being allowed to expose non-sexual body parts such as collar bones, shoulders, and legs, could cause their male classmates to lose control of themselves, schools are sending the message that girls are responsible for the actions of guys around them. This allows boys to not take responsibility for their own

actions and makes girls feel like they cannot speak out as they will be met with responses such as ‘what were you wearing’ or ‘it’s hard for them to control their actions.’ After all, why would anyone bother coming forward if they know that they will not be taken seriously and instead told that it is their fault? You may be wondering why I am so against stopping a problem at its source. To which I answer, I am not. Girls' clothing choices are not responsible for guys actions, they are. And until people can realise that we do not need any systems in place that assist the kind of backward thinking that leads to victim blaming.

Girls' clothing choices are not responsible for guys actions, they are.

If that is not reason enough, dress codes also teach girls that their bodies are things to be ashamed of. Telling young girls to hide their bodies for the sake of others, and then when it suits you want them to act in a way that you find attractive, is not only confusing but frustrating. By forcing girls to constantly be covering their bodies due to the idea that it is distracting, you are sexualising parts that are not usually considered sexual areas. This is not only sexist but can also feel incredibly degrading. In addition to this, most dress codes are extremely biased in favour of the male student population. Many school dress codes are almost entirely made up of rules surrounding what the girls wear and even though there are some basic guidelines for the

boys to follow, if they do not abide by them the punishment is far less severe and is often completely ignored. In telling girls that it is only important that they keep their bodies hidden away, you are making them feel that they cannot be female and by association cannot be themselves. Because if you are female, you are seen as a sexual object. No one should ever have to feel like that they are a distraction and that they must dress modestly to be deserving of respect. Having harmful and incorrect messages like these constantly drilled into your head can have some negative repercussions on mental health and education such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and inability to focus on classwork due to overthinking what you are wearing. Until dress codes are either heavily amended or abolished, girls are going to continue to grow up thinking it is not okay to be female.

Lastly, dress codes have been known to normalise paedophilic and inappropriate behaviour. Though this is not an underlying theme in all school dress codes, some have been created and upheld not only for male students but also for the sake of male staff and administration. Just this year, there was a case of this happening in a school in New Zealand. A year 13 girl called Lauren Hardie got sent home from Wellington Girls' College for wearing a tank top to school, after being told by a staff member



that 'It put male teachers in a vulnerable position.' Once the school realised their mistake, they sent an apology round to students and their families saying that it never should have happened. Notwithstanding the fact that they apologised, the reasoning for the girl being sent home shines a light on how normalised male teachers feeling uncomfortable or being distracted by female students is. If grown men cannot control themselves and their thoughts around young girls, then perhaps they should not be in a job that requires them to be around kids. The lack of self-control and apparent distorted view of the correspondence between clothing and paying basic respect towards people is a huge issue. Male students (and teachers,) should be taught to respect not just girls but all other classmates, regardless of what they are wearing. Whether they are showing some skin or dressing modestly, no matter the clothes, and no matter the reason behind them, everyone is deserving of a bare minimum of respectful and humane treatment.

Overall, any policy that promotes victim-blaming, wrecks self-confidence and is justified by, among other things, possible paedophilic and inappropriate behaviour is not there to help the kids in the present. It is there to preserve the societal norms of the past.



New Zealand's architecture is boring

Fintan Sinclair Y9

If you judged New Zealanders by their architecture, you would assume that they were beige, basic and boring. 252 years of the Modern Age and we're still creating the same square buildings of the 18th century. Compared to other countries, New Zealand architecture is like a bowl of brown rice, where all the grains are the same. As well as that, the importance of interesting architecture is so key to New

Zealand's economy and tourism industry, that we rely on it without even knowing. Also, we don't use the distinctive cultural architecture of Aotearoa that is a major part of what makes us Kiwis. New Zealand architecture is boring and needs to be changed.

Many old and new Aotearoa buildings are boring. Plain grey slabbed concrete prisms and high walls of glass surround most major cities in NZ, and on a cold winter day they look even more

depressing than ever. An example close to home would be the Intercontinental. Compare the Intercontinental, a 5-star hotel which is arguably the best hotel in Wellington and supposedly one of the more architecturally interesting buildings, to the Burj Al Arab, the Dubai equivalent. On one side you've got a large simple bronze prism, and on the other a beautiful sail-shaped building on the edge of a beautifully architecturally designed city, you can really see the difference. If you search up "Dubai's Most Interesting Buildings" it comes up with the most unique buildings in the world, whereas images of "Wellington's Most Interesting Buildings" are embarrassing. Sure, there is history in these buildings, but where are the unique awe-inspiring structures? Where is the building that attracts millions of tourists a year just to look at? You wouldn't see a plain concrete and glass building that could've been made by a five-year-old in Dubai would you? You're probably thinking "But Dubai has so much more money!" Creativity doesn't come down to just money. In fact, you can have a lot of money and still be uncreative. Creativity is about having a rich imagination. For example, there were more creative options for the museum Te Papa than the one that was selected. Frank Gehry, a worldwide known architect who designed the Guggenheim in Bilbao, was one of the many rejected participants in the challenge to design Te Papa. Not only that, but he also didn't even make the top 5 cut. The aftermath of the Guggenheim Bilbao has allowed the Spanish city to build a new airport terminal, a new public transport system of trams and rapid transit, a major culture and leisure centre and two massive projects for urban renewal. And why you may ask, did the New Zealand Government not choose this design? They came out to say that "the winners took the politically correct road in its obvious features to represent the New Zealand story." In other words, the politicians involved liked that idea because it was cheap and ordinary so none of the others matter. Te Papa is a huge building, nearly four times the size of the

Sydney Opera House, and instead of something as magnificent as the billowing sails that make up the Sydney Opera House, we got a shapeless muddle. So, do you think we chose correctly?

Another key reason why New Zealand's architecture is boring and needs to change is the importance of interesting architecture in the community. When you're going to work for an average of 40 hours a week, you want to be working in a building that you can be proud of. Are you going to be proud of 4 grey, bleak tall walls and a roof? Visualize that. No imagination involved, no interesting designs, just 4 grey walls and a roof. Not that appealing, is it? Studies have shown that boring, concrete landscapes and unimaginative buildings with no attractiveness cause higher levels of stress among communities around them. Beautiful architecture designed correctly and uniquely helps humans to feel more relaxed, happy and engaged. Using that information, I believe that New Zealand is in a bad situation, and it needs to be changed.

Are you going to be proud of 4
grey, bleak tall walls and a roof?

Citizens should feel proud of the surrounding architecture, thus creating a happier and stronger community. Right now, you're probably thinking "Where is the money going to come from to redesign our country?" Well, the importance of having interesting buildings is that it also helps to advertise the country. Interesting buildings invite tourists and tourists generate money for more interesting buildings: this creates an infinite cycle which urges and encourages visitors to enter a space of significance and awe. Architecture creates a culture and interesting buildings create a more extravagant and intricate culture that profits from itself. In addition to that, tourism is a significant part of the New Zealand economy: it is one of the country's biggest money-making industries, making up over 20% of all export revenue. Imagine how much that number would

grow if New Zealand was filled with amazing, stunning architecture. Interesting architecture equals a stronger economy, and a stronger economy equals more interesting architecture. Picture this: you drive into Wellington, and you look around and you realise that you're surrounded by the most unique and amazing buildings in the world, combined with a strong and blooming economy that doesn't need to rely on basic foods for its major income. Then imagine the same scene but as you drive into Wellington you're surrounded by its bleak boring buildings, and an economy that relies on commodities like milk, fish and meat, and then you think "Oh wait, this is just Wellington right now." So which scene is better? Which one jumps out to you? Which one would you want?

Architecture is a way of
expressing cultural diversity

Architecture is a way of expressing cultural diversity and Aotearoa has a unique culture that should be shared with the world. The architecture of New Zealand is mainly influenced by the classic European styles that were introduced by Captain Cook and the settlers, whereas Māori designs are barely used. Culture is such a main part of what makes us New Zealanders, but it is hardly used in the architecture around us. If New Zealand wants to have interesting architecture, it needs to involve our distinctive culture. We have overlooked the fact that culture is so important to us, as well as the importance of good architecture, which means we have also overlooked the combined mixture of both: cultural architecture. You could state that Māori culture is so big and is everywhere; you're wrong because only in the last couple of decades have, we made an effort to try and bring Māori culture into our lives and that includes into architecture. Architecture is about flow and form and how you feel in the building, which are as important as its looks. Most modern buildings in the Pacific Islands are inspired by

and based on their older historic buildings. Imagine how you would feel if you walked into your workplace and you felt at home, like you were in your right place, your whare. How much more productive would you be if you felt more comfortable and more secure than before? More than 70% of people would rather work at home than at an office. That's 7 in 10 people! Having happy workers is key to a good working area. You could retort by saying you wouldn't do as much work in a workplace that feels like home, but studies have shown that productivity at home is 47% more than in a cramped office setting. On top of that, home workers work one more day a week and they spend 10 more minutes per day being productive. New Zealand has so much interesting cultural architecture that could be revived to create a modern country that still represents its culture. What, you might be thinking, would be an example of this? Well, an example would be having the structure or the design of a marae as a modern building. Wouldn't you want to work in something like that? I definitely would. Think how much productivity would happen if you combined the feeling of working at home with the strengths of working with other people. The result would be phenomenal and that's why our architecture needs to change for the good of New Zealand culture.

252 years of the Modern age and we're still creating boring square buildings. New Zealand's boring architecture needs to be changed because, compared to other countries, New Zealand architecture is just plain dull, plus the importance of interesting architecture is key to New Zealand's economy and tourism industry. We aren't using the distinctive cultural architecture of Aotearoa which is a major part of what makes us who we are. New Zealand architecture is boring and needs to be changed. So, what's it going to be New Zealand, Guggenheim or Gruesome-Heim?

Gulliver's Travels: Reading log entry

Leith Worden Y9

Summarise the main events of the novel.

The novel is a summary of the travels of the narrator as he is stranded in some entirely new worlds. It follows the narrator as he is met with new cultures and societies of various sizes. In the beginning of each part the narrator washes ashore on an island and is greeted by the locals. In the first two parts the locals are both of different sizes in relation to the narrator, of towering stature and extremely small, respectively. In the first two parts he is first revered, then accepted as a part of life, then finally maliciously used for the gains of the cultures that he finds. In the final two parts he is used for the academic use and entertainment of the species that he finds.

What makes this a 'classic' novel that people continue to enjoy?

I find it amazing that there is most likely a great number of ancient books that could be considered a classic that have been lost to the sweep of time but ever vigilant is the satire. If one makes people laugh or even so much as makes a light-hearted take on a serious issue, one will always be remembered. Satire, sophistication and ideas are what makes a classic, and Gulliver's Travels is no exception.

I believe that the reason that it is considered a classic is simply the lessons taught about how we can learn from other cultures while also delivering an insightful message on the human condition. Gulliver's Travels shows how people

can manipulate others to achieve their own goals before quickly throwing them out when those goals are achieved.

The novel shows the greed of those in power when they gain something that they can use to their own motives, often forgetting the aspect of humanity and making people of other cultures slaves over petty debates or to own more land.

Another thing that is brought up primarily in the third part of the novel is the amount that some spend in their own thoughts. The creatures in the third part spend most of the time in their own head and often are unable to grasp the world around them. They pursue ideals and goals that have little practical use and I believe that the same can be said about humanity as a whole.

The fourth part gives a cruel twist to show how humans enslave other people and animals for their own goals with instead horses enslaving a twisted, greedy fallen form of the human race. It ends up showing the worst of humanity as well as how senseless slavery is.

Another way that this book has held up so well to the test of time is how beautifully sophisticated the style of writing is. It is so formal but is filled with interesting little tidbits and humour that it manages to set the scene and tone perfectly and introduce the reader to the time period regardless of when they read it.

"Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own."

Jonathan Swift.



Māori blood quantification

Lizzie Evans Y11

How Māori do you have to be to be considered Māori? Well, the government used to try and tell us that 50 percent Māori blood was the legal requirement to be considered as a Māori. They used blood quantification which is the idea that race is defined by percentage of blood. Blood quantification is a terrible idea as it is based on outdated ideas of race, it causes insecurity and disconnection from culture and it is not a stranger's right to tell you your whakapapa.

Firstly, blood quantification is based on outdated ideas of race. Featherston street in Wellington is named after a Victorian man called Isaac Featherston who said that they need to 'smooth down the dying people of the Māori race.' Victorians believed humans could be divided into biological races and that some races were superior to others however this proposed a problem for them. How would they categorise someone by race if they came from a mixed background. In Nazi Germany, a person with either 3 or 4 Jewish grandparents was considered a Jew. As we have seen New Zealand governments adopted a terribly similar test for Māori using the '50 percent test'. To me it appears that these ideas of race superiority and dividing races have continued being developed today including in New Zealand. People still have the subconscious belief that white people are the superior race because of the morals that have been passed down through generations. It is clear that blood quantification is based on old fashioned ideologies of race.

The idea of blood quantification is harmful because it can create insecurity and disconnection from culture. The stereotypical features for Māori include dark hair, brown skin, and dark eyes although many Māori have features such as lighter hair, lighter skin, and light eyes. Many associate Māori with darker features. When

people meet Māori who don't have these features such as myself, we are often queried. Comments made are usually 'how much Māori are you' or 'are you a real Māori' and although comments like these might not intend harm, they might be genuinely curious, it can still form insecurity and discomfort. Trinity Browne stated 'I wish my friends knew that when they ask me what percentage of Māori I am – half, quarter or eighth, they make me feel like a pie chart.'

