

Longbenton High School

The Waffle

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Volume II

Issue 4



Aeroplanes and the Upside Down . . .



Art by Christina Isibor, Year 12

In This Issue . . .

- Elliott delves down 20,000 fathoms!
- Aidan writes his first review!
- Keira finds the hidden depths at the Dinner Party.
- Max shares his Metal Gear journey!
- Alesia has some revelations about Privilege and Philosophy!
- Kitty tells you about her favourite musical!

The Book Nook

Titus Groan by Mervyn Peake

'Titus Groan' is a Gothic novel and a piece of post-war fiction, set in the endless and self-contained halls of Castle Gormenghast. It is the first book in the 'Gormenghast' trilogy and whilst this necessitates a certain amount of unresolved set-up it is perfectly serviceable as a self-contained novel. It follows a variety of strange yet defined characters as they traverse the surreal halls and quadrangles of the crumbling wreck of Gormenghast, following the birth of the titular Titus Groan.

'Titus Groan' is first and foremost a descriptive book. It is slow and meandering in plot, but more so in the exhaustive descriptions that Peake relishes on each and every fantastical location. These descriptions may not further the narrative, or even bear any real relevance to any happenings save a general atmosphere, but such is the deft and original use of language that they are rarely boring to read. Peake may stray occasionally into the more abstract and obtuse, but really these moments are few and far between and there is a certain satisfaction in eventually understanding these denser passages. Not to say that the story suffers from these exuberantly articulate descriptive sections; they work in a neat harmony. The narrative itself is dark and weaving, in places surreal and dreamlike or frightening and malicious. Against the main story, that of the conniving kitchen boy Steerpike's infiltration of the upper echelons of the Gormenghast hierarchy, is set two other main subplots. These are the conflict between Flay and Swelter, and the journey of Keda. Flay is manservant to Lord Sepulchre Groan (the current Earl of Groan and the seventy-sixth to have held that position) and Swelter is head chef of the vast kitchens. These I found to be the more entertaining of the two subplots, with their mutual dislike being mutually one-upped to a point almost absurd. Keda is brought in from the small settlement outside of the castle to be Titus' wet nurse. Whilst her sections are more emotionally complex, I found it more set up than payoff- a disadvantage of telling such an interconnected epic across a trilogy.

Titus Groan is unusual in that Peake was both artist and author, and as such the book contains illustrations by him (although this may vary by edition, I read the Penguin Modern Classic publication and that contained 8). Whilst not instrumental they are a fun aside and are very atmospheric. Peake's approach to writing is similar to that of his drawings- every location feels weighty and three dimensional, defined in form and orientation. Peake makes good use of compass directions in defining spaces in relation to each other, which can be useful in visualising the elaborate architecture he describes. Another funner part of Titus Groan is the inclusion of poetry, my favourite poem being 'The Frivolous Cake'. These are (so far as I could tell) totally irrelevant, slightly ridiculous but enjoyable all the same.

My one regret with Titus Groan is that I feel I rushed through the latter half. A slower read would have been more rewarding with a book this dense. Other than that, I really enjoyed Titus Groan and I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone interested in unique settings or a slower pace.

Hopefully I will be back soon, not in the age of the Groans, but in The Age of Reason...



By Aidan Rickard, Year 12

Author's Note: I am more than happy to lend the book to anyone interested, email me at g2rickard@longbenton.org.uk

Ms Doucet's Poem of the Moment

Wulf and Eadwacer

It's as if someone should give a gift to my people—
they will kill him if he comes to the troop.

It is otherwise for us.

Wulf is on an island, I on another.

Fast is that island, surrounded by fen.

The men on the island are murderous and cruel;
they will kill him if he comes to the troop.

It is otherwise for us.

I felt far-wandering hopes for my Wulf,
as I sat weeping in the rainy weather,
when the bold warrior's arms embraced me—
it was sweet to me, yet I also despised it.

Wulf, my Wulf! My wanting you
has made me sick—your seldom coming,
my mourning heart, not lack of meat.

Do you hear, Eadwacer? A wolf bears away
our wretched cub to the woods.

One can easily split what was never united,
the song of the two of us.

10th Century Old English poem by an unknown woman, translated by Roy M Liuzza

Creative Writing Prompt

In 2023, the 'De Winton's Golden Mole' was rediscovered after 87 years of presumed extinction.

Endemic to South Africa, De Winton's Golden Moles are completely blind and possess underdeveloped inner ears, relying almost solely on their sense of touch and the vibrations of prey in the sand to lead them towards food and protect them from predators.

These Golden Moles are critically endangered, owing to diamond mining efforts in their natural habitat. Their tunnels rarely leave any trace on the surface, and their sensitivity to vibrations causes them to freeze whenever they sense something moving on top of the sands. It's for these reasons that they went unseen for so long.

