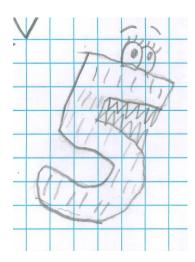


au mai, haere mai ki tenei makahīni tua rima o te kāreti o Onslow.

Welcome to the fifth edition of The Obvious Choice – a magazine of work by students in the English Learning Area at Onslow College. At five years old, the ākonga who named this magazine and created the masthead for it – alumni of 9BHE, 2018 – are graduating from Onslow.

Since its beginning, The Obvious Choice has featured an eclectic selection of the work produced in our classrooms - from fiction to non-fiction, comic to heartfelt, optimistic to melancholic.

Read these pages for surprising twists on well-known stories, stunning descriptions of the everyday, and unexpected arguments to make you ponder the world we live in. Be transported. The time invested in these pieces is most certainly a 'great deal'.



Contact us

If you'd like to contact *The Obvious Choice*, please email bronwyn.polaschek@onslow.school.nz

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all the students whose work appears here. You have managed through short days and a disrupted school timetable to *still* produce work that is striking – in all sorts of ways.

This year's incredible cover is by **Bladon Roe** (Y11) and the amazing back cover is by **Tessa Thornley** (Y11).

Thanks to our doodlers who enliven the page: Tumanako Wa (2, 8, 27, 47, 58, 59, 64, 67, 68, 72, 75, 87), Daisy Niehorster (9, 31), Poppy Albertson (9, 11, 90), Karissa Mainilall (13), Rebekah Duflou (15), Vivian Robles (24), Iris Polaschek (42, 56, 91), Feiyu Wang (30), Alex Conroy-Weithaler (36), Victor Thompson (43, 56), Leith Worden (map – 93), Jeevika Krishna (61), Shivam Jamwal (armour - 93), Dung Le (74), and Isaac O'Leary Nutter (2, 62, 83).

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



Static Images

Trijal Pednekar Y11	10
Klara Toth Y11	16
Flynn Barnes Y12	19
Tumanako Wa Y11	377
Henry Ludlow Y12	400
Arkin Earle Y11	53
Jedh Mairielle Racho Y11	70
Alex Chen Y9	80
Bailey Denton Y10	88





Contents

Creative Writing	
A long, cobbled path	
Leanna Loh Y9	
Fireworks	
By Brooke Harris Y9	
I look up to see them	8
Cam Heron Y9	
Goldylocks and the three bears	5
The blacksmith	
Cate Velloen Y9	
The cattle of Patuna chasm	
Mateo Chapman Y9	
The officers walked into the dining room	
Corrine Martin Y9	
Matariki	
By Neiva Elliott Y9	
Two wheels, one day	
Maia Mesbahi Y9	
The butcher	
Reed Williams Y9	
Celeste Evelyn Moore	
Tilly Jowett Y9	
2042	20
Ilja Copic Y10	
The village of Freefall	21
Dung Le Y10	
Heartlake island.	
Daisy Niehorster Y10	
The gatekeepers	23
Vivian Robles Y10	
Derlin hunting	
Morag McLellan Y10	
The library	
Wren Osborne Y10	
Void	20
Toby Forgan Y10	
Beneath the waves	
Laura O'Toole Y11	
The voyage	28
Aislinn O'Meara Y11	

Train	29
The foot taps	30
Orla O'Meara Y11	
The coarse ground	31
A door to new beginnings	32
The sound of the twig snapping	33
The eviction notice	35
The outsiders	38
Ripples in the mirror	39
After the shattering	41
Overstimulated	43
8.00amLily Harward Jones Y12	44
Memories	46
1939Lilly Athfield Y12	47
Death to Père Fouettard	48
Hermes's Shoes Tiva Green Y12	49
Station	50
To the ones who are always there, waiting - An ode to fictional books	52
ormal writing	54
Hunger Games film review Bee Tran Y9	55
Capital letters: The biggest let-down of the English language	56
The gender pay gap Manon Lavigne Y10	57
The Day after tomorrow review	60

Fast fashion	62
Katarina Skrzynska Y11	
Plastic pollution	63
How true crime hurts victims Ella Thompson Y12	64
How not to reboot a movie franchise: Nikki Harris Y12	66
Obi Wan Kenobi: The mixed feelings are strong with this one	67
Piki atu ki te taumata o tōku maunga Lizzie Evans Y12	71
A few questions	72
The Wellington protest was not a Māori protest Jacob Taylor Y12	
Why 'pug' dogs must go extinct	76
Gordon Ramsay is a cultural icon	76
Is the fox-eye trend offensive to Asians?	78
Keating's Redfern speech Walter Hamer Y12	79
Separation between church, state and sanity	81
A hidden gem: the wonders of the Octemone	82
The dangers of outlawing abortion	
A social critique that upholds the patriarchy??	85
Feminism and Breakfast at Tiffany's Louise Gromme Y13	88

5

A long, cobbled path

Leanna Loh Y9

long, cobbled path stretched before me. The wind whistled as it whirled around me, making me shiver. The path was lined with pretty white roses, a refreshing change from the overgrown path, with cracked stones and weeds peeking through the cement. The ocean waves echoed through my ears as I walked along the path, careful not to trip on a stone, or lose my footing and fall off the cliff edge, down, down into the deep grey waters that were crashing against the large stone wall. The trail continued, but about halfway, the white roses suddenly changed to red. It looked as though someone had painted them, for tiny brushstrokes could be seen. The sky was dark, and thick clouds covered the dark sky, with the moon's eerie glow shining through.

The large, castle-like building drew nearer, and up close I could see all the delicate details, even though the building was old and abandoned, with moss and weeds growing in the tiny crevasses and cracks. It was likely to be an old chapel for those mourning. A large graveyard stood nearby, the gravestones all cracked and crumbling. It's days of being a neat chapel were over, but I could see more red roses, similar to the ones on the path, neatly lined on the edge of the chapel. Again, tiny brushstrokes could be seen. It sent a

shiver down my spine, and I looked around for any signs of life.

Weeds covered the derelict path leading to the neglected graveyard. The headstones were all deteriorating, and it was hard to make out what they said. Several headstones were knocked down all together, not the work of humankind, but that of Mother Nature. The graves were battered and weathered, some worn down to a sad lump of rock. Mist hung low around me, and I made my way around the disintegrating graveyard, careful not to put a foot wrong. Suddenly, a flickering light flashed from the building, and slowly, I could taste fear rising up my throat. The door of the chapel slowly creaked open, and a hunched, shadowy figure stood menacingly in the doorway.

I could taste fear rising up my throat

Nothing was heard from the girl after that. The figure retreated, but not before treating this trespasser, and painting some more roses, along the path, and lining the edge of the chapel. If one even bothered to count the headstones in the graveyard, they would notice, a smaller, newer headstone crammed into the corner, just as cracked and crumbling as the rest.



Fireworks

By Brooke Harris Y9

rash! Noise explodes from everywhere and nowhere, all at once. But then it's gone. My ears immune to everything. Except the rumbling.

Rumbling.

Creaking.

Groaning.

All there but faint. Muffled.

A jolt goes through the metal spine of the car making it whine in protest. My hair immediately falls in dark blonde strands, stroking the car roof. My body weight feels like its tripled, too heavy for me to carry around anymore.

Arms dangling.

Car racing.

Calm replacing eagerness.

As the car lurches in an unidentifiable direction, I giggle and enjoy the tickly sensation of my stomach being left behind. I watch enthusiastically as the tire-streaked road, in the dim afternoon light, races past the top of my broken window. My hands feel the broken glass bounce off my skin, like hail hitting a trampoline.

Metal collides with concrete, and I am entranced by the dancing yellow and orange burning bright against the tedious grey road. My eyes widen with joy. Sparks. Detonating with colour like New Year's Eve fireworks, spitting in all directions. Just specks of light, but so extraordinarily beautiful.

Jostling stops. Lost sound returns. The hurtling car slows to a dead stop.

The beautiful sparks diminish, and I am consumed with despair.

I want them back.

I want the fireworks back.



I look up to see them

Cam Heron Y9

I look up to see them

The stars, the sign of the new year.

What a story they have.

Two lovers long ago

Holding each other, not letting go

Torn apart by their children.

A world of darkness

Filled with light.

A child so angry with his brothers

He threw his eyes into the sky

Where they turned into stars.

Forever they've sat, way up high

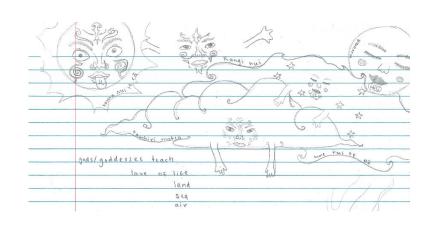
Watching over us.

Matariki is their name,

Used for guidance for the year ahead.

They are our culture

And I love them.



Goldylocks and the three bears

Iris Polaschek Y9

Goldylocks, (named for her hair)

Was such a sweet little dear.

She decided, for she thought she should,

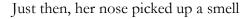
To go for a stroll in the **deep dark** woods.

Halfway through, a cloud shrouded her mood,

She said: "I'm such a fool, I forgot to bring food!"

And so, she muttered, "After this great blunder,

I must find something to calm my hunger."



But what it was, she couldn't quite tell.

She followed it, and it led to a house,

Which was the same colour as her daisy-white blouse!

The smell beckoned her to come inside,

And all she could do was to abide.

"Porridge!" She gasped, and wolfed it right down,

Leaving three empty bowls of a nice warm brown.

In the next room she found

Three chairs sitting around.

But the moment she sat,

The chairs went crack crack,

And she fell on the floor,

But her head hit the door.

It was all she could do to run up the stairs,

And collapse her tired body into a pillowy bed.

Goldy slept for two hours, or so I think.

When she awoke, she heard a clink clink!

The door creaked ajar, and Goldylocks saw,









A bear! It was a monster, making a terrifying roar! Two more came inside, baring their teeth. Goldy sat up and jumped to her feet.

Her jaws opened wide, like those of a tiger,
Then they opened more and grew even wider!
She chomped up the bears,
And skipped down the stairs,
Out the front door, for she thought she should,
Go for a stroll in the **deep dark** woods.

THE END!



Trijal Pednekar Y11

The blacksmith

Cate Velloen Y9

roam across the starless streets, houses hidden in darkness. You can hear the faint snoring of residents if you focus your attention intently. The old dirt roads are full of weeds, vile insects, and hoof prints of many sizes. The houses are classic, with two windows and a small patio leading up to the door. All filled with a lifeless void of silence. All except for one. Just to the left, the last house on Oiser Place. A blinding yellow glow fills the lonely corner with joy.

All filled with a lifeless void of silence.

The small patio is instead off towards the right, a single candle allowing all to see. The property is surrounded by a white picket fence; you feel a sense of belonging in the night air. You can hear the faint hushed voices and tapping along the rigid wood floors. In here lives Joseph Coleman. His jaw as sharp as the blade of a knife, his eyes dark like charcoal, fixed in a cold stare. His clothes fit his body just enough to see his bony figure. His arms are pure muscle while everything else remains slim like breakable sticks. You would not believe a blacksmith were living in a house this extravagant. According to the town he is a man of few words although when he speaks it is of importance, so you listen carefully. Joseph sits, hunched over with a distant look on his face. A pen in one hand, an envelope in the other. I can feel the tension held in the room. Something tells me this is no ordinary letter, on no ordinary day. He pinches the bridge of his nose, letting out an annoyed grunt. He throws the pen and envelope on the table as he abruptly leaves the room. I follow him through the windows, his

footsteps echoing along the wooden floors as he swings open the bedroom door.

The room is neat. Too neat. He makes his way towards a small closet, it looks handmade. The furnishing in the room gives off a sense of poise and elegance yet this man is anything but. His jaw clenches as he throws his oiled, burnt, torn raggedy clothes into a hamper. A loud screech erupts and instantly you see the imperfections in a so-called perfect room. His bed is made of unoiled metal, the mattress is one of many years of age. The inside of the duvet is full of feathers you would find on the side of the road; unclean and sharp. His eyes finally close as the quiet humming of an old lullaby puts him to sleep.

His face transforms into one of joy, I can only imagine he is picturing the life he wanted. To be a seamster; to be proud of who he was and who he'd soon become. A vision appears. He is merely a little boy playing with a ball in an old farmhouse. He kicks the ball into the pigpen and wishes to retrieve it before a pig can eat it. As he climbs over the fence a yell causes him to freeze. It is a man. Around his thirties. "What are you doing you dumb boy! You're out to get yourself killed!" shrieks the man. "I thought I taught you better son. I am extremely disappointed in you Joseph, I really am." The dream dissolves into something else, something that causes this man great pain. He is around the age of eighteen. He walks into a workshop, known as Fix-it feelers. His stepfather greets him with a warm smile. "Gooday Jose, what is on your mind boy? You finally ready to join me in this amazing place?" hums the man as he points all around him. Joseph gives a slight nod, not one of excitement, a nod of fear.



The cattle of Patuna Chasm

Mateo Chapman Y9

"Do you guys want to go the long way?" my mom asked. "The water is much deeper, so you'll get to swim." I looked around and one of my friends agreed to come with me and my dad.

We had been walking the Patuna Chasm loop and we had just finished; we had the option of walking back to the car or taking a slightly longer route where the water was deep, and we would have to swim for a couple meters. The whole walk before was fairly good, but I was looking forward to some off-track excitement that I would take away from this trip.

As we trotted through the gravel and stones, the light from above the chasm illuminated us with rays of beaming light dancing through the gap above, the water below our feet swiftly streamed through the pebbles making windchime-like sounds. Every step the water got deeper and deeper meaning the swim was soon to come. After not too long, I was having trouble feeling the ground, the swim had begun. The water flooded the inside of my shirt, it was much colder than I had expected, and I felt myself being stabbed by cold ice picks, I swam faster until I saw our first hump of land where we could stand again, but there already was someone on it. I continued to swim until I made out what it really was.

A cow.

Actually, half a cow.

It was lying on the surface with ribs completely exposed. It had fallen into the chasm from the paddock above. Peeping through the prison bars of fingers covering my eyes I saw more.

Maggots.

Lots of maggots.

I refused to look anymore as the sight was worse than the smell. Stepping back into the water for the second swim, my stomach was churning and felt like I was going to sink to the bottom. Every tread I tried not to think of the fact that I was swimming in cow remains and keeping my mouth securely latched closed. After taking another corner I had and made it to another clearing of land. I sat on the grass with my head between my knees.

That smell again.

Actually, half a cow.

I looked ahead but no other cow was in sight, turning my head back to see where my dad was, I was met face to face with a half-decomposed cow planted to the left of me. Its nose was in front of mine, only mine wasn't covered in mud and flesh. My dad arrived not too long after and agreed this was probably a bit much seeing there was a sheep with the same fate ahead of us. But there was no way to leave, we were in a chasm, the only way out was to keep going. My friend started to get worried apparently, he saw an eel swimming below him, that was the least of my concerns seeming I had most likely swallowed whatever was floating in the water.

The next few minutes stretched like an elastic band, I had completely forgotten the reason we were here and could only focus on getting out and having a shower as quickly as possible. Eventually the sun was able to fully brush its light on us again.

We were out.

Walking back to the car, my wet socks squelched on my shoe soles, I felt as if I was shivering and burning at the same time. My temptation to bite my fingernails was quickly shut off, I could not imagine what my hands had touched.

"You guys were gone for so long, what happened?" my mom asked.

I looked at my dad in discomfort. He laughed.

The officers walked into the dining room

Corrine Martin Y9

he officers walked into the dining and sat down. In the room next door, Mary graciously walked over to her chair and sat, picking up what she had been doing before Patrick had come home. Patrick. It would be a while until she'd say that name again. She giggled gleefully and continued.

In the dining room, Sergeant Jack and his fellow officers were chatting away. They talked about the case, about Mary, about the missing weapon, and about Patrick, a lost officer. There was a lot they could say. As his officers finished the lamb off, Sergeant Jack was silent for a moment. Then his epiphany came. And it was a terrible, terrible epiphany. Mary Maloney had killed her husband. Sergeant Jack felt an ice cold feeling of nausea slithering through his body. She had opportunity, she definitely had means, and that woman! That woman whot was Patrick's 'sister.' Mary even had a motive. Means, motive, and opportunity. And the leg of lamb. It must have been harder that stone when it was frozen....

"Excuse me for a minute," the Sergeant whispered. "I need to go question somebody."

His officers sat in a confused silence as Sergeant Jack pushed himself and his chair away from the table, stood up and left. His fellow officers' eyes stalked him as he left; Jack could feel them glued to him. He exited the room and walked cautiously over to Mary, who was sitting calmly in her comfy chair under the glistening light of her table lamp.

In a fake-relaxed manner, Sergeant Jack asked her to join him outside for some private questioning. Mary thought nothing of it; she gracefully stood up, her pretty hair falling across her shoulders. She then followed the Sergeant into the garden, a mischievous and cunning grin forming across her face.

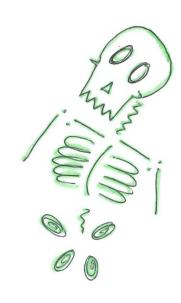
"I need to go question somebody."

Sergeant Jack led Mary outside, and eventually stopped and let out a heavy, concerned sigh. He tried his best to turn leisurely so Mary wouldn't suspect anything. Sadly, however, it was a little too late. Before he managed to get a word out, a solid item came smashing down over the poor Sergeant's head. He fell with a thump, and glossy red blood seeped from under his hair.

Behind him, Mary stood stiller than stone, smiling. Beside her, the man who had hit Jack stood just as still, holding a leg of lamb with tiny shards of ice trickling off the edges.

"Would you like to come over and help me cook this?"

Mary smiled her beautiful smile. "Of course, Sam. Of course."



Matariki

By Neiva Elliott Y9

t's hard to explain the pain of losing someone.

It sits in the pit of your stomach like an eternal fire, burning your every breath and turning your life to ashes. It eats away at your inside and just when you think that it's gone, one action, one memory fuels the fire again.

Trying to forget is like ignoring the fact your body's burning. For some reason no one can notice the flames and they tell you to move on.

Move on?

You can put out a fire. But can this pain ever go away?

Sitting outside on a hill, I wrap myself up tightly in blankets. The cold seeps into every crack it can find, and my face is soon numb. The sky is black with pale gold streaks like those from a paint brush and outlines of trees line the hills. Looking up, I can see Matariki is rising above me. The shimmering cluster reminds me of the past year, and I quickly brush away tears before they come. The fire in my stomach roars to life. My feet move on their own and soon I'm walking, though I don't know where.

Down the hill, I have long lost my robe of blankets.

Past a cold rushing stream.

I walk down the road and somehow, I'm at the place where he died. Staring down the jaws of the cliff, I wonder if I should let it swallow me.

Matariki shines.

Tears are rushing down my face like in a torrent of water. The salt trickles into my mouth and through my wracking sobs a notice a smidge of weight lift from my chest.



Two wheels, one day

Maia Mesbahi Y9

It's freezing, my fingers clutch the handles. My eyes glued to the path ahead. My mother is looking at us through the window, holding a cup of coffee. Looking at her, I sigh, this has been going on since noon.

'I can't do it.'

'I'm scared.'

The cycle repeats, on and on and on. Neverending.

"Go on!" my father encourages, pushing my bike across the cobbled drive. He runs behind me, keeping alert in case I stumble and fall. Suddenly my feet swerve off the pedals. I'm speeding ahead, with no way to stop.

I veer side to side, my hands losing control of the bike.

I gasp!

I see the ground clearly.

My soul leaves my body with a whoosh.

'I'm going to fall. I don't want to get hurt.'

My mind goes blank, I fear the worst.

Gentle hands grab me, stopping my fall, picking up the bike along with me. My father pulls me back up with the bike. He is looking tired. I tremble from his stern gaze.

"You've got to pedal, Maia. Otherwise, you'll fall," he reminds me, I nod shakily then reply.

"Yes, dad." I hold myself from bursting out crying and wipe the tears that start to stream down my face like a river.

"This is the last time I'm going to help you, you might fall, but you will learn."

'You might *fall*.' No, I won't, not this time. Somehow, I get snapped back to reality.

'You might *fall.*' No, I won't, not this time.

My heart beats loudly as I push my feet off the ground. Gripping the handles, my feet find their place on the pedals once more. My face is as pale as paper, the tips of my cheeks, strawberry red. My breath steadies, it's peaceful without my thoughts. My bike chatters as I ride across the mismatched cobble, it makes a sound like my shivering teeth.

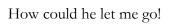
Before I know it, I am pedalling freely. Unafraid of the bushes ahead of me, I trust my father will catch me. Crunch, snap, the dead twigs, and leaves break as I ride over them. Pride rushing through me like a waterfall.

'I can do this.'

'Easy as pie.'

I imagine my father is still behind me, I smile before turning around. He stands far away, waving his hands up. I freeze!

Stopping the bike and myself, I instantly fall over before I hit the bramble. My puffer jacket softens my fall.







The butcher

Reed Williams Y9

√he weeping drainpipes blubber continuously, rain attacking the cobbles vigorously, pelting anything that gets in the way of its onslaught, wetting the unsheltered miserably. The huddling houses cowering, afraid, a cat in a corner, fur matted and frayed. Above this cat a window resides, light flowing out from within its insides, this window can be described as more of a fog, the rain and dirt creating a clog, the fingerprints and sweat a tell-tale sign at the meagre attempts at cleaning the smog. Inside there waddles a lonely chap, whose body has a tendency to shake and flap, his hair is greasy, neither brown, nor black. Shirt embedded with the smells of melancholy death, apron stained with what came spraying from the animal's last breath. His eyes are like beads that taint the soul, his mouth like a fish's, droopy and cold. His nose is a statement in all the wrong ways, his cheeks are too red, from an alcoholic haze.

His room is a mess of bottles and litter, he stares with contempt, a look that is bitter, where his eyes rest, the very air seems to jitter, he stamps on the floorboards where the small bugs flitter. A table sits demure in a spiderwebbed alcove, the depressing kitchen consists of a lone old stove, the mattress he calls a bed infested with spiders, his trivial little cupboard filled with beers and ciders. The walls are of stone festered with small crevices and holes, random spots and stains placed like human moles. The floor is awash with toe stubbing hazards.

A little leak in the loft licked the floor with a plip, the mice munching mildly holding cheese in their grip, wind whining and whistling, teasing the town. Darkness splays its long fingers covering the lights, as true night sets in, only one man still fights to stay awake in these arduous nights, sitting there sadly in his too tight tights.

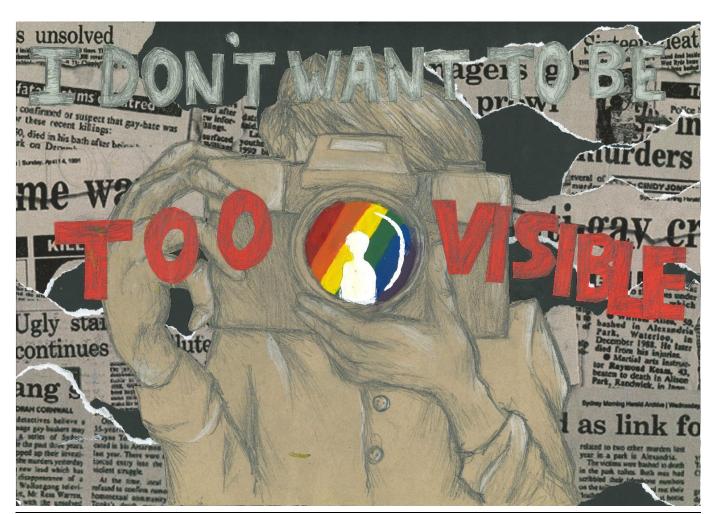
(DREAM SEQUENCE) The drainpipes giggle and laugh with unbridled mirth. The rain diving down and pelting the earth, tickling and caressing hair into a darker shade. The colours of the world all abated, the plants now sodden but contentedly hydrated, the children inside excited, elated, as they watch the wet worms writhe, utterly fascinated. The window was pristine, not a mark

or a scratch, polished and dusted was the quaint little latch, beyond this a tall leg juts from a torso, another leg next to it just very slightly more so. A head and some arms are part of the deal, the face is static in an expression of zeal, her eyes are like tea that unburdens the mind, soothes and bewitches, warm and kind. Her nose is rounded, plainly blunt, her chin follows suit, curved and upfront, her mouth is etched straight out of stone, always happy, never alone. Her long legs

lope trousers luxuriously lacey, the fire ferociously fizzles, fun, racy. She is perfectly poised, the perfect mother, Ralph Mullin loved her like no other.

He sits up, helplessly alone, as the house creaks and the wind moans, a man barely able to pay for his loans, Ralph weeps as he remembers his mother's gravestone.





Klara Toth Y11

Tilly Jowett Y9

hrough the ink of the night a lone beckon blazes bright among the rows and rows of slumbering grey houses, daring me to take a closer look. I'm hypnotized with its simplicity. It's pureness. The building's light casts a rich buttery glow on the cobblestones, slick with tears from heartbroken souls who choose to drown their sorrows in mead. Some say it's a sanctuary for individuals no matter their class, wealthy or poor, to gather and remorse, console each other as they raise their glasses long into the starless night. Others see it as a place to forget. Forget the struggles and hardships of life. Forget. Forget your lost dreams that somehow escaped your grasp and floated off in the summer breeze. Forget.

A dark figure emerges from behind the Liver and Peas Pub, the shadows consuming her limp, exhausted body. A body which belongs to a ragdoll, a scraggly old plaything, which has been jostled and torn apart piece by piece, time and time again. She seems desperate to escape what most commonfolk claim to be the greatest haven in the lands. Half of her locks are tightly and tentatively plaited around her head in an intricate crown while the remainder of oaky tangles cascade down her back in a waterfall, swaying in an exasperated manner with every stride. This girl, she fascinates me.

A dark figure emerges from behind the Liver and Peas Pub, the shadows consuming her limp, exhausted body.

While many see the pub as an endless source of hope and laughter, she cannot imagine a more hellish place to be. She walks up a winding set of rickety stairs, leading to the balcony of a dull house, which appears even duller next to the vibrant bustling pub. As she stumbles into the dim light of the room, her features become clearer. Vivid. And all too real. A tiny amount of freckles parade along the bridge of her nose, which is pointed up as if in disgust. Her brown rustic apron flaunts an array of golden liquor stains, an unwelcome reminder of the countless customers who spray shards of rum onto her clothes, clumsily waltzing around and yelling gibberish which only an ogre could understand. The tatty leather apron drapes over her pearly white and crimson red dress, contrasting against the lively colours. The bottom of her gown puffs out in a flourishing spectacle, a regal poppy blooming in a field of dirt. I find it funny how even the ugliest thing can conceal a hidden beauty. A beauty that's petals are slowly wilting. Holding on to life. But not quite dead. Her name is Celeste Evelyn Moore, daughter of the publican, waitress by day, writer by night. Her skin is tanned from sitting on the dock, bare feet dangling over the clear water that affectionately laps and licks at her toes, head thrown back as the sun's warming rays dapple her face, eyes contently shut, a distant smile, knowing full well she should be helping at the pub. But thoughts of her furious father could not and would not interrupt those pristine afternoons by the sea.