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percentage of Māori I am – half,
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This is how many feel. As Māori we don't base our 'Māoriness' off the percentage in our blood because being Māori is so much more than blood quantum. Māori rely on the passing down of ancestry or whakapapa through generations, our whakapapa helps us connect with our tupuna (ancestors), whanau (family), whenua (land), iwi (tribe) and marae. The idea can also create disconnection from culture. An example of this is Tayrn Pryfhout who is a Māori woman who has non typical Māori features. She was always happy to be immersed in Māori culture but was often rejected by Māori even by her own family. She was often called 'the white girl' and asked if she is truly Māori. She went to the Māori centre at her university and someone asked if she was lost. Her experiences with not being able to identify with her culture started to cause a disconnection to the point where she took off her pounamu or green stone which is a sacred treasure. Clearly this idea is harmful as it creates insecurity and disconnection from culture.

Why should you accept someone who you don't know from a bar of soap telling you what your ethnicity is? There are some key concepts of

Māori identity, one of them being whakapapa. Whakapapa or descent lines are links to your ancestors and to places, this is one important part of belonging to a Māori community. This is how I know I belong to Taranaki Maunga and Ngati Mutunga. According to Ngati Mutunga iwi anyone is a member who descends from one or more Ngati Mutunga ancestors either by birth or adoption. It is more like belonging to a family than it is being compared with a pie chart. Māori are Tangata Whenua, people of the land but New Zealand is a multi-cultural society, and we all bring something unique and useful to our society. It is not necessary for us to get out a calculator or a colour swatch as tools to invalidate each other. Eighteen generations ago around the 16th century there lived a famous woman called Ruaputahanga. She is my direct ancestress and is described in the old stories as he kiritea, he urukehu, he wahine ataahua. To translate for you



the stories say that she was a beautiful woman, fair haired and pale skinned. The stories are describing a full-blooded Māori who never had contact with Europeans. If she was here today would someone dare to suggest that she is not Māori? In 1920 the Māori language Newspaper Te Kopara said Ko ētehi Māori he kiritea, he turehu, he urukehu. This translates as some Māori are fair skinned, pale, or red headed. It is clear to see that you can't judge whakapapa by a quick look.

In conclusion Māori shouldn't be categorised and divided by the percentage of their Māori blood. This is a horrible idea as it is based on outdated ideas of race, it creates insecurity and disconnection from culture, and you can't judge whakapapa by one look. To leave you with a whakatauki, 'E kore au e ngaro, he kākano I ruia, mai I Rangiātea.' 'I will never be lost, for I am a seed, sown in the heavens.'



Infomercials

Ben Fabling Y11

Let me paint you a picture. You are an elderly person living alone. Your children have left the house, and your partner died many years ago. You sit watching the television for something to do. A whole channel of unnecessary products flash before your eyes, and the voice on the TV convinces you that you need them. Not only are you spending an exorbitant amount of money, but the product you are buying is most likely shoddy. You are being taken advantage of.

An infomercial is a longer form of a commercial that takes up the length of a regular TV program, usually around 30 minutes to an hour, with no breaks in the middle. This allows for a far more tailored and well-presented advertisement. This raises a good question. If the advertisement is

well done and high quality, does that necessarily mean that the product will be the same? Take for example the Powerfit (Trademark 2011). This is one of the many products that are all sold online at a company called The TV Shop. This “miracle weight loss treatment” consists of a vibrating step that the purchaser stands on for 30 minutes a week. This is far less than the recommended 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly from the World Health Organisation. From the ad we can see dramatic weight loss in people who used this device. Sounds good right? Not really, because down at the bottom of the screen we can read the small print. ‘Results not typical. Most people will lose less. Powerfit users followed the reduced calorie eating plan and did the Powerfit workout regularly.’ For a \$500 product, it seems that a lot of the weight loss miracle comes down

to a simple calorie deficit diet. Simply put, you're paying half a grand to eat less pies.

If you decide you do want to buy a "miracle remedy", or an "instant fix" you have to keep in mind that the product that you are purchasing may not even function properly, or even function adversely. Users of the 'Pain erazor' have experienced this first-hand. This device claims to use electrical stimulation to provide natural pain relieving endorphins to users. Surprisingly studies have been conducted on the same concept, but remained inconclusive. Realistically a medical device called the TENS machine can provide pain relief using the same system, but with some side effects such as skin rashes, the lowering of blood pressure, and seizures in epileptic people. On a prescription device like this, it can be regulated so that people with heart conditions or epilepsy don't end up using it, But the pain erazor is a consumer product that can be purchased online. This means that anyone, even potentially people with the aforementioned conditions, can purchase what is essentially a miniature TENS machine. One purchaser left a review on The TV Shop's website that stated using it on his elderly mother left her in severe agony. After hearing this, do you think that these products should be advertised on their own channel on public television?

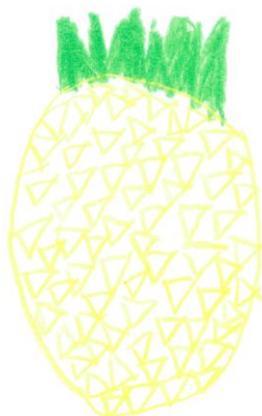
Those who do buy these products are a lot of the time those who are in need. These people wish to purchase a product that takes away pain, or reduces their weight, or helps them get better health in general. These people buy these

products because they are desperate to have something simple that will solve their problem, and therefore more liable to get scammed. The Pain Erazors reviews list is filled with complaints from those with arthritis that they cannot operate it with frail hands, and yet they cannot return it as they are pressured by sales to keep it.

If you decide you do want to buy a "miracle remedy", or an "instant fix" you have to keep in mind that the product that you are purchasing may not even function properly, or even function adversely.

This unethical method of selling is called high-pressure selling, and is the same tactic that many scam-call centres use to try and force a product or service upon customers. The usage of imperative statements like BUY NOW and appealing to greed with phrases like BUY ONE GET ONE FREE are all psychological tactics that are used to manipulate people into buying.

In short, infomercials are cheap and easy ways to sell a product to a customer, but the products sold could be flimsy and far overpriced. Infomercial salesmen employ tactics that are regularly associated with scams to target the most vulnerable people who might purchase. The fact that they are given their own channel on public television is outrageous and needs to be stopped.



We're running out of time

Tait Keller Y11

Dear Jacinda Ardern,

In recent months I have felt that your government hasn't been doing nearly enough to combat the catastrophic dangers of climate change. Climate change is an issue I care deeply about, especially as a young adult. This means I will bear witness to the full consequences of past generations' actions. Despite being a strong and loyal supporter of your government, I feel that I am being let down by the lack of action on this extremely key issue.

I know that my opinion and views are relatively widespread. This was demonstrated by the massive turnouts to the school strike for climate march in April this year, as well as the two marches in 2019. The September 2019 strike alone had over 170,000 people attend across the country. This goes to show just how widespread the demand for greater action on climate change really is. These people make up a large part of the voter base, so it is crucial for your government's survival that you meet their demands. Failure to do so will force them to turn to smaller parties like the greens. Although the Green party has traditionally been allied to Labour, I'm sure you would prefer being able to keep your current majority, where you don't need to rely on anyone else.

On top of this, almost all young people in NZ strongly agree with this, and as they turn 18 it is crucial that you secure their votes for Labour. By far the easiest way to do this is to start thinking in the long term about creating and preserving a future for them. I know that I, along with many other young people, feel that we are being forced to inherit a screwed-up world. Mainly as a result of past generations being selfish and only thinking about themselves. This failure of the older generations has caused many young people today to become increasingly frustrated and

angry about the state of our society. To quickly and effectively remedy this, your government needs to take the initiative. To make sure that we will have a world where we can grow up safely and without being forced to clean up everyone else's mess.

While I'm aware that there are many people sceptical about climate change, thousands of papers have been written by extremely smart and competent scientists. As a Prime Minister, you have access to some of the best information available, and all of it tells you to do more. On top of this, you have plenty of extremely knowledgeable people working for you, any one of whom would tell you that we need to be doing more. During the 2017 election campaign you said that climate change is this generation's nuclear free movement. It is about time you followed up on this. I know that many politicians, even in your own party, are afraid of angering the fossil fuel companies. Yet, they are only able to wield that power because people like you are giving it to them. This is because we allow large corporations, whose sole purpose is to make money, to use their wealth to influence politicians and leaders on crucial issues. This is almost invariably because the policy might harm the corporation in question. We also put far too much stock in their empty promises, and then turn a blind eye when they don't follow up on them.

In the end, it is blindingly obvious that taking drastic action soon is crucial for your re-election chances. This would also be an investment in the future of your party, by giving as many young people as possible a favourable impression of the Labour party. Action on this issue will also be critical for maintaining your key voter base. Especially as I know I'm not the only person who feels let down by your government.

Yours sincerely, Tait Keller.

Gorse's unlikely redemption

Ryan Gordon Y12

Gorse. What a simply wonderful plant. Talk to any New Zealander about it and they will roll their eyes and curse it. It is universally hated in NZ – a ubiquitous pain in the neck. Ask any farmer and you will find gorse to be their arch-nemesis. Having once attempted to commando crawl through a gorse patch during an orienteering event I can relate to that. The eradication of gorse is a thing to aspire to – it's prickly and a weed to boot – but how can we achieve this? Do we kill it en masse (what we've been trying)... or can we use its redeeming features?

First let's analyse gorse, or *Ulex europaeus* if we're being scientific. As its name suggests it is a weed in NZ, first introduced from Europe sometime before 1835 as an alternative hedge. However, just as with rats and stoats (not coincidentally also introduced from Europe) NZ's less competitive vegetation meant that it quickly became all-pervasive. From there it was a short step to becoming the bane of every farmer's existence – its prickles meant that it easily took over paddocks without resistance from farm animals. The only reliable method for getting rid of it is with vast amounts of poison, but even this is problematic as previously dispersed gorse seed can remain viable for up to a hundred years after dispersal, untouched by poison. Gorse became the stoat of the plant world, damaging and nigh on impossible to get rid of. Its only real weakness that we know of is its extreme intolerance to shade.

Its only real weakness that we know of is its extreme intolerance to shade.

But how does that help us? I mean, we can't exactly put a giant shade cloth over everywhere gorse is present – it's a ridiculous and impossible

solution. Wouldn't it be nice if there was native bush above the gorse, providing the shade for us? That would kill two birds with one stone...

That was exactly what Hugh Wilson, a 42-year-old botanist from Christchurch with a love for the outdoors, set out to do in Hinewai Reserve, Banks Peninsula, in September 1987. He wanted to restore 1000ha worth of native bush from bare farmland but went about it in an unprecedented way – instead of going out and planting millions of native trees, he simply started pest control initiatives against browsing animals such as goats and sheep and left the farmland to it. Many neighbouring farmers watched with mounting despair as the former farmland was rapidly colonised by gorse – gorse they knew would shortly be threatening their farmland. Some went so far as to legally oppose his right to grow that much gorse and Wilson ended up in a big stoush with the local council over it.

Then, after 25 years or so, Wilson's method proved immensely successful – out through his thick canopy of controversial gorse native trees were growing, set to rise up and out shade it within another 25 or so years. His theory had been proven, and his meticulous recording of data cemented it as science. The surrounding farmers were duly impressed/dumbfounded (possibly both) and many sold their land to Hinewai Reserve or retired parts of their land and let it regenerate (mostly the steep parts... but also parts that had become overrun with gorse). A few farmers admired Wilson and his forest but couldn't bring themselves to join in – gorse was so ingrained as an enemy.

Just like those farmers, you may be thinking this sounds way too good to be true – how come the best method for regenerating native forest is to grow a weed, gorse? Let's take a look at the science behind it. What Wilson was observing in Hinewai was plant succession – think of it as forest evolution. Originally the farmland in

Hinewai was devoid of nitrogen and other essentials for most trees to grow – it had been grazed by farm animals for years. In this low nutrient soil the first species able to grow are primary succession plants – hardy colonisers such as gorse that ‘fix’ nitrogen (a nutrient necessary for all life) in the soil for the use of other plants. Once enough nitrogen has accumulated, other shade-tolerant plants (largely native) begin growing up through the now mature gorse canopy and create a canopy of their own above the gorse. This effectively kills the gorse and in turn puts new nutrients into the soil, nutrients necessary for the last stage of succession – the forest giants, huge trees such as totora, kahikatea, and rimu.

Perfect! Or almost... there’s just one catch to this – there can’t be any introduced pests such as sheep, goats, and deer to eat the secondary growth. If they are present then truly the gorse is interminable, succession cannot happen. But this

problem is neither insurmountable, nor specific to succession through gorse – native plantations encounter the same predator problems. In a way, this just means that we are now killing *three* birds with one stone – the eradication of gorse, the regeneration of native bush, *and* (if we stretch a point or two) pest free 2050 are all interwoven.

Gorse is noxious, prickly, and a terrible weed in NZ, but it is also an excellent nursery plant. Hinewai isn’t the only place where gorse has facilitated forest regeneration, it’s just the only place it’s been documented. Anyone 50 or older living in Wellington will tell you what the hills were like when they were younger – a thick yellow mat of gorse every spring during flowering. Not something you’d think of looking at the healthy native bush on the Karori hills and up behind Ngaio and Johnsonville, to name a couple of examples.

Ironically, the best way to get rid of gorse, the prickly weed, farmer’s bane... is to let it grow.



A letter to the British Museum

Rhiannon MacCreadie Y12

In 1753 the British Museum was established
A glorified trophy case for everything that wasn’t British. A place to keep what your ancestors stripped from indigenous lands. Things from unjustified wars we only see from a British perspective.

These spoils of war under glass eyes are seen for what they are on the surface. Bronzes of beautiful imagery and skill, arts of heads, ancient translations, luxury burials, crowns from kingdoms that they made perish. To you, they’re simply just artworks.

Yet we know they are not artworks; you know they are not artworks; they are artifacts. They hold more than just expression. They hold

history, community, and culture. They have a spiritual meaning that your glass eyes cannot see.

Our chiefs and most important
ancestors are being kept away
from us in haunted boxes under
your floor.

“The Parthenon is sitting in Greece like a smile with missing teeth.” A hugely historically important building, marvelled for its extreme detail and beauty that dates back to 430B.C. To the people of Athens, it means more than a pretty building. It is an enduring symbol of democracy and one of the world’s greatest cultural monuments.