Write a story or poem using as little visual description as possible, rather focusing on the sensory experience---as abstract and non-human as possible.



Prompt by Alma Finnegan, Y13

Student Spotlight with Daisy Jones . . .

Name three things that you're good at.

"Baking chocolate chip cookies, that's like my pride and joy. Building Lego. Making origami fortune tellers really fast."

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

"Hopefully getting my doctorate for medicine and maybe married."

If you won the lottery, what's the first thing you'd do?

"I'd probably buy lots of food. Maybe lots of lego sets - I'd buy the massive F1 McLaren lego cars."

Has anything ever happened to you that you can't explain?

"I've had the same exact dream three times. It's always me in a car, and I'm crashing into a bunch of shops, and it's like deja-vu."

What's your favourite fast food chain?

"Low-key just Subway."

Daisy Jones, interviewing Cara Henry, Y12

Stranger Things: Season 5

A Review with Alma

On the 27th of November, the first 'volume' (four episodes) of Stranger Things Season 5 landed in the UK, and so far, the reception has been overwhelmingly positive. I have to say I have been head-over-heels in love with this show since I first watched it, and this release being so recent, I thought there's no better place to obsess over it than here, where I can't hear you guys groan in response. This comes as a breath of fresh air from the apparent curse of most TV shows' subsequent and final seasons being historically disappointing. It's really looking out to be one of—if not the best season of Stranger Things we've seen! But worry not, this review will not contain any plot spoilers for any season of the show! I've taken care to ensure that those who read this article after finishing the first four episodes of Season 5 will understand what I am referring to, while not insinuating anything for those who are yet to watch it!

Each episode floats atop a compelling pace. There's definitely a sense of a building culmination; no time is wasted with distracting side plots. Rather, in the first episode, the writers open up a unique line of inquiry regarding a character that has gone completely under the radar up to this point: one that I doubt most viewers could have, before this point, named if they tried. Ordinarily, I would not be on board with this kind of move so late into a franchise. I'd imagine that making good use of a character already familiar would do more for my engagement than forcing me to attach to a whole new character. However, the writers of Stranger Things possess a particular ability in getting viewers invested into new characters in minuscule amounts of time. They managed it in Season 4, in getting the audience to resonate with Krissy's story in the first episode alone. In any other show, I would be sceptical, but Stranger Things does it right every single time. And, at the same time they manage this while doing justice to every other well-known and loved character. I'm finding this especially true with Will, Robin and Dustin.

On this note, the fulfilment of characters this season feels intuitive and sensitive, even while some characters have changed owing to the events of the story up to this point. At times it can be heartbreaking, but wonderfully it is always believable. On top of all this, I'm finding the cinematography of this season particularly beautiful. I'm no expert, but it feels like the colour is so much richer, and the thought put into the layout and running of shots feels a lot more artsy than--

--previous seasons, and again I found this especially noticeable late in the fourth episode where one particular scene comes to mind. The whole shot appeared to be on one take, as the camera slowly panned around the action in circles. It felt like the world was closing in, and the tight choreography looked like a nightmare to organise, but its execution was immaculate.



I'm particularly enjoying how they've played with the typical representation of the upside-down, differing from its very conventional gratuitously terrifying classic hellscape. I'm appreciating the kind of 'crouching-tiger' fear that this alternative representation is proving itself to imbue, while remaining true to itself and believable within the context of previous seasons. Likewise, this season cements its overall tone incredibly quickly. It's very clear that the writers are not holding back this time. It's their final season, and they're willing to place everything on the line. In the fourth and final episode of the first volume, this is shown to be particularly true. It's throwing our expectations to the winds in the most jaw-dropping ways. I was floored by the fourth episode, and it seems like this is a sentiment shared by many. Time after time I am sat wondering how on earth a situation is going to play out, only to have my theories obliterated by the most satisfying answer I could've never dreamed of. In all senses, it feels like the quality is of such a higher standard. Whereas I might have previously considered 'Stranger Things' as a more casual watch, the sheer quality of this season has already made me rethink my perspective on the franchise as a whole. I know I'm going crazy over only four episodes, but if they can keep up this momentum going into the next volumes of the Season, I just know I'm going to be unbearable to speak to for weeks.

Not to mention I've already found the humour in this season to be a lot more down-to-earth and genuinely funny than earlier in the show. I think this is greatly assisted by the aforementioned deeper consideration of each individual character and their trajectory from the writers. Everyone seems more fleshed out, and as such, there's a run-off effect where the dialogue, particularly the banter, feels so much more fluid and in-character. There's a real rapport between the characters at this point in the story, which feels satisfying especially as a viewer who has followed the story throughout its five seasons.