Celeste's room seems deprived of personality, starved bare like a barren desert aching for the cool scent of rain. There are but mere hints and glimpses of herself scattered throughout. Pockets of adventure and flare that flitter within her fine and noble wardrobe, dance across the cluttered surface of her desk, cower in the dusty forgotten corners. But these glimmers of a once happy child yearn to break free. To tear down the walls of their confinement and paint the bedroom in enchanting tapestries and tales. A yellowing crinkled map is tacked above a desk, pierced with pins showcasing various lands. Lands that appear exotic, woven with mystical stories that Celeste desires to tell. Lands that are far, far away from

Bridenhorse. Far, far away from her father who listens to his customer despairs, rather than face his own. Far, far away from this little room, where dreams are not allowed to be dreamt, where your future is laid out in front of you like a bland dinner menu. But alas there's only one dish to choose from. A dish that doesn't come close to satisfying Celeste's ever-growing hunger.

Looking closer at the map, I can hardly make out the smooth strokes outlining the town of Malsworthy, deliberate thunderclouds of scribbles are slashed through the skin thick paper, a dark jumble that pollutes the otherwise spotless map. The angry charcoal streaks infiltrate the town, glowering with rage and revenge. But behind each and every one of the harsh led lines, there is a reason, a heartbreak. A person, who smelt of wild grass and horses.

My gaze falls awry, shifting to a narrow ebony box, carved with alluring designs of winding vines and silky pink lily pads. The gleaming gold accents curl around the box, swirling and merging in such a way that makes me wish I were a part of the well-orchestrated dance, where I could pirouette and spin over the metal latch, tango with the lush painted plants. Her hand cautiously opens the lid and encloses around a toffee-coloured journal, the weathered pages, the familiar feeling of the rough cover. This is Celeste's escape. Her soul, gushed out in the form of elaborate stories, leaping from one page to the next. As the pages fall seamlessly open, they seem to glisten and giggle, eager to be filled with heartfelt tales, excited to be the canvas of one's masterpiece. As Celeste's pencil smoothly scrawls across the journal, her mind gradually clears, like the frothy waves washing up on the shore.

Tellings of guilt paining her for serving townsfolk the poison that transforms them into the very monsters she despises, her father so charismatic he could convince the devil to have a drink with him. Words spill out on the pages, small bricks slowly building Celeste's room into a towering castle. A castle which she oversees. A fantasy that will never come to an end. But as billows of mist cloak the moon and the dark sky caves in, the colours start to fade from Celeste's tales, the crown embedded with jewels disappears from her head. And there she is back in her dull, oh so quiet room.

Tellings of guilt paining her for serving townsfolk the poison that transforms them into the very monsters she despises, her father so charismatic he could convince the devil to have a drink with him.

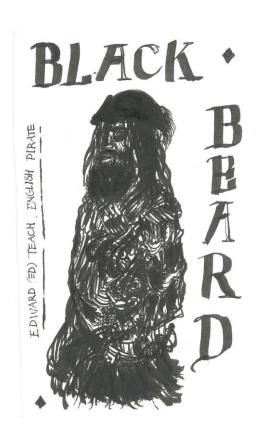
Celeste's head sinks into a lacy pillow, her fingers still wrapped around the pencil, not wanting to let go of her perfect little world. Her eyes are flickered shut, and a scowl is plastered on her face, fixed there as if she's a glossy porcelain doll. Not a menacing scowl, which a rabid dog flashes at you, bubbling at the mouth and eyes a penetrating red. No, but a scowl of fear. A scowl that tremors inside, you are scared with slanted eyebrows and gnashed teeth, face boiling, fists clenched and drained to a ghostly white. A scowl, because it's easier to appear angry than sad. Easier to yell your hate for those who wronged you than cry your heartbreak for those who were wronged. I can see her dreams all too well, I intently wish I could not, for what exists in the gloomiest corners of her mind, seem to contaminate all her thoughts, like the black plague suffocating all light that ever was. The dream features a fair courageous woman, wide grin stretched out, chuckling like a joyous Jacko lantern. Her mother. She's perched atop a broad dignified steed, trotting down a desolate path overgrown with prickly brambles. Celeste's mother fixates on a glassy lake glazed with the honeyed tint of sun. It'd be a rather pleasant dream if you did not know what was to come.

Thick smoke carpets the sky, dimming the blinding sun to a pale sickly luminescence. The thundering of hooves obscures the melody of sparrows. A shrill shriek rings out. Bandits swarm, their twisted smiles flashing from beneath deep indigo cloaks. Arrows flock the air, hurtling and diving, sharp beaks glinting with menace as they lock onto their prey. "We've got you," they hiss. A single blotch of blood, staining her blouse, ever so slowly engulfing her like thorny rose vines strangling a rotting tree. A dying tree. Her horse lets out a bleating neigh and bucks backwards, distressed. Afraid. Celeste's mother catapults off her saddle, thrown through the summer scape. The lake she once admired swallows her up as if nothing but a slight appetizer. A single hand reaches towards the

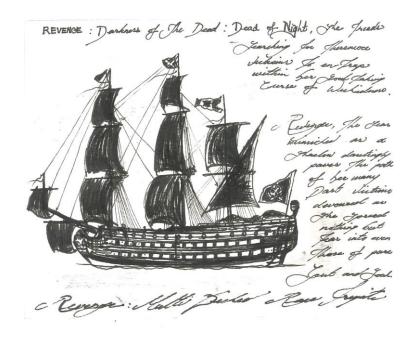
setting sky, before the waters consume her, and she sinks deep, deeper, deepest. Nothing but a discarded body wallowing at the bottom of a lake. Nothing but a forgotten nobody, in the town of Malsworty.

Without warning Celeste jolts awake, instinctively brushing her hands over her journal, confiding in the one thing that comforts her. So, she writes and writes and writes. And the sun embraces the sky as the ever-foreboding dawn chases the dark away. The intoxicating scent of fresh bread browning in the bakery's oven crawls through the slightly ajar window, the once hushed town is slowly waking up, but on she writes.









Ilja Copic Y10

Prologue

When I was born, I was never alone, I was showered with love and affection, I was taught about music and dance, about history and life, but most importantly I was taught to explore. That's what I've always done, and that's what I'll continue to do.

Although I was always loved, I had what they call growing pains, it felt strange to change bodies like this, until I could barely recognize my first form. I started on all fours, I now I walk like the people who raised me.

But nothing lasts forever.

I would wonder if there was a reason no one else was here, that I was all alone after almost all else decays. I've searched almost every place, read every book and there's no explanation as to why they disappeared, and why they left me behind.

Nowadays, I look up to the stars and wonder if there's something more out there, if there is I will go and find it.

Beginning – 2042

Cold. Unvielding, unrelenting, lonely, familiar. The light of the moon illuminates the empty street as my footsteps echo in the silence. I move through the abandoned streets looking for any remaining signs of life. I find nothing. Reaching into my pocket I cross out this city on my map, I'm running out of places to look. I'm slowly losing hope as I can feel my body slowing down, I don't have much longer left. I can't remember the last time I had a decent night's sleep, or meal. Only the faint memories of my family keep me going. I will find them or find where they went. I will explore for them, like I promised. As the days go by, my memories fade, I forget things that I found, I forget my family, my old life. I'm terrified that one day I won't remember anything, at least now I know I'm forgetting things. I come

across a tipped car with a threadbare baby seat in the back seat. Judging by the label the child would be 23 this year, if people were still here that is. I drain the fuel from the tank, it's expired but it'll be useful later. I keep moving through the rubble, for a second I think I see a tree, an alive one, but it is just a mural. I must be more run down than I thought. I'm getting closer to my final stop, but I have a feeling they won't be there. My family always told me that they'd survive anything, that they were preparing humanity to flee Earth if needed. I believe they did, but then why did they leave most of humanity behind? I decide to lie down and rest for the night. I will go to the next city tomorrow.

The next city is much like the others. Abandoned, desolate, ruined. I start on the outskirts traveling inward to the city. Walking into a school yard, faded hopscotch painted on the ground. I learnt about this game when I was younger. It's more fun with friends, unfortunately. Entering the old building I see rot eating up the walls. With no one to take care of the buildings here, I'm not surprised. The lockers are rusted with books thrown all over the floor. I bend down to pick one up, but my knee buckles, and I fall to the ground. I thought that it would've lasted longer since my last accident. Searching through my bag I look for anything that may help. An old scarf and a splint. It's not much but it will have to do. Moving over to the wall slowly, hoping my knee won't fall apart in the process,. I wrap it up with the old torn scarf, using the splint to give more support. Resting at the school for a while may be a good idea. Using the rotted wall for support I make my way over to what I assume is a dorm room. Setting my stuff on the dresser I lie down on the bed. Maybe reading will pass the time. I reach over to the broken bookshelf and open the first page of the book. Feline anatomy.

The village of Freefall

Dung Le Y10

bove the bottomless ocean is an island floating in the air, with the sound of the wind dancing around and the smell of nature given by the purity of mother nature. On it is the village of Freefall. The village has existed for a thousand years, and it's just a normal island surrounded by ocean, with diligent people yet an uninspiring life. Through the empathy of the god of gravity, Apocalypse, the people are granted the zero-gravity crystal which makes the island float in air. The life of people is a bit more exhilarating. Over a thousand years the people in the village recognise the ability of the crystal and realise its ability is more than just keeping the island float; people are now using it to control objects and use it for the good of their life.

"Commander, the Strix troops are approaching us," a soldier reports.

"Defence Legion, listen to my command: Protect the crystal!"," Commander Ro commands. "Advanced Legion, prepare to attack."

Commander Ro flies into the air, he quickly draws his sword, the blade thin as a paper,

shining as the sun reflects off it. Like an eagle swooping down to catch the food, he slides his sharp sword through hundreds of Strix, making them suffer a painful death.

The swords stab through many of them, but it's not enough.

Ro spots a Strix sneak into the Wind Academy to steal the crystal. He immediately flies to that Strix, trying to stop it from getting the crystal, but suddenly behind Ro there is another Strix shooting its feathers, stabbing Ro in the back. Ro falls through the air; he uses his final strength to control hundreds of swords from his soldiers and shoots these deathly swords toward the Strix. The swords stab through many of them, but it's not enough.

But no, the Strix that snuck into the Wind Academy still gets the zero-gravity crystal and flees, the soldiers try to stop it, but the Strix uses the black hole and disappears.

Ro falls down on to the ground. He can barely open his eyes. He is surrounded by the blood of despair. Suddenly the ground starts to shake, objects start to float in the air.



Heartlake island

Daisy Niehorster Y10

he buzzing of the helicopter's engine was making the knot in my stomach tighten and my palms sweatier by the second. I hadn't opened my eyes for what felt like an hour – I couldn't stand the sight of trees the size of ants and mountains the size of pebbles. My fear of flying had started when I was 12 and had to use an oxygen mask on a plane. Now ten years

later, it took me months to bring myself to go on this trip.

The opportunity to write about Heartlake Island was presented to me by my boss at Houston Daily, and my fascination for the town was the only thing convincing me to go. The three week stay without cell phone reception or non-organic food and helicopter ride were not so persuasive. The town was entirely eco-friendly; one of the first zero carbon cities ever, that also grew all

their own resources and made their own food. Before the flight I had devoured an entire packet of M&Ms, since I wouldn't be getting anything like that for weeks, but the aftermath of this decision was painfully nauseating.

I heard the pilot yell something from the front seat to me. I jumped back into reality, forcing myself to open my eyes, and asked him to repeat himself.

"Get ready to land!" he bellowed with a thick New York accent. I wasn't sure what he meant by that, as there wasn't much for me to do to prepare myself physically. But I clenched my fists and held my breath as we slowly neared the ground. The sight of Heartlake Island was magnificent, which was no surprise. The name was fitting, as the island is naturally morphed into a love heart shape. I dared to lean closer to the window opposite me so I could see more of the land. Majority of it was green, with patches of wooden buildings and flower beds. The urge to vomit was gradually fading, and for the first time, I felt a small sense of excitement about this trip.

We landed surprisingly smoothly, and I unbuckled myself from the seat, and gathered my bag and jacket. The pilot opened the side door for me to get out. I turned around once I was out right before he shut the door.

"Thank you. Are you not coming?"

He shook his head and tapped a non-existent watch on his wrist. "Running late. Gotta be back by 5. Someone's gonna meet you at the entrance around now." He slammed the door shut.

I nodded and waved goodbye. Where's the entrance? Who's meeting me? Where do I go? I suddenly wished I'd asked more questions or come with a partner who knows exactly what they're doing.

I suddenly wished I'd asked more questions

I look around me for anything directing me to an office or some sort of centre. There's a dirt trail

ahead of me, and I'm surrounded by tall, wide trees. I start to walk along the pathway as the helicopter takes off behind me. The beating pulse of the propeller is deafening, and I stick my fingers into my ears.

Ten minutes later, I'm still walking on the same track, with no sight of any person or animal other than the occasional bird overhead. I took a mental note of how quiet it was here; the lapping of the distant waves was the only continuous sound. I pulled my bag off my back to retrieve my water bottle and camera. I snapped some photos of the long, winding trail behind me, and the trees around me. Focusing so closely on it made me realise how deep the forest was – it looked infinite. I wondered how long it went on for. The island wasn't very big.

Maybe it was the thought of what was out there in the woods, or the fact that I felt lost in this seemingly inhabited island, but the knot in my stomach returned – this time a nervous one. An intense, yet incredibly fragile one.

A sign. I shot out of my daze as soon as I saw it.

The delicate pink font saying 'Heartlake City' was smeared with a crimson liquid. *It's paint. It's just red paint.* It was a stupid excuse but the only one that tamed my anxiety. But as I approached the vandalised sign, I noticed a smudged handprint. I tried to swallow the uprising feeling that something was terribly wrong and followed the arrow beside the sign.

I soon entered what I assumed was the main shopping street. There were several buildings with long, matte panels of wood crawling up them. A flower shop with fresh flowers, a church and several second-hand shops stood out the most to me.

When I passed each shop I peeked in the windows – despite the occasional 'we are open' signs, there was not a person in sight. Where is everyone? I didn't want to think about it. The town was eerily silent; I had imagined a bustling city,

with crowds of joyful people shopping. Why was there *literally* nobody?

The town square led to the village, where there were small, sweet cottages scattered over daffodil and daisy fields. And still, not a single person was in sight. I spent the next ten minutes going up to several cabins, knocking on the door, each time more and more frantically. I started calling out 'Hello?' my tone panicked.

No reply. No sound. Except for... no. I'm imagining it.

A small, delicate sob, echoing from somewhere distant to my left. I turned and walked so fast my body couldn't keep up with my legs. I soon saw her... a small figure, cradling her knees, leaned up against a tree in the woods.

"Hello?" I called to her. Her head shot up and her red, tired eyes met with mine. I expected her to be cautious of me, but she stood up and came towards me briskly. Her sobs increased as she embraced me.

"Where is everyone?" she cried.

I was wondering the same thing.



The gatekeepers

Vivian Robles Y10

verything feels distorted and purple. It's like looking through those two-dollar store purple sunglasses and everything looks mystical but fake. Grass scratches my fingers. Purple grass. Two women walk over to me during my grass revelation; they're both purple, of course. I don't have time to process exactly what I am looking at. One of the purple women looks down on me, almost disgusted.

"We have another one," she says to the other. To me she orders, "You must come with us at once." She grabs my arm and I try to shrug her loose but fail. She hoists me onto my feet, maintaining her grasp and dragging me along with her.

We walk for a few seconds.

"You can let go now." Her grip is becoming painful.

"Do not talk back to your gatekeepers," she snaps.

I wait a few seconds.

"Where are we going?"

"Do not talk back to your gatekeepers," she repeats.

They continue dragging me through what seems to be a purple forest. It wouldn't be surprising if pixies or mushroom folk started whispering in the trees; it's that pretty. I realize blinking repeatedly doesn't make the flowers or leaves any less purple and barely miss bumping into the gatekeeper when we come to an abrupt stop. They roll their eyes in unison which makes me frown. There's a big door standing in front of us, so bizarre and tall it could be a landmark. Even after a few seconds of staring, I can't take it all in; it's that bizarre.

Do not talk back to your gatekeepers

"What's that?" I point at the bizarre possible landmark. The gatekeepers sigh.

"Do not talk back to your gatekeepers."

I guess I must wait. One of them guards the door while the other walks out of sight. I'm tempted to ask the gatekeeper where the other went but I know what her response will be. I bite my tongue and busy myself studying the door. It looks twenty feet tall, heavy oak; it's like a larger version of my childhood door. How odd.

The gatekeeper returns, now holding a bucket of paint and a notepad. She hands over the notepad and marches toward me, paint bucket swinging in her hand. Before I can finish a thought, she pulls a paintbrush out of the bucket and swipes it across my face. It was such a swift motion, no hesitation. I touch my face and inspect the purple on my finger. She just painted me purple.

"What was that for?" I frantically wipe my now purple face with my shirt.

The gatekeeper with the notepad starts writing.

"Talked back to gatekeepers, four times," she reads.

So now I get no answer? A scripted answer is preferable to threatening writing. The gatekeeper painter steps closer, carrying the brush soaked in purple. Paint falls onto the already purple grass I once found pretty. Nope. I step back, trip over a tree root and rip a hole in my jeans in the falling process. I stand and

recover from my fall, not swiftly enough to escape free of a new purple smear on my arm.

"Leave me alone!" I scream, "Get away from me!"

"Talked back to gatekeepers, five times. Refused orders."

So, I'm supposed to just let them paint me head to toe in purple? I'm starting to get dizzy. It's the paint; the fumes. If I were a cartoon, there would be stars circling my purple head. Maybe there are stars circling my purple head – what's the limit in a forest with bizarre childhood doors and

purple gatekeepers? I stumble over my feet and the gatekeeper swipes at my exposed knee. I don't think my neck can support my heavy, purple head.

I'm still thinking this when I black out.



Derlin hunting

Morag McLellan Y10

groan as Gistal soars, chattering overhead, and the wooden beams of my bed creak, signalling it's time to wake up. I roll over, burying myself deeper into the soft warm fabric of my blankets. A friendly haven of safety encasing my body. "Just a few more minutes" I grumble. Gistal makes an angry deafening scream in my ear, and I almost fall off my bed in surprise, "Gistal you stupid bird!" I mutter as I tumble awkwardly out of bed, my blankets jumbled in a messy heap. I rub my eyes and blink until things become more focused, the clothes and books scattered messily on the floor and the disorganised papers and pens on my pine wood desk. The chaotic room I'm forever being asked to tidy.

Gistal perches on the cool stone window ledge in my bedroom. It looks out across the alluring stone abodes of the elf kingdom, alive with early risers, the sun glinting off the snowy capped mountain tops high above. A smug look is on the crow's long sharp beak, as I fill a clay bowl with seeds and set it down next to his dark scaly feet. "There you go, no need to damage my ears anymore" I murmur, glaring at Gistal who greedily wolfs down his breakfast, clucking in victory.

I change into my brown school clothes, cringing at the itchy fabric on my skin. I help my little brother, Yoclan get ready for school and bring my mother a glass of fresh apple juice. I set the glass of sweet liquid on her bed side table, the glass hitting timber. "Thank you Crawed", she smiles and looks lovingly at me with her

illuminating red eyes, her wavy brown hair tucked neatly behind her slim pointy ears. Even in sickness she's still breathtakingly beautiful. "Good luck for today, I'll make an extra special dinner tonight" and she squeezes my hand warmly with her soft hand. Suddenly the warmth leaves my body and I'm hit with a sensation of dread that travels through my long gangly bones, reaching every crevice inside me and I shiver. I remember what day it is. Today is choosing day.

How could I forget such an important day! My eyes widen and my hands begin to shake, this decision will affect the rest of my life for good. All the current 16-year-olds of Onila will choose what job they will start training for, a job using their magical strength. I still haven't discovered my magical strength after 16 years of training and learning the magical elements. Fire, water, earth or air? I'm not better at any of them more than the rest. "Thanks mum," I say forcing a smile. I don't want her to know that I haven't even decided what job I will choose yet.

I stand in front of the silver rimmed mirror on my wall and run my hands through my short curly hair trying to slow down my breathing. I remember the first time I saw my new eye colour three years ago; the relief of my unanswered questions being answered. What do I define myself as? Who am I really? I was half awake and at the time I thought that my mind was playing tricks and those beautiful, bright violet eyes didn't really belong to me. I was wrong. Ever since then I've been non-binary, my pronouns being ze/zir, my violet eyes being a symbol of who I am. In Onila whenever an elves eye colour changes, meaning they are now a different gender, their old gender if forgotten. Red for feminine, blue for masculine and purple for nonbinary. This is who they are now not who they were then. I absentmindedly stroke Gistal who has hopped up onto my dresser. "Wish me luck" I sigh, "I hope I make the right decision."

We stand, nervous 16-year-olds, side by side against the cool stone wall. Nobody talks. Everyone thinking about their own personal decision, some more confident than others.



The library

Wren Osborne Y10

he old cathedral-like library knew things. It knew the way the pages rustled gently as the smooth paper was turned, it knew the way the dust rose from the carpet, tainting the air. It knew the warm fire and the cool leather sofas that people would curl up on. It knew the way the linen on the books felt as you ran your hand over them, and the crackling sound the fire made. It knew the quiet, the silence that was sometimes interrupted with an uncontrollable snort of laughter or a gasp of horror.

Familiar people would enter the library throughout its days and read about their favourite subjects. The library knew that and would place the books next to their favourite spot to read, an

armchair in the corner that was just right, or the sofa that was by the window. Some people would visit every day, some only once a month, but the library waited patiently for them so it could make them feel safe again.

It knew the quiet, the silence that was sometimes interrupted with an uncontrollable snort of laughter or a gasp of horror.

It loved the way the people smiled in comfort at the books and out the window at the park. The library loved its people and tried to take care of them as best as it could, offering comedy after a particularly sad book, or their favourite series

The Obvious Choice 2022 25

after a confusing new one. The library was a sanctuary and took on the responsibility as such.

The library knew these things, and what it knew and loved the most was the rainy days. The days when fresh rain and howling wind would bring in new people, soaked and chilled to the bone, seeking shelter and comfort. The people would shiver gratefully at the warmth and smell of pine and smile out its arched windows at the rain. The soft sound of the falling water relaxed them as they assumed their fate, and wandered around

the library, finding familiar and new things to know. They read the inked words by the fireplace accepting the library's offers of sanctuary, warmth, and knowledge.

Later in life, sometimes the people who had taken shelter from horrible days came back and visited. The library knew them all, regardless of age, and welcomed them back gladly, remembering the rainy day when they had met. The library knew things, and it loved rainy days

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Void

Toby Forgan Y10

arkness. A faint breeze blowing in a rhythmic fashion. The beating of a heart. A consciousness in a void, barely aware of their surroundings. Floating through this picturesque place of nothingness. Infinity stretched out just a fingertip away, yet as distant as death, unpredictable. As if it was phasing in and out of reality.

The consciousness observing its surroundings, trying to remember anything at all, heard a noise. A beep. It seemed to come and go as if it was repeating. As it focused in on the beep it became clearer and clearer. A consistent noise. Beep. Beep. Beep. Intrigued by this he focused more, drifting away from this dark reality. An image flashed across his mind. A room. First dim, before brightening. It seemed blank, completely empty. Almost another void. The beep grew louder, on for a few seconds, before the image disappeared.

A low hum travelled across this mesmerising plane. As it grew louder it seemed inconsistent. Less a hum and more of chatter. A distant conversation. As if it were taking place in the future, seemingly impossible yet happening right... then? It seemed to slow down, becoming almost comprehensible. As it slowed, it seemed to pass through him before travelling down the

opposite direction of a timeline. He shivered, now cold, the feel of a blanket over him, stuck in a cold sweat. As if he had woken up from a nightmare.

A weird feeling came over him, sending a chill down his spine as the beeping became louder. As if there was something touching his chest. The room came back. This time more detailed. There was a bed with a large shape on top, seemingly similar. Various electronic equipment surrounded it. Some big some small. A table with wheels moved towards it pushed by another bigger shape, except this one looked almost humanoid. There was another figure above the thing on the bed. As it reached down it pulled something off it and quickly put it aside. At that moment he felt something torn off his chest as well. It seemed that they were connected in some way.

The beep slowed turning into a consistent singular beep.

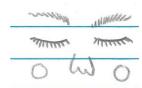
The beep slowed turning into a consistent singular beep. The two figures seemed to panic, moving faster and frantically. One started rubbing two objects together before slamming them into the thing on the bed. He seemed to rocket backwards shoved immensely hard by the figure. The image seemed to fade again. Not

before another pulse sent him flying backwards, leaving him once again floating in a void, slowly losing his senses.

He could no longer feel cold, now feeling nothing at all. The consistent beep fading away as well. The image but a speck in this false reality, speeding off into the distance. A bright light seemed to grow in its place. He seemed to be attracted to it, being gently pulled towards it. The

light was warm, comforting, finally putting something in this barren wasteland. It stopped. He stopped. For a moment they just stood opposite each other, nothing but them, no noise, no nothing. But now seemed to be pulled away from it, as the light grew steadily smaller.

Panicking now, they were sucked away from any hope of escaping this... void





Beneath the waves

Laura O'Toole Y11

The sky wailed and darkened, soaking through his clothes. His wet hair clung to his forehead and the water blurred his vision. From the east, the sun was rising, but the sky remained dim and consistent in its downpour. The worried yells of those around him were deafening and ruined his focus.

The ship was flooding, and the more it rocked, the more water spilt over the sides and onto the deck. It began to climb up his legs til it was at his knees, seeping into his boots. His feet soon grew numb from the cold seawater, and walking became a straining task. He moved with high knees, avoiding the pull of water at his feet. It did not take too long for him to reach the middle. Their ship was minor compared to his previous ventures, with a small crew to go along with it. But smaller ships sink faster, and he feared the size was no longer to their advantage.

The smell of salt was intrusive, so much so that he could taste it. He scrunched his nose as if he could rid it of the horrid sensation. His worn hands reached for the mainmast, and he watched the door to the captain's quarters open. Another one of their crew walked out and hurried past him with a distant look in his eyes. He deflated as

no one followed from behind, and hope began to drain away.

Their lanterns were beginning to go out as the waves reached heights their ship could not. The remaining light reflected in the water, but not enough. He looked down, and although it was dark, there was no transparency to the water. It was pitch black. His eyes widened, and his heart dropped. The dread in his chest pulled at his lungs and made it hard to breathe. This was not a force of nature. It was something one hoped to only hear about in old pirate tales and never lay witness to it while onboard. No number of buckets used to haul the water off the deck would slow their inevitable descent to the ocean floor.

This was not a force of nature.

The ink in the water coloured his clothes and made the once brown cloth a dark black. A rougher pull forced him to the ground, and he knocked into the side of their ship. The cold muted the pain in his back, and he did not register it. He rested in the misty water as his surroundings became background noise. He was no longer present as if he were a reader and this was a story. He gave in to the numbness and let it drown him. He could only think of home, a place he would be lucky to see again. He thought of the warmth, the community, and his family.

The picture of his home kept in his left pocket burnt with memories and was painful on his icy skin. Somewhere in the distance, he heard the mainmast snap and fall into the sea, yet he did not move. The water fell on him in waves, relentless in its downpour.

His vision was blurry, yet he could not miss the movement of something so large. A tentacle had wrapped around the bow of their ship, with the railing shattered under its strength. He whipped his head up as he saw more movement in his periphery. His breathing was shallow while another tentacle wrapped itself around the stern. The ship struggled under the added weight and surrendered to the force bringing it down.

One final tug sent the ship plummeting onto its side, and he fell along with it. His chest collided with the open sea, and with his remaining strength, he swam. He could not determine which direction he was heading, but he continued. Adrenalin assisted him in making it a safe distance from the ship and the creature. His legs gave out, and he turned himself onto his back to float. When he opened his eyes, he noticed the light peeking out from behind the clouds as they parted. The sun shone down on him with its morning glow. He basked in the heat, unaware of the reality that he was stuck in the middle of the Atlantic, alone.