You hold pieces of that democratic symbol on stone plates and modern walls. Not even trying to mimic the Parthenon, you expect people to understand the pages of history they ripped at random from its walls.

The torso of figures highlighted at the end of the room look like bodies being hung like trophies. A beautifully sinister reminder of just how you came into possession of these artifacts.

Yet you are no stranger to keeping culture away of its home. The Benin Bronzes are the most highly contested artefacts in your possession. The people of Benin are crying for their history. To know where they came from, who they are, who are their ancestors? You don't know. They don't know.

You cannot read the bronzes like someone from Benin could. You cannot understand the importance of what the figures are wearing, doing, seeing, saying, finding, giving. You cannot fully understand how an artifact was used, everyone that used it is dead.

These are the heads of my people you display as if they were preserved for the world to see. Stripped of their status, their mana. Our chiefs and most important ancestors are being kept away from us in haunted boxes under your floor.

Give us back the people of our history. Give us back the heads of our ancestors. Give us back the markings of a chief, of an iwi. Not one but all. They are all unique, tapu humans, they are all important to our history.

Stop displaying heads as if they were not human. Stop excusing your actions by calling them "primitive."

32 heads you display; of 16 cultures they destroyed. One male, one female from each. As if we are preparing for the dead Noah's ark.

You are the figure of your ancestors caucacity. You are a window, not a door. Your glass eyes haven't been cleaned since the 1900s. It's 2021.

The laws and social premise you stand by are outdated. It is no longer trendy to have collections of loot. It is no longer trendy to ignore small cultures. It is no longer trendy to display dead bodies. It disgusts us.

We have been in your hallowed halls you are so proud of. The jumbled mess of culture, thousands of years, thousands of miles apart, put together making no sense for anybody except to represent the vanity of British culture. The superiority you feel above everyone else.

You must right the wrongdoings of the past, you must feel embarrassed of your extensive collection. You have the opportunity to be prideful of your own culture. To give back could be revolutionary. Providing the pieces that dying cultures need to revitalise. To make a more diverse and richer world.

In French they will tell you, *la politique de l'autruche**. Change will start with you cleaning your glass eyes.

**la politique de l'autruche* - something is in front of you and you say you can't see it



Shelly Bay

Chris Farro Howard Y12

The land at Shelly Bay has been mishandled and disrespected since 1886 when it was first confiscated from the Taranaki Whanui through the use of the public works act. However, in 2021 Shelly Bay is once

again the topic of great controversy due to Ian Cassels and the Wellington Company's current development plan for the area. The development is projected to revitalize the area, enhance the open and public access to the waterfront, and tackle the deferred maintenance to its

infrastructure and buildings there. However, the development plan itself is not the issue as much as the way the Wellington company got ahold of the land itself.

The treatment of the land at Shelly Bay Is a textbook example showcasing how the Treaty of Waitangi and its three principles have not been honored in New Zealand. This is due to lack of iwi consultation from the Wellington city council and the New Zealand government prior to the signing of a 2014 special housing accord involving iwi owned land at Shelly Bay and the outright breach of trust which occurred between the Taranaki Whanui and the Port Nicholson block settlement trust or PNBST. These two actions directly violate the treaty of Waitangi and fail to uphold the traditional Māori Values, such as Mana Whenua and Tino Rangatiratanga. This clearly shows why the development should not go ahead due to its cultural insensitivity and the fact that it directly violates and acts contrary to New Zealand's founding document.

How would you feel if the government and your city council decided to sell your house without even asking you about it first?

The first action showcasing why the development of Shelly Bay should not go ahead is the signing of the 2014 special housing accord between the NZ government and the Wellington City Council (WCC) without properly consulting the Taranaki Whanui. This is a problem due to the Taranaki Whanui being the rightful owners of the land involved. How would you feel if the government and your city council decided to sell your house without even asking you about it first? This action fails to uphold two of the three principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, these being partnership and participation. This is due to consultation being key in a partnership with both sides needing to contribute. The WCC did not

allow a partnership to be formed by not involving the Taranaki Whanui during the signing of the accord which in turn blocked all iwi participation in regard to the land at Shelly Bay. This led iwi members to feel aggrieved as their land was once again ripped from their control. This is shown in this quote from Mau whenua a group comprised of iwi members occupying the land at Shelly Bay in protest of the development. "We believe that it is our whenua, and that it was illegally sold to The Wellington Company ... and we are wanting it returned."

This accord allowed the Wellington Company to sign a five-year lease on the land at Shelly Bay showing how the current development plan is built on the disrespect of the Treaty of Waitangi and the exploitation of the Māori people. Once again reinforcing just how vital it is for the development to not go ahead.

The second action taken against the Taranaki Whanui which shows just how necessary it is for the current development plan to not go ahead is the mishandling of iwi resources by the PNBST. The same year as the signing of the housing accord the PNBST attempted to pass a resolution with the goal of selling iwi land. In order for the resolution to pass it required a 75% approval rate from all adult members of the Taranaki Whanui. However, many iwi members were unable to vote due to a failure of the PNBST's membership system with 2752 potential iwi members applications being declined with no reason given. As well as this a further 9000 applications were "lost" resulting in even less iwi members being able to have their say. In my opinion this failure on its own is enough to bring the PNBST's integrity into question however, what they did next only solidifies this thought. Despite the large amount of iwi members who were unable to vote the resolution still did not manage to reach the necessary 75% approval rate. This did not stop the PNBST however, as they told the Taranaki Whanui that they would not be bound by a motion not to sell. This was in response to an iwi

resolution directing the PNBST to "immediately cease all negotiations with Ian Cassels and the Wellington Company."

The PNBST then sold 4.96 hectares of the land at Shelly Bay to developer Ian Cassels for only 2 million dollars followed by a further 10 million for a final fourth block of land. This meant that the PNBST sold the land at Shelly Bay which was originally bought for 13.3 million dollars for a 1.3-million-dollar loss. Land which was valued at over 20 million dollars. Now how is that beneficial for the iwi? This complete blindsiding of the Taranaki Whanui combined with the utter failure which was the PNBST membership system shows how the PNBST blatantly lied to the Taranaki Whanui and stripped them of their right to Mana Whenua and Tino Rangatiratanga

which was promised to them in the Treaty of Waitangi. Imagine if you put your trust and resources into a company to have them not only completely disregard your opinion but to act in direct opposition to it.

If the development is allowed to go ahead it will continue to allow iwi to be undermined and taken advantage of. This is due to the lack of respect the New Zealand people have for the Treaty of Waitangi and will only continue unless a new precedent is set. Therefore, due to the current development plan for Shelly Bay completely disregarding the Treaty of Waitangi and its three principles it must not go ahead and the land at Shelly Bay should be returned to its rightful owners, the Taranaki Whanui.



Birds of Prey

(and the fantabulous emancipation of one Harley Quinn)

Sophie Crozier Y12

I never imagined that Harley Quinn would take down some of Gotham's most notorious villains with a confetti gun. So, I was nothing but amazed when I witnessed it in the 2020 action movie, "Birds of Prey". The confetti gunfight set a tone early in the film, and the scenes that followed didn't disappoint. "Birds of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)" set out to detach Harley Quinn from her well-established role as the Joker's romantic interest. It recast Harley as a powerful villain and gave a nuanced depiction of a woman in film. Beautifully crafted by Cathy Yan, the film addresses topics like misogyny while maintaining a candy-coloured and chaotic air.

The story opens with a heartbroken Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) struggling to get through day-to-day life after being kicked to the curb by the Joker. The introduction is quite comical as

Quinn narrates herself detonating a chemical plant as a statement of her ended love. She then comes to the somewhat tricky realization that she doesn't have the infamous Mr J to protect her anymore. Now, Harley must learn to defend herself from her enemies. After attempting to escape the many thugs after her, she is caught by the Black Mask, a narcissistic psychopath who desires to control Gotham. Harley is given an ultimatum; she can become a mercenary and secure a stolen diamond that will give the Black Mask the wealth to own the corrupt Gotham or die. Quinn embarks on a fantabulous journey where she comes to terms with her strength as a villain and finds three unlikely allies - Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett) and Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez).

Unlike any DC villain before her, Harley has a multi-faceted character and doesn't spend her entire existence devising schemes to end the world. In the film, she is often found doing everyday activities like shopping and watching

television while eating cereal. It's refreshing to see a multidimensional villain that carries some humane qualities. Harley is also portrayed as a person with real vulnerabilities. The opening scene immediately displays an intoxicated Harley in despair over her breakup, saying, "A Harley Quinn is nothing without a master." This scene is juxtaposed with a clip of Harley fending off several thugs with her trustee baseball bat in hand. Like any person struggling through a time of hardship, she underestimates her character. Quinn's ability to switch from a self-loathing individual to a carefree maniac that casually buys a Hyena called Bruce Wayne is highly ludicrous. But Harley Quinn's split personality takes the viewer on an entertaining roller coaster of emotions and adds to the chaos of her character. There is nothing more empowering than a character that isn't afraid to be themselves.

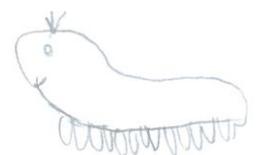
Unlike any DC villain before her,
Harley has a multi-faceted
character and doesn't spend her
entire existence devising schemes
to end the world.

Even more delightful is the sound visuals that Warner Bros brought us in this film. From costumes to scenery to fighting choreography, "Birds of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)" encapsulates the anarchic style of Gotham. Margot Robbie can be seen sporting a short punk hairstyle and glittery overalls instead of the tacky white top she wore in the 2016 blockbuster

"Suicide Squad". The "Birds of Prey" outfit reflects Harley Quinn's haywire personality as a woman directs the film. This means that the cinematography isn't impacted by the 'male gaze' like in "Suicide Squad". The 'male gaze' caused Harley to be portrayed as the Joker's property which is evident in her shirt, saying, "Daddy's Lil Monster". Now, Harley is seen in a comfortable costume that makes her look powerful and cheery.

But the highlight of the movie is the intricate fight scenes. The choreographers were able to maximize the set's potential by incorporating props like rollerblades and slides to create what looked like some of the most thrilling fight scenes to participate in, in film history. At one stage, Harley is fighting some henchmen outside a blown-up building, later fighting the same guys on top of a car. The action-packed fight scenes are sure to keep the audience on their feet and draws attention to Harley's confidence as a character. You watch and want to be just like her, with all her sass and whimsicality.

Ultimately, "Birds of Prey" will leave you feeling as though you've spent the night at the amusement park, eating candy floss and getting drunk on the colourful scenery. With a story as chaotic as its main character, you will be watching the end credits and yearning for more. A film where the protagonist is often walking around with one shoe is a film you cannot help but love. For its riveting, silly and hyperviolent scenes, "Birds of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)" is a treasure viewers won't forget



The not-so-secret toxicity of The Bachelor

Tayla McCulloch Y12

Attention all Bachelor and Bachelorette fans, take a moment and let me enlighten you. I don't want to be the one to spoil a light-hearted source of entertainment. But this needs to be heard. As you may know, The Bachelor is a successful TV favourite going on its 25th season. The show's popularity is easily among the highest of all reality TV shows to this day, with the latest season finale attracting over 6 million viewers. But behind all the romantic getaways and dreamy contestants finding love, lies many deeper issues and toxic values. Although the Bachelor may seem to promote loving and accepting viewpoints, it is the same show that also sends out countless negative messages.

Now, I must admit, at first glance I too found myself drawn into the Bachelor, seeing all the alluring women fighting to win the affection of their 'dream man.' Living every young girl's dream, right? Lavish dates and dramatic twists and turns through the shows use of eliminations, keeping us all on the edge of our seat. But as I made my way through more and more episodes, I increasingly noticed the toxic nature that the show holds.

One of the biggest things I noticed almost immediately was the lack of diversity in the casting. Each season there is a number of 30+ contestants on the show, and typically there were only one or two BIPOC cast, and in its earlier seasons often none. It took the franchise a full 24 seasons before they cast a black lead in the show, which I feel was only in response to the desperate cry of viewers who also noticed this flaw. Mike Johnson who was a contestant of The Bachelorette season 15 has commented on the "*atrocious*" lack of diversity in the television series. In an interview with US weekly where Johnson explained his feelings on the issue he stated, "*It's supposed to be about love, and love comes in all forms and*

colors—not just white America." Honestly, I find it quite astonishing how blind people must be to not realize this obvious flaw to the show, it's close to impossible for it to be labelled as a coincidence.

Moving on, I feel that the next prominent issue that the Bachelor plagues its viewers with is the utterly obvious portrayals of unrealistic beauty and relationship standards communicated throughout the entirety of the show. I think anyone that has watched the Bachelor and could confidently say they have never compared themselves to the people on the show in any form, are certainly a rarity. I mean look at them! It's clearly no secret that casting producers take physical attraction into account when selecting participants on the show. But I feel that with these unrealistic beauty standards portrayed, we as an audience could subconsciously internalise this and allow it to affect our outlook on ourselves or even standards for potential partners.

The way that the contestants try
to 'win the heart' of the star
always comes down to them
being incredibly fake.

Continuing on the topic of unrealistic standards, let's talk about relationships. Relationships shouldn't be made to entertain, as seen on the Bachelor, nor should they be broadcast for all to see. The way that the contestants try to 'win the heart' of the star always comes down to them being incredibly fake. Plain and simple. They change their personalities to fit whatever is desired in hopes of winning the competition, and during the process will happily tear down and sabotage other contestants. Some may say they are doing whatever it takes for love, but I say they are just cheating at a game with no fair winner. Love isn't something that is won by being better

than everyone else, it is something that should happen naturally. And yes, I understand that this is the point of the show, to create a game. But all this does is communicate to the audience that they can sacrifice the expense of others to get what they want. Showing them a completely twisted and false portrayal of relationships and advertising them as 'perfect.'