When searching for people to obsess over the show with, I've encountered the issue that many people either haven't watched the show at all (to each their own), or, more frustratingly, who got bored half-way through. Now, don't get me wrong, I completely understand, and this is where my frustration comes from. Particularly, I've found that people lose interest in Season 1 and 2, both of which I can't really stand either. At the same time, lots of these people have expressed that they are enticed by how people have described the promising beginning of Season 5. To those who may be struggling with this dilemma themselves, I think I can be honest and safely advise that those not so interested can skip the first two seasons of Stranger Things without missing all too much in the remaining three. However, Season 3 is suuuper good, and Season 4 was my favourite before S5's first volume dropped. I seriously can't remember a single thing that happened in S2, and so long as you understand the basic premise of S1 that sets up the whole show, particularly the characters of Will and Eleven, you'll be pretty sorted for continuing from S3. Obviously there'll still be aspects of the show that you miss, so if you can be bothered, starting from the beginning will always be best. However, I do think that without watching at least Season 4 beforehand, you will be pretty lost starting out with Season 5.



Thank you very much for hearing my out yet again on another huge waffle-sesh. I hope that if you've found yourself hesitant in the past to try out this show, that you might give it a second chance! And here's to hoping that the rest of Season 5 lives up to my--admittedly lofty--standards...



On another note, keep your eyes peeled for this year's 'Waffle Advent Calendar'! It's on theme for an exciting new series of articles I'm starting next year... Hope you'll stick around to hear me yap!

by Alma Finnegan, Y13

Alesia's Deep Dives . . .

Simone Adolphine Weil

Simone Adolphine Weil, born on the 3rd of February 1909, was a French philosopher and political activist. She is most well-known for her contributions to spirituality and politics.

Planning for this issue, I had noticed a reoccurring pattern. All of the previous philosophers I had written about were straight, white men, who all had the privilege that they had never been told to "stay quiet" because of their gender, or their background. And though sure, they were great minds, what really are the odds of the world's greatest philosophers all coming from the same background?

This also reminded me of a graph I had stumbled upon recently, in which the company, GoodReads, published information on each book genre and the gender distribution of each of them. To me, the amount of men that completely dominated the philosophy section did not surprise me, but made me think about what society expects of us, and how the patriarchy negatively affects everyone, even men. This led me to do some research, and I found Simone Weil. She perfectly encapsulates what can only be described as the indomitable human spirit. I briefly read about her, and was instantly captured. Her perseverance must have inspired tens of thousands of women to fight for the cause they believe in, and is one of the reasons why I can express my own views today. Whilst writing this, I could only imagine the amount of women who had the same views, the same ambition as Weil, but were forced to occupy traditional female roles, or were so unlucky they were never given the opportunity to have these thoughts in the first place.

At only six months old, Weil suffered a life-threatening appendicitis, and she struggled with poor health for the rest of her life. Her parents were very comfortable financially and she was raised in a supportive, caring household. Her brother, André Weil, was a renowned mathematician, and they had a very close relationship.

She was deeply upset by the news of her father having to leave to serve in the First World War, and many people believe that this is what caused her to be so considerate of others. As a child, she sent packets of sugar and chocolate to other soldiers serving in the war. At only 10-years-old, Simone began actively protesting for workers' rights, marching on the roads next to her apartment. She had encouraged workers of a resort she was staying at to unionize upon hearing the wages they were earning, too.

Weil was obsessed with cleanliness, she had always been under the impression that if she was not meticulous, others would view her as 'disgusting' even though she was considered as being very beautiful and conventionally attractive. However, this did not stop her from avoiding all forms of physical contact growing up. Her mother recollected Weil always having a preference for 'boyish' activities and traits, and that she believed that she had to set aside any of her female traits to pursue her love for improving those who are socially disadvantaged. She was referred to as "our son number two" because she would often wear boyish clothing and little to no makeup. She also signed her name as "Simon" to avoid others undermining her due to her femininity.

By the age of 12, she had become fluent in Ancient Greek, alongside her brother, mostly for the purpose of being able to speak with one another without their parents understanding. She had also taught herself Sanskrit to read the Bhagavad Gita in its original language. During her studies at the Lycee Henri IV, she had grown a reputation for her radical political beliefs and protests against the military draft. However, officials at her school were extremely opposed to her refusal to wear feminine clothing, and she was later suspended for breaking a rule banning women from smoking alongside male colleagues.