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The voyage

Aislinn O'Meara Y11

he waves lapped softly at the edges of the beach. It was time to go. I watched as my fellow voyagers loaded the last of their belongings onto the ship, waving sorrowful goodbyes to the family that had come to see them off. My name's Abigail, and I didn't have anyone left who cared enough to come and bid me a last farewell. The thing is I had a great life before the world began falling apart, before its shattered fragments began piercing the hearts of the people I loved most.

It was a shock when New Zealand began experiencing the extreme weather and pollution that had spread across the globe. Sunny days became sweltering, and rain fell heavier and harder than before. People started to become sick due to severe air pollution. Disaster struck again and again. Floods and wildfires claimed the lives of countless species of plants and animals as well as numerous mothers, fathers, sisters, grandparents, girlfriends, boyfriends; the new solar and hydro powered villages in France are our last viable option. Shut off from the rest of the world those who remain go to live within

these villages. A new and revolutionary air filtration system separates and removes harmful greenhouse gases from the air, producing safe, clean air which is filtered through the village atmospheres.

Shut off from the rest of the world those who remain go to live within these villages.

A sharp tap to my shoulder yanked me from my thoughts; the crowd of passengers was now moving, swarming over the ramp connecting the ship with the pier. Through the gaping cracks in the rotting wooden floorboards, I could see the sorry remains of where a beautiful turquoise-green ocean paradise had once been, brimming with marine life. The waters were now grey and oily, rubbish covering every inch of the surface. They warned us about this, predicting that if we didn't act fast, Earth would become unliveable.

I ambled my way across the main deck behind the sea of others to get to my assigned sleeping cabin. From looking at the ship's condition it was clear it was facing a difficult battle with rust, mould and other forms of fungi. I didn't imagine the interior would be much of an improvement. After all, cramming 1,000 people onto an ancient and decrepit sea voyager didn't sound very luxurious. After descending a flight of steep, creaky steps that groaned underfoot it was announced that we had reached our "home" for the next few weeks. The floor was covered wall to wall with thin, greying mattresses. Some were torn and holy, others had variously coloured stains scattered across them. Mould and moisture festered in every corner.

Scanning the small room my eyes settled on a shredded mattress snuggled into the back corner. That would do. I opened my meagre box of

belongings, the carboard soft and sodden. Carefully I reached in and brought out a jagged piece of glass, my makeshift mirror. As I glanced down deep set, hazel eyes peered back at me; there was a certain emptiness there. My long mop of wild, brunette hair sat just below my shoulders in a complicated web of tangles. I knew this face... it was a perfect combination of both my parents. My heart ached with longing to lie in my mother's arms and feel the familiar tickle of my father's stubble as he wrapped me in a bear hug. I felt a low grumble beneath me as the ship began to move. I lay down and closed my eyes, imagining my parents standing along that pier, shouting words of encouragement and love. The journey had begun.



Train

Skye Montgomery-Reed Y11

Warning: this piece includes graphic descriptions of violence.

am watching you, yes, you. You are nervously twirling your hair around your finger. I can see the beads of sweat forming just above your brow. You fight the urge to look around. Burying your face deep in the paper. You know not to look out the window, or even around the train for that matter (Don't you?). You are one of the smart ones. Though I have not yet figured out whether your intelligence will bring fortune or misfortune.

Ah, you're reading the article about Mr and Mr. Jones? I like that one, I especially like that part about the jar of pickled, humanoid eyes they found buried deep in their backyard. Speaking of eyes, I can see you fighting the temptation to look out the window. Only a thin panel of glass that shields you from their hungry gaze. They will not hurt you, but they do yearn for you. They want to devour you. The red veins that creep towards the glistening pupils are ready to burst. Like I

said, they won't hurt you, not if you stay on the train.

Ah, you're reading the article about Mr and Mr. Jones?

Oh, the veins have now popped. Or some of them have. Bleeding a deep crimson through the pupil. I'm watching you flinch as the blood splatters the window. You are not flinching at the sight so much as the sound. Your eyes are still glued to the papers. Reading the same lines as you mutter to yourself. Good, you've remembered. You try to maintain your sanity as the veil of fear falls heavier, more oppressive. But I tell you now, there is no reason to be afraid. In fact, if you could look out the window you would see the sort of beauty in it all. The wonderful red liquid that seeps through the cracks in the panelling.

Oh, how I wish you would watch it pool at your feet, staining your clothes and those shoes you got for your seventeenth birthday from a close relative, now dead. They say it was a murder, but

did you ever wonder how? Why? ... who? So, is that the reason you are on this train? Is that the destination you desire? In the sight of revenge. A task you may never finish.

You gasp as the hot blood slowly laps you up. Why is it so hot? Why is it burning you? You may not like it, but I do. I don't think people appreciate the smell of flesh burning nearly as much as they should. It reminds me of the delightful homecooked stew my mother used to

make. You remind me a lot of her. I can't say why though. Maybe it's forgetfulness? Because I have only just noticed that you are looking around. A silent fear in your eyes as the red fluid devours you.

I will admit, I did flinch slightly at the loud bang of the gunshot.

I think it's important to note that it wasn't the eyes that killed you, but your own stupidity.

V A

The foot taps

Orla O'Meara Y11

the foot taps consistently. Consistently? Constantly, I think, was the word I was looking for. My mind's wandering again, so much so I wouldn't even call it wandering anymore. Running, perhaps, though that's not very representative of what it's doing. Jogging just sounds stupid. Racing, maybe? Darting, my mind is darting, flitting in and out through each topic like a butterfly. Well, anything to distract me from where I am. Who I'm with. How I'm feeling. I can hear the foot still tapping, no, bouncing now. Whoever's doing it needs to stop, or I think I will go mad. I picture myself with my hair tousled and a manic smile stretched across my face, arms caught in white sleeves and red smeared across my face.

Scribbling pens pull me from my thoughts, how are they still going? It hasn't been silent for at least half an hour: those pens haven't shut up. My eyes track away from the blank paper, white and blank like my mind, full of atoms floating but empty of ink. Devoid of thoughts, personality. My eyes scan the room, so full of colour, yet not. The blank paper in front of me seems to suck the life out of it. It seems like such a distance from me to the next desk, I feel as if I'm down a tunnel. Yelling for help but they can't hear. The tunnel is muffling my voice, the cavernous distance

between the desks is my downfall. They can't hear me, and I'm left frustrated and alone. Except for the sound of the door creaking. And the pens scribbling, still taunting me and my empty thoughts.

Yet again, the door creaks, and I stare at the clock's face. A line of apple green surrounds it. A line of apple green surrounding a clock hand, slowly ticking to my inevitable end. Green, like plants and trees. Green, like this hot liquid churning in my stomach. But the rest of the walls are grey and brown, so mundane, but I guess I'll have to get used

to that. Mundane, me. It's like a synonym at this point. What's worse than mundane? A hot, uncomfortable feeling rises, and I can't stop it; it keeps tracking through my body, up and up. It's up so high now I almost laugh; why is it so high up here in my head? Why am I laughing so much? Why do I feel like this?

And there's the foot again, bringing my head back down from the heights. Tap, tap, tap, goes the foot, and now I can hear the clock ticking, and there's so much white noise in my head, and I want it to stop, but I don't know how to focus, oh how do you focus; why is it so hard for me to focus? I don't want to be here; these walls closing in on me are my worst nightmare.

Yet again, the door creaks, and I stare at the clock's face.

The symbols in front of me are moving and jumping and darting like my mind. But they don't stop, and the paper's blurry and I'm scared of what's going to happen if I can't make sense of it. I need to see through the blur, pull something out of the bag. Anything, to help me. I need to make my brain click so I can feel accomplished and not like such an idiot all the time.

But the foot is still tapping, the clock still ticking, the white noise still buzzing, my mind still darting. So, it's not there. My focus, my brain, any of it. It was never there, an illusion made up by a clever magician. I guess that magician's me, although I wouldn't call myself clever after all this. I wouldn't call myself clever after I get handed back my math paper with a big red FAIL. So, I keep squinting and fidgeting and cringing, alone in my hot seat, thighs sticking to the plastic. And then, suddenly, the bell rings, and the tapping of the foot stops, and I realize it was me all along, that I was the one doubting myself, and maybe this is all on me, again. Maybe if I stop my mind darting and my knee bouncing, maybe, just maybe, I will get good marks. And I won't be a failure, just like that test.

V A

The coarse ground

Scarlett Stallworthy Y11

he coarse ground bit into her as she tripped on a jutting tree root and fell to her knees, lungs heaving. The surrounding forest seemed to breathe with her, alive, and conscious. The night watched her.

Darkness draped around her shoulders like a blanket, though she barely perceived it, her thoughts a frenzied jumble of grief and desperation.

Framed by tousled hair, the lifeless eyes of her lover stared at her from below.

Her limp body clutched tight in her arms, fingernails digging into her skin, terrified to loosen her grip. She had been unable to close Myra's pale eyelids, unable to accept the death of the one she loved so much, loved more than herself, more than the brightest stars and deepest seas. Tears were now pouring down her cheeks and dripping onto Myra's body. As she knelt on the forest floor, shadows began to creep up her body like snakes, enveloping her, twisting through her hair, collecting her tears.

"You have come here for aid," came a velvet voice in her ear, a hint of warm breath playing on her neck. Hair whipped across her face as she spun her head in a desperate attempt to catch a glimpse of the being that spoke to her. She frantically searched the shadows between the trees, but there was no shape, no witch to be

found, only that voice, that silken voice.

"Please," she whispered into the darkness, clasping Myra's body close to her chest, "please."

The shadows that had been prowling up her body

retreated, drawing together before her like storm clouds. The forest grew eerily quiet as a figure emerged from the wisps of oblivion, tall and slender.

Decaying skin decorated its arms with long fingers darkened ever so slightly at the tips. A blood red dress hung off its slender frame. Large tears displayed the creature's ribs; spindly vines weaving between the bones. Dashes of glowing fungi accentuated its high cheek bones. While a

chilling sight, the creature maintained an aura of elegance and beauty. It was captivating.

Gazing into the endless black pools of its eyes, she realized she was face to face with death itself.

"Please," she said again, tears once again threatening to spill from her eyes. She faintly gestured Myra's body forward, without ever loosening her grip. "My wife, please, I'll do anything," she whimpered "I love her, I can't live without her, anything, please." She began to sob but resisted slumping her shoulders in defeat just yet; she clung to a thread of hope that she could strike a deal with the being that stood before her, the very reason she had run into these uneasy woods.

"I am a promise; the darkness between stars, the roots beneath the earth," came the voice from the creatures frighteningly flawless face, "I'm the ruler of your nightmares when you sleep and when you wake. When it comes to making bargains, I deal in souls."

"My soul is yours," she whispered, her voice steady and unwavering. She continued to stare into the abyss of its eyes as a terrifying smile bloomed across its face.

She continued to stare into the abyss of its eyes as a terrifying smile bloomed across its face.

The energy in the air shifted as she felt the creature's gaze land upon the body of her lover, felt it outstretch towards her, yet remain motionless. Warmth began to flourish on Myra's body beneath her fingertips, snaking up her torso to her reach her face. A sparkle appeared in her eyes as colour returned to her cheeks. A gasp escaped her lips as she beheld life return to the love of her very existence.

She gazed upon her lover with eyes as black and soulless as the darkness watching her

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A door to new beginnings

Karis Ayling Y11

→ he humidity hit me like a wave, even in the air-conditioned building you could feel it. It felt different to home already. All I could see were the white walls lining the sides of the tunnel leading me off the plane. I walked into the drab but orderly customs hall. "Passport," a rough voice said. I looked up, the man was tall and had a heavier build, he was pale but had bright red hair that didn't seem to match the rest of him. He wore the standard navy coloured uniform that I had seen dotted all over the airport. He moved with the pace of someone who was very bored and very tired. He lifted my passport to compare it to my face, then slid it back over the cold hard metal surface that bit at my hand when I picked it up. "Out through there," he said in his very strong accent. It was

hard to decipher so I merged into the crowd who stumbled their way out of the gates at the end of the room.

The droning of voices filled the space and echoed off the walls. The sound grew even louder as we reached the end of the room, to where all the awaiting families and friends were gathered. I pushed through, a blur of faces, sounds and colours moved around me.

The house that I was supposed to be staying at wasn't far from the airport, so I decided to walk. I watched as the modern airport, towering glass offices, and large shopping centres faded away into small old-fashioned townhouses. They lined the edges of the road, three stories tall. Their crumbling brick faces felt intimidating. The windows only showed the backs of curtains, even though it was mid-afternoon. Ivy covered the

buildings and hung in front of the doors protecting whatever was inside. I didn't like it here, the place felt dark and cramped. I found myself longing for the open streets with the shops, or the glass buildings that reflected the sun. Where I was it felt like the shadows were lurking. I kept walking, all the buildings looked the same, one side of the street a mirror of the other.

105, I looked down at the wrinkled piece of paper I had clutched in my hand, then back up at the door. The building looked the same as all the others I had passed. The same big front door with black chipping paint. The same windows with the curtains drawn. It didn't look inviting. I took a step forward, a breath, then I knocked on the door. The door clicked and swung open. A woman stood there. She had brown hair with grey streaks running down her shoulders. She had round glasses with thick lenses that sat low on her face. She had a sharp nose and dark brown eyes that held a piercing gaze. Her clothes were shabby and looked like they had been worn a few too many times. I had never felt more out of

place, my hair was wrong, my clothes were wrong, I was wrong. I did not fit in here, and I wasn't sure I wanted to. "Come in" she said, her voice was just as sharp as the rest of her. She reached out a hand and ushered me through the threshold.

105, I looked down at the wrinkled piece of paper

Although it felt wrong here, it shouldn't have. In some way I belonged here. I looked back at the woman behind me, her eyes were a reflection of my own. "You can put your stuff in there," she pointed. Everything felt forced and awkward. This is the person I had been looking for my whole life, but it just felt wrong. I could see the image of what I had expected crumbling in front of my eyes. All my emotion felt like a heavy weight, I wasn't sure what to feel. I turned around. She smiled at me and to my surprise it was warm and genuine. I could almost see a couple of pieces of my crumbled image slide back into place, and that was all I needed for now

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The sound of the twig snapping

Alex Fingleton Y11

he sound of the twig snapping echoed through the woods signalling the end of her life as she knew it. It was her worst nightmare come true. All of her fears turned into reality. She had failed. Her heart filled with despair as she waited for what she was sure would come.

Ten seconds passed in silence. Maybe they were pretending they hadn't heard in order to lure her into a false sense of safety. Twenty seconds. Was it possible he hadn't heard? Thirty seconds. Surely, he would have done something by now. After a minute she finally dared to take another step.

She could see him now, sprawled across a rock, hands behind his head. He was very obviously struggling to stay awake. She considered her chances of getting to him before he could yell for help. The man was obviously drowsy and content after a good meal, but with this group's reputation, he would most likely have quick reflexes.

She knew how close she needed to be in order to grab a deer but given the man's current condition she doubted she would need to be that close. She remembered all those years of hunting with her father, learning how to move quietly, how to track prey, and most importantly, how to kill.

Never had she pictured using those skills on another human.

She was only five meters away now, close enough to hear his deep heavy breaths in the cold night air. She was approaching from his right and given the state he was in she highly doubted that he would make the effort to actively seek out an intruder. Every particle of her body quivering with tension, she leapt forward.

She was across the clearing in a flash, the bandit had only begun to turn when she crashed the hilt of her knife into the back of his ear in a move her father had taught her. Instantly the man's body went limp, and he slumped to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Looking down at her handy work she reflected on how useful being raised by a forester was proving to be. Then, remembering why she was here she crept closer to the camp.

There were six of them, all armed with swords or spears. She could never handle that many, and worse she couldn't see what she was looking for. Trying not to cry as she thought of the consequences of failure, she pictured her father's kind face instructing her as always,

"Look for something you can use" he would say, then give her one of his encouraging grins.

Hurriedly she scanned the area looking for anything that she might be able to use to her advantage. There were seven small leather tents clustered around a central fire that was clearly used as the dining area. Apart from that, there was nothing remarkable about the camp and more importantly, nothing helpful. The men around the fire, although laughing and clearly distracted, had their weapons close by. She uttered a muffled curse at her decision to not bring her bow. She could have picked off at least three of them before they reached her. Then from the trees to the left of the camp, there came a muffled cry.

"Derk" cried one who was obviously the leader,
"What did I tell you about keeping him quiet!"

"Sorry," came the reply. Her heart skipped a beat. She knew who that must be. Quickly but quietly, she made her way round to where the yell had come from. It was then that she finally saw him. Tied to a tree, covered in cuts and bruises and barely managing to hold himself upright. Her father.

Standing over him was a man holding a knotted rope. Resisting all her impulses to blindly rush at the man she crept closer.

"Just tell me where it is," the man spoke in a soft threatening voice,

"I know you took it and I know you know where it is so tell me and this can end."

As he spoke the last words the man who had yelled at him before came through the trees.

"Hasn't he told you yet?"

"Hasn't said a word." At this, the leader's eyes narrowed.

"They're made of strong stuff these sneaks, aren't they?". Her mouth opened in shock, (Sneak was slang for the King's covert intelligence operatives). But her father couldn't be one; it wasn't possible. Yet the rational part of her thought about his frequent trips away and his combat skills and realized it must be true.

"We'll get it out of him eventually, come on let's leave him to think about his decisions." She waited till she was sure they were gone then ran to her father's side. He looked at her, shocked, then realisation hit.

"Divern you have to run."

Holding her hand to his mouth, she whispered, "Shhh they could still hear us; now hold still, I need to cut these ropes."

"Div-"

"I am not leaving you here, now hush," and she used the convenient gag on the ground to silence him. For a few seconds, there was silence apart from the sound of the knife working on the ropes, then he started squirming.

"I didn't cut you, did I?" she asked hurriedly, checking his face for any sign of pain. Strangely

her father didn't seem to be looking at her, he was looking over her shoulder. It was then that she heard a low slithering sound from behind her. It was one she knew all too well. The sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard.



The eviction notice

Alison Power Y11

he eviction notice felt like a child in a McDonalds playground. A child wondering why all the grownups wouldn't come and have fun in the playground too. But the notice was not a child. Instead, it was thinking 'Why don't all pieces of paper become eviction notices?'. The question was answered by a brutal 'Rrrriiiiip' as the notice was torn off the door and flung into the quickly filling bin.

"OI!"

Randolf turned around from where he hovered over the bin. Coming along the street towards him was the silhouette of a troubled man. His shoulders were slouched, hands in pockets. But his legs, his legs were certainly running.

As the man drew closer, Randolf crossed his 160cm worth of legs (this was still only two thirds of his total height). His height meant that when the man drew up on his doorstep, Randolf could confidently peer down upon him. The man, in turn, was taken aback by Randolf's height. You see, he was used to being taller than all his peers. Forging confidence, he straightened his hat.

"Yes?" Randolf voiced. Although it came out more like 'Yrrres'. The anthropomorphising process had improved vocal capabilities significantly. Although the lab boffins of 'Project Croac' had left subjects with a cruel tendency to roll r's. Regardless of whether r's were present.

"That's my eviction notice," the man said, with trouble. He wasn't the running type and the 100-metre jog had taken much of his energy.

"Oh," said softly spoken Randolf, leaning to read what the man's name tag said. "Would you like it back?"

The guy, known as Joseph, clicked his back. A warning- A warning Randolf didn't see.

"Well?" Randolf probed.

Joseph inhaled. "No, you foul Taddy! I would like my land back! Go bugger off to your French Nirvana!"

Unphased by the slurs, Randolf stood still. Instead of responding, he reached out and hooked Joseph's chin with the sticky pad on the underside of his finger. With his other arm he reeled in Joseph's nametag so he could read Joseph's job title. Despite eyes taking up 15% of Randolf's head, Randolf was severely long sighted. Charles Darwin had once decided that this was an important safety improvement.

Despite eyes taking up 15% of Randolf's head, Randolf was severely long sighted.

"Joseph." said Randolf. And it was very much 'said'. Not 'exclaimed', and not even 'spoke'. No trace of emotion laced his voice. But his green face plainly displayed disdain. "Joseph Campbell, government race evictions official. Why do you want my house so much? Why my house? Our neighbours' is so much bigger."

"Jorrrrseph Campbrrrelll," mocked Joseph Campbell, unpicking himself from Randolf's' sap-like finger. "Oh, don't take my house *Jorrrseph Campbrrrell*. Maybe you will be slightly more

The Obvious Choice 2022 35

courteous when I tell you that a keychain factory is going to be installed right on this site." He stamped his petite foot.

The feeling of disapproval could not stop itself from inhabiting Randolf's' face. Even being evicted for some old money shmoney reason would be honourable. However, being replaced, *replaced*, and with of all things a keychain factory. That? That was unacceptable.

Years ago, frogs were a beloved icon. Masses adorned with green, beady eyed bucket hats lined streets in devotion. Every teenager and their girlfriend wanted a frog. But after Project Croac, frogs were seen as a threat to the grasp humans had on the planet. Mankind's one desire is eternal rule over all heaven and earth.

"I am an icon of human progress. I am a cherished by-product." Randolf growled to provoke a reaction, as the pair had been staring at each other for a bit.

"You are an icon of human progress in France. You are a cherished by-product in France. But let's

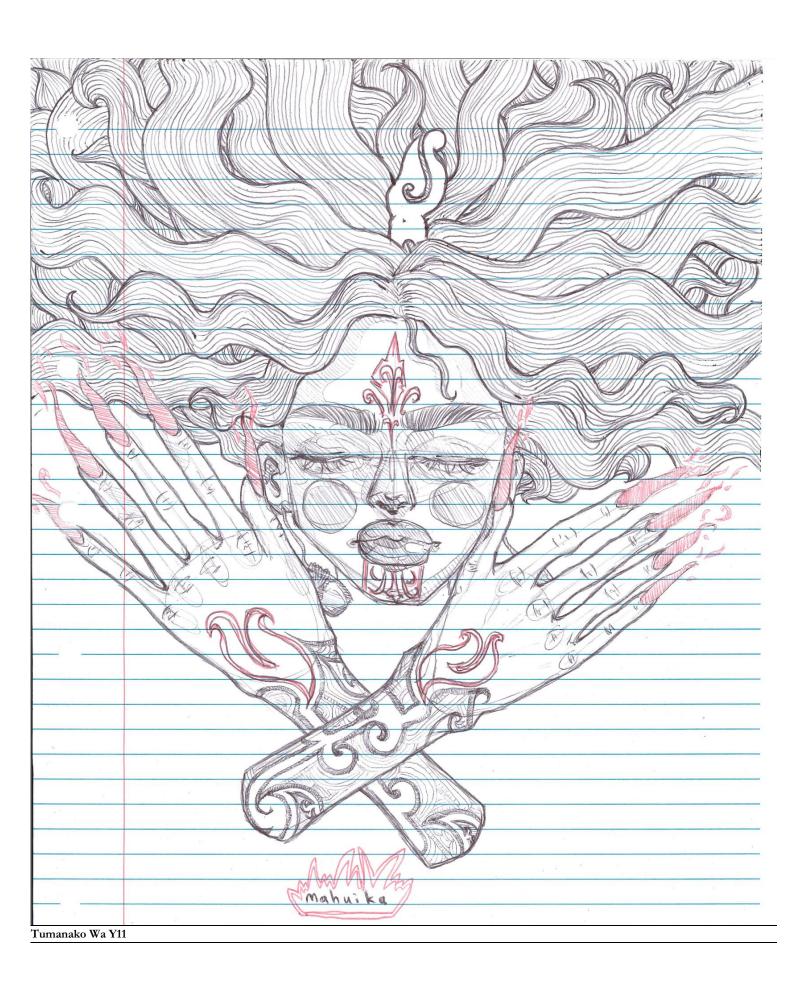
not forget, your France also eats your legs," Joseph shot back.

However, being replaced, *replaced*, and with of all things a keychain factory. That? That was unacceptable.

Their theoretical hackles raised higher. But Randolf knew he couldn't argue with the local government. They were notoriously the most randiaphobic of all governments. The spark of disastrous wars past still riled up their battle spirit each day. That sweet revenge had yet to be tasted, yet to be savoured. Each war a gamble on the changeable open hours of a locally owned café. Each victory something to be devoured along with an oversize muffin and a cup of tea.

But although he was a long way from Cité de Carcassonne - Randolf knew he would fight for all he was worth to keep his own château, and his race, standing on this skewed planet.





Nathan Stacey Y11

other had said I would be fine. She'd straightened my uniform's blouse and stood up to face me. I knew she didn't believe what she said. I didn't.

I begged her. Don't send me! Let me stay! Please.

All of it replays in my head, as the screech of metal-on-metal intensifies and then stops. 'Kia Ora, and thank you for travelling with Metlink', says an almost tauntingly chipper voice. I wish I wasn't I think bitterly, stepping off the train. Immediately I'm battered by horizontal rain. Cursing, I rush along with everyone else to the relative safety of the station building. I ignore the beeping electronic pedestal. Who cares if they charge me extra?

There. The split-second relief of being indoors is dashed by the sight of them. The outsiders came a week ago. At least a thousand of them, like a swarm of locusts. Dad insists we call them outsiders. *Protestor is too dignified*.

I walk quickly through the station, trying my best to avoid their view. God knows what they would do to somebody like me. The station is usually empty at this time, save for other students. Not today. I slip out at the first opportunity, all but sprinting up the escalator.

My God.

I can see their full congregation now, spreading out from the bus station, across the streets and onto parliament lawn. Protestors mingle about as if at a music festival. Police officers are stationed at points surrounding the protest. I realise I've been holding my breathe. Exhaling forcefully, I turn right towards Mulgrave Street. My arms tense as I shuffle down the bus station walkway. They've emblazoned their cars with abrasive slogans.

End Vaccine Apartheid'

Freedom from Mandates!'

And most chillingly of all

'Aunty Cindy, this is for you'

accompanied by the image of a noose.

I can feel it again. The overwhelming fear. Its tugging at the edge of my brain.

A group of older men are gathered towards the end of the walkway. Not a mask in sight. I slow my pace, attempting to not catch their attention. I can see one of them looking in my direction.

No. Not in my direction.

At me.

"Hey **Bitch**," comes his call. His friends all turn to face me.

I'm petrified. My muscles won't move. I beg them to, but they won't.

"Hey Bitch, I can't **hear you**. How 'bout you take off that damn muzzle!" He moves towards me.

I take a single step back. I can't breathe now. There's nobody else around, all the usual office workers having made the smart decision to not come in today.

"I don't think you ****ing heard me"

You always think you can imagine what pain feels like. Our minds have a memory of what it feels like. But a memory is always fainter than the here and now. And here and now, is when I can feel it. It's like a lightning bolt has struck me point blank. A blindingly painful blow to the eye. I'm knocked off my balance, tumbling backwards into the side of a nearby truck. All my anxieties rush through my mind, as if saying *I told you so!*

I look up into the face of the man who did this. His mouth is curled into a sick little smile.

"You sheep make me sick" he spits. I brace myself for another strike. But instead, he leans down, and grabs a hold of the mask I'm wearing. My small blue bubble of hope. He rips it off, throwing it down into the gutter.

"Pathetic little Bitch," he shouts, before turning tail and returning to his group.

I lay there numbly, my mind blank. I should call my mum, my friends, anyone. But I just can't. Then I see him.

A man is standing over behind the walkway. His uniform is proudly labelled

'NEW ZEALAND POLICE FORCE'

He's looking at me. He has been for a while. He saw it all, I realise.

He saw it all. And he did nothing.

"We protect you," I think.