I hope that by reading this you have become enlightened as to the negative streak this series seems to endlessly continue. Whether you decide

to continue to binge the show or not is up to you, but I know that I'm not planning on supporting such a toxic and damaging franchise in any way, shape, or form. I can only hope for the same from you. And if you are now eagerly scavenging to find a new show to dive into as a replacement, I fully advise you give RuPaul's drag race a chance. Guaranteed to be filled with even more binge-worthy drama without being centred around toxic nature. Instead, being overflowed with inclusiveness, something we can say the Bachelor lacks tremendously.



Why, Jordan Peele?

Pepi Olliver-Bell Y12

Why, Jordan Peele? A film with so much potential, yet it somehow manages to humiliate the horror genre completely. Following Jordan Peele's Oscar-winning film 'Get Out', there was no doubt about the high amount of anticipation for his film 'Us'. I won't lie. The excitement I had after watching the trailer made the film a must watch for my weekly at home movie screening. I'm no film critic, but I found that it was an awesome example of a terrible movie. It pities horror, blatantly displays racism, and in all honesty, is boring, overhyped and ridiculous.

2019 film 'Us', directed by Jordan Peele, follows a black family who are attacked by mysterious figures in red jumpsuits. Upon closer inspection the family realize the intruders are exact lookalikes of them. To be honest, this concept is promising. Perhaps the best part of the film is the synopsis. And the cast is not half bad either. But sorry Lupita Nyong'o, they did you dirty in this film. The concept was there, But the execution was awful. I thought that the plot would be better, and you don't need hidden meanings to make a good movie. What the hell is up with those rabbits? Is there some clear hidden meaning I'm missing? Is there a purpose to the

clones other than killing people and holding hands? This film was so unclear that everyone thought it was about something different and tried to make it seem better than it was in their heads. This movie made me wish that my evil twin would stab me with a pair of scissors.

The title definitely has some correlation to 'US' (as in the USA) rather than us as people, as it mirrors the racial struggle in the USA. In saying so, Peele thought it'd be fun to make it more racist than the crows in Dumbo. Whether you agree with my opinion or not is irrelevant but take time to acknowledge the classic white couple hating each other, being drunks, getting plastic surgery, and their kids being airhead blonde twins. But don't worry, they get killed in their second scene. Having covered one major flaw, let's talk about how you can find this in the horror section on Netflix. That in itself is something to laugh about. What's even worse than watching a bad horror is watching a horror that ends up being a comedy. The doppelganger lookalikes used strange sounds to communicate, the ridiculous murder scenes would disappoint any mass serial killer, I mean how could you not laugh?

Anyone calling this a masterpiece doesn't understand horror.

At this point you might be asking “it’s not all bad, is it?” and you’re right. I will give the movie some points for cinematography. Despite having flaws throughout, I can’t ignore the strong compositionally creative shots and innovative camerawork that at points made me double-take to admire the artistic craft on screen. The choice to use a carnival as its prime setting was ripe with horror potential. The cinematography made the carnival (which is commonly a family friendly place) feel dark and gloomy. I can also appreciate the funhouse setting because the use of distorted mirrors makes things feel unpredictable. To be fair seeing myself in the mirror scares me enough. In case you are wondering why I sat through the whole movie, it’s because the thought that went into each camera shot was worth appreciating

and respecting. I froth over good cinematography.

Regardless of if you take my ruthless review in to consideration or not doesn’t faze me. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Unless you genuinely do like the movie, because sorry we can’t be friends. I just hope this review can save 2 hours of your life, so you don’t end up grabbing a pair of scissors in order to forget what you’ve just witnessed on screen. Anyone calling this a masterpiece doesn’t understand horror. “It’s so great”, nope, you’re deluded. You’re the type of person to go with the Rotten Tomatoes rating. Besides a little fancy cinematography here and there, this movie will not be one I watch again. Oh, and sorry, did I mention spoilers? I didn’t bother because for those who haven’t watched it, do not waste your time with it



Why schools need to work harder to remove an environment that encourages rape culture

Louise Gromme Y12

How would you feel if you were living in a society that normalises an experience that will follow you for the rest of your life? If your friends were using an event that took something away from you that you can never get back, as a means for comedy? This is the effect that rape culture has on sexual assault survivors. Rape culture can be defined as a society that upholds common beliefs which normalise sexual assault, violence, and abuse. It has the effect of minimising the severity of sexual assault, and usually exists within a male-dominated environment. It is a serious issue that has an undeniable presence in New Zealand, and many schools provide a setting that allows misogyny to breed. We can start by identifying the problem and learn how it affects survivors, understand the role of sexism in the culture and how it is a major issue in all boys' schools, and finally, work

towards dismantling the patriarchy that builds the system of these schools, and therefore remove the ‘boys will be boys’ rape culture in the younger generation.

There are multiple ways that rape culture can be displayed, all of which are commonly seen in modern-day society. Casual rape jokes, slut-shaming, catcalling, the phrase ‘boys will be boys’ are all things seen in day-to-day life that fuel a misogynistic society that promotes the values of sexual violence and belittles the experiences of survivors. Some examples of frequent trivialisation of sexual violence and assault include a team saying to their opponent “We’re going to rape you” in a game of sport, or “That is ear rape” when hearing something unpleasant. These common, seemingly harmless phrases make rape seem like a trivial event that should be taken lightly. They can be triggering to survivors of sexual assault, reminding them of their

traumatic experience as well as implanting the idea in their heads that the severity of their experience is low, and they won't be taken seriously. This combined with victim blaming, - phrases such as "she was drunk", "her skirt was too short", or "she was asking for it"- has the effect of the survivor's credibility being questioned and getting treated with doubt and hostility, whilst also empathising with the attacker and not following through with proper punishment. It is crucial that we as a society understand that there really is no such thing as 'asking for it' without a clear yes, and that by putting the victim at fault we are allowing rapists to walk freely, potentially continuing to put other people in danger. Rape culture encourages rapists to follow through with their desires, and it silences the survivors. It is constantly around us, and although the younger generation is fighting to eradicate this nasty belief system, we still see this culture alive and well amongst teenagers, - particularly single sex male high schools in New Zealand.

When we think of rape culture the first images that come to mind are the most obvious, - catcalling in public, objectification of women in the media, the romanticization of toxic masculinity and sexual violence towards women. And while all of these examples play a significant role in contributing to rape culture, a place that is commonly forgotten is all boys' high schools. The lack of female presence provides a breeding ground for misogyny and sexual misconduct.

The system of these schools is entirely based on the patriarchy, teaching boys from a young age that they have the right to degrade women. Elite boys' private schools in particular give these young men an inflated sense of entitlement and superiority, encouraging them to believe they have the right to both comment on and act on women's bodies. Sexism is a major aspect of rape culture, as sexist ideologies contribute to the idea that women are none other than sexual objects existing for the male gaze. Sexism prevails in these all-male high schools, with even the Scots College headmaster being a proud and open sexist. The prestigious boys' private school turned co-ed in 2020, and during an open day in 2019, the schools' headmaster Graeme Yule was accused of making sexist remarks. He stated that girls would not be allowed to sit at the back of the classroom painting their nails, but instead be expected to participate in work and sports, as well as additional comments on girls caring about the size of bathroom mirrors. He painted a picture of girls as vain and self-obsessed, being incapable of participating to the extent of males on their own accord. It's obvious that this well-respected Wellington school continues to hold negative, outdated stereotypes and the ultimate presence of rape culture in schools like these is no surprise. In 2017, boys from all boy's high school Wellington College displayed rape culture in its truest form. Facebook screenshots showed a comment saying, "If you don't take advantage of a drunk girl, you're not a true WC boy", and another saying "f*ck women". And while the



headmaster stated that he was appalled at these comments and that they do not represent the nature of the school, it is unlikely that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that these kinds of comments are not made again - because the creation of these kinds of comments is so deeply rooted in the patriarchy that these schools are based on, that these boys are simply learning and picking up on what they are around. As a teenage girl, I can confidently say that boys my age, particularly ones that attend all boys' schools, are casually and confidently making sexist remarks that contribute to rape culture, invalidating people that have experienced sexual violence. It is a regular, almost daily occurrence that creates an uncomfortable environment for women and survivors of sexual abuse. We don't want to believe that our friends, sons, and brothers would go through with their claims, but their 'boys will be boys' mentality that is making so many people feel unsafe is a clear sign that our system is heavily flawed. Action needs to be taken to prevent us from turning young men into rapists.

Rape culture can't be eradicated in a day. To fully remove it from our society is a major process that is going to take time, and it is essential for us to believe that everything we do against it is going to make a difference.

We know for a fact that rape culture exists. It has real, negative implications, and it is so prevalent in our society that teenage boys are naturally picking up on it and contributing to it. There is no denying that it is not actually the boys themselves, but it is what they are consistently being taught and exposed to. Why has the problem repeated itself so many times? We need to make a change, whether that is simply standing up to a friend's nasty rape joke or breaking down the education system and properly educating

teenagers about sex and consent. Rape culture can't be eradicated in a day. To fully remove it from our society is a major process that is going to take time, and it is essential for us to believe that everything we do against it is going to make a difference.

Often when we see rape culture, we don't realise the seriousness of it - we don't actually understand that it is rape culture, and that by playing the bystander, we are a part of the problem. One of the most impactful things we can do is call people out for making degrading and sexist remarks, refuse to question the survivor's consent, and always believe the survivor. This will encourage other people to follow, resulting in the denormalization of this kind of behaviour within our social groups. Obviously, the problem goes further than this, and in an environment where no one is willing to stand up against the behaviour that promotes sexual violence, further action is required. Schools need to be bringing up sex and consent regularly, and adolescents need to be learning about these topics in a safe environment where they understand the complexity of consent. The majority of teenagers today are turning to porn as a form of sex education, which comes with a handful of negative effects. It normalises sexual violence and male aggressions vs. female passivity, as well as creating unhealthy expectations for the way all genders are supposed to act and look. If people are taught from a young age that consent goes further than a simple 'yes' or 'no' and we break down what an unhealthy relationship looks like, we can help adolescents to grasp the full idea of what real consent is. With the introduction of Mates and Dates - a programme taught in Years 9-13 that discusses healthy relationships in all forms - teenagers might be getting a better understanding of power dynamics and gender equality. Still, it seems that all boys' high schools are more focused on the reputation of their male students, rather than the misogynistic culture that thrives amongst them.

This 'boys will be boys' culture needs to be banished, and we need to remove the idea that these elite boys' schools have superiority over their female counterparts. Teenagers need to be properly punished for having an attitude that encourages sexual violence and invalidates the trauma of survivors, as well as embedding the belief into the school system that no gender is superior. All boys' high schools are not better simply because they are filled with boys. Stop normalising rape culture. Educate yourselves and do better.

Rape culture is a huge problem that is deeply rooted within our society. It can be seen in many ways and is constantly around us. It is a set of values and beliefs that promote sexual violence and discourage survivors to come forward about their experiences. Rape culture thrives in all boys' schools. We need to identify the problem in our education system and change it. If you still don't think rape culture is a real issue, tell me, how would you feel if you were constantly surrounded by a culture that casually makes fun of your trauma?





Flynn Barnes Y11

The end of the world

Josh Young Y12

'The end of the world,' a concept as old as human civilization itself. It is in the human conscience and curiosity to speculate about when life as we know it may end. In recent times, that idea has resurfaced. Although not the end of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the public that normal human life is very fragile and unstable and within just weeks or months, everything can be turned on its head. This world crisis has opened billions of eyes to just how careful we need to be and to not take life for granted. All of this sounds very depressing but as we hopefully come out of the other side of the pandemic, the entire world's attention will have to be directed to another global issue, Climate Change.

People do not seem to understand how serious this crisis is. Maybe that is because the effects are not immediately clear. The effects are not sudden. They build up slowly. Your life does not get flipped on its head in a matter of days. So, it makes sense that a large majority of people are apathetic about it. But this situation is so much more than just some disaster we are going to encounter in a few decades, and everyone is collectively responsible. Even if it was, what would we do then? Just leave it to the authorities. I am willing to bet that in that scenario, very few people would be doing anything. That is, unless their houses suddenly begin to sink below the waves.

No matter who you are, where you live, or what you do, climate change will affect you in one way or another. It is our collective responsibility to do something about it. According to NASA, 427 billion tons of sea ice in Greenland and Antarctica have melted each year between 1993 and 2019. This has resulted in sea levels rising over 20cm since then. This may not seem like much but, it is predicted that by the turn of the century, nations like Tuvalu, Kiribati, and

Maldives will be entirely underwater. This means over 500,000 people (more than Wellington's population) will lose their houses, jobs, and lives within the century. No one wants that on their hands. Can you imagine watching the news one morning and hearing about all of Wellington losing their lives due to severe flooding? You would feel horrible. Everyone should be doing something to stop this crisis.

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Ever since the 1950s, the amount of atmospheric CO₂ has increased exponentially to the point where there are now over 400 parts per million of CO₂ in the air. Before the industrial revolution, the atmospheric level of carbon dioxide never exceeded 300 ppm, for 800,000 years! Doesn't this show just how bad the situation has become? There is an argument that atmospheric carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas levels increase naturally. And yes, this is true. Volcanic eruptions and changes in the Earth's biosphere can cause an increase in CO₂, methane, and other gases that trap heat within the Earth. However, ever since the turn of the century and the industrial revolution, the levels of greenhouse gases have just exploded, as mentioned previously. That does not seem like a coincidence, does it?

You may ask, "Well, if it is that bad, who should be responsible?" Humanity as a collective should be held accountable. The climate crisis is a threat that everyone needs to be aware of. Yes, China and USA produce 44% of the world's carbon dioxide emissions between them, so it may seem fair that Xi Jinping and Joe Biden take the most

responsibility but, China also produces over 30% of the world's economic output. These nations and their leaders should be using their influence to start whistleblowing and encouraging the public to act now. But, without you, your family, and everyone else, the fight against climate change will not go anywhere. Why should anyone be able to sit back and assume the world governments will fix this problem on their own? This is an infantile assumption to make; to assume the higher ups will fix all problems that come about. They should be leading the line, but everyone should be working together to help. Without the public acting immediately, any actions the world leaders take will be irrelevant as they will not receive backing and very few people will follow through with instructions. How would you feel if one day, NASA announced that the global warming crisis had gone too far and

could not be reversed? Knowing that you had a part to play in that irreversible disaster.