"What a load of bulls **t"



Ripples in the mirror

Mya Willmer

rip, plop. I leave a trail of pool water behind me as I squelch past my coach. He's shouting encouragement at someone, probably Olivia. Everybody cheers for Olivia. I turn away, but meaty fingers clamp down on my shoulder, pinching the skin. I forgot my father came to training today. He mutters in my ear "Teammates support each other." I sigh, turning my head towards the water. It is her; she slices through the water with such ease, displaying perfect technique. I scrunch up my nose in frustration, she's so perfect.



My muscles are burning, pushing, faster and faster. I take a breath. The snippet of life above the water flashes before my eyes. I saw Phoebe. She is looking at me with a scrunched nose and a dark figure is looming behind her. Her father, of course, he's here. The water ripples as I finish my lap. I push myself up, small beads of moisture drop down like rain, and I'm panting, dragging air into my screaming lungs. My gaze drifts towards Phoebe. She is busy talking to her father. I swivel my head around, looking. The water gurgles and splashes, chuckling at me. Maybe I should stay in the pool forever.



We're traipsing outside to the parking lot, my father still gripping my shoulder. I can feel a lecture coming on. I wrench on my car door, the cracked paint leaves flakes on my scrunched hand. It groans as dad presses down on the pedal, I feel like groaning as well, "Phoebe" he mutters, here we go again. I zone out as his voice drones on, highlighting all my mistakes. My eyes follow a buzzing fly, trapped in the car along with me. It twitches onto my dad's leg, and I catch a snippet of my father's voice "Olivia was on fire today, why can't you do that?" He slaps the fly away, but I'm the one who feels the pain.



The bus is packed, but nobody knows who I am. Vehicles are blurring together outside, forming a rainbow, I squint my eyes imagining I'm in the flow of colour, it doesn't work. Voices shatter my thoughts, a scream from a toddler being comforted by his mother, her reassuring words swim in my mind. Have I ever heard that before?

Nobody knows who I am.



Our car barely makes it home, I think we're all dreading the day when we must get a new one. I stumble into the shower, the steam engulfs me, a haven of droplets cascading onto my aching muscles. Safe. I spend more time wet than dry,

but I like it that way. I dash out of the shower, trying to conserve as much heat as possible. I rap layer upon layer of warmth around me, my blankets give the best hugs. My parents are having their usual argument. They think I can't hear them. But I hear everything. I try to plug it out and shut my eyes, but sleep eludes me. Instead, my thoughts swim around, landing on Olivia. Her life is probably as perfect as her technique.

It's the big day, junior nationals. If I win, I will get more than a gold medal. Everyone will be there, all my biggest rivals, but most importantly Phoebe. The day passes in a blur of splashes. But I'm only focused on one race. It's time. My cap is squeezing my pounding head, Phoebe is right beside me, we glance at each other. Bang. We're stroke for stroke; our bodies are sliding through

Twister

the water with ease. I should be looking down, but my head is turned towards Phoebe. She's looking at me too. Our splashes are colliding above us, but all is calm beneath the surface. I burst forward challenging her to keep up, but she is already next to me. Suddenly I'm unsure, my emotions are churning along with the water, I'm squinting through my goggles peering into the swirling mass of bubbles but I'm struggling to see.

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I've finished. But I'm stuck on the side of the pool, my head is swirling with possibilities, except Oliva always ends up on top. She's smiling at me. Strange. She's slowly edging towards me, her hand juts out snaking forward for a shake, I stare at it. Since when are we friends? Her hands still hovering, asking a question that I'm not ready to answer.



Henry Ludlow Y12

After the Shattering

Jan Munro Y12

fter the Shattering, chaos reigned.

No one really knows for sure how long chaos reigned, but most historians nowadays agree that it must've been at least a few centuries.

Then one day the Grand Empress appeared. We think she had a name once, a name like the rest of ours, but everyone who ever heard it isn't around anymore.

And for whatever reason, people listened to her. Probably because she killed the ones who didn't.

And so it went, with the Grand Empress ruling to this day. Although 'ruling' is a bit of a strong word. Now that everyone follows her lead, and she no longer kills the ones who don't, she spends all her time on whatever floating island tickles her fancy, leaving those of us who can't afford to live above the surface level stranded and having to fend for ourselves.

\blacktriangle

"Oi, Jonesy!" comes Davo's voice from across the office, "Get over 'ere!"

I sigh, walking on over. The rest of my coworkers are all huddled in a circle.

"What's going on here?" A bottle is spun. It points to me. "Oh, great... what do I have to do this time?" I ask.

"We've got a special one for you..." says Davo, "The Grand Empress herself has been delaying the renewal of her car's warranty."

"You didn't... please tell me I don't—"

"Oh yes you do," he says with a chuckle. I stalk off, fuming.



Later, once I've cooled off a bit and come to my senses, I wave. A passing taxi slows to a halt beside me.

"Where to?"

"The Grand Empress's private island."

"Good luck," the driver says, and I see a glimpse of his eyes, wide in shock, through the rear-view mirror.

We arrive, and the taxi rolls off before I can pay him, assumedly too frightened to stick around. The golden light of the setting sun glints off clean patches in the grimy steel gates as I tread carefully, cautious of possible security measures.

The air is silent and still. A branch snaps under my foot. No alarms go off. I let out a sigh, relieved, and continue towards the looming arches of the hulking front doors.



When there's no reply to the ringing of the doorbell, I give a tentative push to the doors, which creak loudly as they swing open to reveal a grandiose entrance, decked floor to ceiling by golden furnishings, with suits of armour lining the walls.

My body instinctually senses a presence behind me.

As I make my way up the staircase, a shiver runs down my spine as my body instinctually senses a presence behind me. Frozen in place, I dare to peek over my shoulder, and my eyes are graced by the Grand Empress herself, dressed in extravagan—a t-shirt? I suppose that away from the public there's no need for formal attire, but the Empress in a t-shirt is not something I ever expected to see in my lifetime.

"Your Divine Excellency, if I may?"

"Go ahead, but please, no titles," the Grand Empress replies, "I'm sick of titles, sick of this whole job, really."

"How should I address you then?" I ask.

To which she replies, "My full name is Katya Konstantina Désirée De Witte, but that's a bit of mouthful so just call me Katya."

"A bit? You don't say..." I mumble under my breath, "Katya, then?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm here on official business, and long story short, we've been trying to reach you about your car's extended warranty..."

"Oh... so you're one of those then," Katya says before stalking off silently. Cursing, I follow her into the next room, where I find her sitting on a desk, sharpening a sword menacingly.

"Oh ****. That's... not a good sign," I think as I back up slowly, palms already drenched in sweat.

She stands up, pointing the sword at me, so I turn tail and run. I run to the nearest set of armour, ripping off the chest plate and holding it above me to block the sword slicing the air towards my head. I scramble along and grab a sword of my own from the next set of armour just in time to hastily block another swing from Katya.

She consistently advances, and clearly practiced at this, she continues swinging at me with elegant and pristine technique again and again. I stumble, raising the sword again to try to parry but my efforts are too late, and I barely manage to get my head out of the way. I hear the slice of the blade

through the air and notice my ear bleeding as I crawl backwards away from Katya.

"Why is this necessary?" I ask, panting, to no reply, "Why?" But Katya's face gives no clues, stolid and stonier than a rock itself as she effortlessly swings at me again. I'm late to block again, but this time

there's no stopping her. I scrunch my eyes tight and patiently wait for my demise. But it doesn't come. I tentatively open an eye to see Katya's sword at my nose.

She finally talks, saying, "Get out of my house, stranger."

"But... the warranty," I say.

"Screw the warranty, get out of my house or I put my nice little sword here through your throat, understand?"

"I'll lose my job though," I say, whimpering.

"Do you want to lose your job or lose your life?" asks Katya.

"Alright, alright," I say as I stand, backing away slowly, "One question, though..."

"Shoot."

"What makes you so opposed to renewing your warranty?"

"Get out."

"No, seriously though..."

Katya returns her sword to my throat, "Get. Out."

I decide now to fake backing away and take a wild swing at the Grand Empress. So shocked that I even try to fight back, I manage to land a hit on her, slicing along her collarbone. She hisses, clearly pissed. She strikes at me, but I somehow manage to parry it, and use the moment to strike again. Our roles reverse now, and I hold my sword to her throat.

"Why must we always do this, Jones?" she mumbles, thinking I can't hear. But I can.

"How do you know that name? And what do you mean 'Always do this'? Should I know you? Who are you?"

"Come, put that sword away, we have a lot to talk about..."



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Overstimulated

Lucy Smith Y12

s I walk down the corridor at 8:39am, I prepare myself to hear the bell. I look down at my phone as the time switches to 8:40am. I take a deep breath in and wait.

The bell doesn't go.

Just as I breathe out, I hear the piercing ring of the bell in my ears. It's like every other day. I knew it was coming yet once again I wasn't prepared. The sound of the bell takes over my head and it feels like it's never going to end. My chest goes tight, and I feel like my mask is swallowing up my face. God, I hate living in a pandemic.

Suddenly, I realise that I'm standing in the middle of the hallway, so I rush past the next few classrooms until I make it to the door that says 37 on it. Staring at my timetable on my phone, the number on the door and again my timetable, I finally get it into my head that I have English. Every single day I'm terrified of walking into the wrong class. I've gotten used to it by now. I take the door handle and pull the door only to realise I'm so in my own head that I should be pushing it. Thank God no one saw me, I think to myself.

My teacher is standing at the front of the class with a bottle of hand sanitizer ready to give me some. This moment is one of my worst nightmares. She gives me way too much as per usual. The sticky, slimy feeling of it on my hands is enough to nearly set me over the edge. Three minutes since the bell rang and I'm already having another shitty day. Wiping the excess hand sanitizer on my dark blue jeans, I head to my desk in the back left corner of the room and take a seat.

There are currently only four other students in the class, so I'm hoping that more have gotten sick, and it'll be a quiet spell to start off the day. I bring my knees up to my chest and hug them tightly, pulling the sleeves of my hoodie down over my hands for comfort. Much to my annoyance, the door opens and what seems like hundreds of students come into the classroom yet really, it's only about 15 others. They're all talking so loudly.

As I put my hands over my ears, I throw my head back and look up. I want to scream. Although my eyes are closed, I see a slight flicker and I open them to find the light is broken.

Great. Just what I need. My eyes to try and block out flickering lights.

What seems like years later my teacher tells everyone to be quiet so we can start today's class. Then it all comes crashing down on me again. She reminds us that today of all days we're watching a film. Just like the hand sanitizer, watching films in class is a nightmare. Sitting on these uncomfortable seats while wearing my hot, tight mask. Paying attention, so I know what to write the goddamn essay on afterwards. My teacher puts on the film.

"This is going to be torture," I mumble under my breath.

"This is going to be torture," I mumble under my breath. There are a million things going through my head but not a single one is related to the movie. I sit there tapping my fingers on the desk, my legs, my chair, basically everything around me. I'm staring around the room at every poster on the wall, reading them, counting the number of tiles on the roof. Keeping still feels impossible.

Eleven minutes of the film have gone by, and I feel as though I can't do this anymore. I so badly want to pick up my things and walk out of the room to go home but I'm too scared of what people will think.

I wish the students here knew I've just been diagnosed with ADHD. Even more so, I wish my teachers knew how to cater for me. Instead, they either treat me like any other student or they treat me as if I'm 5 years old and speak to me so slowly like I don't understand them. But I don't 'look' like I'm neurodiverse so there's a lot of people who won't believe me if I tell them. I've been called an attention seeker before; I don't need to be again.

All I need right now is a hug. I pull out my phone and consider messaging one of my friends to see if they could meet me in the bathroom, but that stupid, evil voice comes into my head again. It tells me I'm not worth them missing out on their

class time, or that they'll say no and laugh about it. My teacher is glaring at me across the room, so I quickly put my phone back in my pocket and see that only five minutes have passed since I last checked the time.

It feels like a lifetime.

I get distracted thinking to myself about the pros and cons of leaving class until I realise everyone is getting up and leaving. It's time for maths.

I get up alongside everyone else and leave the classroom. For a brief second, I consider heading towards the office and asking them to call one of my parents to pick me up, but I know they'll be mad at me and tell me that I have to suck it up and deal with it. I know if I go and ask to get picked up, instead of words coming out of my mouth, tears will pour out of my eyes.

There is no point.



8.00am

Lily Harward Jones Y12

Solution of the building without speaking to or smiling at anyone. It's not like there aren't people around to talk to, neighbours attempt to meet his gaze and are met with a glance at the wall behind them. He hasn't smiled in a long time.

9.42am, Wellington - It's a mess in here, but he can't help thinking what a beautiful sight it is to wake up to. Sunlight waves through the curtains, different to the flashing LEDs of the night before but equally welcome. The room is filled with an inescapable sense that at some point, joy was created, and what more could one want?

9.44am, Auckland - He is stuck in traffic. Everything around him is moving in slow motion

but life won't stop for a moment. The air in his lungs has been the same for four years now. His seat is pushed too far back but to bring himself to change it would be too difficult. He'd have to admit that he's alone now, and that he's not tall enough to fit his own car. Not man enough.

10.23am, Wellington - He scrawls a note informing that he'll be home around two, and will pick up more bread on the way. As he arrives at the library, he notices a cat sitting just outside the window.

11.33am, Auckland - Most offices do fun things every once in a while; Christmas parties, Friday drinks, book clubs, shared lunches. Nothing like that happens here. It's just a place for days and people to waste away while the rest of the world explores and creates. There's a cat sitting outside his window, taunting him with its freedom. Life used to be colourful, but as he looks around at the empty suits and the \$2 paintings, everything

blends into the same shade of grey as his computer screen, in which he stares blankly at his sunken face.

1.47pm, Wellington - On the way home, he passes a man with an open guitar case and a melodic voice. The man sings an old favourite, and a light breeze allows the sun to shine comfortably.

2.27pm, Auckland - His desk is covered with dust, except for a picture frame shaped area in the corner of it. It's small, and no one else cares, but for him it's overwhelmingly distracting. It's a gaping void that won't stop screaming and wailing. Every time he tries to go near it, it cries louder so now he just leaves it alone. He had a son once, and technically still does, even though he would never admit it. He hasn't realized that the screaming void sounds so familiar because the wailing was taken straight from the mouth of a now 20-year-old boy, who is hated by his father.

3.31pm, Wellington - Life is made up of little rituals that knit a blanket for him to engulf himself in. He knows things won't always be this way, so he tries to wrap himself in that blanket as often as he can while it's still there. Thursday means board game night, and as he walks back into the place he has made his home, the oven is warm, and the couches are full.

5.02pm, Auckland - The room is busier, and smaller, than it was at the start of the day. People are discussing their weekend plans, picking people up from dance classes and going out for dinner to celebrate this and that. His laptop is the only light in the room, spotlighting his loneliness.

7.14pm, Wellington - He doesn't know when the sun set, but he's sure the room was filled with blush pink and warm gold for most of the last few hours. Maybe that has less to do with the sun and more to do with the company. Monopoly has never been his strong suit, but as he gets sent to jail for the 5th time in one game, he thinks he'd be happy to miss every turn in every game for the rest of his life, if it meant he got to feel the skin around his eyes crinkle like this again. He wants to spend his time with the people he loves, even if they're much better at Cluedo than he is.

9.13pm, Auckland - More hours have passed in this squeaky office chair than necessary.

9.42pm, Wellington - The snacks ran out hours ago, but no one wants to leave yet. The world feels small with everyone packed around a single coffee table that doesn't match any other furniture. He slips away to fulfil one more ritual. He has so much love in his heart, he only wants to share.

9.53pm, Auckland - He stumbles through the door back into the place other people call his home. No one has turned the heating on, because there's no one else to do it. He's not used to being by himself. The apartment is cold, and dark, and never feels emptier than at night. He never wants to be consciously here for long.

9.54pm, Wellington - Buttons are pressed and the phone is held to his ear, he waits for the ringing to stop before giving up and going back out just in time for his turn. The laughter from the other room is more than enough to fill the silence of an ignored phone call.

9.54pm, Auckland - He falls asleep with gel in his hair and guilt in his heart. He's knocked out cold, not to be woken until tomorrow morning. He doesn't hear the phone ring, but that's okay. The phone will ring again tomorrow night.

Tess Mainwaring Y12

hat's where me and my friends would meet up at night and get drunk," I laugh, gesturing to a cluster of trees framing the park as we drive past.

My husband frowns.

"What, were you in a bad crowd? I thought you'd have been a good student, in study groups and science clubs."

I snort at the idea. As we drive through my hometown, many old emotions rise to the surface, emotions I didn't think I'd ever feel again. I've begun to find myself missing how carefree and limitless my life used to be. My friends and I would lie under the stars and talk about the crazy exciting lives we would lead once we finally left this boring town. At school, my head spilled with dreams of being a dancer, or an actor, or a fashion designer. Move to Hollywood and let my future fall into place.

Everything seemed so simple back then. I would stay out past curfew, skip classes, and drive my parents crazy, believing that somehow everything would work out. That confidence is something I've lost and would do anything to get back.

Everything seemed so simple back then.

"What else did you and your friends do, besides getting drunk." My husband's voice sounds curious, careful, maybe a little bit scared. I didn't want to shatter his perception of me. I twist my wedding ring as it seems to tighten around my finger, a feeling that's grown familiar.

"I mean, just your usual teenage rebellion. Sneaking out, going to parties, dressing in a way that made my parents cringe." I shrug it off, not wanting to think about those days, and how much more fulfilled and happy I felt. My life was

in such vivid colour back then; now my days blend together, grey and predictable.

My eyes slide to my husband. His strong jaw, dark hair, bright, beautiful blue eyes. Meeting him in university felt like the love at first sight people wait their whole life for. It seemed too good to be true. At the time, I suppose dropping out to get married and have a family felt like the best way to preserve our fairy-tale romance. I wince as I remember my parents' reaction. They were so proud of my big dreams, even throughout my rocky teen years they knew I had a passion and fire that would propel me towards great things. For them, seeing me choose my husband over myself was like seeing the girl I used to be dead at his hands. Bile rises in my throat as I reconsider the choices I was once so sure of, see the mistakes I made as a lovestruck teenager. Right now, as the cold air strokes my cheek through the open window, as my old dreams pave these worn streets, I feel as though a veil has been lifted.

We turn the corner and I see my old high school emerge from the trees. I feel as if the ghost of my teenage self is standing there, glaring at me with disappointment and resentment. Wondering how I managed to end up jobless, raising three kids at the age of 23. Tears burn behind my eyes as I tear my gaze away.

"Hey love, is everything ok?" His soft voice shatters my thoughts. I keep my eyes forward.

"Yeah I'm fine, just a lot of memories here," I say shakily.

A warm hand rests on mine, which adds a layer of guilt to my boiling emotions. I wish that this life was enough for me, but I don't think it ever was. These past few years I've just been going through the motions, on autopilot. Under the surface I am still that girl that I've been catching glimpses of on this warm autumn drive.

Lilly Athfield Y12

he boy gripped the cold handrailing and stared into the icy depths of the deep blue water below him. A sense of dread built in his stomach. It twisted and churned, which made him feel seasick before he had even set foot on the vessel that loomed in front of him. Blistering paint had peeled from the exterior. Dark puffs of smoke drifted lazily from the top of two tall funnels. It looked as though it was being kept afloat by some supernatural force.

The boy was no older than thirteen, with a dark tangle of hair and an anxious look on his face. Pinned to the front of his coat was a yellowing identity tag, or in other words, his ticket to freedom. His hands and face were grubby, yet he did not stand out on the bustling dock. It was clear that the other children around him were as scruffy as he was. Each had a similar label pinned to the front of their clothing. Those unfortunate enough to have let the harshness of the situation sink in sobbed. A small handful of children were excited by the prospect of a change of scenery. They gazed up eagerly at the seventeen thousand tonnes of floating metal before them. Most, however, were bleary-eyed and solemn.

Pinned to the front of his coat was a yellowing identity tag, or in other words, his ticket to freedom.

It was not long before the crowd started to move towards the ship's gangway. The boy struggled to control his anxiety as he followed the swarm of children boarding the ship. A man in an official-looking uniform sensed his uneasiness and gave him a scrutinizing look. The boy hastily stumbled forward. I want to go home, I need to get off, he thought. But as he turned around, he saw that all the boarding passengers blocked the door which he had come through. He let his eyes wander

over to the mountains in the distance taking in their immense beauty. *Home*, he thought. He took one last look before he let the flow of people move him further into the belly of the metal beast.

The boy found himself in a crowded bunkroom far below the deck. There were no windows, and the dingy lights did not do much more than give the room an eerie feeling. He sat, perched on the end of a filthy bed. On it lay a single threadbare blanket. The walls were grimy, and he shuddered to think about what had made the stains on the floor. He found that the sweltering heat mixed with the swaying of the boat had conjured up a rather nauseating feeling. But there was nothing that could be done. It would be another eighteen hours before he would see land again. After a while, his eyelids began to droop. Slowly, he drifted out of consciousness, letting his dreams take him back to the comfort of his own home.

BANG! He woke with a start drenched in a cold sweat. A piercing scream broke the silence followed by shouts of panic. What's happening, he thought as the lights flickered and then went out. He could hear the other people in his room murmuring amongst themselves. Torpedo? Boiler explosion? His mind flipped through all the possibilities he could think of. His heart raced as he scrambled to the door. The corridor was lined with dim lights and packed with people shoving each other out of the way. He stood in the doorway, hesitating about what to do while he tried to gather his bearings. It was only then that he noticed water had seeped through his shoes.



He saw someone's mouth open as they screamed, but for all he knew, no words had escaped their mouth. All he could hear was the blood that pounded in his ears. One thing he knew for certain was that if the ship sank now, he would get sucked down into the vacuum that it created. There would be no hope for survival.

Large crowds had never been something the boy was fond of. He had always gone out of his way to avoid bustling spaces. So, the pushing and shoving that followed was not a situation he wanted to remember. He struggled to make it up the staircases while being grappled by panicked passengers. His heart pounded in his chest and his lungs burned. Finally, he breathed in the cool, bitter air and his face stretched into a smile. The black night sky was a veil of darkness, a blanket of concealment. Unfortunately, his serenity was not long-lived. One overpowering thought echoed around his head. Where had all the lifeboats gone?



Death to Père Fouettard

Ben Fabling Y12

Sleep for me is breathless, like a catching in the throat. Slipping between the cracks in my mind, I plummet down, down, down, into a shaft so deep and dark and choked with soot with light barely a pinprick in my eyes. I've dreamt before. I don't wake up, I don't stop falling, spiralling and clinging to the shreds of my mind like tattered pages. Will this go on forever?

A flash of light, barely visible. I cling to it like a thread, like a lifeline. I'm sinking, drowning, and I'm not sure if I want to be pulled aboard, or let go and be dragged under by the raging current. I imagine that beneath the surface there is an ethereal calm, a muted stillness. L'appel du vide, The call of the void, they call it. That feeling when you're standing up high above a deep dark pit and something small and buried deep deep down in your soul whispers, "Jump". I resist, even as the last of my air is forced from my lungs. I'm so close now, the surface a blazing lattice of light just within reach. My hands grasp towards it clawing desperately as the light blazes bright once more—

"Mel!" A firm grip on my shoulder pulls me decisively from the depths. I shake my head and move my long dark hair from my eyes. My vision is unobscured and focuses on the figure above me. Rembrandt crouches next to me, concern

showing in his emerald eyes. Despite being my cousin, he looks shockingly similar to me, almost so much that we could be mistaken as siblings. His hair is my shade of deep black and his shoulders are wideset, giving him a subtle hint of strength despite his diminutive stature. His features are defined, a sharp jawline and brilliantly white teeth (Hard to achieve down in the Char). His grin is infectious as always, and I feel myself offering a tentative smile. "Nightmare?" He words it like a question, but both of us know the answer. Anyone born in the Char would be more than familiar with nightmares, awake if not asleep.

He words it like a question, but both of us know the answer.

It was a miracle they were even here now, up in the Lumiére. It was only luck that Rem had snatched that authorization from the guardian, and even more luck that they had managed to get aboard the elevators without being questioned, as soot-covered and furtive as they appeared. I remember well what it was like stepping out of the artificial, sterile light of that elevator and into light from the sun. It was so much more pure and untainted, it felt like a light caress across the skin. Down in the Char all of our light came from lamp-glow, reflected off grime covered walls, and filtered through the endless layer of ash and dust and little floating plastics. It felt like needles. I have a faint recollection of my mother reading to me, back when us Charbonnières could still read. She said the Lumiére was so high up that it was above those deadly clouds, and it was unaffected by the acid rains or the flooding or the constant infection and disease. She said that the people were equally lofty, the best of the best, and that one day they'd find a way to make all the clouds go away, and bring back the light to everyone. I remember speaking to her in that tone of naivety that only small children or idiots can have; "Mama, why don't we all go live in the Lumes? It's not very nice here." That was the first time I saw my mother cry.

"Mel?" It's Rembrandt again. I appreciate his concern, but can't bring myself to tell him how small I feel in the face of all this splendour. "Of course, Remy. Just thinking about the others." When Remy got the ticket, we knew we had to be fast. Elevator tickets need to be reauthorized daily, and the last lift of the day was leaving in twenty minutes. Remy and I had to make the tough decision to abandon our friends and our family, though I made a hollow promise to myself to return once I had made a name for myself up here. "I hear you on that one," Remy

looks thoughtful, before shaking himself out of his own reverie. "Listen, we need to move now that it's no longer day. We don't know the topside very well, and all of our maps are probably outdated. If we can't find a place to crash and change out of these-" He gestures to his sooty, tattered, tunic "—we'll be picked up by the guardians and be back in the Char before you know it." I agree with him. We need to be able to pass as Lumen if we wanted to stay in this place. We scale down from our resting place atop the roof of a bakery (One benefit of living below was an acquired skill of climbing) and cross under the cover of darkness to the tailor across the road. Everything up here is arranged for convenience, not a sprawling maze of apartments and stalls like the Char. Digging through the bins outside, I find a beautiful pair of jeans and a shirt with a slight tear along the sleeve, something easily covered up. "So much waste. I would have loved clothes like these down there," I say hesitantly to Remy. I still have no clue whether he's one of the ones who hates the Lumen, or one of the ones who worships them. We don't ask those sorts of questions in the Char. "I guess that's what happens when you've taken so much. You get a choice." The emphasis on 'taken', a slight hiss in his voice, tells me all I need to know. I breathe a sigh of relief.



Hermes's Shoes

Tiva Green Y12

y shoes were not working. They were behaving as normal shoes, which in my case was not the main function or purpose of my shoes. They look like ordinary shoes at first glance, stylish shoes granted, but still just shoes. They had been malfunctioning for the past couple of weeks, but like most old tec, when it does not work you whack it and magically fixes itself, or gets damaged further, depending on who you ask.

What happens if my shoes stop working or what do they do in the first place, you might ask? Well, have you heard the ancient Greek legends of the god Hermes? And you know how he has shoes with little wings that fold out to carry the god? Well, you could say I stole his shoes, (ironic since he is the god of thieves) or, well, I found them. So, when the shoes stop working, the wings fold in without my consent, also they no longer keep you airborne. It was just my luck that I happened to be in said air when they gave out. Life was unfair. I contemplated my terrible luck as I

plunged towards the earth at breakneck speed. My short blond hair streamed behind me. At least this is an interesting way to die I suppose, but still death was not a very appealing aspect currently. Yesterday yes, but today I had cuddled a friendly cat and now life seemed surprisingly good. I smacked my feet together in an attempt to reboot the old junk, hard enough to leave bruises, if I lived long enough to care. The wings fluttered to life just before I would have died. Nice. So instead of dying I was merely covered in bruises.