Back to that idea about the 'end of the world.' This concept was just an idea that no one really believed would happen in their lifetimes. However, with how this climate crisis is going so far, and with how little many people seem to do about it, this idea is much closer to reality than you might think. I am not saying everyone should be panicking and trying to find immediate space in the nearest doomsday bunker. What I am saying is that we as a species should be doing far more than we are currently doing to combat this threat. We should not be leaving it for our governments to sort out as it affects us all. If not, it will really be even worse for us than the current pandemic.



The injustices of Thomas the Tank Engine

Joshua Henshaw Y13

Thomas, the Tank Engine has been a mainstay of children's television since 1984. Everyone knows the smiling faces and bright colours of the main character Thomas and his friends. On the surface, the island of Sodor seems like an ordinary cheerful place, the perfect setting for the show to impart important life lessons to children. But look a little deeper and through the context of a Marxist lens, the cracks and injustices of the island society become clear. Marxism looks at the relationship between the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, and the working class, the proletariat. Thomas and the other working-class train engines are unknowingly trapped in a cycle of oppression by the Fat Controller, the man who holds all the power on the island of Sodor.

The most obvious point in the series that could be exposed to criticism under a Marxist lens is the society in which the characters live in. The

train network of the island is owned and operated by the Fat Controller. He holds sway over the economic machine and lifeblood of the island, the trains. The man appears to have used his influence over the island to push out all competing forms of cargo and passenger transport like trucks or buses in order to seize complete control of Sodor. Despite the presence of a mayor who appears fairly regularly throughout the series, he seems to have little power over the island at all and is generally only shown in cameo roles or without speaking. The Fat Controller also supervises the construction of facilities that should really be managed by the local government, for example building a search and rescue station in the episode 'misty island rescue'. In Sian Evans' 'Through the Literary Looking Glass, the ruling class or bourgeoisie are defined as "The ruling class who own the majority of the wealth and control the means of production, distribution and exchange of material goods." The Fat Controller is a perfect

representation of the upper-class Marxism works against. If we place the Fat Controller high up in a ruling position this puts the trains and other vehicles down in the lower proletariat class “Who provide labour that keeps the system functioning.” Throughout all the many series and adaptations of Thomas, the trains are always placed on the bottom of the social ladder. The trains have been forced into a position where they lack the means of production and must sell their labour to survive and in most cases are shut into a single purpose on the railways with no possibility of upwards movement.

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Karl Marx reasoned that the system put in place by the ruling class only functioned as long as the general workers didn't realize their shared political and economic goals, their unity as a class of laborers and the injustices forced upon them by the bourgeoisie. So why haven't the trains of Sodor united together against the tyrannical Fat Controller and formed a worker's rebellion? The answer lies in Marx's concepts of false consciousness and class consciousness. “(Frederick) Engels coined this term to describe the phenomenon whereby workers in a society might believe they are in charge of their own destinies or understand and agree with the way society is run, without realizing that they are being manipulated.” This false consciousness is a state that is maintained by the Fat Controller to prevent the trains from reaching class consciousness, the stage where the working class realize their situation and begins a revolution. One way in which the trains are kept unaware of the ways society is exploiting them is the Fat

Controller's use of the phrase “A really useful engine.” He cleverly gives the trains an undefined goal for them to work towards with no actual meaning behind it and no real example of what a “A really useful engine” actually looks like. Giving the trains of Sodor this simple objective keeps them fixated on one goal, meaning that they don't look towards other options of success or gain and keep pushing towards a future that cannot be achieved. The term is also sometimes used to push trains towards a specific goal, for example after Thomas has a run in with some mischievous trucks he's pulling and narrowly avoids an accident he is told that “You should learn more about trucks if you are to become a really useful engine.” In the end the term is only used by the Controller to manipulate his trains into doing better and trying harder so that they make more money for him. Through this deception the Fat Controller has all the trains looking towards him for judgement on whether they are useful and they all base their own self-worth on the opinion of their boss.

The other major effect of the Fat Controller's impossible goal setting is that it turns the engines of Sodor against one another in a conflict to be considered the most useful engine. This conflict among the trains is likely a very intentional outcome of the Fat Controller maintaining false consciousness among the trains. A text by Ashley Crossman states that false consciousness “...produces a view of oneself as a single entity engaged in competition with others of one's social and economic standing, rather than as part of a group with unified experiences, struggles, and interests.” Across the series, there is a multitude of instances in which trains cruelly sabotage each other in order to get themselves an advantage or simply to make their colleagues look bad. In just first episode of the original run of Thomas the Tank Engine the plot is centred around Gordon executing a revenge plot against Thomas after Thomas made fun of him. The trains regularly do things similar to this to each

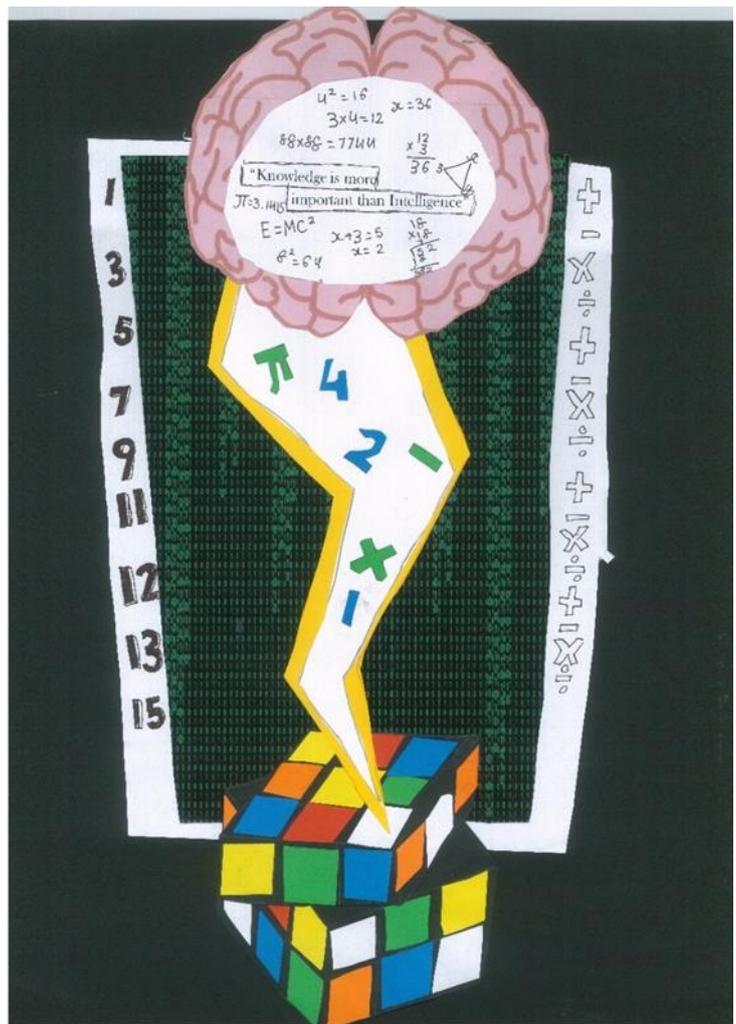
other and will mercilessly tease each other over their misfortunes. The competition created between the trains causes divides and makes it impossible for them to view themselves as a group with common desires and struggles meaning that they will never gain class consciousness or the stage at which the proletariat become fully aware of their exploitation.

Applying a Marxist lens to Thomas the Tank Engine reveals the values, consciously or unconsciously embedded in the series by its creators. The show presents the Fat Controller as a funny but fair man who loves his engines and wants the best for them when in reality, he is exploiting them and only sees them as objects for

his own material gain. The Fat Controller's seemingly harmless encouragement turns into a cruel manipulation of the train's sense of self-worth. The trains are pushed to compete for the Controller's praise, driving them to take drastic action in order to reach an impossible goal. Looking through the lens shows us the series' underlying support of the capitalist system that supports the ruling bourgeoisie and in which the working class are unaware of the injustices they're exposed to. Marxism believes that revolution is inevitable, so perhaps Thomas and his Friends could break free of their oppression. As Karl Marx said, "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."



Enoch Jiang Y9



Land commodification in Aotearoa

Herbert Zielinski Y13

Introduction

When I say “a piece of land”, what comes to mind? Do you picture an invaluable part of nature, crucially important to the plants and animals living on it, as well as to the culture of human occupants? Or maybe you imagine a vacant, blank slate on which to build property, an untapped resource? Aotearoa’s colonial and capitalist history has distorted our perspective of land, degrading it from a taonga into a resource. I will explore how land became commodified through Aotearoa’s history, what the risks of commodifying land are, what the benefits of a holistic view of land are, and how we can change how land is viewed to benefit both people and ecosystems.

How did land become commodified in Aotearoa?

As a British colony, Aotearoa is built on the capitalist values of British colonisers, who have converted our country into their image since they arrived back in 1769. Under the capitalist British perspective, land is merely a tool with which to make money. The original Māori settlers didn’t share this view; they had no concept of absolute land ownership, only of different rights to a piece of land to different tribes or individuals. British colonisers needed as much land as they could get if they were to advertise Aotearoa as a desirable country to immigrate to. Therefore, the Treaty of Waitangi was written literally overnight, for the primary purpose of making the purchase of Māori land by Pākehā as easy as possible.

When Māori signed the Treaty of Waitangi, they agreed to give the Crown, or British government, rights to buy and sell Aotearoa’s land, and in return Māori would receive full rangatiratanga or chieftainship of the land. However, due to translation differences between the English and

Te Reo versions of the treaty, Māori believed they would be able to continue using their land as normal after the Crown bought it. Because of the conflicting ideas of “rangatiratanga” and “land ownership” and between Māori and Pākehā, Māori lost almost all the influence they had on their land once the Crown bought it. In 1839, the New Zealand Company purchased 8 million hectares from Māori tribes. When the Land Commission investigated the purchase, it found that Māori weren’t informed that sales would mean losing continued use rights on the land. Yet the Commission ordered the Māori to drop their claims in return for more payment. This proves the vast differences in how Pākehā and Māori view land. The Pākehā-controlled Land Commission assumed land was worth no more than the sum of its monetary value, while Māori saw the priceless ecological, spiritual and cultural importance of the whenua.

Land commodification is just as widespread as it was back then. While researching for this piece, every mention of “land ownership” would produce guides on how to buy the largest area of land for the lowest cost and taxes. Through colonial history, our primary view of land is as a source of income and material gain. We must shift this perspective if we are to care for the land and the people on it in the long-term.

What are the risks of land being commodified?

Aotearoa’s primary industries are excellent examples of land commodification degrading the environment. The forestry industry’s plantation forests alone cover 7.84% of the entire country, while the combined agricultural industry covers 39.75%. Add these percentages together and you get 47.59%. Almost half of the entire country is controlled by farmers with minimal restrictions, for the primary purpose of producing profit. Both industries hold their land under freehold,

meaning they have the rights to do almost anything to it to make more money. Owning land allows farmers and arborists to ignore the dangerous side effects of un-sustainable farming. Primarily due to fertiliser and bacterial contamination from dairy farming, almost 60% of our rivers are polluted beyond safe levels. The aftermath of a logging operation can permanently make soil uninhabitable by anything except more pines.

Through colonial history, our primary view of land is as a source of income and material gain. We must shift this perspective if we are to care for the land and the people on it in the long-term.

This evidence is eye-opening, but the fact that these individuals were allowed to buy the land in the first place is unacceptable. The New Forests forestry company recently bought 77000 hectares of land over just 4 years, making it the third biggest private landowner in Aotearoa. How would you feel seeing massive areas of land bought up for farms and pine plantations, while knowing it's unlikely to ever regrow into native forest? Our land will not last to the future if we give profit-seeking individuals uncontrolled power over it.

What are the benefits of a holistic view of land?

Under the Te Awa Tupua act, 2017, the Whanganui river has the legal status of a living entity and legal person. The Act recognises that the Whanganui river has rights to environmental, cultural, spiritual and economic wellbeing that must be upheld by dedicated Whanganui Iwi kaitiaki. Their job is to give the river a voice in support of its wellbeing and ensure no-one violates its legal rights. The Te Kōpuka committee was established from iwi, local

authorities, government, river users and enviro groups to collaborate on the best interests of the Whanganui river itself. Te Kōpuka developed a management strategy where, using government funding, collective decisions can be made on how best to manage the river's holistic wellbeing.

The economic value of the Whanganui river isn't ignored in this situation, quite the opposite; through the kaitiakitanga operation around the river, jobs have been created and economies have been enriched. The legal status of the river ensures that all people connected to it can benefit from all it has to offer, and in return, the river receives the care it needs to stay healthy.

By perceiving the Whanganui river as all of its ecological, cultural, spiritual and economic components, fully informed decisions can be made on what human activities should be allowed near the river. This evidence proves that when a piece of land is viewed holistically, people benefit just as much as nature benefits.

Conclusion - How can we change how land is viewed and managed to benefit both people and ecosystems?

Almost every system of government in the world commodifies land. Most countries assume that ownership is tied with exclusive national sovereignty gained through colonialism and war. In Aotearoa, we have the power to change that and it's all through perspective.

Māori call themselves Tangata Whenua, or people of the land. They have deep ecological, cultural and spiritual connections to the land they live on, therefore they must care for it. Kaitiakitanga is the Māori system of care for the land, involving kaitiaki or guardians who have the responsibility to protect it. Kaitiaki ensured kaitiakitanga practices were followed during food and wood collection, to keep plant and animal populations stable. The incentive to treat land with the respect it deserves is already rooted in our culture and recognising this is all it takes for

us to begin restoring land beyond just its economic value.