"That looked like it hurt." Squinting through my eyes I saw the silhouette of a boy, framed against the midday sun.

"Stating the obvious," I groaned. Focusing on the figure, he changed from a shape to an actual person. Sort of. I promptly closed my eyes and lay back down; I couldn't do this. Then I sat back up, there was a stone poking into my back if I lay down, and it hurt.

"If you are dead does that mean I get your shoes?" the boy asked

"No, it does not," I grumbled. "They are pieces of junk, but unfortunately, I am rather attached to them." As I said this, I opened my eyes, I had fallen into one of the many small junk yards of Eagath. My shoes were not the only thing that was related to the Greek gods, because the boy in front of me looked like said Greek gods. Sort of. He had a robotic arm. So, a cyborg Greek god? It is embarrassing to admit but he is the reason that, more often than not I fly over this particular junk yard, because I am hopeless and

maybe a bit of a stalker. Now he had noticed me because I had toppled out of the sky like a squawking bird. Oh, a perfect meeting for the beginning of a romance novel you might say, I should be thrilled. Instead, I want to crawl into the empty tomato can that is on my left. Weirdly specific I know but what can I say, living in that rusty can sounds really great right about now. Less mortifying. Unfortunately, I had not found any old tech that could shrink my size to fit into a can. I really should keep an eye out for that, it would be very handy indeed.

"A pity, I could probably fix them and avoid falling out of the sky so spectacularly." He has a smirk on his face as he says this.

"I thought you would be nicer," I mumbled too quietly for him to hear, as I stood. I straightened, trying to look dignified. I opened my mouth to say something witty, make a better impression. Then to my mortification my shoes suddenly when into overdrive shooting me into the air without my consent. I might have screamed; gods, I hope not. In 5 minutes, tops, my shoes were depositing me in a heap at my doorstep. The homing device I had added last week was obviously working. Yanking my shoes off my feet I chucked them into the house. "Bloody things, why is old tech so faulty!"

That was possibly the most embarrassing thing to have happened to me in my 17 years of life.

"Bye then," a boy said, his face turned up to the sky.



Station

Sascha Hunt Y12

racking yellow paint lines the edge of the platform. A weathered brick building sits a few feet back from the edge sheltering a mass of people huddling in its relative warmth. Its walls are smothered in a thick plastery paint

that had dripped down to the ground and seeped into the cracking concrete beneath. Within the shelter stand bankers, engineers, salesmen and students, all of them layered and bundled in winter clothing from head to toe. They all avert their gaze as an elderly man walks past. A dog waits patiently to the right of the walls of the

station shelter, its head held high, fixed facing the platform. It doesn't seem to notice the passengers waiting on the platform, to him the shelter may as well be empty. The passengers are much the same.

After a year of seeing the creature sitting on the platform each morning, he began to blur into the monotony of their lives, at first there was gossip of a forgetful or even dead owner. But eventually, he became just an object taking up space in the peripheral of their vision. His body is aging and tired, with brittle tufts of black and white hair scattered across his slight body. The hair on its stomach shoots out in different directions, standing propped up by hardened crackling dirt. Despite this, his head is held high, in stark contrast to the passengers waiting on the platform.

The old man, now sitting on the bench far off from the shelter looks on. He grazes his palm on the unkempt stubble of his chin as he props his head in view of the dog. A train huffs out a pained whistle from around the bend, it's gears clang and whir as it pulls its way across the rusting tracks. Workers dotting the platform dart their eyes and reach for the satchels and bags waiting patiently at their feet. The old man's eyes stay still and focused on the dog. The wrinkled pads of his fingers resting on his cheek, his skin is silver pale, and his grey hair is thin enough to see to his scalp. He wears worn suede work boots with thick soles and shoelaces that fray at the ends. The old man presses his hands into the bench and heaves himself onto his feet. His knees and joints crackle and wheeze like a leaking hydraulic crane as he walks toward the dog. He rests his hand on the back of the dog's head, his yellowed frozen fingertips briefly combing through the dog's fur. Its gaze is momentarily broken, and its head briefly props up in the direction of the man, acknowledging his presence. He removes a bone shaped treat from the inside pocket of his jacket and places it in front of the dog's paws. The old man then

lumbers to the waiting train, joining the rest of the passengers. The dog gratefully gobbles down the snack and then returns his attention to the train.

Through hopeful eyes the dog stares expectantly at the open doors; with each passenger that steps off the train onto the weathered platform, the look diminishes. Passengers step onto the train to take their seats and stare idly at the space between their feet. The man takes a spot to the left of the door, gripping onto a pole on the side of the train's narrow walls. He looks through the windows back to the platform, reading the dog's expression once more.

Through hopeful eyes the dog stares expectantly at the open doors

The man's eyes are milky with age and pained by the morose look on the dog's face. To think an animal once so joyous was now in this state, tormented him. It had saddened him from the very first time he saw the dog was left waiting and today he can't stand to witness it again. Ashamed that his inaction has reduced him to a bystander, on par with the rest of the passengers, he turns away and grips the pole fiercer than before. Although he may not have been able to give the creature a new home he thought, at least he was showing some semblance of empathy, especially in contrast to the other passengers. With each glowering look and apathetic stare, the train seemed to sink further into the tracks, weighed down more and more.

As the doors shut, the train hisses a sharp whine and then scrapes and claws its way out of the station. The dog lets out a pained sigh, the air from its nose turning into water vapour as it hits the frigid cold air. The mist dissipates in front of the dog's solemn mouth and he stares across the station, his eyes watery and frozen by the cold air. Inside the train's body the man spots a passenger in his peripheral. A middle-aged banker

apathetically staring at the floor. His expression was so blank, the old man thought 'It is as if he is staring straight through the floor to the tracks shooting past underneath.' He wondered whether the passengers all hiding behind their blank stares and solemn looks were even thinking of anything. Their empty looks rebounded off the train's walls, bouncing from window to window before settling as a thick smog at their feet. The type of smog that burns your eyes and makes your stomach drop the man thought. The old man grips the pole at his side even harder than before.

The train makes its way from the platform. The sight of the empty train tracks stings the dog's eyes. The image burns from the pupil all the way to the back of his skull. He lurches forward towards the edge of the platform and cranes his head over the edge, stretching his neck to view the train seeping into the mist. Eventually, there is no sight of the train, and the dog's head drops to the ground, his bony shoulders protruding from his body as his head weighs the rest down.

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To the ones who are always there, waiting - An ode to fictional books

Scarlett Woods Y10

Whether I'm lying in bed, snuggled under my covers

Or bathing in the sun at the beach

Or sitting in the classroom, pretending to do work

You allow me to leave reality

To travel away to a land filled with magic, safety And love of all kinds

You provide me with an endless source of entertainment, imagination and emotions

You join me on the ride of fantasy – far away from reality and its hardships

And though I may stare at a paragraph

For five long minutes

Trying to comprehend it, to figure out what could happen next

And though I may forget about you for a few days

Or a few years

You are always there waiting, patient for me to come back

You laugh with me when they make a joke

And cry with me when they die

You shout with me when they make a dumb decision

And scream with me when they get betrayed

You're with me as I figure out who I am

Through the pages you provide

And you grin a wolfish grin when my standards rise yet again

And though you were crafted by someone else

I keep you safe, while you help me grow

You stay with me when I seek comfort from your pages

And you stay with me, even as years pass and I move on to others

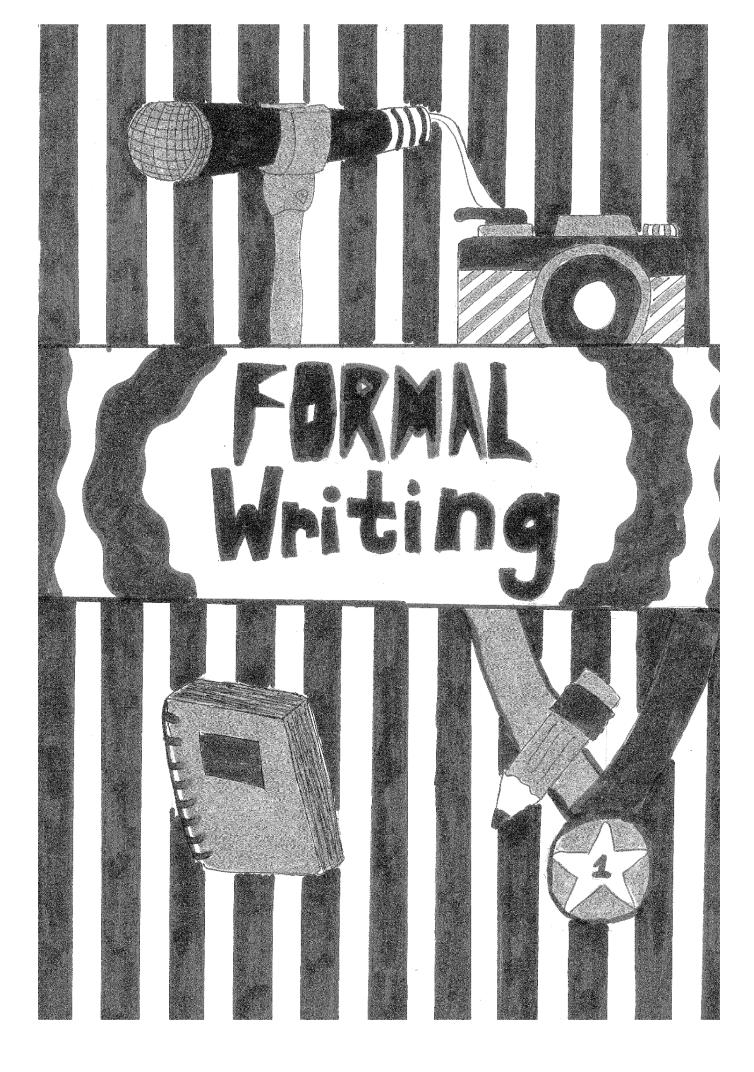
I know you'll always be there, waiting on the bookshelf for me to come back

And when I do

I know you'll welcome me back with open pages



Arkin Earle Y11



Bee Tran Y9

→ he first Hunger Games movie, action, betrayal, romance, a masterpiece created by Suzanne Collins brought to life by award winning director Gary Ross. The transition from book to movie was a good decision and the execution of it was better than expected. The writers really did read the book and truly brought the gruesome battle royale theme to life and the sappy teen romance included in the film as well. The characters are also played by great actors from Jennifer Lawrence playing Everdeen, the brave main character, to Josh Hutcherson playing Peeta, a shy wimp who will literally cry at the smallest things. Anyways, the actors did a phenomenal job bringing the characters from the black ink on paper to a reallife production. The place where the actual games were filmed in DuPont State Forest, North Carolina, which in my opinion looks absolutely stunning, giving the film the wild forest look and feel.

Anyways, the actors did a phenomenal job bringing the characters from the black ink on paper to a real-life production.

The storyline of the movie was well paced, it wasn't trying to rush through all the boring "no children killing each other" parts and kept the tempo of the entire movie at an acceptable speed. The character development really shows. For example, Peeta going from a very unlikeable character to uhm, okay not Peeta but most characters like Katniss being a slave to the capitol to the winner of the prestigious Hunger Games, swearing revenge to the Capitol. The story leaves off at just the right time to make a good pickup point for the next movie which I unfortunately can't talk about today, but it ends with President

Snow (President of Panem) thinking about his next move to get rid of Katniss and Peeta.

Next the theme of the movie, the blood and gore in the Hunger Games is more of an R-rated movie than PG-13. The Hunger Games gets its main theme from the 2000 film "Battle Royale". The aim of the "game" is to be the last one standing in the arena, to achieve this you pretty much have to brutally murder everyone else who are also children, very fun don't you think? Tied in with a clichéd love triangle with three important characters involved makes it an extremely controversial film and the rebellious behaviour of the different districts (regions in the movie) led it to get banned in cinemas in countries like Thailand and Vietnam who have banned the entire trilogy.

The entire movie is always keeping you wondering what's going to happen next, the suspense at the beginning of the games is genuinely frightening and the romance in the movie is like I said before, quite clichéd 80s high school romance kind of thing, but it gives the movie another story to tell which is nicer than seeing children brutally murder each other every couple minutes. The mental states of many of the characters are not in great shape. Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta's mentor is an aggressive, alcoholic who is broken from the Hunger Games that he won and the Careers which are the children who were trained to win the Games are very cocky and obnoxious, all of which are a wide range of personalities for the characters.

In the end though, the entire movie is a cinematic masterpiece, from the choice of actors to the main story. The visuals for the arena itself was just how I imagined it in the book and the emotion that the characters give really does make the film feel real. Lastly, if you do decide to watch this film, Happy Hunger Games, and may the odds ever be in your favour.

Capital letters: The biggest let-down of the English language

Ruby Easton-Smith Y9

nce upon a long time ago, the English language was developed. So were others. German, Spanish, French, Greek and more, they've all made the same mistake. A mistake that is still prominent today, in 2022. And it all started once upon another time when humans began to write, therefore creating alphabets to communicate thoughts through squiggles. Yet when this process began, someone out there decided that one wasn't enough, and so two sets of scribbles were developed. Capital and lower case. Now, for people who have been speaking English all their lives, you might not notice how utterly pointless the use of capital letters is. But I assure you, English and other Indo-European languages would be better off without this mind-boggling system of which to write when.

Have you ever sat there wondering whether a particular word needs a capital letter at the start? Or just forgotten as you typed up an essay? Do you ever think how stupid it is to have two different designs for each letter? A or a. For some it comes easily, from years of practice. But why put in the work in the first place? Why be marked down for a lower case I, when in reality, it does not affect anything in the slightest? Really, it doesn't! There are plenty of other languages that deal without them. Understandably, you may think "why not? It isn't that hard!" But, my dear reader, that is a misconception brought to you by having the knowledge ingrained into your brain, as you navigated early primary school. As you've grown up, you have made plenty of errors with capital and lower case, so you've concentrated on fixing it. Sure, it gets sorted out eventually, but think of all the better things you could have done with that time, if only English wasn't silly enough to incorporate those unnecessary struggles.

Have you ever sat there wondering whether a particular word needs a capital letter at the start?

Although English isn't the only one that suffers from this tedious mistake, not all languages acknowledge a larger case. Imagine your mother tongue is one of such, and you turn to English as a new language to learn. You go to a class, you learn things. Like the alphabet and how to write using English characters. You learn things that native English speakers take for granted, things you must learn from scratch. And as you do so, you come to the same conclusion I have. Capital letters suck. Because now, you've got to learn not only how to write your abc's, but also your ABC's. That's twenty-six unnecessary letters to waste your time on. Because apparently that made sense to someone, somewhere, a long time ago.

Are you starting to see my point? Why must we keep this up? Because your teacher required such in Year 1? Because some old person decided way back when? There is no need for us to be picky about it, stuck in a dumb tradition that no one's bothered to see for what it is. Of course, no one is going to read this and drop everything to change how we write, but just ponder it over. Why did this come to be? If you find an answer, please contact me, but for now, capital letters will remain pointless and redundant in my mind, and probably yours.

Manon Lavigne Y10

Te all grow up wondering about what we might be when we're older - a police officer, a pilot, maybe a doctor. These ideas often change from year to year, switching with our interests. However, there is one thing that barely changes, that is, that no matter which job is chosen, there is a near certainty that the women doing those jobs, will be paid less than their male co-workers. Little girls across New Zealand are pushed into this future of earning an average of \$27,227 less than men a year. In 1972 the gender pay gap was declared illegal by the government, yet despite this in 2012 the wage gap was 9.1% and in 2020 the gap rose to 9.5 %. In 8 years, the gender pay gap went up by 0.4%. Do you think that counts as progress? Why is it that 50 years later we see the gender pay gap barely moving at all, and when it does shift it is increasing instead of decreasing? How come no effective efforts are being made to put an end to this illegal inequality? We must ask ourselves why women are to this day, still getting paid less than men even when they are doing the exact same job to the same exact standards? At the glacial pace this gap is closing women may have to wait a hundred years until they can get the equality they legally and ethically deserve. What many people don't realise is how the gender pay gap is slowing us down, both socially and economically. As this essay will demonstrate, eliminating this gap would allow us to advance and improve New Zealand in many ways. The key points are that everyone doing the same job should be paid equally. The pay gap is creating negative effects on society and, removing the gap would have immense benefits on the economic world.

It seems obvious that if people are doing the same job, to the same standard, they can expect the same pay, this is why everyone should be paid the same in their line of work. Therefore, it seems not just ridiculous, but unjust that women in the same occupations as men are doing the same job, but in many cases are being paid almost 10% less. How is it that this inequality persists in 2022? People like to explain the gender pay gap in terms of skills, experience and of education, however research conducted by the Ministry for Women found that these factors only accounted for 20% of the gender pay gap. This leaves the remaining 80% down to gender bias and discrimination. Meaning that there are no good explanations that the majority of women are being paid less than their male counterparts. The source of this discriminatory gender bias mainly consists of people holding onto old and outdated stereotypes and traditions, which are in turn dragging down the evolution of New Zealand. The social worker pay equity settlement can show us the extent that society undervalues a female dominated workforce.

It seems obvious that if people are doing the same job, to the same standard, they can expect the same pay

When social work was compared to several occupations mostly performed by men, it was found that those male occupations paid approximately 30% more for doing work of similar skill, experience, and effort. This claim meant that social workers had a significant pay increase to recognise the value of everybody's work. The settlement not only helped women get the pay that they deserved, but it demonstrated that women can and do already perform to the same, if not higher, standard as men. It should go without saying that women with the same capabilities, performing well in their occupation, should be paid equally to the men in those jobs. shown that some factors Research has contributing to the pay gap is the way that women have been treated when trying to

negotiate higher pay. They are not taken seriously or are given an unnecessarily difficult time. Compare this to the men trying to negotiate their pay. As an Australian study shows, while women are more willing to negotiate their pay (most likely to the fact that they are being paid unfairly), men are more likely to get a pay increase. This could be because men tend to have a more aggressive negotiating style or just because of gender bias and how women are discriminated and taken advantage of in a workplace environment. When two men share the same skill set and are working at the same job with the same hours, they will always get paid the same. Why should this change when there are women involved? There was no good reason back then, there is no good reason now. Women have to take care of themselves the same way men do, and they often have the lion's share of childcare responsibilities and unpaid work in the home. With less money and more they need to spend it on, it puts women in a horrible position. Because of this inequity 50% of middle-aged women have no personal retirement savings, meaning that they might not be able to take care of themselves when they are no longer able to work. This needs to stop now. We must start fighting for people to follow through on what was promised those 50 years ago. Women deserve to have a fair chance in life. Over half of NZ's population are women, and most of them are being paid less than they deserve for the same amount of work. It's time we as a fair and just society, honour the law and start demanding gender pay equality.

Gender pay equity is not only about women, it is beneficial for New Zealand's society as a whole. This is not just a women's problem. The gender

> gap effects. and the

has numerous negative These effects are slowing down our society

development of many companies, as inclusive and diverse environments. Environments that can understand and reflect the communities they are operating within. Thinking of the gender pay gap as a women's issue is proven to stop the advancement and create a block in the futures of companies across New Zealand. Equal pay benefits everyone in an organization because when employees feel like they are being paid fairly, they are likely to continue working for the company, and work more productively and harder in their roles. This commitment helps advance the company and improve it. But this cannot happen when studies show that 36% of female employees think that the men do not care about the pay gap issues and nearly half of the men surveyed think that they should not be involved in pay equity discussions.

Gender pay equity is not only about women, it is beneficial for New Zealand's society as a whole.

You may think that the pay gap does not have a direct impact on men, however what does impact men is their job and possibly the impact it has for women in their lives. In a workplace you work in a team, and it is almost certain that you will one day work with women. If we work on eliminating the pay gap for women in the workplace, it may provide a blueprint for addressing other workplace inequalities. It would show that the company values all employees equally is open to address and help resolve other potential issues in a constructive way. If people feel undervalued in a workplace they probably won't be working to their highest standard. If women know that they will be paid less than men the whole way through, it's hard to see the point in trying. On the contrary, when they are valued as demonstrated by equal pay for equal work it results higher job satisfaction. This flows through to benefits in productivity and workers' mental health. Closing



the existing pay gap creates positive effects for both women and the communities around them. If people work hard to stop the pay gap, then that hard work most certainly will be returned in our workplaces and society. The more effort that is put into this solution, the more will be given back, and as far as I'm concerned, it's well worth the extra money and effort to get equal pay, but the question is, does society think so? In order to make a positive change, it is so important for workplaces to contribute to these discussions because it is something that can forever benefit their company and help make a difference in the lives of their workers. The truth is they need it to happen, and our society needs it to happen. So, let's make it happen.

The elimination of the gender pay gap will create a better future for our economy. Why? Because the gender pay gap effects New Zealand's biggest consumer group. Women in New Zealand make 80% of the purchasing decisions yet are losing almost 10% of their wages through wage By closing the gender pay gap inequalities. women will have more money to spend in our economy. This we know because studies show that more of women's pay gets put back into the economy. This expenditure would help keep the economy going, especially in these times of high inflation that are driving up prices and with families having to tighten their belts. As you can see this isn't just an issue affecting women. On top of this there is the 'pink tax'. The 'pink tax' describes the fact that for products that both men and women buy, such as shampoo, jeans and pens, those exclusively marketed to women cost on average 7% more than the same product marketed to men. The pink tax plus the pay inequality significantly impacts what women have to spend and are completely unjust. It's way past time to begin addressing these historic gender inequalities. We should not have to put up with this unlawful practice. By bringing in these inequalities in price and pay, it creates more issues for women to deal with and more financial

difficulties impacting their later life. However, lifting the gender pay gap would help our economy greatly, whist starting in the workplace. There are many benefits to having companies that are inclusive and equal spaces for women. Having well-paid representatives of at least half of your market involved in the decision-making, product design and development, will help companies create effective products that meet their female client's needs and result in more sales and use of their services. This all benefits the economy and is another example of how catering for women makes it good for most. Since women tend to buy more and would have almost an extra 10% to spend or invest in products if the gaps lifted, our economy would be impacted for the better. The extra economic boost would be worth the lost money spent on closing the wage gap. Women are an asset to our economy, and at the moment we are wasting opportunities. Lifting the pay gap would not just help women across our country, but it would help all other gender groups, and many companies along the way. The pay gap being lifted would help make New Zealand become a better country, economically and socially. It is worth it.

The elimination of the gender pay gap will create a better future for our economy. Why? Because the gender pay gap effects New Zealand's biggest consumer group.

When all citizens are happy, society as a whole can function more efficiently. When everyone pulls their weight and is rewarded equally for doing so, it evens out to help everyone. We can't expect this to happen with so many unaddressed inequalities surrounding us. However, once society pulls together and makes a tangible effort to solve the gender pay gap, we will notice a positive

difference for all. By society addressing pay inequality it opens a wider discussion on gender injustices and other inequalities across marginalised groups (Notably the rainbow community and ethnic minorities). It has been proven that spaces that are inclusive to women, tend to be inclusive for other groups as well. This is why it is so important for everyone's sake that this effort is made to better our community. The gender pay gap is not going to be closed overnight, but maybe with a little more effort, we can help reduce those predicted 100 years of

wage gap, into less and less until women can get their equality. New Zealand's economic world, social world, and equality are all depending on it. As you can see the closing of our pay gap is going to benefit everyone who is a part of New Zealand. Our economy will get a boost and our society as a whole can become more connected and inclusive. Women do deserve to be paid equally, but New Zealand as a whole has a right to improvement, and the first step to getting that, is closing this gap.

The Day after tomorrow review

Finn Chamberlain Y10

Irom a mainstream point of view the film The Day After Tomorrow by Robert Emmerich is the fictional story of a sudden world-wide storm that puts the world into a new ice age after a scientist named Jack Hall is largely ignored when trying to warn the United Nations of his environmental concerns. His research proves true when a large storm engulfs the earth and slowly freezes the northern hemisphere. After New York is hit by the storm Jack goes from Philadelphia to rescue his son and his friends who are trapped in the city. This movie follows the themes of other typical disaster movies and contains similar characters. The science is horrific, and the plot is predictable, although viewed through the lens of the disaster movie genre its special effects are dramatic and well done as they highlight the dangers of climate change.

When we view The Day After Tomorrow through a disaster movie genre lens we understand that the stereotypical characters are used to progress the story and are reminders of things in the real world such as short-sighted politicians and concerned scientists. Throughout the film the politicians and scientists very rarely agree on the need to stop global warming. At a United Nations conference in New Delhi, Jack

Hall presents his research to the U.N about the changing climate and how his model predicts another ice age which the Vice President Becker dismisses.

The science is horrific, and the plot is predictable, although viewed through the lens of the disaster movie genre its special effects are dramatic and well done as they highlight the dangers of climate change.

Becker is stereotypically an arrogant politician who ignores science, this is proved by the quote: "Professor, our economy is every bit as fragile as the environment. Perhaps you should keep that in mind before making sensationalist claims". Becker's choice to downplay things is a reminder that in our own world politicians can be short-sighted. They are too often focused with lining their own pockets. Scientists like Jack Hall usually value the environment over the economy. Therefore, they will look to science and technology to find the answers to an impending disaster. In the disaster genre, science and technology save the day. This is true in this film.

True to disaster film genre The Day After Tomorrow uses special effects to show the power of nature. In this film natural disasters are dramatic and entertaining. Viewed through the disaster movie genre lens, they are effective because they show the realities of climate change and the dangers of global warming to viewers using the things we are familiar with like change in sea temperature and unusual weather events. The film has many scenes showing the power of nature including massive hailstones in Japan, powerful tornadoes in Los Angeles and a huge temperature drop in Siberia causing things to suddenly freeze. The most memorable example is a massive tidal wave in New York that washes over the Statue of Liberty. Distressed citizens begin to run away in fear. The special effects are impressive as they look realistic, with the intention of making the viewer awestruck, and some may even feel terror. The waves are filmed in a wide overhead shot and the city appears small and insignificant in comparison. Sound effects of loud, crashing waves and epic background music emphasise the power of nature. Seeing the film's special effects through the genre lens makes viewers feel involved in the story and helps us to understand overwhelming force of nature. The science in the film is iffy at best as it is inaccurate. The film's big tidal wave moves very slowly through the streets of New York and, in reality, would never be that big. The combined techniques are terrorising to the seemingly small people on the ground. The science in disaster movies is often implausible but is correct in saying that we must not ignore the very real threats of global warming.

The Day After Tomorrow contains themes typical of the disaster movie genre. These include

strained relationships between parent and child, experts and scientists clashing with politicians, teamwork and self-sacrifice. The ideas of teamwork and self-sacrifice are interesting because it shows the dedication of characters to help those they care about to survive the disaster. Frank, one of Jack Hall's associates, relates to teamwork and self-sacrifice because of his heroic actions in the scene with the skylight in the New York shopping mall. In this scene Jack, Frank and Jason walk across the top of a derelict shopping mall, a skylight cracks and falls inwards dragging their equipment and Frank with them. Frank then cuts the rope connecting him to the equipment and after realizing he was still too heavy to lift, cut the rope connecting him and Jason thereby falling to his death. Close ups of Jason's saddened expression emphasise the meaningful sacrifice Frank has made. Viewing the film's themes through the genre lens reminds viewers of the role of disposable, minor characters in disaster films who often die trying to save the hero and help them complete their goal. This is true of Frank.

Viewing the film's themes through the genre lens reminds viewers of the role of disposable, minor characters in disaster films

Overall, The Day After Tomorrow is a very generic example of a disaster film as it contains stereotypical characters, over the top special effects, and a predictable plot. This film is a very standard disaster film when viewed though a genre lens with a very common but important message of the dangers of global warming.



Katarina Skrzynska Y11

ost would agree that working for long hours with little to no breaks is cruel and inhumane. Now imagine working in an overcrowded, poorly ventilated factory that is on the brink of collapsing. This is not what people want to endorse. Yet, if this wasn't the case, then why are we still supporting fast fashion? Not only is fast fashion murdering our ecosystems and engulfing our earth in flames, but it is exploiting hard-working people. Unfortunately, this is the reality that we live in. The cycle of fast fashion is extremely easy to fall into. But consumers have the power to stop it. Consumers can start making educated decisions about what they buy and whom they buy it from.

Fast fashion is the process of companies creating and mass-producing low-quality clothing garments. This is to keep up with the ever-faster speed at which trends change. This appeals to clothing companies in a multitude of ways. It is quick. It is cheap. And it works. People always give in to their temptation to buy a whole new wardrobe when summer or winter comes around. It may seem 'cool' or 'trendy' to be the most fashionable person in the room. But what is not cool is the amount of clothing that is thrown away. All these clothes end up in landfills, then rivers, then our oceans. An estimated 92 million tons of textile waste is produced by the global population each year. Each day in Bangladesh 22,000 litres of toxic waste is also poured into rivers by fast fashion companies. Not to mention the 1.5 trillion litres of water these companies require every year. It is time that we, the consumers, start calling out these sustainability malpractices. This is how we will hold companies responsible for the implications they create.

One day I was walking out of a store. Clutched in my hand was a brand-new top. It was a good

deal, only \$5! Then I looked at the tag... 'Made in Bangladesh' it said. And for the first time, I thought about where this top had come from. Who made this? I conducted some of my own research and the results I found were shocking. Trapped in the captivity of sweatshops for more than 100 hours per week are 40 million people combined. This includes both women and young children. Their blood, sweat and tears are what have enabled you to buy your clothes so cheap.

It is estimated that 93% of brands surveyed do not pay their workers close to a living wage. They can be paid as little as 3 cents an hour.

It is quick. It is cheap. And it works.

Workers risk their lives to earn that money to feed their families. Most

sweatshops lack proper safety requirements. Safety equipment, fire extinguishers, and fire exits are hardly ever supplied. Sweatshops also lack safe and supported infrastructure as they are built unprofessionally. There are many ways to stop supporting the exploitation of workers: Downloading apps that rate millions of companies based on their sustainability and how they treat their employees and most importantly spending your money wisely by opting to purchase more expensive items that will pay the person who made it a fair wage.

Why is fast fashion so popular? The answer lies with social media and globalization. Social media is the glue that keeps us all connected and while this is usually a good thing, it has its downfalls. Exposure to the never-ending stream of influencers and celebrities there seems to be on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube means people will see various trends. A trend is a topic or subject that maintains a surge of popularity on one or multiple social media platforms for a limited duration of time.

The lifespan of a trend is one that is incredibly short. The problem with this is that when people see a trend, they want to participate in it because who does not love the validation they get from their friends when they are wearing something stylish? When the next trend comes it is the same process; they see, and they buy. But the old trend that was once considered cool now sits unused in the closet only to be thrown away when you are finally reminded that it was there. This process creates so much unnecessary clothing waste. However, developing a sense of personal style is a terrific way to start thinking critically about trends. When you see something new trending on social media, you will be more likely to ask questions like: "Does it fit my own, personal style?," "Can I wear this with other things I already own?," and "How many times will I wear

this?." Once you achieve this you can start investing in high-quality staple pieces. These will remain timeless so you can keep wearing them repeatedly, to prevent any more clothing waste.

Consumers should not have to find out that their clothes come at the expense of the planet or people. Fashion is art, but not when it took 3000 litres of water to grow the material. Or not when the people who sewed the piece were only paid 3 cents an hour. It is both our responsibility and the brands we buy from to speak up on this issue. Then we may all start shopping smartly and sustainably. Critical thinking and education are what we need to stop the fast fashion trend cycle. Only once fast fashion is abolished can we be satisfied knowing that the clothes on our bodies came from somewhere good.

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Plastic pollution

Abigail Holden Y11

Plastic pollution has become one of the most serious environmental issues in the world. The amount of plastic production is ballooning, and we need to change this before it is too late. A great deal of the world is swimming in discarded plastic, which is harming animals and even humans' health. It is estimated that about 3% of all plastic produced every year ends up in the ocean. There are many other issues too, such as the fact we are not doing anything about it, or that ever since the pandemic began, there has been a reluctance to pick up rubbish. As plastic is such a popular material, these issues are a huge problem for the earth's population.

It is no surprise that plastic is such a popular product, as it is versatile, cheap, and easy to purchase. A plastic bag to carry your takeout, a wrapper on your chocolate bar, a straw in your iced coffee. These alone seem harmless. However, these tiny modern-day utilities are so easily thrown out that they barely register in our minds. This means our plastic usage is building

up. There are many necessary, inevitable uses for plastic, such as straws for people with disabilities, or surgical gloves. Although, cases like these only represent a small percentage of our overall plastic usage.

A plastic bag to carry your takeout, a wrapper on your chocolate bar, a straw in your iced coffee. These alone seem harmless.

After World War Two, the development and production of plastic rapidly increased. Half of the plastic produced overall has been in the past 15 years. It is expected that production will further increase to around 600 million tons by 2025. This is around double the weight of the world's population. We urgently need to lower our plastic usage before it is too late, and our environment is ruined.

Plastic is not only increasing in production, but it is also killing millions of wildlife every year. Animals often eat plastic. This is because they are not able to distinguish plastic from food. One example where we see this is when turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish. Another example is when fish mistake tiny pieces of plastic for small particles. When animals swallow plastic, it fills their stomach and makes them feel full. This causes them to eat a lot less, thus their energy levels drop and a lot of them die of starvation. Almost 700 species of wildlife are affected by plastic, including sea birds. Studies show that every single sea bird consumes plastic at least once in their life. If our trend in plastic production continues, there could be more plastic in our ocean than fish by 2050. A quote by Sir David Attenborough that puts the impact of plastic into perspective is, "industrial pollution and the discarding of plastic waste must be tackled for the sake of all life in the ocean." So, what can we do about it? There are multiple things, such as asking restaurants to stop using plastic straws, or getting your own reusable coffee cup. These minor changes will save our wildlife. Is it not worth it, for the survival of these animals?

We, humans, are the ones who invented plastic. Therefore, it is up to us to clean up the plastic, to minimise the huge environmental issue it has caused. Since the beginning of the COVID-19

pandemic, there has been a reluctance to pick up rubbish. A survey by Take 3 for the Sea found that 42% of those who took the survey are more reluctant to pick up rubbish since the pandemic started. Additionally, 72% of the survey respondents have said they have noticed an increase in neighbourhood littering. The United Nations reviewed historical data. They have predicted that 75% of used masks and other related products will end up in landfills or oceans. From personal experience, I know that this is true. I walk my dog every day, and I always see masks lying on the road, or in the gutters. This is not ok. We are at the point where we can no longer let these masks into the environment. It is vital to change the way we think of plastic, before the rubbish becomes too much.

So, everything comes down to whether you stop relying on this dangerous product to save our planet. Think about our stunning marine animals, starving themselves and dying. They do not deserve it. Are you willing to make a change to decrease your plastic usage? Or are you going to let our environment be destroyed? That choice is up to you.





How true crime hurts victims

Ella Thompson Y12

ave you ever thought about how your true crime obsession is hurting people? You probably never realized that it could be. True crime hits the spot for so many of us. Call it morbid curiosity. Call it an adrenaline rush. Call it human nature. But there is something about it that we are attracted to. Death and pain are so widespread and deeply entrenched in our society that it is no surprise that many people are

fascinated with them, but is it causing more harm than we realize? Victims, victims who belong to minority groups and family members of victims are all harmed by true crime.

True crime is not an inherently harmful genre. The problems come when thrill-seeking true crime fans and the media serving them forget that victims were real people, not just characters in a narrative. It feels like an obvious thing to say, but also a truth that is far too often forgotten;

behind every violent crime is a victim. A person who is now either tragically dead or still alive and dealing with the indescribable trauma of their past. When victims are paraded in true crime documentaries, with the crime against them broken down in excruciating detail, the human behind the figure is lost, and the only memorable name becomes the killers. Whilst for some, true crime is a form of escapism; for victims, it's a brutal reminder of a scarring moment in their own lives. True crime is supposed to be entertainment, but it deals with real-life crimes, and those crimes have real-life victims and survivors. It's often made without input or even consent from the people most affected by the crimes. Often this leads to works that ignore the victim's life or treat them like a statistic; at its worst, the genre can reopen old wounds for little more reason than entertainment. When you continue to consume true crime, they keep making it, and real people living real lives keep getting re-traumatized every time. Victims deserve better.

True crime hurts all victims. But especially victims who belong to minority groups. There is no denying the whiteness of true crime. With an estimated 80% of true crime fans being white women, the decisions about what to portray in true crime are made based on what is presumed a white audience will care about. Meaning like the majority of true crime fans, victims broadcasted in these shows are white females — whereas far more reported homicide victims are black males. Popular true crime stories primarily focusing on crimes against white women cause us to ignore the violence faced by minority groups. Crediting himself with 93 victims, Samuel Little is one of the most prolific murderers in American history. Yet he remains largely unknown compared to other well-known killers such as Ted Bundy, BTK and Jeffery Dahmer, who most if not all of their victims were light-skinned females. Serial killer-related content is extraordinarily popular among Americans, so is it not unreasonable to

credit this ignorance to Little's alleged victims to the fact they were disproportionately black women? It's not that stories of white women shouldn't be told. They should be. But so should others. We need to hear stories of people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, unhoused people, sex workers, immigrants and a lot of other stories we've been told – implicitly, by the same faces appearing on our screens, over and over - aren't worth telling.

True crime hurts all victims. But especially victims who belong to minority groups.

For family members of victims, their murder is a deeply personal tragedy. For millions of true crime fans, it's entertainment. It's a way to escape from their mundane lives and experience the horror, fear and excitement that comes with true crime stories. But behind those giddy thrills are gutting stories of psychological harm and families and communities left irreparably shattered. No one should sit at home, shuddering with horror and rage as their greatest trauma is repackaged into a titillating narrative for someone else to consume. Losing a loved one is hard. Losing a loved one to a violent crime can be even harder. Losing a loved one to a violent crime and then having this tragedy ruthlessly dissected in the limelight while you try to grieve is something no one should go through. On rare occasions, families of missing and murdered people will approach different true crime outlets to spread awareness of an unsolved crime, but in most cases, the family are not asked for consent and are often unaware that their family member is being used for entertainment. Victims' families have no real way to opt out of media coverage, as public footage can be used without their consent. When watching a true crime show, I don't stop and think, 'Oh, but did the victim's family consent to this?' and chances are you don't either.

Existing at the intersection of entertainment and education, true crime is on an ethically treacherous perch. Unfortunately, more often than not, it falls to the side of harmful rather than helpful. True crime is harmful to victims, victims who belong to minority groups and family

members of victims. Morbid curiosity will always be a part of the human experience, but we must not let our fascination with true crime distract us from all the people harmed in and by these stories. Victims deserve to be more than just an afterthought. They deserve to heal in peace.



How not to reboot a movie franchise: From the creators of *Charlie's Angels*, 2019

Nikki Harris Y12

hen a beloved T.V. show from the mid 70's successfully reboots to a whole new generation, raking in half a billion dollars across two films and becoming a household name, you would think it would be easy to rest on those laurels and call it a day.

That's what Charlie's Angels should have done.

Instead, they release the disappointment of the year: a whole new Charlie's Angels film, starting up again 16 years after Full Throttle wrapped up the series. With Elizabeth Banks writing, producing, acting in and directing the movie, how could you go wrong? Pitch Perfect 2 was clearly the best one, right? This movie can be summed up in three words: Unoriginal, cringeworthy and preachy. I understand that when a genre is strict, it's hard to come up with entirely unique content, but if that means recycling half the plot of another movie, relying solely on the nostalgia effect of the franchise and reinforcing stereotypes as an attempt to seem 'progressive', it probably should never have made it past the drawing board.

The creepy thin man. The epic castle fight scene. The Chad. All of these are memorable, iconic parts of the original movie series. Even 22 years after the release (and 8 years since I was allowed to see it) those characters and moments are engraved in my mind. And yet, I've already forgotten half of the plot of the 2019 version I watched last week. It was basic and predictable:

When a cutting edge, *never-before-seen* piece of technology (read: An Alexa with its own batteries) is stolen, the group of crime fighting women must band together and get it back before it can be weaponized. Sounds like a thrilling plot, and it was...22 years ago when this was the exact storyline of the first movie.

'But Nikki,' you say. 'If they're building off a franchise, isn't staying true to the base text a good thing?'

'But Nikki,' you say. 'If they're building off a franchise, isn't staying true to the base text a good thing?'

Great point, hypothetical reader! While they do keep a lot of the key components, such as the mystery of Charlie and the iconic three-woman team, Banks' take on The Angels derails its predecessors in more ways than one. For instance: in the first 10 minutes, Bill Murray's Bosley is poorly photoshopped to be a young Patrick Stewart, which would be a sweet homage, if they hadn't introduced a dozen "Bosley" characters a minute before, leaving no real reason to overwrite the original. Instead of a fine wine, Bosley's character aged like milk: completely soured, to the point where there's negative light on the original films too. His goofy, lovable, loyal-to-a-fault character switched sides and became a murderous psychopath over a watch. That's right. He got a bad retirement present and

decided that was reason enough to become a mass murderer. Way to keep the legacy going, Banks!

Elizabeth Banks blames the movie's failure on men not wanting to go see women in a "male genre". Her blame implies that her film was cutting edge, the very first female-lead movie in the spy movie genre. As you can probably tell from the movie being a continuation, it's clearly not a new concept, so using sexism as an excuse for objectively bad writing just reflects terribly on everyone's behalf. Eight months earlier Ocean's Eight hit the theatres with a similar challenge: creating a female-lead instalment of a beloved 2000's film series. Yet Oceans eight had one major difference: it wasn't always women. Unlike Charlie's Angels, Ocean's Eight was entirely reworking their audiences' expectations by

following the story of Danny Ocean's sister and her badass girl group of criminals. A bold move, but one that paid off, making *Ocean's Eight* a commercial success. They had a relevant and cohesive plot, properly paid homage with clever cameos from the previous actors, but still held enough charm and intrigue to work as a standalone film. On the other hand, *Charlie's Angels* used nostalgia as a crutch, throwing in obscure references as a reminder of their past glory, but still tried to grasp the youth with sad, outdated attempts at relatability that left them more out of touch than ever.

This movie was two hours of my life I would have much rather spent rewatching *Full Throttle* for the eighth time. As far as plans on a sequel, I'll take the words from Naomi Scott's acting peak: Good Luck Charlie.



Obi Wan Kenobi: The mixed feelings are strong with this one

Rory Booth Y12

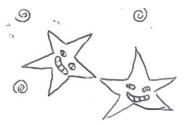
he prequels were my generation and I happily lived off all things Star Wars prequel-related, such as the Clone Wars animated series (both the 2003 2D animated series and the 2008-2014, 2020 3D animated series) and I am still happy to talk about dumb criticisms of the prequels that have been done to death by many, many, many people.

Now, making the original and prequel trilogies wasn't like making a model airplane (or Millennium Falcon for that matter), as there are some things that don't stick nowadays, like the special effects for both trilogies, that are both dated, like the original trilogy with its 70s/80s visual effects and the prequel trilogy with its clean-cut CGI. However, this time, this is a story that is set between the events of Revenge of The Sith and A New Hope, just like Rogue One, Solo, yadda yadda. Making it technically a prequel to a lesser extent.

Anyway, let's talk about the next thing Star Wars-related that Disney pulled out from their corporate butter churner, Obi-Wan Kenobi. Well??? Did I love it??? Did I hate it??? Well... I have mixed feelings about it, honestly. Now, before any of you pull out your toy lightsabres, I need to say one thing. It honestly felt like Disney lied to us yet again.

They promised us a grand-scale adventure of an exiled Obi-Wan Kenobi, but what we got was an... average adventure, to say the least. I mean, the first episode's intro shows Ewan McGregor doing mundane things on Tatooine, not to say that he lives in a hollowed-out cave like a redneck hobo. However, I guess that can be explained since Obi-Wan is trying to hide the fact that he is a Jedi.

As someone who lapped up the prequels' material like a big kitty cat, this was slightly disappointing. It's time to talk about the characters in this miniseries. Obi-Wan still is the stoic, level-headed Jedi that he is, as he retains his



personality from the prequels, which is a good thing, the prequels and this series both expand his character very well, as he tries to communicate with his mentor, Qui-Gon Jinn via the Force, something that Yoda taught Obi-Wan after the end of Revenge of The Sith. He really does play the "former Jedi now in exile" role very well. Luke Skywalker is only a young kid in this miniseries, and he is watched from a distance by Obi-Wan.

They promised us a grand-scale adventure of an exiled Obi-Wan Kenobi, but what we got was an... average adventure, to say the least.

He is shown with a helmet and goggles on his head, which is supposed to represent him being the son of Anakin Skywalker, who also longed to be an adventurous pilot??? Well, his parents didn't know that his father blew up a droid control station when he was a kid. Leia Organa is also a young kid in this series, raised by Alderaan nobility. And we are supposed to believe that she is a sweet, young girl, but I just think she's unlikable at first. She's just so sassy and as a result, she runs away into the woods, and she gets captured by Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers (who plays one of the Imperial Inquisitors). Parenting in Star Wars... was Bail Organa too blind to notice the RHCP member preying on her???

And now, let's talk about the big bad himself, Darth Vader. The first time you see him in this series, he is partially naked, with the burn wounds from the battle on Mustafar still on his body, with the youthful innocence of who he once was now completely gone. He is also submerged in a bacta

tank when we first see him. Lovely. And let me say... this is one of the best characterisations of Vader I have ever seen. James Earl Jones still does a great performance as always, as he still loves voicing him, despite being 92 by the time this series was released. I think one notable highlight of his voice performance in this series, is when he sounds extremely pissed off at one of his top Inquisitors, Reva (more on her later) and immediately starts Force-choking her once he gets to her. Just... the pure hate that flowed through Anakin Skywalker once he got corrupted by the dark side in Revenge of The Sith is still there and the fact that he lives on Mustafar, the planet where he almost got burned to death, really does help how truly evil he really is. The once-innocent young slave boy from Tatooine is gone, twisted... by Darth Vader... and Palpatine, also.

Also, the scene where Vader burns Obi-Wan in retaliation for what he did to him on Mustafar is just terrifying, it proves that he is out for blood after what he did to him previously in Revenge of The Sith. This makes for an improved characterisation in this series compared to other spin-off material.

For me, I think world building is the most important thing in Star Wars. It's like you can take a real-world location, add aliens and unique environments and call it a day, but it's much more complicated than that. The original trilogy mainly had simple-looking planets, while the prequels' world building was more complicated, as a lot of the planets in that trilogy felt unique to the Star Wars franchise and the sequel trilogy just copypasted everything from the original trilogy. Let me say that the world building in the franchise is amazing.

Anyway, I think the world building in Obi-Wan Kenobi is creative for the most part, but visually lacking in some parts. Like, Tatooine does look the same as it does in previous films, you still

have Mos Eisley, the Lars homestead and the canyons where the Tusken Raiders live, and then you have the new planets like Daiyu, which is a city planet that is reminiscent of the lower levels of Coruscant. The lighting in the planets presented a more realistic atmosphere, while the planets where the Empire is under control have some darker undertones, like how it does create the vibe of an oppressive dictatorship.

I love the world building in the franchise, it's one of George Lucas's biggest strengths, although I sometimes felt that the world building in this series felt uninspired, for the most part it looks like they took inspiration from other planets, which of course, is not a bad thing and a lot of the planets in this series also felt unique for example, Daiyu and Nur, with Tatooine still being the planet from Star Wars we recognise. Unfortunately, we are going to talk about one of the series' flaws from here on out, so strap in. It's time to unleash the dragon.

I... don't think the Imperial Inquisitors were good villains. Now, the idea of them is cool, Jedi that got tricked into joining the dark side and that they were the elite forces of the Empire, what great ideas! But instead, we barely got to know anything from the Inquisitors and just served as a quick plot device to get the series going and they were expanded in previous material, like Rebels and the spinoff Expanded Universe games. Then the Inquisitors in this series just get shoved off to the side-lines and Reva is the only character that we are supposed to care about. Now, I have just one thing to say about Reva's backstory. (Clears throat) Why does she even survive the youngling purge conducted at the Jedi Temple??? It was a relentless operation! Everyone was killed in that attack! Instead, Reva said that in a later episode, she played dead to avoid being killed by Anakin or the clone troopers. She was supposedly captured by the Empire later in her life to become brainwashed by the dark side. One thing that I don't like about her is that she's incompetent. The reason why Darth Vader Force-choked her was because she failed to stop Obi-Wan, which is just face-palming for a character that has so much potential to be a credible villain. And that's why I don't like Reva that much. She was supposed to be a character that we're supposed to care about, but her incompetence only hurts her character.

I... don't think the Imperial Inquisitors were good villains.

Comparing Star Wars to real world events is kind of like combining peanut butter and jelly. It just sticks together, if you know what I mean. A lot of those people who say that Star Wars shouldn't have parallels and that it should remain simple are probably blind to realise the Empire has a ton of Nazi Germany comparisons. Both are totalitarian dictatorships; both are infamous for conducting mass genocides and there's one of the evillest people in film... and one of the evillest people in history (Emperor Palpatine and Adolf Hitler). One notable instance of this happening is when Obi-Wan and Leia visit Mapuzo and get captured by an alien who works for the Empire, with the emblem on the side of his truck, which is similar to people who secretly work for the Nazi forces capturing enemies and loading them on to trucks. And to that, Star Wars isn't simple. There's way more complicated stuff that goes with it and reminds us of villainy in history.

And there you have it, my Obi-Wan Kenobi review. It's a good Star Wars spinoff, as I honestly felt it's in the same vein as other spinoff-related material such as Rogue One or Star Wars: The Clone Wars. I liked the characterisations of as they are the highlights of the series. As much as the series succeeds in some departments, it fails in some other departments, as well. Like the characterisations of the Inquisitors and Reva and some incoherent story moments, I think it's safe to say that it's a decent Star Wars spinoff that deserves a watch.



Jedh Mairielle Racho Y11

Piki atu ki te taumata o tōku maunga

Lizzie Evans Y12

iki atu ki te taumata o tōku maunga, ka kite au i te mana, i te ihi o te whenua nei nō oku tūpuna. I climb to the summit of my mountain to see the lands of my ancestors. I am fortunate as a Māori person living in contemporary Aotearoa that I have a connection to my whenua. That I can return to my marae and feel at home where I have Turangawaewae. My place to stand. This is an important part of my cultural identity, knowing my whakapapa but there are times where I like many other rangatahi Māori have questioned my 'Māoriness,' pondering the question, 'am I Māori enough?' Indigenous peoples all around the world are having to navigate everyday life in a colonised setting. We live in a system which is made and suited for Pākehā. As a light skinned Māori, I am addressing the coloniser mindset around skin colour and blood quantum as we live in a system in which we are made to think that if you are indigenous and white passing, you are white not indigenous. This is invalidating for many as being white presenting does not take away from your cultural identity and your connection to your Māoritanga does not come in measurements. We also should not be internalising this concept.

In 2022, rangatahi Māori are diverse and come in a variety of skin colours but that does not make us any less or more Māori than each other. It is often that we feel ashamed. For lighter skinned Māori ashamed of feeling not 'Māori enough.' I label myself as white presenting Māori as I acknowledge the privileges that having whiter skin has and I have not had the same experiences as darker skinned Māori like many of my family but that does not take away from my cultural identity. Light skinned Māori have been labelled as 'plastic,' 'fake' and not 'real' Māori because of having light skin. But what does being a 'real Māori' look like? To Pākehā it may look like tan or dark skinned, dark hair and brown eyes,

however, from a Māori point of view it is many things but not your physical traits. It is about whakapapa, your genealogy. Taonga tuku iho. Treasures passed down; relying on the passing down of knowledge through generations, it is participation. Meaning being involved with your iwi and your marae and seeking knowledge and creating connections. It is not individualistic, it is about togetherness, and it is certainly not what is seen on the outside. If you know you are Māori that is what matters no matter what colour skin, you have.

Being Māori does not come in measurements.

Being Māori does not come in measurements. Telling someone you are Māori often comes with the dreaded question: 'what percentage of Māori are you?' As if the percentage in our blood equates to how Māori we are or if we should be identifying as Māori at all. As if we need to take out a calculator and compute a justification for saying we are Māori. Māori woman 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 human pie chart.' Defining Māori by the percentage in our blood is a colonial method used by colonial governments to categorise and control indigenous populations. 50 percent Māori blood was the legal requirement to be considered Māori in Aotearoa up until 1975 but now the only requirement is Māori whakapapa. The idea that how Māori you are based on the percentage of Māori blood you have is untrue, you cannot have a fraction of the connection you have with your tupuna, rivers, seas, and land. This connection does not come in parts.

These ideas are harmful, causing hurt and insecurity among Māori and indigenous communities. Many people experience a disconnection from their culture because of these

ideas such as Taryrn Pryfhout who is a Māori woman with non-typical Māori features. She was often labelled the white girl and rejected as a Māori person by her own family. She went to the Māori community centre at her university and was asked if she was lost and due to these experiences, she often felt like she did not belong amongst the Māori community. She began to not wear her taonga, a sacred treasure. It is not Māori's fault for having these colonial ideas on skin colour and blood quantum. They are set by a colonial agenda and living in a colonised Aotearoa means we live in a society made for Pākehā to thrive and succeed in. Ideas like these are popularised to invalidate Māori identity, to minimise the influence of Māori and the number of those identifying as Māori. These are the most mainstream ideas as a result causing some Māori to internalise this. It is disappointing to see us being divided, we should be uplifting each other and show manaakitanga especially as a minority. We need to uphold Māori values as we are living in an environment where we are not valued even though we are Tangata Whenua.

I know my whakapapa, I know I belong to Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whatua ki kaipara and Ngā Puhi iwi.

In conclusion, it is time to address the colonial mindset around skin colour and blood quantum. I will not base my connection to my culture off these methods. I know my whakapapa, I know I belong to Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whatua ki kaipara and Ngā Puhi iwi. I will continue to advocate for Māori rights, to participate in wananga, to return to my marae, to do kapa haka and continue my Te Reo Journey. I will engage with Te Ao Māori, give back to the whenua and stand with other rangatahi Māori. This is what is important, not percentages, fractions, and appearances. If you have Māori whakapapa, you are Māori.

It is fitting to finish with a whakatauki: e kore au e ngāro, he kākano i ruia mai a Rangiatea. I will never be lost for I am a seed sewn in Rangiatea.





A few questions

Christian Donkin Y12

spend a lot of my time wondering who I am, dissecting the ins and outs of what makes me myself, but maybe I need to look at myself as a whole. People tell me I am one of a kind. I am able to achieve great things. If you keep being yourself, you'll go far. There is only one of you.

Things make up who I am, I'm sporty, I'm chatty, I'm a bit unpredictable. I'm also know for my rugby, surf lifesaving, and my love for music. Those things are not me. They make up a part of my life, but they do not make who I am. I have many hobbies and skills, yet I want to do everything. I want to learn to juggle, to surf, to

do the splits, a backflip, make pottery, learn the everything there is to know about every topic ever. But that's impossible.