What if all of Aotearoa was legally personified, just like the Whanganui river? This system could include a Ministry for Kaitiakitanga, with branches all over the country. Commodification of land would be virtually eliminated through the granting of legal rights, jobs would be created through kaitiakitanga, and Māori would regain

more of the influence over land they lost through colonialism. If a law like this was passed, our generation could fill the first jobs in an exciting and important new field. It is crucial for us to think critically about how we view land, because this is the only way we can rid ourselves of dangerous colonial values. We must shift our perspective from commodifying land to seeing it as it truly is: a living, breathing connection between the natural world and human culture.



Shrek is an anti-feminist text

Hamish Nicholls Y13

Numerous animated films in present society tend to revolve around feminist ideologies. Some films do this well, while others reject this theme entirely. *Shrek*, released in 2001 and directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, focuses on the life of a male ogre (Shrek) whose swamp is infiltrated with pesky fairytale creatures due to Lord Farquaad, of the neighbouring kingdom, banishing them. Shrek then seeks out princess Fiona, locked away helplessly in a tower, to exchange her for his own solitude with Lord Farquaad. Treating princess Fiona as an object up for trade is against all feminist values. In fact, the text can be interpreted to support my hypothesis that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text. Kristen Schiele of California State Polytech University, Lauren Louie of the University of La Verne, and Steven Chen of California State University highlight the importance of correctly portraying feminist ideology in children's animations, as well as demonstrating what good portrayal of feminist ideology is, in their critical text: 'Marketing feminism in youth media: A study of Disney and Pixar animation.' On the other hand, Maria Takolander of Deakin University illustrates that feminism is poorly shown in *Shrek* by unpacking the underlying meanings behind the text. She

suggests that not only does the film poorly portray feminist values, but it also reinforces traditional gender roles that set woman back decades and provides unfit role models for younger generations of girls. Both critical texts help to prove my hypothesis that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text.

'Marketing feminism in youth media: A study of Disney and Pixar animation,' by Kristen Schiele et al, is a great source to help prove my hypothesis, by providing useful insight into what feminism in children's animation should look like. While this source neither agrees nor disagrees with my hypothesis, it does however provide examples of what animation should look like in children's films. Kristen Schiele et al state: "Media is a key influencer of children's understanding of gender based on the meanings, relations, and representations they portray," and "Media created for young girls are at once problematic and promising... they can be problematic when they solely reinforce patriarchal gender norms, in which female characters are passive, domesticated prototypes judged by their physical appearance." These quotes show that proper representation of woman is vital in children's viewing content to provide them with role models and teach them new ways of thinking, as well as showing that

traditionally enforced gender roles are damaging to the young audience. This helps support my hypothesis, as Shrek enforces traditional gender roles, where the male (Shrek) is portrayed as strong, heroic and in charge, such as when he rescues Fiona from her tower and ties up Dragon, while Princess Fiona is helplessly trapped in a castle awaiting “true love’s kiss” to set her free. She is then used as a token for trade without her choice, silencing her voice; effectively telling the audience that woman must be submissive and not make their own decisions. Kristen Schiele, et al, also provide examples of what animation should look like to become more progressive and match today’s societal standards. “For instance, in *Frozen*, Elsa accidentally freezes her sister, Anna, and the movie reveals that only “an act of true love” can undo the damage. The script plays on the audience’s expectation that the act of true love will come from a male romantic interest. The film’s concluding scenes reveal that, in fact, sisterly love can undo the damage.” The authors of this critical text show that a text is more successful and better suited to pro feminism values when the storyline of the text is not predictable. A text can become less predictable when it does not meet our expectations based on traditional gender roles, such as stated above. However, *Shrek* does not seem to fit this description. While there are instances where traditional gender roles are challenged, such as when Fiona fights Robin Hood and his men, traditional gender stereotypes are reinforced all throughout the film, as well as the storyline being very predictable – the male protagonist rescues a helpless princess from a tower, falls in love with her and decides he wants to keep her instead of exchanging her. Children the age of the target audience are impressionable and keen to take on new concepts. This means that they will take behaviors seen by their role



models, both in real life and film, to use them in their own life. However, *Shrek* shows young children that choices are not up to themselves if they are female and that they must sit patiently awaiting their savior instead of rescuing themselves. This also affects young boys as they will take away from the film that they have to be courageous and ‘masculine,’ and that showing any signs of femininity is weakness. *Shrek* following traditional gender stereotypes and not challenging the viewers’ expectations of the storyline, is both out of date and damages the young viewers’ understanding of gender, making them feel the need to fit into their gender categorized stereotypes of which the text reinforces, therefore making the text anti-feminist. I believe this critical text to be reliable as it is well cited all throughout and is written by 3 different professors across 3 different universities, making it credible. This source has made me more inclined to agree with my hypothesis as it has shown me what a strong feminist text should look like as well as the importance of one. This has allowed me to compare *Shrek* to these criteria and not see enough similarities to call

Shrek pro feminist. In fact, the study by Kristen Schiele et al has allowed me to see the anti-feminist messages throughout the film *Shrek*.

‘You can’t say no to the *Beauty and the Beast*’: *Shrek* and Ideology, by Maria Takolander of Deakin University, is also a great source to support my hypothesis, that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text. Takolander’s argument clearly supports my hypothesis through a thorough analysis of the text, providing useful insight into the widespread misogynistic tendencies featured. In her analysis, Takolander states: “In *Shrek*, Dragon, the gender imposter... is both ‘reduced to another form of femininity’ and ‘sexually humiliated’... she is wooed by Donkey’s flattery and transformed into

a grotesque, eyelash- batting parody of femininity. She is then chained up and humiliated by Shrek. Later, mastered, she becomes Shrek's and Donkey's pet. They put a bridle on her and ride her around.” This quote shows that misogyny is rooted in *Shrek* just under the surface layer. Takolander has simply taken one scene and analyzed it through a feminist lens, finding it to show an utter lack of feminist ideology and being harmful to feminist representation. This is due to the underlying message that woman will be punished, as Dragon was, if they dare to be strong and independent, in turn forcing woman to become submissive regardless of if they try to be strong or not. The impact of this is young girls thinking that they must submit to males regardless of what they believe, creating a gateway to all sorts of possibilities that leave the young girls at risk of harm in the future. The only other strong female character is Fiona, who is treated as an object whose only purpose is to fulfill the male's desire. This causes negative influences on young children and how they interact with the world. This is also shown by Takolander through the quote: “Fiona is a woman along for the ride. She enters the narrative when she is chosen by Lord Farquaad from a selection of fairytale girls in a magic mirror. She is then rescued by Shrek, delivered to Farquaad and quickly reclaimed by Shrek.” This quote further shows that Fiona is silenced and has no chance to even state her opinion, rendering her almost inanimate without a voice, like an object.

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This is also shown in the film when Lord Farquaad is searching for the ‘perfect’ princess to marry in the magic mirror. By doing so, the audience is shown that only a person’s physical

attractiveness is important, and nothing on the inside matters, as he is only choosing Fiona based on her appearance. Farquaad is only seeing what he wants to see in the mirror: a pretty thing that will make him a king. Once again showing how Fiona is treated as an object in the text. My hypothesis that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text is further reinforced when Takolander discusses how woman in the film are forced to be submissive. “...she is rewarded for her amiability by being wanted; by being the constant, if peripheral, object of male desire.” Throughout the film Fiona is submissive to all her male figures in her life, including Shrek and Lord Farquaad. An example of this is when Shrek is rescuing Fiona. Fiona refuses to walk, so Shrek throws her over his shoulder and continues, ignoring her wishes. As a result, she is rewarded, as Takolander states. Both Dragon and Fiona are used to show male superiority, teaching children from an early age that woman are to be submissive, and they will be rewarded, or if they are not, they will be forced to submit, like Dragon. Even though Fiona is also strong, shown when she fought off Robin Hood and his men, this is not the same because Fiona is then rewarded for her submissive behavior by being given attention from men. She acts submissive when required to avoid punishment, whereas Dragon is ridiculed, tormented, and chained up, later forced into becoming Shrek and Donkey’s pet.

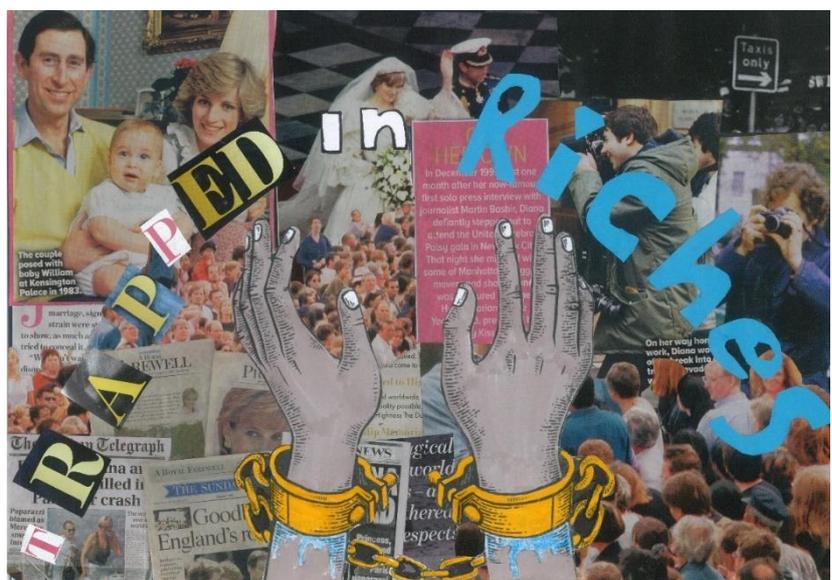
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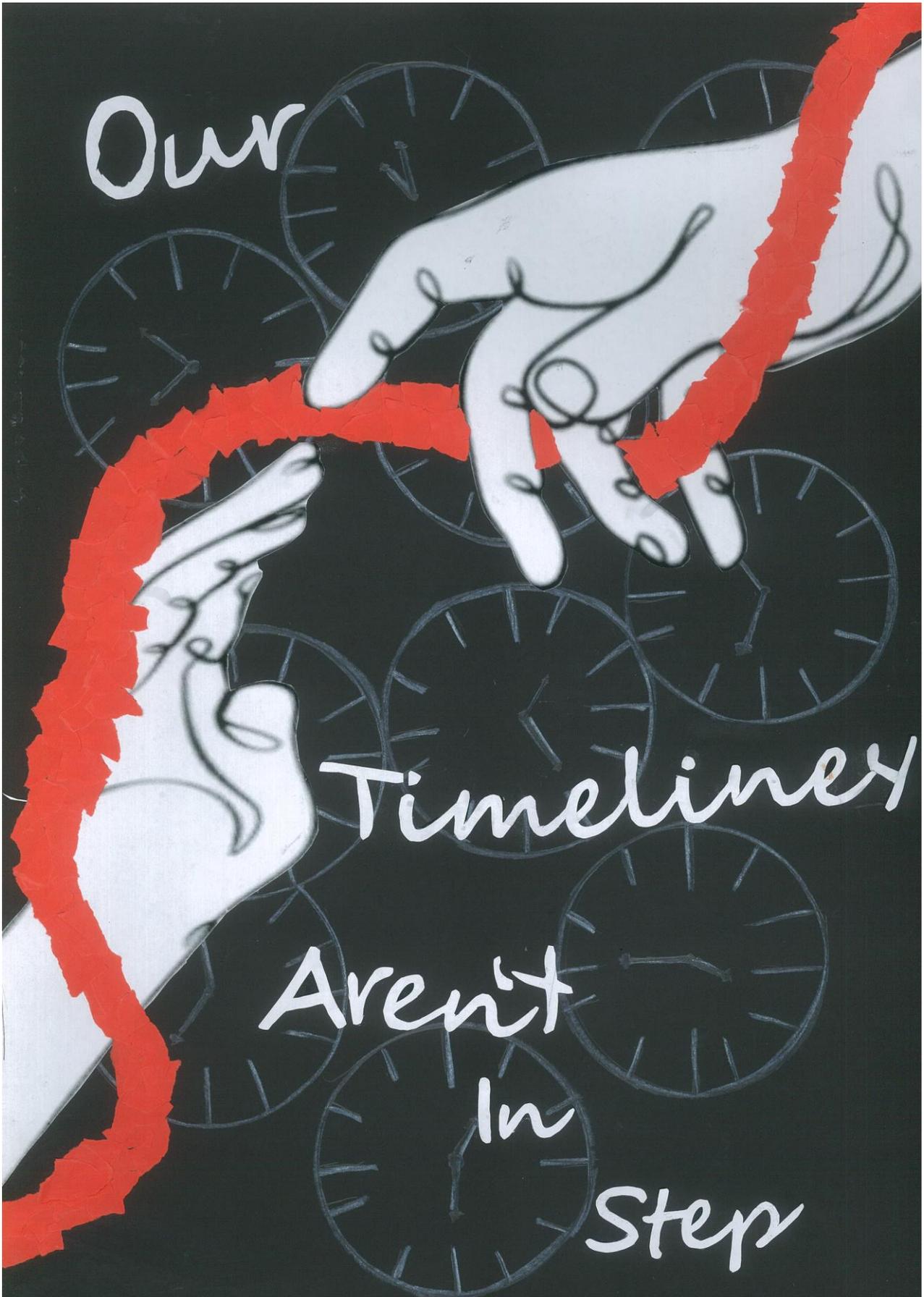
These gender roles implemented by directors Adamson and Jenson are extremely traditionally based and anti progressive – not fitting feminist ideology, in fact, directly opposing it. Teaching young children that girls must submit, and boys must be ‘masculine’ and superior, encouraging inequality, toxic masculinity, and misogyny in younger generations, making the text extremely anti-feminist. I believe this critical text to be a reliable source as it offers insight from both perspectives, is well cited and is written by an established author from Deakin University, making the source credible. Takolander’s critical text has confirmed my hypothesis that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text, due to her in-depth analysis of different moments throughout the film as well as the film as a whole. Takolander uncovered the true meanings rooted in the text, that woman must be submissive, or risk being forced to submit, and males must be strong and ‘masculine.’ This is entirely against feminist ideology, as these ideas negatively impact how children perceive the world and how they interact with it. Young boys become scared of being seen as feminine, and young girls feel they must be submissive, or risk being humiliated and put back in their place, damaging their development.