How can I fit all of that into my already busy life? Does doing more things give me more of an idea on who I am? I always have this feeling when everything around me is perfect, and I think to myself 'Something's missing from my life, what is it?'

Maybe it's the inability to be completely proud of myself for achieving something, feeling like I only put in half the work or half the effort, because I know how I completed it, and it wasn't that hard or energy consuming, or as prestigious as is seems to other people. Could this feeling of

mediocrity be because of the fulfilling life I have? Has travelling at a young age and filling my life with goals, ambitions, and achievements made achievements feel less important? Why do I have the need to be as good as I can and not feel good enough at the same time?

I want to write thrilling stories and skydive. I want to join the navy and at the same time pursue a career in something deemed useless or unprofitable. Why is there not enough time to experience everything?

When we pass, we are remembered for who we were and what we did, whether it be "He was a wonderful father of his children." Or "His brownies were really good." We leave a different impression on everyone. How can we be remembered and measured throughout successes or personality if we didn't even know who we were? I think the reason I'm scared of dying is because I don't want to be forgotten. I want to be remembered for something significant, something grand. Only there is so much choice on what to do. What do I want to devote my life to?

Maybe one day I'll have the answer to this, by that time it'll most likely be too late. The answer will be in reach as I stumble, falling short of a promised paradise.

Who am I? Are the constant thoughts of that question stopping me from enjoying the moments that make me who I am? Do the little quirks about me go unnoticed? How much do my friends actually know about me? We talk a lot about lots of things, only getting into what makes us who we are during a quick chat in the background of a party or a rushed conversation in between classes. Feeling vulnerable enough to open up about ourselves. Do those little things we share truly make up who we are?

Then there are things only we know about. Our thoughts, our views on others, how we speak to ourselves inside our head, and what the voice between our ears tells us. Sometimes the voice sounds like somebody else, our father, mother, sports coach, friend. Pushing us closer or further away from our identity the more we listen to the voice that is not our own. Seeing people ridiculed or cast to the side for speaking their mind, while thinking the same thoughts in our head. Do you ever know someone had made a mistake which is so truly terrible they deserve to be isolated, but still feel bad for them even if what they did goes against all your values?

Can our values interrupt human nature?

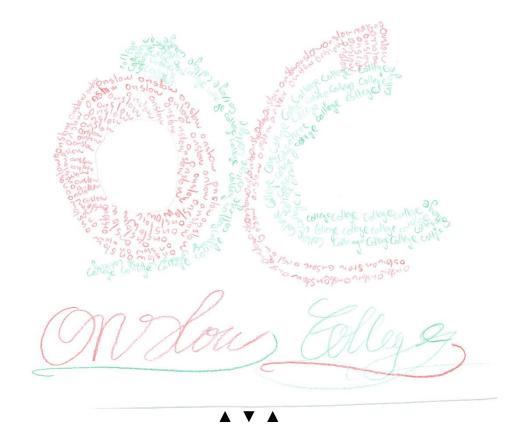
Can our values interrupt human nature? I think everyone who seems like they have it figured out is just as terrified as the people who do not hide behind a mask. The outgoing friend is just as lonely as the introvert, but who's going to be vulnerable and open up? Is everyone too scared to have their thoughts and feeling inspected by someone to the point it's stopping them from having any real friends or personal moments? I know I'm surrounded by people who would help me out at any chance they had. What happens when we slowly drift apart? Does the offer to help wither away as the friendship drifts or is it still as strong if you return back into each other's life's?

Maybe we feel so out of touch with ourselves because we are out of place. Not in the way of in the wrong group or place, as in what we are designed for. We are designed to survive. We created art and music and sport as entertainment when we had food, water, shelter. What happens when we get bored of them? What has replaced our need to hunt and survive? Where are we using out adaptations in the world we live in now? I still have so many more questions.

I'll leave two more here.

Does anyone really know who they are? Will we ever find out?

The Obvious Choice 2022 73



The Wellington protest was not a Māori protest

Jacob Taylor Y12

Tires, trash, and a danger to the public; the Wellington Vaccine protest was not a Māori protest. I was sitting at home watching the news with my mum, watching live streams of the protest on Tik Tok. Me and mum were laughing and mocking the protesters; sometimes commenting insults for the fun of it. It was all fun and games until the protesters started fighting. Tents started burning, bricks started getting thrown, and rubber bullets were shot into the crowd. Me and mum's enjoyment turned sour, we looked into the crowd and saw Māori abusing the police, we saw Pākehā encouraging Māori to abuse the police, and we thought to ourselves that this wasn't a Māori protest.

In early February, Parliament grounds were overrun by protesters that were "Setting up tents unlawfully." The protesters were initially advocating for the removal of vaccine mandates, but later turned into an anti-government movement. Police commissioner Andrew Coster says, "The differences this time is that there are explicit death threats around our

parliamentarians, our journalists and around people in our society." In my opinion, wishing death on people in our society is not a Māori way. The protesters "Who blocked roads around Parliament for two weeks and have set up elaborate camp on Parliament ground" did not cooperate with police requests and further, instigated violence. There had been reports of "human excrement" being thrown at police and "a stinging substance" that police believed was acid. The protesters' camp had a first aid tent, free clothing tent, a hairdresser, and their own personal security detail. The protesters had Trump flags and flew them alongside the Tino rangatiratanga flag (a flag meant to represent all Māori). In my opinion, this protest goes against Māori tīkanga and values. Making death threats towards people in our society, blocking roads and access to businesses for weeks at a time, and supporting a racist leader is not a Māori way.

This protest was not a Māori protest, and this is shown through many leaders and Māori activists' perspectives. Prime minister Jacinda Ardern called for the protesters to leave many times but failed to establish a peace compromise between

them. She said that "The protesters had their say. It is time they go home and now obviously the police are taking action to ensure it does not grow and to ensure the disruption, or where people are behaving illegally, that is addressed." A Māori protest would have tried to reach a peaceful compromise, and this can be seen at Ihumatao, with SOUL co-founder Qiana Matata-sipu saying, "It is really important that this protest is tika and is pono, that the protest doesn't have a determined outcome before we get into it, and that there is a willingness for all parties to sit and not just kōrero, but to listen." I do not believe that a Māori protest would incite violence and neither does Tame Iti. Since the start of the protests, Māori activist Tame Iti has been advocating for the betterment of tīkanga, "I'm telling you this: if you're not going to get vaccinated, then you can't come to my place... We have to put in place more tikanga and kawa around that." His perspectives on vaccination have always followed Māori values and further highlights that this protest is not a Māori protest. Advocations for hospitals and wellbeing for Māori have been shown throughout history. With the creation of Māhīnarangi meeting house in 1929, by Te Puea Hērangi: who wanted the meeting house to be formed into a hospital but was denied by European health authorities. Te Puea Hērangi's vision was for Māori to "Mahia te mahi hei painga mō te iwi," a whakatauki about "doing what you must for the betterment of the people." In my opinion getting vaccinated and protecting the community would be doing what I must for the betterment of the people.

Mahia te mahi hei painga mō te iwi

Ihumatao is an example of a true Māori protest. The protest was peaceful and was made sure to follow tīkanga and kawa. The Ihumatao protest

was about the illegal confiscation of land in 1863 and was only recently remedied by government on the 17th of December 2020. The Ihumatao protest was open to reason and was able to properly able to discuss with the Crown and Auckland Council, "A memorandum of understanding (He Pūmautanga) has been signed by the Kiingiitanga, the Crown and the Auckland Council, which sets out to how parties will work together for the future of the land." This is a complete contrast to the Wellington protest, where reasoning and bargaining was not an option. At the protest, police acknowledged the protesters for their peaceful approach. People were singing, people on the frontline were chatting and laughing with police and ahi are burning all over the place. The signing of He Pūmautanga helps ensure the future of Ihumatao. The land was bought under the Land for Housing Programme for 29.9 million as the three parties decided that housing would be placed for kaumatua and kuia. In contrast to the Wellington protest, the Ihumatao protest helped protect the future of the land and the future of people there. The Wellington protest had no positive impact on society, no long-term vision or resolution. In my opinion, that is why the Wellington protest is not Māori.

In conclusion, the Wellington protest was not a Māori protest. It did not follow tīkanga or kawa. Supporting terrorists, starting fires, and making death threats to members of society is not a Māori way. True Māori values are shown at Ihumatao, and through the actions and perspectives of Tame Iti, Te Puea Hērangi, Qiana Matata-sipu and the Kiingiitanga. E kore te patiki, e hoki ki tōna puehu. Do not make the same mistake twice.



The Obvious Choice 2022 75

Why 'pug' dogs must go extinct

Avin Chen Y12

n exchange for an unusual appearance, pugs have appalling health. To get that flat-faced large-eved look that buyers love, pugs were bred to have deformed skulls and tiny airways. This means that from the moment it is born, a pug is constantly asphyxiating, and will never know what being able to breathe properly feels like. Due to their airways, pugs also have great difficulty cooling themselves down by panting. This makes it extremely easy for a pug to overheat and suffer organ failure. Additionally, those large eyes that buyers love so much are susceptible to many conditions. One such issue is eye prolapse, where a pug's eye will pop out of its socket. This is so common that people will just push it back in – apparently, going to the vet for this is optional. 64% of pugs also suffer from hip dysplasia, meaning that they have trouble walking as well as breathing and seeing. But that isn't all - pugs can suffer from a condition called Necrotizing Meningoencephalitis. This condition inflames the central nervous system of the dog, making the brain swell against the walls of the skull. It is invariably fatal.

This incredible frailty springs from the pug dog's genetics. In an investigation by the BBC, the 10,000 pugs in the UK were found to have the gene pool of only 50 individual dogs. Fifty. This means that pugs have 0.05% of a healthy dog's gene variety. A study found that they are almost twice as likely to experience health issues compared to normal dogs. Given this, it's

surprising that they don't experience even worse health issues. In fact, pugs are so prone to health issues that the same study stated that Pug dogs "can no longer be considered a typical dog from a health standpoint". The Pug has become something other than a normal dog. It is a cursed breed, doomed to live in pain for all its days. Selective breeding can solve famines, create loyal helpers, and give us more productive crops. However, the breeding of the Pug has created only pain and suffering. Knowing all this, my sincere belief is that the breeding of pugs must stop, before any more of these twisted creatures masquerading as dogs are born. The Pug's broken genes must not be allowed to pass on.

I firmly believe that the pug dog breed must gradually be wiped out to prevent any more suffering caused by humanity's interference with nature. I don't think that there is any reason to kill already-living dogs unless they are in pain there is no value to be had in killing that which already exists. If one of these creatures is already alive, the least that can be done is to minimize its suffering by giving it care and attention. However, every action must be taken to stop more of these "dogs" from being born. As intelligent people, it is our job to take responsibility for our actions. We must recognize when something is not worth its cost, even if we are not the ones paying it. No living thing deserves to live in pain like this accursed creature, and only by stopping more from being born will this suffering end.

A V A

Gordon Ramsay is a cultural icon

Nicole Clemente Y12

ordon Ramsay is a cultural icon.

Period. His childhood has led to him becoming the celebrity chef he is today. In doing so, he has created a new playing

field for himself. Whilst achieving fame, he hasn't forgotten his roots. He's done charity work to help those less fortunate than him.

Gordon Ramsay was born in 1966 in Johnstone, Scotland. When he was 9 years old, he moved with his family to Stratford-upon-Avon. He had hoped to be a footballer when he was younger and was even chosen to play for an under-14s football team at 12 years old. But he suffered a severe knee injury and was forced to quit entirely. At 16, he moved out of his family home and into an apartment in Banbury. Ramsay's childhood shaped him into the person he is today: a fiery individual with an iron discipline. This iron discipline has earned him a total of 16 Michelin stars. But before this his family history was tumultuous. "I was dealt a dysfunctional card. ... My little brother became a heroin addict, and my father became an alcoholic." This is revealed in an episode of Gordon Behind Bars, a reality TV show where Ramsay teaches baking skills to inmates. His family members' afflictions had affected him. But it had affected him for the better. Despite his beginnings or perhaps because of them, Ramsay worked on his discipline and swore to make something of himself.

Ramsay's childhood shaped him into the person he is today: a fiery individual with an iron discipline.

Being a celebrity chef, Ramsay has a platform few people get the chance to perform on. While he could've fed off his own fame and success and kept it to himself, he's used it to elevate others who are less fortunate than ordinary members of the public. To quote a particular example, he has organized an event with Madhur Jaffrey to fundraise £100,000 to help HIV and AIDs efforts in India. Ramsay and his wife became the first couple to become ambassadors in 2005. They became ambassadors again in 2020 for the Cornwall Air Ambulance. There's more but that would just prove my point on Ramsay's altruism, so to speak. The charities he supports fundraise for a variety of disadvantaged people. His charity work isn't as well-known as his personality, but his effort should be noted as well. As a cultural icon, there are certain things Gordon Ramsay will be famous for. And with that, the attention of the public is turned to his every action, so that the impact of them is amplified. Thus, it can be argued that with the privileges he's earned and his own troubled childhood, he wants others to have a better chance than he had growing up. He doesn't want anyone else to suffer the way he did.

First and foremost, Ramsay is a chef. He's not like other celebrities. He's not a singer or a TikTok influencer. He's a celebrity chef. He's probably the only one that most of Generation Z can name. His temper is largely responsible for that. Ramsay's famed temper is iconic in the sense that the people he yells at deserve it. Superficially, it's entertaining to watch Ramsay berate narcissistic people on the quality of their food. It feels justified for us, the viewers. On a deeper level, however, Ramsay has made a monopoly on berating these people, as evident through his shows: Hell's Kitchen and Kitchen Nightmares. He's made his own niche market where he can be a prominent figure. It's creative out of the box thinking, playing on his own strengths. Being a chef, he can offer industry advice but by choosing derelict restaurants owners and incompetent chefs, it has given him the opportunity to highlight his personality. He created a new game and in doing so, cemented his legacy.

In summary, Gordon Ramsay has made a farreaching impact. As an entity, his influence is farreaching and successful in the sense that most of the general public know who he is. As a person, he has had a rough start but through his hard work and dedication to his craft and capitalizing on that, he's achieved the status of a cultural icon.

Jayne Holmes Y12

f we're being honest, I wasn't too sure. And that's kind of a problem. The line between 'just a makeup look' and an offense to an entire race is thinning every day. And who do we have to thank for that?

♦*。 White people ♦*。

While that's partly a joke, (key word – partly) it can be convincing when you see so many people on social media say it's just a pose, just a makeup style. *Just Eyeliner*. Convincing until I saw other people like me, Asians and half-Asians say "Hey, uh, actually, that's kind of hurtful. Please stop." only to be utterly ignored and even shamed for 'trying to cause drama'.

Right as the Stop Asian Hate movement gained attention, so did the fox-eye trend. This caused a stir-up of opinions because the injustices towards Asian communities, especially in the U.S., were being dragged to light. Yet, you had white people, especially Caucasian influencers, doing their eveliner to imitate east Asians and pulling back their temples for photos. This unsurprisingly offended a huge number of people. The extremes the eyeliner was taken to, the physical alterations, the pose many recognised as one previously used to mock them. Yet what added to all of this was how insensitive it felt at the time. Many have described it as 'white-washing' Asian features and discussed how what was once used to ostracise us is now being sought after and, dare I say it, fetishized.

I grew up in predominantly white neighbourhoods. And when I say predominantly, I mean there were three Asian kids in school, two of which were me and my brother. We were all half white, half Japanese, and we all got the classic "do you speak Chinese?" "What does ching chong chang mean?" "How do you see when you

smile?" all while pulling their eyes back as a 'joke'. I was six years old, so I didn't know just how offensive these statements were to, oh, I don't know, several entire cultures. But, with the rise of Asian hate during the pandemic and the increased awareness of racial micro-aggressions due to the Black Lives Matter movement, little oblivious me finally figured that one out.

Trying a new eyeliner style and deciding it's flattering for your eyes is perfectly ok. Doing something with the intention of looking more 'Asian', is not. Whether that be eyeliner, medical procedures, taping up skin, or pulling it back for a pose. Many online agree, including Eve Cong, a London based actress, and Sherliza Moé, a design and style focused Youtuber. While I have taken a few digs at Caucasians, obviously not all are guilty. However, enough people have carelessly hopped on the trend to make it a big deal. Celebrities idolised for their style and beauty with huge followings (such as Kendall Jenner, Emma Chamberlain, and Bella Hadid) are no exception. Jenner and Hadid have been suspected of having cosmetic procedures to raise their brow bones and pull back their eyes. With Emma Chamberlain taking to Instagram to post herself in the exact pose used against thousands of east-Asian kids.

Trying a new eyeliner style and deciding it's flattering for your eyes is perfectly ok. Doing something with the *intention* of looking more 'Asian', is not.

So, is the fox-eye trend offensive? Unfortunately, this isn't a yes or no question, part of the reason it's so widely debated on. For the most part, eyeliner is eyeliner. It's the meaning that comes with it that needs to be carefully thought about.

Keating's Redfern speech

Walter Hamer Y12

ustralian Prime Minister Paul Keating's landmark Redfern speech was the first _admission bv the Australian government on the negative impact of the European colonisation of Australia. It was given unexpectantly at the Sydney launch of Australia's celebrations for the 1993 International Year of Indigenous Peoples on 10 December 1992, at Redfern Park in Sydney. That place itself was the centre of the urban Indigenous Australian world. With a bold admission of guilt without encouraging guilt as an answer- and Keating's trademark frank and eloquent rhetoric, the speech has been widely recognised as one of the greatest and most influential speeches in Australian history. In this powerful four-minute address, Keating decisively admitted to the white invasion and colonisation of Australia. This was an incredibly moving speech, candid, unvarnished, and finally, honest.

What made the speech so effective is how bluntly Keating put the ownership and the responsibility white Australians had over the blights of Aboriginal society. This firmly drew attention away from himself and to the facts he presented, and the solutions he proposed to lead the way to reconciliation. When Keating addressed the mostly Indigenous crowd at Redfern, he did so in a way that was clear. "We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases, the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers."

The final of those lines led to euphoria from the audience. It was a final recognition of the Stolen Generations, of mixed-race Indigenous children taken from their parents to become 'more white'. Keating spoke of the Stolen Generations a powerful statement on the complete responsibility white Australia held. "We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our

ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us." With the final resolving line, Keating reveals the sheer tragedy and loss of it all, through a dangerous lack of the so-called "golden rule".

For the audience, the feeling of grief and empowerment was overwhelming. Keating's humble and gracious approach to the speech made it more potent than simply saying "sorry". Before Keating gave the speech, the crimes of the white man he described- the theft of children, the murders, the alcohol, the crime, the genocide (although he did not use the term)- were things that, if raised by Aboriginal activists, would lead them to be shouted down. But through a Prime Minister admitting guilt unconditionally, there was no room for fragile denial from white Australians.

What made the speech so effective is how bluntly Keating put the ownership and the responsibility white Australians had over the blights of Aboriginal society.

I think this speech is important listening for those living in settler colonial societies across the world. As a New Zealander, I feel privileged to have heard the Redfern address. It does not only inspire me that perhaps one day our government will finally acknowledge its own failures towards indigenous people, but gives me a better understanding of the shared struggles of Aborigines and Māori. This is despite popular opinion that Australia is the "worse" of the two, based largely on New Zealand's bicultural image as opposed to statistics. But unlike Australia, Pākehā leaders have still not owned up responsibility for the untenable situation Māori are designed to live in. We still have so much further to go, and everyone essentially has to play

a part. This is not an issue we can ignore in society, because that society was built to subjugate indigenous peoples.

I think something that makes this speech so potent and admirable was not something in the text itself, but, rather, something it was lacking. Specifically, the word "sorry". My ultimate analysis of this is in comparison with "the Apology" to Australia's Indigenous peoples given by Kevin Rudd in 2008, in which Rudd gives a far shorter speech that specifically includes the word "sorry" and focused almost solely on the Stolen Generations rather than anything else. At first glance, many would say that Rudd did better than Keating because of his apology. But I, personally, would warn against that. Keating knew saying sorry, no matter its significance, would just be an attempt to absolve guilt and "make things even", rather than address what Australia faced. He showed evidence of the ongoing effects of colonisation, and gave an outline for future reconciliation. Ultimately, the concept of saying sorry is a European and Western one, and does not follow first Australian traditions. It implies exoneration and the relinquishing of guilt. Why would one apologise for something still very much ongoing?

If people heard Keating did not apologise, they would assume his speech was without compassion. Endless evidence in his words suggest otherwise. "We failed to ask - how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us...Imagine if our spiritual life

was denied and ridiculed. Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it." Keating conveyed exactly how Aboriginal leaders felt, because he had listened to them, not because he felt obliged to or wanted to alleviate his own guilt. It was, instead, because he wanted to understand the terrible burden white Australians chose to ignore. I honestly feel confident and pleased that, 13 years before I was born, there was a leader in the world he actually understood. And he did so unconditionally and proved that there was no way around ignoring the wrongdoing anymore. "The message should be that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian democracy to include indigenous Australians. There is everything to gain."

Ultimately, I feel Keating's blunt acceptance of wrongdoing at Redfern showed that paying lip service was not the answer. In relation to a damning Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which laid bare the horrors of contemporary Australia for its first peoples "devastating clarity", Keating foreboded the inevitable white guilt that would arise from his speech. As he spoke of his creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation- a genuine solution, not a five-letter-word- and a "new partnership" which would arise from it, he spoke of guilt as being diametrically opposed to action. "Down the years, there has been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the responses we need. Guilt is not a very constructive emotion. I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit.

seven and two took flight into the blackness above, wild FURIOUS NIGHT.

NOW reflect on Those Who came to pass.

All of us."

Separation between church, state.... and sanity

Chia Hunt Y12

t wasn't until Christianity started to make me uncomfortable that I realised I speak the lord's name, very often for someone who is not Christian.

I grew up separated from any religious practices. As a child, it left me confused.

My first experiences of Christianity were as a shy 9-year-old. I accidentally signed up for Christian education classes in primary school. Left to silently follow along, pretending to speak the prayers and attempting to copy the other diligent children's hand gestures.

Being a socially anxious child who had not yet developed her own moral compass, I remained in those classes until the end of primary school. This resulted in my performance in a Christmas play... as a sheep (the only character I felt I related to after a year of classes).

As a teenager widely connected to the world through social media, I could say that religion still confuses me as it did my younger self.

I do not claim to have observed or understood every/any religion. Not at all. However, I want to talk about how my limited experience has shaped my perception as a whole.

I have seen how religion has helped form cultures, resulting in the wildest creations. To this day, weaving their way through decoration, clothing, and so many traditions.

From my eyes, this surface view of religion appears beautiful. It's full of colour, laughter, self-fulfilment, and freedom. Yet aspects of specific, prevalent religions seem to encourage far more hurt.

For instance, take America. From a country like New Zealand, they appear to be moving back in time. By this, I mean that the advancement of the country is highly driven and simultaneously restricted by an uprising in extreme Christian beliefs.

For example, these statements are spoken by Christian extremists:

"If you're Christian, you're a good person. If you're anything other than Christian, you're going straight to hell. No exceptions." What the hell happened to personal beliefs and freedoms?

And "Getting an abortion goes against my religion. Therefore, no one can get an abortion!!" Aka, my religion is correct and must therefore apply to all.

What frightens me is the constant barrage of similar statements online. It shows the scope of such extremism and its effect on the non-religious. In an American term, the First Amendment has failed.

There is NO separation between church and state. And this pathway has spiralled into the passing of new laws built solely on religious beliefs.

Christianity continues to plough its path down the same road it's always taken. However, given our social advancements, such as accepting the LGBTQIA+ community, it is nothing other than chains and shackles.

Christianity continues to plough its path down the same road it's always taken.

Of course, not every country is like America. Not every Christian is an extremist. But seeing the impacts of religion on progressive communities is somewhat traumatising.

Scarier yet, when I myself identify with groups that Christianity appears to go against violently.

While I respect people's personal religious beliefs, I absolutely will not excuse them if harmful practices have been involved.

Manipulation, violence, and self-centred notions of superiority should not be dismissed in any situation. It seems religion has gotten away with it all.

Frankly, my exposure to Christianity has been anything but self-enlightening. There is a lot of darkness for something that claims to be so divine.

I know many will rightfully argue that there are many religions this world has to offer. So why shun all of them because of a few negative experiences? Personally, the reality of the world's most popular faith has become a bit perilous.

Aspects of Christianity go against the very things that make people who they are. That is a fundamental disagreement which will never budge as long as religion remains antiprogressive.

There is no place for that in a progressive society.



A hidden gem: the wonders of the Octemone

Tait Keller Y12

idden in the depths of the ocean, so deep that even light cannot pierce the blackness, lie undersea vents. Powered by magma, these geological marvels form breathtaking oases, supporting animals of all shapes and sizes, from octopi that don't use ink to worms that swim in boiling water. One such wonder, the Octemone, has been described as "one of the ugliest, yet most fascinating animals." It looks as though an anemone grew tentacles and walked off, reminiscent of something a pre-schooler would draw. Despite its unseemly looks, the Octemone's life cycle takes the form of an epic saga, spending months drifting on the currents, to hunting in total darkness. Underlying it all, undersea vents play a crucial role in its survival.

The Octemone begins its life with incredible heat, as adult Octemone, being the proud parents they are, throw their new-born larvae into the scalding heat of the vent itself. There is a method to their madness, as Octemone larvae are born with a fleece-like coat of bacteria, which keeps their core to the cool temperature of 55° C. Being thrown into the vent in this manner launches the larvae as high as 300m above the vent. This extra height may not be much, especially compared to the kilometres of water that remain above them, but every little bit of

extra height they get increases the strength of the currents they encounter.

The Octemone begins its life with incredible heat, as adult Octemone, being the proud parents they are, throw their newborn larvae into the scalding heat of the vent itself.

They will spend as long as three months out in the open ocean, drifting through nothing but empty, cold, dead water. There is nothing to hunt out here, so the larvae remain in almost total dormancy, doing just enough to stay alive. Their bacterial coat begins to die off, lacking the nutrients found close to the vent. The loss of its coat is a crucial step in its development, exposing the heat-sensitive nerves covering its body. It will use these heat sensors to know when it reaches its final destination, a new undersea vent. Finally, after its months drifting on the currents, a larva detects a small increase in the water temperature. Excited, it activates heat sensors all over its body, allowing it to pinpoint the heat source's location. These fresh sensors confirm it, causing the larva to enter the final stage of its activation: active movement. Using the heat sensors to guide it, the larva swims down, and sure enough, there's a vent. This larva was lucky.

Of the thousands it was launched with, only a few siblings will survive, scattered across the ocean.

The few Octemone larvae able to reach a new undersea vent thrive, finding themselves in a nutrient-rich, prey-filled environment. So begins their adult life, as the once small and insignificant larvae grow into powerful hunting machines, the top predators around. Adult Octemone come equipped with a wide range of tactics and weapons to hunt their prey. These include three different types of tentacles, able to be used for anything from flying through the water to stunning and subduing prey. Most incredible of all are the short tentacles that cover the top of its head, like a thick crop of hair that's been zapped

with electricity. This time it's the hair that does the zapping, with each tentacle carrying a massive amount of charge, stunning everything it touches.

An Octemone may never meet another adult of its kind, living in complete solitude. While this would be a death sentence for many species, Octemone have both male and female reproductive organs. This rare adaptation allows a single Octemone to produce thousands of larvae, keeping the species alive without the need for complex mating rituals used by other animals.

These larvae then get thrown into the vents, where they embark on their own saga, beginning the cycle all over again.