By analyzing both critics’ work, I have concluded that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text. Both critics

agree with what feminism should look like in children’s animation. Kristen Schiele et al demonstrate what good feminist texts should look like as well as the importance of them for children’s development, which we can then compare to *Shrek* and draw the conclusion that *Shrek* is not a good feminist text. However, Maria Takolander discusses *Shrek* directly and how it does when passed through a feminist lens, also allowing me to confirm my hypothesis. Perhaps at the time of the film’s release, the directors decided that society would prefer having more traditional gender roles, which would “make the film more successful,” or they decided that making Fiona “ugly,” with the idea behind it being: “It’s what is on the inside that matters,” was enough feminist ideology and they did not want to lose the appeal of the film to the audience. I still believe this to be inexcusable, especially after analyzing my two different critical texts, which provided numerous examples each of what was wrong with the text, in turn helping me conclude that *Shrek* is an anti-feminist text. This goes to show that what makes a text feminist is not the presence of ‘strong’ female characters, but when the moral values and life lessons that are communicated through the film are not based on gender stereotypes as seen in *Shrek*.

Tilly Mainwaring Y9





The problem with *Beauty and the Beast*

Sharvi Dev Y13

B*eauty and the Beast* is a classic children's film directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise in 1991. From the surface this is just a fairytale about a cursed beast, who after a long search for love, eventually finds his princess. However, there are critics who have dived deeper into the story and believe that Belle (Beauty), actually suffers from Stockholm Syndrome and it has been romanticized in this not so innocent tale. Though, there are others who dispute this theory, stating that Belle and the Beast may have an abusive relationship, but Belle is not psychologically ill. So, which is it?

Caroline Anne Duff's thesis on the gender roles of Disney heroines is a strong source that can prove Belle does indeed have Stockholm Syndrome. Duff states, "Her change of heart and attitude towards the Beast indicates that she has developed Stockholm Syndrome." This firmly suggests that the switch in Belle's emotions in relation to the Beast are not normal. She is held captive by the Beast, as when her father gets lost on castle grounds and the Beast takes him as prisoner, Belle sacrifices herself and takes her father's place. Initially, Belle is angry and after multiple arguments, she tries to escape. Yet once she is saved from a pack of wolves by the Beast, she is very quick to change her perspective. This is the point where Belle starts to sympathize with the Beast and gain affectionate feelings for her captor, leading to her developing the psychological disorder Stockholm Syndrome. Duff points out that "Belle suddenly begins to act like a woman being concerned for an abusive man, wanting to understand and help him." The only reason the Beast changes his behavior is due to Belle's support and influence. This is shown in moments such as when Belle does not speak to the Beast unless he speaks to her politely and uses manners. Because the Beast improves his ways with Belle's guidance, it makes their relationship

appear to be healthier than it is, because the fact remains that Belle is still a hostage. "The Beast may be lavishing her with gifts, clothes, an entire library full of books, and they may be enjoying one another's company at meals, playing and dancing together, all of which appear to make Belle happy, but ultimately, she does not possess the power to wake one morning, and leave if she so chose because she is the Beast's prisoner." This further shows Belle's Stockholm Syndrome is glamorized by the luxurious lifestyle the Beast provides her with. In return for her love and support, Belle is showered in materialistic things by the Beast, and they live happily, after the Beast transforms back into a prince. But Belle is still not free to leave whenever she feels like it, she is now expected to stay with the prince forever. Duff's thesis indicates that Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* romanticizes Stockholm Syndrome as it does not show the reality of being taken hostage.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast
romanticizes Stockholm
Syndrome as it does not show the
reality of being taken hostage.

Instead, it covers it up through the Beast's lavish lifestyle and Belle's sympathy made out to look like love. To me this film conveys the message that staying with someone abusive is okay. Even if you are with someone against your own will, they are just doing everything in your best interest. This film also gives the idea that you can profoundly change a person's toxic and unhealthy ways. However, these are both wrong, and not the case for many victims in these situations. With Disney's primary audience being children, this film is very problematic. It teaches young boys that it does not really matter how you treat your partner because they will always stay with you. It also encourages toxic masculinity by showing that it is normal for men to be aggressive, rough, and dangerous just like a beast.

Although Belle's character is supposed to have a positive influence on young girls, it can do the complete opposite. Instead, this film could be teaching young girls that they should stay and care for a man even if he displays abusive behavior and is doing the wrong things. It is essentially showing that abusive men do not mean to hurt their partners and it is still love because they are not violent all the time. However, this is not the case barely ever, as abusers have the intention to hurt. Therefore, this Disney movie could potentially be dangerous for children to watch, as it minimizes violence and abuse by making an unhealthy relationship appear to be a loving one.

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Erin Michelle Lederer's thesis on cinematic abuse in *Beauty and the Beast* is another very convincing source, which instead goes out to prove that Belle and the Beast have an abusive relationship. Lederer starts their thesis off with "Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* cultivates stereotypes and gendered behaviors consistent with domestic violence and thereby encourages viewers to accept and tolerate abuse against women." This strongly indicates that the Beast is abusive towards Belle and that this is a domestic violence situation, not a case of Stockholm Syndrome. There are moments when the Beast is kind to Belle, such as when he tells her "The castle is your home now, so you can go anywhere you wish, except for the West Wing." Yet even here he is still putting restrictions on her by telling her where she can and cannot go in her own new 'home.' Then there are moments where the Beast gets hostile and angry towards Belle over nothing, such as when he yells at her saying "You

will join me for dinner, that is not a request." At this point Belle disengages from the interaction and only starts to cry and show emotion when she is left alone in her bedroom. The constant and sudden changes in the Beast's behavior are very much like the abuser in a domestically violent relationship. They switch their moods all the time and can go very quickly from calm to extremely aggressive for no valid reasons. Belle is also a correct portrayal of a victim of abuse. Just like Belle, abuse victims tend to shut down and mentally leave a combative situation, only releasing emotion when on their own. Lederer also states, "Who Belle is and what happens to her tells the female audience who they are, what they should tolerate, how they should act and what will happen if they do not." This is a powerful statement that suggests this film is a dangerous influence on young females. Belle is an intelligent girl who is still only recognized for her pretty face, shown by the fact that Gaston only wants Belle because she is the prettiest. She is dominated by the Beast and by the end is just his princess, nothing more. From the moment her relationship with the beast begins, she constantly deals with bursts of anger and violence from him. She also in a sense is controlled by being told what and what she cannot do while being in the castle and knows the consequences if she does not follow those rules. This encourages the idea that males are and are meant to be dominant over females, and that if a female acts the right way and follows the rules, then everything else is okay. It teaches young girls that they should put up with pretty much anything from their partners no matter how hostile or violent it may be, as those moments of kindness make up for that abusive behavior. The danger of young boys seeing this film is that they are encouraged to be aggressively dominant over their partners. They are being taught that women are just like their property, and they can treat them however they wish because their partner will still stay with them. Similar to Caroline Anne Duff's thesis, Lederer's thesis also emphasizes that this film

instructs young children all the wrong things. Not only does it romanticize an abusive relationship, but it also encourages toxic masculinity and the idea that females are meant to be weaker and submissive, they are meant to love and care for their partner no matter what their partner is like to them. I believe in Lederer's statement on the fact that this movie downplays and even encourages abuse, making it seem acceptable.

After closely reviewing and analyzing these two sources, I have concluded that though the relationship between Belle and the Beast is unhealthy and toxic, Belle does not really suffer from Stockholm Syndrome. Both Duff and Lederer strongly agree that the Beast is an abuser and Belle is a victim, and that this is masked by the Beast's luxury lifestyle and Belle's

compassion. They also both believe that this film is a dangerous influence on young children, encouraging the stereotypes of submissive females and hostile dominant males. Although Duff's thesis was meant to prove that Belle has Stockholm Syndrome, it instead was the source that convinced me Belle is just in an abusive relationship. She is not suffering from a psychological disorder but her love for the Beast is abnormal, considering what she goes through when staying in the Beast's castle. I found that both theses persuaded me that Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is a problematic film which romanticizes an abusive relationship, embedding corrupt values on love and gender roles into young minds.



Looking at fast fashion through the lens of historical fashion: what can we learn?

Rebecca Elder Y13

"I do love having new clothes. But old clothes are beastly. We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending." Aldous Huxley wrote these words in 1932, in the midst of war and the Depression: fast fashion had not emerged yet. He predicted that as the world got more capitalist and mass manufactured, we would care for our clothes less and consume more: he basically predicted fast fashion. Fast fashion is a huge problem, ethically and environmentally, and there are lots of ways that we as consumers can try to alleviate its damage. However it's worth looking at the 2 centuries of fashion production before Huxley put pen to paper: by looking back at fashion history, we can learn what it could look like now.

Fast fashion is the mass production of cheap clothing corresponding to the quick trend cycle.

It describes brands with rapid product turnover like H&M, Zara, Mirrou, or Shein.

The mechanics of fast fashion are crucial to understand. There is demand for a new trendy item, seen on a recent runway, red carpet, or film. However these trends are fleeting, due to the fast news cycle of social media. This means a garment needs to be noticed, designed, the fabric manufactured, cut, sewn, flown to stores, and advertised, within mere weeks.

Cheap, synthetic fabric is often used to cut costs. Synthetic fabrics, such as polyester and nylon, shed microplastics when washed, which seep out into the waterways. Cheap dyes are also harmful: tanneries in Bangladesh are responsible for a huge amount of toxic wastewater. The whole process is fuelled by fossil fuels. And even if the fabric is naturally sourced, like cotton or wool, deforestation is often used to clear fields to grow it.

Now the fabric needs to be cut and sewn. This usually happens overseas: countries like Bangladesh or Vietnam have lax labour laws to cut costs, particularly in clothing factories - very low pay, poor working conditions, and children working. It actually costs less to have garments constructed overseas and flown here, than to make garments locally. These workplaces are often unsafe and cruel places to work: the workers, most of whom are women, can be victim to sexual harassment, lack of maternity leave, low wages with children to feed, or in some cases UTIs from lack of bathroom breaks. Next time you buy something fast fashion, see if you can find an unclipped thread or a wonky seam, and then see how quickly it falls apart. Think about how the worker must have been working for this to happen. Disasters caused by terrible working conditions and worker exploitation, like the Rana Plaza collapse which killed over 1100 workers, are frequent.

The garments are flown or shipped across the world, guzzling oil and gas. If your favourite fast fashion store has new designs on the floor weekly, and they were all made in Bangladesh, think of how many airplanes and freight ferries that is, and how much carbon all that transport is costing.

The manufacturing of clothes wasn't always this way. Before and immediately following the industrial revolution, manufacturing was a much slower, local, quality process. However, it's important to note that a lot of fabric production, especially cotton and chintz, was directly tied to slavery and the colonisation of India. Capitalism and imperialism have always hurt people, and they continue to hurt people through fast fashion. However we can take note from other areas of the historical fashion industry, like the construction of garments, to help people now.

I'll be discussing the 18th and 19th centuries. The sewing machine was patented in the 1840s. Broadly, people got clothes custom from a local

dressmaker. This wasn't just rich people - the middle and working class would as well, it was just how you got clothes.

Historical fashion obviously had trends, as we can see from the changing silhouettes, but due to the less developed means of communication and manufacture, they happened much slower. They were influenced by the royal court or by royals, and then later fashion plates and magazines.

Fabrics that were easier to produce in Europe, like wool and linen, tended to be woven by skilled artisans in centres of commerce, such as Italy, France, or China. Later, weaving workforces moved to England and other places. As said, fabric would be woven in centres and then shipped or imported.

Next time you buy something fast fashion, see if you can find an unclipped thread or a wonky seam, and then see how quickly it falls apart. Think about how the worker must have been working for this to happen.

You would buy enough fabric for the garment in mind from a fabric merchant, and take it to your local dressmaker. Home sewers would not have the same skill as dressmakers by trade. It's like how you can cut your own hair nowadays, but most people go to a professional hairdresser. Ready-to-wear garments would not be sold until the late 19th century, though you could buy small things ready before then. For the style and cut of the garment, you could use fashion plates or the dressmaker's advice. You would go in for a few fittings, where your garment would be cut and fit and then sewn. The sewing process tended to take anywhere from a single day for a basic gown, to days or weeks for something more complex.

We have receipts from New Zealand women commissioning gowns from their local

dressmakers on Lambton Quay, and going through this process. There was a much clearer idea on the consumer's end of where the clothing was coming from, as you were intimately involved with the creation of your garments. Garments tended to be higher quality and more ethically made than they are now.

Buying and owning clothes now looks very different than it did 200 years ago.

Fast fashion shops used strategies like lighting, displays, and sales to encourage impulse buying, to sell as many clothes as possible. We know that a lot of these strategies like low prices and frequent product turnover are a direct result of poor labour practices.

We own more clothes now, but wear the same amount as ever - we only have one body and 24 hours in a day. As we own too much, a lot of our clothing, which was harmfully manufactured at great cost, is now sitting idle in our closets. The cheapness of fast fashion means we take owning lots of clothes for granted. We don't treat clothes as they need to be - washing them properly according to their specific needs, or mending frequently instead of throwing something away once it gets a hole or stained.

We are also throwing away more clothes than ever. A big trend in recent years has been 'decluttering' - getting rid of lots of the things we own to free up our space and appreciate what we have. Appreciating our clothes is good, but what happens to the discarded clothing? Clothing is a huge part of our landfills, between 7-12%, a lot of which is plastic. Even if you donate your old clothes, the majority of clothes donated to op shops aren't sold, as many of them aren't cute or trendy or easily resellable, and they end up in landfill anyway. The world is sagging under the weight of all the waste we create, and fashion is a huge contributor, especially the plastic.

The culture of clothing consumption was very different in the 18th and 19th centuries. Firstly, as discussed, people didn't own as much clothing:

fabric was expensive and getting something made was an intensive process. An 1840s handbook for NZ colonists, recommends that a labourer's wife should bring only 3 cotton dresses, while a high society lady should bring 20 dresses. People would rewear clothes time and time again. Everyone knew how to mend - all children were taught needlework. Clothing was a precious, expensive commodity, and everyone needed to know how to care for theirs and get the absolute most out of it.

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But we can see the evolution of trends in the 18th and 19th century, right? If people bought way less clothes, how would people keep up with trends? Most people did follow at least basic silhouette trends: the rich wanted to be fashionable, and the middle and working class wanted to be respected. So then, if people were keeping up with trends, but buying new garments much less frequently than we do today, how is that possible? By refashioning garments.

People would simply take garments that they already owned to their dressmaker, and have the dressmaker refashion the garment according to the new trend. They could change the cut, the silhouette, or just change the sleeves or trimming. As expensive as fabric was, it would have been crazy to abandon a whole dress just because it was out of fashion. If you didn't want the garment entirely, it could be given to a friend or family member, refashioned for a child, or recycled for the home. Throwing something away unless it was well and truly tattered was out of the question.

Also, sidenote, I think we have objectively devolved in terms of fashion aesthetic and function. Do you know how enormous pockets used to be? Do you know how beautiful evening

wear used to be? Did you know that in the 19th century, there were different gowns for morning, mourning, afternoon, informal entertaining, visiting, dinner, evenings, and royal court? Do you know how elegant sportswear used to be? Did you know that clothing used to have much better temperature control because everything was natural fibres? Did you know 1830s and 1890s sleeves needed separate supports to keep them in shape? Did you know corsets weren't in fact patriarchal torture devices, but if fitted correctly, comfortable supportive garments which were functionally bras? We have to go back, people.

Historical fashion was not perfect: the production of fabrics like cotton in the 18th and 19th century was linked to colonisation and slavery. Towards the end of the 19th century, as the industrial revolution birthed mass production, disasters like the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire foreshadowed disasters to come. And I'm not suggesting we go back to stitching everything by hand. However historical fashion seems objectively less harmful than fast fashion, certainly the construction of garments, and I think that as consumers and on a larger scale, manufacturers, we can take some lessons from how we used to do things.

Campaigning for worker's rights, environmental protections, supporting smaller local makers, and generally overthrowing mass manufactured capitalism will allow us to return to a fashion landscape similar to that of history. We know what it can look like, and one of the best ways to get there is to campaign for radical change.

However here are some things you can do as a consumer, as we can't all overthrow corporate overlords all the time. Some of this stuff may be more possible for those with more financial privilege, so if you are lucky enough, take advantage of it.

Firstly, mend your clothes. You just need a needle and thread. Learn to darn your socks, patch your jackets, embroider over small holes and stains. It's easy to learn, and it'll make your clothes stronger and last longer. If something is too damaged for you to be able to mend, take advantage of your local tailor or dressmaker.

Second, pay more attention to where your clothes come from. Try to buy clothes from local businesses with quality materials and transparent supply chains. Buying second hand is also great, from an op shop or a for-profit thrift store - often it helps you support local charities, and keeps clothes out of landfill.

Third, if you absolutely have to get rid of something, hand it down to a friend or family member. Organise a clothes swap! Sell it on Trademe! Just make sure what you're getting rid of is definitely going straight to a good home and not potentially to landfill. And you can always refashion the garment into something new, either yourself, or again with the help of your local dressmaker.

Finally, this is the cheapest option: buy less stuff! It reduces the amount of clothes you won't wear, avoids needless clothing consumption, avoids supporting unethical brands, and allows you to buy more quality pieces, less frequently. Avoid impulse buying something because you feel you ought to. Plan purchases. Try getting something custom made! Slowly build a versatile wardrobe for all your needs - the Georgians and Victorians were experts of the capsule wardrobe.

To be honest, the reason that fashion has become so detrimental is more due to late-stage capitalism than anything inherent to fashion. And to be honest, the seeds of what it's become were always there. But we can learn real lessons about how to truly value our clothing from the past, and for the sake of ethics and the environment, we really have to get onto it.



The Dark Knight: Wonderfully dramatic or just straight up traumatic?

Rachel Vass Y13

Spoiler Alert: It's the Latter

One night, while I procrastinated studying for my mock exams, I came across a tweet that read: “men are like hey wanna watch this movie it's 3 hours long and absolutely nothing fun happens”. As my eyes scanned over the words, I felt them resonate with me, understanding me as nothing else in my sleep-deprived mock stressed haze could. In my case, the man was my English teacher, and the movie was the critically acclaimed, two and a half-hour-long instalment of the Batman trilogy – *The Dark Knight*. Directed by Christopher Nolan, this film has been serving as the bane of my existence since we first started watching it, via screen share during a lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

When I watch a movie, I'm looking for something that I can see myself in, that I can relate to. *The Dark Knight* was certainly not that movie. In the entire two and a half-hour run time, there is only one female character who can be argued to have an important role: Harvey Dent's girlfriend, and Batman's childhood sweetheart, Rachel. Yet, despite sharing a first name, there was absolutely nothing of myself that I could see in her. This is because, unlike our brooding 'sad-boy' hero, Rachel is not shown to have any personality traits other than 'love interest'. She is only a 'girlboss' to the extent that her feistiness can appeal to the main male characters. She may be the object of both of these characters' affections, but the keyword in that sentence is 'object', as she is never treated by Nolan as anything more than that.

Even if there was any character development, it doesn't change the fact that Rachel is killed off halfway through the movie, taking the number of impactful female characters from 1 (ish) to 0. The movie doesn't even have the bare minimum of female character interaction to pass the Bechdel

test, let alone enough for the female viewer to see themselves in. Also, when we look at the killing off of Rachel, we see that for all *The Dark Knight* is claimed to eschew the stereotypes of a typical superhero movie, it certainly clings close to the trope of women in such films being killed, maimed or depowered as a plot device to move a male character's story arc forward. This phenomenon is so common it even has a name: 'fridging'. Discussions surrounding *The Dark Knight* often gloss over how it contributes to this problematic trend but how is someone supposed to enjoy a movie when they know that if they were a character, the director would consider them disposable and discardable. One dead Rachel is enough, thank you very much.

I would be hard-pressed to come up with a description of the plot at all. A simple story of good vs evil, hero vs villain? Or, a subversive film that questions the very nature of morality?

At the height of my Dark Knight induced frustrations, I desperately tried to break down why a movie that had me on the verge of tearing my hair out was others' favourite film. Surely there was something with the plot, some grand overarching narrative that invested the viewer, held them to the edge of their seats? Yet, as I wracked my mind for a path to bridge the disconnect between my experience and pop cultures' perception of the film, there was nothing particularly notable about the plot that came to mind. I would be hard-pressed to come up with a description of the plot at all. A simple story of good vs evil, hero vs villain? Or, a subversive film that questions the very nature of morality? The key problem with this movie is that it tries to be both, and end up as a pretentious and confusing mess. It is torn between being a

good superhero movie for the audience who watch it because it is a Batman film, and being a good movie for those who watch it despite it being a Batman film.

Many an English teacher will try and convince you that *The Dark Knight* uses tension and suspense to force the viewer to re-examine human nature and society. However, the very nature of the Batman franchise makes the attempts to build this suspense and tension ineffective. The audience knows that they're not going to kill Batman, not when there's a sequel coming out and a line of toys to sell. As for the message about society? Well although there is room in the world for the film about society and morality that *The Dark Knight* fails to be, that room is not within the confines of the Batman franchise. Nolan cannot make Batman evil lest it compromise the bottom line, so all of his attempts at portraying Batman's moral greyness fall short, making a character as broody, unlikeable, and unrealistic as the ridiculous voice Christian Bale uses to portray him. A voice that, when combined with the comical and cartoonish suit he wears, makes it hard to take anything he says seriously, further damning Nolan's attempts at a dark and gritty film.

Not content to simply be an unenjoyable viewing experience, *The Dark Knight* went one step further and made that viewing experience an excruciating two-and-a-half hours long. Length in itself is not inherently a bad thing; *Little Women*, one of my favourite films of all time is only 15 minutes shorter. However, when you find yourself checking how much longer is left of the film, only to find it's not even halfway through, you've got a problem. This movie could have been a whole hour shorter, and even then I would probably still consider it poorly paced. How does it manage to bore the viewer to tears while also simultaneously attacking you by constantly cutting from one bland plotline to the next? Nolan is all about killing off women called Rachel, but was me

wanting time to breathe during the movie really too much to ask?

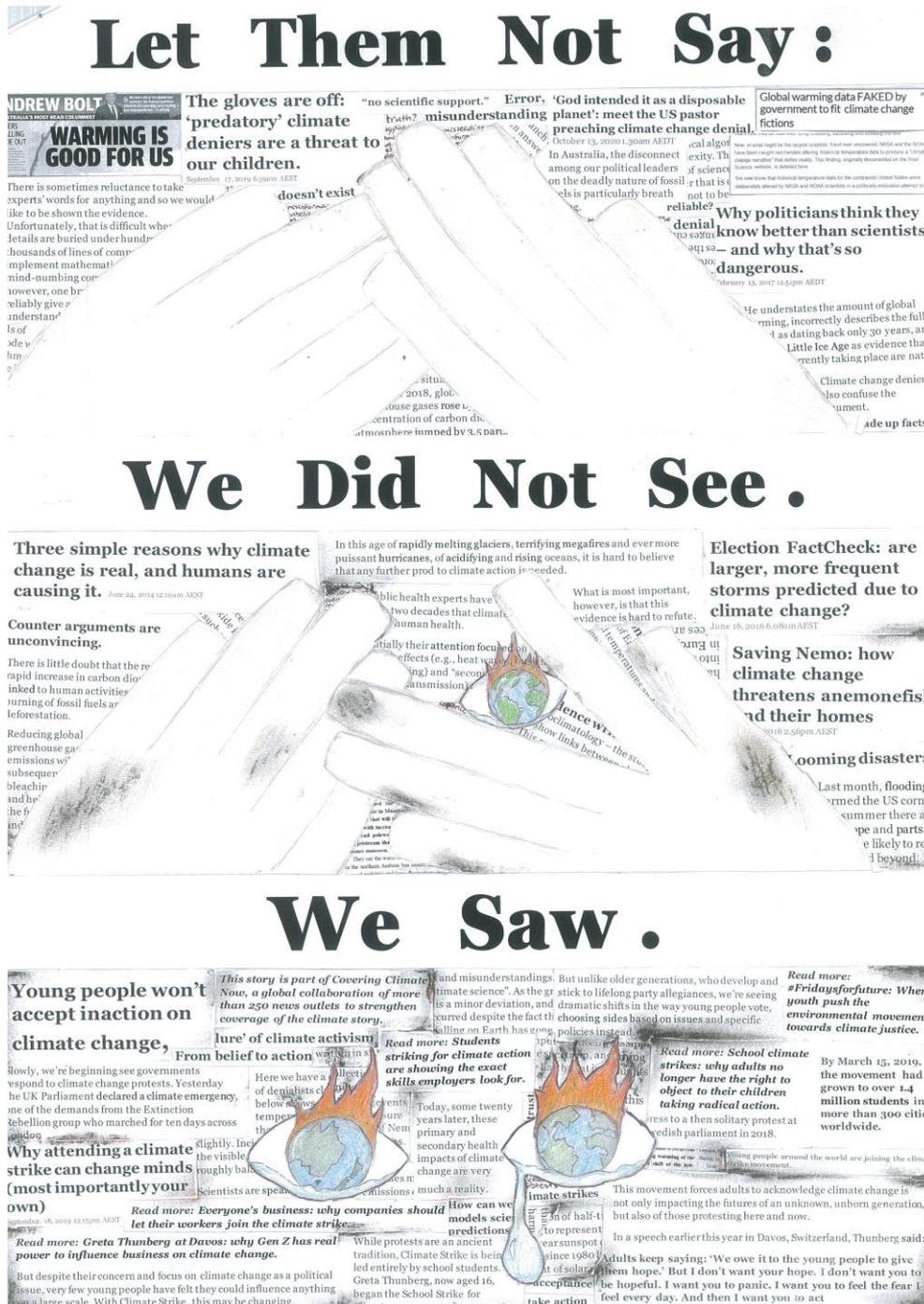
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Considering that it is a sequel, the movie spends far too long on character exposition, although only that of the male characters of course, and its forgettable side plots only serve to increase the run-time. One simply has to look at the scenes involving the mob, the Hong Kong trip, or the focus on showcasing futuristic technology (such as the ridiculous attempt to reconstruct a fingerprint from a shattered bullet) to see exactly why this movie has me staring at my watch in despair. Don't even get me started on the fight scenes which despite being mundane and monotonous in the name of realism, still eat up a massive chunk of time and feel as if they last forever to an already unengaged viewer. Instead of engaging with the audience, these scenes alienate not only the audience members who are not big fans of violence, but also those who watch superhero movies for the very fast-paced exciting fight scenes. Even the movies arguably most exciting car chase scene has been heavily critiqued for its confusing cinematography, meaning that the one chance for an exciting moment is wasted. Renowned video essayist and movie critic Jim Emerson, has published a 20 minute long analysis breaking down why exactly this scene is so disorientating. Considering that the scene itself is only five minutes long, that is impressive for all the wrong reasons. When the film alternates between boring violence and boring plot, I once again find myself asking why this is considered to be one of the greatest movies of all time.

To conclude, no matter what you consider a good movie, *The Dark Knight* is not it. Are you

looking for something visually entertaining and captivating? Sorry, the movie has to be realistic to make it dark and gritty, so you'll find yourself staring at a movie more blue than twilight, and without any sparkling vampires or exciting fight scenes to spice it up. What about a movie that portrays some great message about the nature of humanity? Nice try, but instead all you can see

throughout the movie is how hard Nolan is trying to make this happen, rather than any marker of success. Nolan fails to achieve the very purpose he shaped the movie around, and that's why, now I have mercifully escaped my level two English exam, if you see me watching *The Dark Knight* you should interpret it as a sadistic cry for help.



Jayne Holmes Y11