The dangers of outlawing abortion

Ben Strong Y12

n the 24th of June 2022, people all across the United States of America had their constitutional right to abortion stripped away; the culmination of a battle in the supreme court being fought for almost 50 years. These issues may seem distant, but it is crucial that now more than ever, that we understand the consequences of outlawing

abortion, so we should not fall into the same trap of misinformation that many Americans have.

A common misconception among the shortsighted 'pro-life' movement is that the outlawing of abortions will cause them to cease entirely, which could not be further from the truth. With the plug pulled on proper medical support, and several states now actively punishing those who seek abortions, pregnant women have been forced to turn to extremely dangerous unofficial

or improvised methods of terminating their pregnancies. A heart-breaking study from the World Health Organization attributes up to 13.2% of maternal deaths globally each year to unsafe abortion. This figure should be expected to climb with pregnancy being criminalized across America, which begs the question: Just pro-life are these pro-lifers? how Haemorrhaging, infections, uterine perforation, and damage to other internal organs are all dangers that many pregnant women will have to chance, and that is all assuming that abortion is even successful. To make matters worse, many will avoid seeking proper medical attention after the fact, for fear of prosecution. And it gets worse. Somehow.

"It was just emotionally difficult walking around, knowing I had a dead foetus inside." This is the sickening story of Marlena Stell; a Texan woman forced to bear her nine-and-a-half-week-old stillborn foetus, after her doctor refused surgery. Interviewed by the Washington post, Stell went on to confess how she had had to live with the mental battle of carrying a dead foetus inside of her for 2 entire weeks, as she desperately struggled to find medical assistance. The procedure for the foetus' removal was denied by her physician, due to it being frequently used in performing abortions; a practice that Texas has been notoriously trying to squash for decades. Marlena Stell's story is a prime example of the heavy toll these laws would extract from the mental health of those they affect, as if stillbirth weren't already traumatic enough. A joint study between Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School indicated that women who suffered through miscarriages were 2.5 times more likely to develop severe mental illnesses than those with successful births. Additionally, the EPDS (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) reported that the rate of just milder cases of depression reached up to 4 times more likely among stillbirth mothers. This may very well indicate a new front of the war on mental health, exacerbated by the new restrictions on reproductive rights.

It is equally terrifying to think about how easily one could be falsely charged for abortion-related crime. Chelsea Becker, age 25, was accused, trialled, and sentenced to imprisonment for 16 months. And what was her crime? Manslaughter? Robbery? Fraud? Miscarriage. Two months prior, Becker had lost her unborn baby boy at 8 months pregnant. After failing a drug test due to an ongoing meth problem, she was accused of using the substance to self-terminate her unborn foetus. Despite her lawyers arguing that there was no way of proving that the substance was responsible, she was charged with the crime of 'murdering a human foetus,' and found guilty. Stories like Chelsea's will undoubtedly become more frequent in the coming years, with even mere google searches of abortion related products and procedures becoming probable cause for investigation and/or prosecution.

The driving arguments behind treating unborn foetuses are greatly varied, coming from many different political and religious standpoints. But what cannot be denied, what cannot be argued against, is the suffering that it will inflict on the pregnant women who bear them. Banning abortions doesn't save lives; it takes them away. Desperate women will risk extreme bodily harm trying to carry out the abortions themselves, instead of in safe, secure medical conditions. Traumatised mothers will be forced to bear their miscarriages as they struggle to find support, dealing with the emotional toll of a dead child inside of them for days, or weeks. Women will be tried for murdering a child that aren't even born yet, just because someone said they seemed suspicious. We cannot allow this to happen here.

A social critique that upholds the patriarchy??

Ryan Gordon Y13

uthors create works that reflect their own society, and these works in turn reinforce existing societal roles and frameworks to their readers. Society upholds itself; this is a captivatingly beautiful cycle... but we have a problem. For millennia, the vast majority of the world has operated on a patriarchal model - i.e., a system designed by men for men, with little to no reference to women anywhere (aside from 'the housewife'). An excellent example of this is the US, whose constitution to this day does not have an amendment specifically protecting/ guaranteeing equal rights for US women. This patriarchal model means that there is countless ages old literature embellishing and extolling patriarchy - including Shakespeare's infamous Taming of the Shrew, but almost none denouncing it or providing an alternative view. A toxically patriarchal society feeds on and promotes itself through its literature, creating not a beautiful cycle, but a vicious cycle.

A toxically patriarchal society feeds on and promotes itself through its literature, creating not a beautiful cycle, but a *vicious cycle*.

Bong Joon-ho's Parasite (2019) has widely been regarded as a ground-breaking criticism of wealth disparity and social inequity – and undoubtedly it is. We follow the story of two families; the Kims and the Parks, locked together in the eternal class struggle that has been civilisation thus far – an essay for another time. However, when one considers the gender roles portrayed in Parasite, a different story emerges – and it is distressingly conservative for a major contemporary film. Mr. Park reigns supreme and unchallenged as the patriarch of the bourgeois Park family. The men of the proletariat Kim family consider the wider

picture while the women remain firmly focused on the family. The only truly independent, strong woman in the film (Kim Ki-jung) dies after trying to forge a path for herself in the world. It is not good enough for a social commentary to criticise capitalism while upholding the patriarchy.

Let us first consider the Park family – how do they operate? Well, Mr. Park is the 'classic male breadwinner', CEO of a successful tech firm. He comes home from work each day expecting dinner and a warm welcome from his wife. Mrs. Park's sole job seems to be looking after everything to do with the house and children; making sure it all runs smoothly. Except even this she doesn't do herself, but rather employs a housekeeper – Moon-gwang – to do it all for her. She seemingly has no real purpose, no drive, no ambition in life beyond being a figurehead housewife. To alleviate her extreme boredom, she turns to drugs. We get two pieces of evidence for this; the first implicitly when she is woken by the housekeeper after Ki-woo arrives for the first time, the second explicitly during the almost sexscene with her husband in which she barters sex with Mr. Park for drugs - "Then buy me drugs.". As an upper-class woman, she has undoubtedly received top-tier education. Why then, isn't she using it? Why not alleviate boredom by getting out and doing something she wants? Are we truly to believe she would rather stay home all day and exist solely for the pleasure and convenience of Mr. Park? She is the very image of a 1950's housewife. In fact, she is even less than that considering she delegates the work to her housekeeper. She doesn't really know who she is or what she wants to do with her life, instead maintaining the status quo of subservience to her husband, who expropriates her labour effectively controlling her; we have a patriarchal family. Mrs. Park is the most powerful woman in Parasite - she is the wealthiest, the most

influential, the 'cream of society'. Her character is a slap in the face for feminism.

In the making of Parasite, Bong was concerned with exposing a truth about the nature of capitalism – it is possible that he did not even consider what the structure of the Park family meant for feminism. What is really interesting then, is why the Park family is structured the way it is. Perhaps Bong meant to suggest that the patriarchy was part of what's wrong with capitalism, but for my part I consider this to be unlikely. In her paper *Theorising Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby notes that "patriarchy both pre-dates and post-dates capitalism, hence it cannot be considered derivative from it."

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The two systems are separate from each other capable of operating independently, although it is fair to say that in the modern day there is deep and complicated by-play between them in our society. That being said, a social critique such as Parasite should not undermine harmful aspects of society while endorsing others. Both systems inherently require the oppression of certain groups. Is Bong suggesting we shouldn't oppress poor people, but we should oppress women? That doesn't sound right... The film would have worked just as well had Mr. and Mrs. Park been in equal partnership – all the same messages about capitalism would've been there, alongside positive gender equality messages. But perhaps Bong is suggesting something highly patriarchal about the bourgeoisie, rather than society as a whole? In evaluating this, I turn to the Kim family...

"Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity." - Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique. What does that quote even mean? Unlike the Parks, the Kim family is not overtly patriarchal. What is concerning in the Kim family dynamic is the way Mr. Kim and his son Ki-woo become increasingly involved with politics and the wider societal picture throughout the film while Mrs. Kim and her daughter Ki-jung remain adamantly focused on family. This is particularly evident in the scene where they all get drunk in the Park household and Mr. Kim starts discussing the driver Yoon - "Hey, Ki-woo. You know that driver Yoon? ... He must be working somewhere else now, right?" Ki-woo agrees with the assessment - "He's young, got a nice physique." They have widened their gaze to that of the working class as a whole. Kijung's response to this is explosive - "Fucking hell! ... We're the ones who need help. Worry about us, okay?" Later, Mrs. Kim rejects a fellow worker in favour of her own family - "Don't call me sis! ...I'm calling the police." Mrs. Kim and Ki-jung are so focused on family solidarity they don't even pause to consider their fellow workers.

Under a patriarchy, women were never supposed to worry about or discuss anything outside of the home. It was considered by many male 'experts' at the time to be too complicated and overwhelming for them. Yet in a 2019 film, we see the same warped idea playing out. Ki-jung and Mrs. Kim are facing all the same problems, all the same hardships as Ki-woo and Mr. Kim. They are painfully exposed to the inequalities of society every day - even more so since they started working for the Parks, yet they maintain a non-perspective about politics throughout the film. Unlike Mrs. Park they don't even have the choice of staying at home - they have to work, and in doing so encounter other people as desperate as themselves. But instead of showing even remote awareness of the working class as a whole they insist that the men focus on the

family. Such a message is reminiscent of harmful but annoyingly persistent gender stereotypes – in particular what it means to be 'feminine' versus what it means to be 'masculine'. These are difficult to quantify, having built up over thousands of years into gross prejudices and assumptions, which then cement themselves in our collective psyche. The damage they can do has no bounds - they provide a framework for people to conform to in a society where we should be free to express our true selves without fear. A quick google search is all one needs to do to reveal the baselessness of these stereotypes suggested synonyms for feminine include "soft", "delicate", "gentle", "tender", and "refined". For masculine it's "virile", "macho", "manly", and "strapping". I hate these stereotypes. Quite simply they are ridiculous. Absolutely working-class women would think about the politics that dictate their lives just as much as the men. It is absurd to even attempt to classify it as 'unfeminine'; for the concepts of 'feminine' and 'unfeminine' to even exist. Only a systemically broken system like the patriarchy would invent such lies. It takes a real collective effort to overthrow these gender stereotypes, and a movie such as Parasite that reinforces them is, to put it mildly, unhelpful.

"Men use violence as a form of power over women. Not all men actively need to use this potential power for it to have an impact on most women." (Sylvia Walby, Theorising Patriarchy). It is a sad truth that women are subjected to far more gender-motivated violence than men, but one we must all face up to. The men in this world are for the most part free to walk the streets, safe in the knowledge that they will not molested, raped, or otherwise violated. Put simply this is male privilege and it arises from precedent - it is a patriarchal structure that is used by men to consolidate the patriarchy. When Ki-jung dies at the hands of Guen-sae (Moon-gwang's husband) in the birthday scene of Parasite, her death is a

prime example of such male violence. Her status the most outgoing, self-assured, purposeful woman in the film makes her murder particularly significant. From a feminist perspective it can be interpret ed as a warning to other strong 'out of line' women: this is what happens when you challenge the patriarchy. Violence is a form of control – it creates fear, and because of the sheer precedence of male violence towards women, any additional violence has that much more of an impact. Ki-woo is attacked in a similarly vicious manner by the same person, yet he survives. Why is that? Consider a parallel ending in which Ki-woo had died instead of Kijung. Ki-jung was killed by Guen-sae as a way to draw out Chung-sook – it could just as well have been Ki-woo. Beyond the birthday scene is a sequence in which Ki-woo discovers exactly what it means to live in a capitalist society – messages that could just as well have been discovered by Ki-jung. Her death was not integral to the plot, but it is reflective of the sort of violence women are subjected to in the real world. Violence that is prevalent enough to impact the behaviour of roughly half the earth's population.

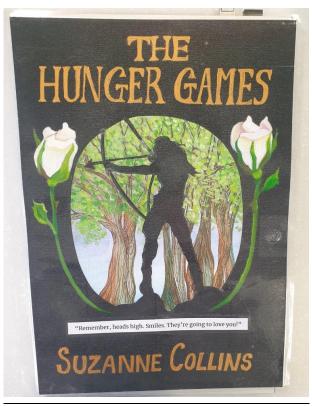
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I said in my introduction that Parasite is a ground-breaking criticism of wealth disparity and social inequity. That much hasn't changed - it is still a brilliant critique of capitalism, and the fact that it is riddled with conservative gender roles and stereotypes is more a mark of what Bong has unconsciously picked up from society than his personal beliefs. In making Parasite, Bong was focusing on capitalist society – it is

highly likely he did not even consider what applying a feminist lens to his film would reveal. He needed a typical upper-class family, so he

created your stereotypical nuclear family, centred around the male patriarch. The murder of Kijung was a powerful way to advance the plot and craft his critique. The fact that it also advanced a patriarchal cause was secondary to Bong. The truth is, these gender roles and stereotypes didn't come from nowhere. As a society we have come a long way, but we arguably still have even further to go. In its death throes, the patriarchy has (largely) shifted from explicitly banning women by law to subtler means such as paying male-

dominated workplaces more, the use of male violence to create fear, and the reinforcement of backward stereotypes such as what it means to be 'feminine' or 'masculine'. It is their prevalence – in particular our internalisation of these stereotypes as a society – that makes them so difficult to avoid, but by no means impossible. In this day and age we need our social critiques to do justice by all marginalised groups, not just pander to one.



Bailey Denton Y10

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Feminism and Breakfast at Tiffany's

Louise Gromme Y13

Blake Edward's 1961 trailblazer film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* based off Truman Capote's story of the same name, is iconic for its independent, chic female protagonist Holly Golightly, and the glamourous, heavily romanticized portrayal of New York City in the early 60s. Holly Golightly's seeming self-sufficiency and sexual liberation has gained readings of the film as a feminist tale of a

strong-willed woman navigating the world on her own two feet, free from the constraints of male hegemony and economic structures. However, whilst Holly Golightly was a groundbreaking feminine icon for the decade in which the film aired, applauding *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as a feminist film is dangerous in the way that it precedents neoliberal ideas and values. From the film's failure to acknowledge Holly's privilege as a

conventionally attractive, white woman to the idea of 'freedom' conveyed through Holly's individual choices and actions, the harmful notions of neoliberal feminism can be applied to Breakfast at Tiffany's. From a Marxist feminist point of view, it can be argued that Holly Golightly's character reinforces the gendered and classist constraints perpetuated by a capitalist society that institutionalizes sexism. Marxist feminism attempts to eradicate the underlying cause of gender inequality that comes from economic structures. unlike individualized, neoliberal 'feminism' we see in Breakfast at Tiffany's.

The idea that Holly Golightly, a thin, white, conventionally attractive woman attempting to conquer young adulthood on 'her own two feet' whilst using her sexuality to earn money from men, is 'feminist' or 'empowering' is entirely derived from neoliberal politics. Lolu Olufemi states in Feminism, Interrupted, "The neoliberal model of feminism argues that 'inequality' is a state that can be overcome in corporate environments without over-hauling the system, centralizes the individual and their personal choices, misguidedly imagines that the state can grant liberation, seeks above all to protect the free market and fails to question the connection between capitalism, race and gendered oppression." This is exactly the type of 'feminism' we see in Breakfast at Tiffany's. The film follows a nineteen-year-old woman, Holly Golightly living in a New York apartment alone with her cat, who makes her income through what can be described as 'escorting', in which she accepts money from typically older men, in exchange for spending time with them.

A notable example of this 'escorting' in the film is when Holly reveals that she is getting paid by an imprisoned mafia member, Sally Tomato, to visit him in a high security prison weekly. She says, "In fact I never knew him until after he was in prison. I adore him now. I mean, I've been going to see him every Thursday for seven

months." This exchange fits what neoliberal feminism defines as 'empowering'. Although Holly Golightly is still financially reliant on men, neoliberals would see this as liberating due to her earning money by choice, reinforcing the capitalistic emphasis on making money and climbing the socio-economic ladder. As Lola Olufemi stated, neoliberal feminism focuses on the individual, and we see that Holly's actions do nothing to challenge the oppressive forces imposed on women. There is still a power imbalance imposed by capitalism due to the man having the money, creating a system Marxist feminists would define as the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'proletariat'. Her 'work' value comes from her youth and beauty, which fails to challenge the unrealistic and harrowing standards expected from women by society to remain beautiful and ties a woman's worth in capitalism to the physical.

Her 'work' value comes from her youth and beauty, which fails to challenge the unrealistic and harrowing standards expected from women by society to remain beautiful and ties a woman's worth in capitalism to the physical.

Her privilege as a beautiful, white woman who has been surrounded by luxury her entire life is also never acknowledged. Whilst she is getting ready to visit Sally, she asks Paul to fetch her 'crocodile skin shoes' and wears flattering clothing and extensive accessories, including a wide brimmed hat and stylish jewellery. This suggests fashion and high class. The presence of a prison as an instrument for a wealthy white woman's income also abides by neoliberal feminist theory. The privilege Holly has to flamboyantly dress up to make money in an institution which is a symbol of oppression for

people and women of colour, poor people and queer people, is an aspect of neoliberalism as it favours only the most privileged women. According to Lola Olufemi, "White feminist neo-liberal politics focuses on the self as a vehicle for self-improvement and personal gain at the expense of others... This model works best for wealthy white women, who are able to replace men in a capitalist structure... It invisibilises the women of colour, low paid workers and migrant women who must suffer so that others 'succeed'. It makes their exploitation a natural part of other women's achievements." By exploiting her sexuality to earn cash from men, Holly Golightly is still well within the constraints of a patriarchal, capitalist society that confines women to male

hegemony. Her obsession with the luxury jewellery store, "Tiffany & Co.' highlights the film's correlation with neoliberal thinking. Holly expresses her love for luxurious accessories when she says, "It calms me down right away, the proud look of it; nothing very bad could happen to you there, not with those kind men in their nice suits, and that lovely smell of silver and alligator wallets. If I could

find a real place that made me feel like Tiffany's...' The obscurity of Holly feeling 'safe' around rich white men in a shop only accessible the higher classes emphasizes Holly's obliviousness to her own privilege. Her utmost desire for a place like Tiffany's which is only accessible to the wealthy, reflects neoliberal feminism's "obsession with getting women 'to the top" which "masks a desire to ensure that the current system and its violent consequences remain intact," outlined by Olufemi. Holly's idea of success is reaching a place of luxury, which perpetuates the pressure placed on the working class by capitalism to climb the economic ladder in order to succeed. This follows Olufemi's definition of neoliberal feminism, where a privileged white woman's dream is to succeed by a capitalist definition - becoming a member of the higher class, which can exist only through the exploitation and oppression of marginalized communities.

The film's precedent for individualistic, neoliberal feminist politics is also evident through Holly's loneliness that stems from her desire for independence, calling herself a 'wild thing'. She says to Paul, "We're a couple of no name slobs who belong to nobody, we don't even belong to each other." This idea of an individual identity, or lack of, due to not associating with a group or culture, stems from Western individualism and is a theme present in neoliberal feminism. Holly Golightly prides herself on her choices and actions, individual without considering the welfare of other women and

> 'succeeds' in the capitalistic patriarchy by monetizing off her societal beauty. She seems liberated due to her wild spirit and lack of will to be tied down, but this liberation only comes from what capitalism has already granted her for her beauty, whiteness, and class. Like Paul says, "You're already in the cage, you built it yourself", however the 'cage' refers to the confines of capitalism, which Holly

believes herself to be free as a result of her place as one of the most privileged sections of society, second to heterosexual white men - it is not a cage that Holly built herself, but one that she continues to reinforce in her deluded 'empowerment'. This inherent flaw in neoliberal feminism is summed up by Lola Olufemi nicely, stating "In this approach there is no challenge to hegemony, only acquiescence."

Whilst *Breakfast at Tiffany's'* Holly Golightly may be viewed as a feminist icon in the eyes of neoliberal feminists, viewing the film through a Marxist feminist lens creates a more critical perspective on the way the film's protagonist's individual choices cannot liberate her due to her role as a woman in a capitalist America. Elisabeth Armstrong states in *Marxist and Socialist Feminism*,



"Marxist feminism also theorizes revolutionary subjectivity and possibilities for an anti-capitalist future." This is a direct contrast to the way neoliberal feminism excludes conversations about the economy and trusts the state to grant liberation, as opposed to seeing it as the main oppressor. Holly Golightly lives comfortably in her luxury and ability to blend in with the higher classes, and even dreams of reaching the 'top' of capitalism – this desire reflected through her love for 'Tiffany and Co.' By applying Marxist feminist theory to Breakfast at Tiffany's, one can see that Holly's 'escorting' as a means for income is reinforcing the gendered power imbalance innate to capitalism, disguised as sexual liberation. In a capitalist society, men are in a position of dominance over women, as the wealthy are to the poor, which Armstrong outlines - "Behind every capitalist social relation - that of the capitalist and the worker - lay another buried social relation, that of the household - between husband and wife." Although Holly may convey a feeling of freedom, the men she escorts - Sally Tomato for example - still play the role of the bourgeoisie as she does the proletariat, as far as social relations go. Her utilization of her sexuality has zero effect in disrupting the gendered oppression imposed by capitalism.

Holly's New York apartment, taste for luxury, glamourous style and lavish house parties suggests that monetarily, she is a member of the bourgeoisie, or wishes to be at least, but the dynamic of gendered social relations remains intact – whilst capitalism is at play, women will always be in a lower social position to that of men. An issue that Marxist feminists could raise with Holly Golightly is that by valuing money over welfare and happiness – her love for jewellery, spending time with men she feels no emotion towards who she is financially reliant on – she reinforces the gendered oppression imposed by capitalism by embracing the role of the proletariat in order to benefit herself and

move closer to the bourgeoisie. Armstrong refers to a pioneer of Marxist feminism, Alexandra Kollantai, stating "Kollantai agreed that 'woman' is a class-divided group within capitalism; therefore, the vote alone was not enough to ensure all women's liberation. Women's franchise did nothing to advance the power of workers for themselves; instead, it heightened the class power of some women over others." Holly's independence and individual autonomy over her choices and actions does not empower all women nor herself, but rather it shows her pre-existing privilege as a member of the higher class and places her in a position of power over lower class women.

Breakfast at Tiffany's is not a feminist film from a Marxist lens, as Holly comfortably lives in her luxury and even wishes of gaining more, refusing to address her own role in supporting the dominance of men which she supposedly wishes to escape. Armstrong also recounts, "From the 1930s, Marxist feminism in the US demanded greater attention to the political and economic dimensions of systemic racism alongside sexism and class exploitation." There are several instances where Holly breaks the law and she easily avoids being arrested, due to her privilege as a member of the bourgeoisie. These examples include noise control coming to shut down her noisy party, her and Paul stealing masks from a children's shop and sneakily deterring the police, and her involvement with Sally Tomato, a mafia member. With each of these circumstances her whiteness and resemblance of the higher class allow her to bend the law without arrest, a stark contrast to the experiences of working- and lower-class women, queer women, trans women,

and women of colour, with many of these groups overlapping due capitalism's favour of heterosexual, wealthy white people. In reality, there are several tragic incidences of innocent members of marginalised communities being arrested or even killed by the police in an act of discrimination



against the oppressed lower classes. An example includes Breonna Taylor, an African American woman shot in her apartment by at least seven police officers who forced entry into her home, a tragic incident entirely driven by racism that is reinforced through a capitalist society who sees people of colour as a threat. Holly would likely never experience anything remotely close to this, and refuses to acknowledge her position of privilege over other women. One can see through a Marxist feminist lens that Holly is in a clear position of class power over other women and abuses her privilege within her section of society, supporting the class system of capitalism that creates division in gender and race. The American legal system is perhaps the most obvious example of systemic racism and wealthy, white favourism, which is shown through Holly Golightly's smooth encounters with the police.

By viewing her character from a Marxist feminism perspective, one can see the issues with referring to her character as 'empowering' - she commodifies her own sexuality for economic wealth, which both pulls women deeper into the confines of capitalism and the patriarchy, whilst simultaneously increasing her own wealth and climbing the ladder of capitalism, furthering her already existing dominance over less privileged women. A direct contrast to neoliberal feminism, Marxist feminism sees Holly Golightly as a privileged white woman chained in patriarchal constraints of capitalism who weaponizes her class hegemony in order to 'succeed' in the eyes of a capitalist. One could hypothesize that her idea of 'free will' and 'independence' does more harm than good for the liberation of all women living in capitalism.

One could hypothesize that her idea of 'free will' and 'independence' does more harm than good for the liberation of all women living in capitalism.

Breakfast at Tiffany's is one of the most influential films from the 60s, for more reasons than its cinematography and New York glamour. It sets a precedent for neoliberal feminism, which can also be referred to as 'choice' feminism or 'girl boss' feminism. Whilst the film alone may not be harmful nor intend to perpetuate harmful ideas, it is unfortunate that 'girl boss' feminism has become the leading form of feminism today and is what most people consider 'feminist'. After viewing the film through a Marxist feminist lens, one can see the inherent flaws in neoliberal feminism and its inability to liberate women from constraints patriarchal enforced capitalism, as it only increases the power of certain women over others, enabling working class women, queer women, and women of colour to continue being exploited. In modern film, it is evident how popularized the 'girl boss' trope has become, which follows women 'succeeding' in capitalism due to the supposedly 'empowering' decisions they make through the course of the film. Some examples include Legally Blonde and Sex and the City. To simply label these films as 'feminist' without acknowledging the different forms of feminism, debates within feminism itself, and varying opinions on what is considered 'empowering' is a dangerous action, as it continues to push wealthy white women's 'feminism' - neoliberal feminism - to the mainstream without discussing how all women are affected. The success of one individual does equal female empowerment, neoliberal, or 'girl boss' feminism fails to recognize, as we see in Holly Golightly from Breakfast at Tiffany's.

Neoliberal feminism's domination of the media has unfortunate consequences in reality, as people uneducated in the history of feminism and the many different forms, tend to gravitate towards what is seen in the media. This results in the praise of capitalistic, typical 'girl boss' women such as Ivanka Trump, who do not consider the liberation of all groups of women. Ivanka Trump could be described as the 'face' of neoliberal feminism, as she was an incredibly wealthy white woman with pre-existing privilege that used her power to support her father Donald Trump who is not interested in the welfare of all women. He appointed three conservative judges to the supreme court who have now overturned Roe v. Wade, severely limiting the reproductive rights of women in the USA. Women like Ivanka Trump, who will always have access to abortion due to their wealth and privilege, will not be affected by this event nearly as much as poor women who already have limited access to healthcare and reproductive rights. However, following the neoliberal module will blindly continue to place privileged white women at the forefront of the reproductive rights movement and silence the voices of marginalised women who see abortion rights as a much more profound issue than "my body my choice." This is an obvious example of the way self-empowerment through climbing capitalism is a hyper-individualistic, neoliberal



attitude that only benefits the most privileged women and continues to reinforce the patriarchy and capitalism.

Ivanka Trump could be described as the 'face' of neoliberal feminism

There is no doubt that Holly Golightly is an endearing character who makes a story that so many people have come to love. However, one must be cautious in what they define as 'empowering', as we can see how Breakfast at Tiffany's has set a precedent for perhaps the most well-known form of feminism today, which has potentially harmful side effects for women who are not all beautiful, white and wealthy like Holly Golightly. We can enjoy the beauty and nostalgia of Breakfast at Tiffany's, but applauding the film as 'feminist' is not as liberating as some tend to think it is. Understanding alternative forms of feminism that intend to target the root cause of the women's rights issues, like Marxist feminism for example, will help us to get a more critical and comprehensive view of what 'empowering' for women and effective in leading the struggle against gendered discrimination and inequality under modern capitalism.