In 1936, Simone began to focus on the Spanish Civil War. She was an anarchist and asked anti-fascist commander Julián Gorkin to be sent on a mission to rescue the prisoner Joaquín Maurín. However, Gorkin refused to let her go with the defence that it was a suicide mission, and would cause more harm than good. This sparked rage in Simone, arguing she has "every right" to sacrifice herself for her beliefs, and though she was never able to convince him, she joined the anarchist Durruti Column, which specialized in high-risk missions. Unfortunately, Weil was incredibly nearsighted, making her unable to shoot properly, and her comrades often tried to abstain from letting her go on missions, even if at times she insisted. Instead, she was in charge of shooting a rifle at a bomber during air raids, as it was a better fit for someone with poor sight. However, she was forced to leave, and only a few weeks later, her former unit would go on a mission in Perdiguera leaving every woman on the mission having been killed. This even further inspired Simone to continue to write about peace and labour.

After the rise of Nazi Germany, Weil said that “non-violence is only good if it is effective” and with that, she had committed her life to fighting the Nazi regime, no matter how much violence was used. She fled to Marseille and joined a resistance group, which, unbeknownst to her, was infiltrated with informants. This led to her being questioned by the Police, whom she swiftly escaped by simply not giving any information.

In 1937, she prayed for the first time in her life, at the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Her friends describe her visit as having changed her views on religion, marking a turning point in her spiritual life. Whilst reciting George Herbert's poem Love III, the line “Christ himself came down and took possession of me” had sparked what she would refer to as a revelation, and felt deeply connected to Christianity - Catholicism in specific. Though she was deeply religious, she refused to be baptized and would criticise the Church, stating “I have not the slightest love for the Church in the strictest sense of the word”. She would often argue against the strict rules on society's expectations of women and frankly, humans as a whole.

Simone Weil moved to the United States with her family in 1942 for their safety, and she knew they would refuse to leave unless she came with them, too. During this period, Simone's ambition for writing skyrocketed, some of her most notable works included:

- The Need for Roots
- What is Sacred in Every Human Being?
- Are We Fighting for Justice?

These works contained her listing her concerns surrounding a New France, rebuilt with the same mistakes as the French Revolution of 1789. Instead, she advocated a country built on obligations and needs. And instead of patriotism being solely based on borders, she suggested it be based on compassion, instead. She was incredibly insistent on these beliefs and refused to back down, though this was incredibly difficult in a time when women would still be ridiculed for having their own, personal beliefs.

Her rigorous work routine made her physical health deteriorate at an alarming rate. One day, she was found slumped over on the floor of her apartment, leading her to be diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1943. She continued to work as she used to, ignoring her doctor's orders to rest and eat well. She instead limited her intake to what she believed the residents of France would have eaten at that time, during Germany's occupation.

Eventually, she was moved to a sanatorium and after a lifelong battle of medical issues, passed away from cardiac arrest at the age of 34. On her coroner's report, it was listed that “the deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat whilst the balance of her mind was disturbed”. Many academics argue over the nature of her death to this day, some blaming it on her political actions done to herself, and others claiming it was simply because she had always had a compromised immune system, though the reason for this is something we will never truly know. My personal favorite reasoning as to why she died was written by English biographer Richard Rees, opining: “As for her death, whatever explanation one may give of it will amount in the end to saying that she died of love.”

As for the more philosophical side of Simone's beliefs, she was deeply involved in Metaphysics and Cosmology. She believed that God is a perfect being, and therefore our existence is only true, alongside a higher being. She also believed that humans had something inherently “unholy” to them, as anything below God is a creature in a damned position. According to Weil, Evil is not present because God could not create a ‘perfect’ world, but because the act of creation itself, by nature, implies that perfection is impossible.

Her beliefs on Beauty were that it was not just a simple aesthetic category, but instead a more spiritual, and moral concept that could be applied to anything. In her writing ‘In Gravity and Grace’ she wrote: “The love of the beauty of the world is the only pure love. It is the love that enables us to look at things without trying to appropriate them.” She believed that beauty should not consume us, but help us see beauty through better eyes. For Weil, “the beautiful is the experiential proof that the incarnation is possible,” and that beauty is inherent.

Quotes:

“All sins are attempts to fill voids”
“Everything beautiful has a mark of eternity”

Question:

Can society ever truly be perfected?

By Alesia Macovei, Year 12

Game Review: Metal Gear Solid

by Max Eagan, Y12

"A strong man doesn't need to read the future, he makes his own."

~ Solid Snake

When I first played Metal Gear Solid, I hated it. I hated it so much that I went out of my way to refund the Master Collection Vol.I (which took ages I might add) and watched a YouTube video about the plot of the first 2 games. I regret that so much as I have since given it another chance and fell in love with it. The story was ruined and the twists didn't carry the same magnitude as they would have. My point is, if after reading this article you want to try this for yourself, stick with it and it'll grow on you. It just takes a bit of time.

Metal Gear Solid released in 1998 (same year as Half-Life 🤖) for the Playstation 1 where it was immediately critically acclaimed, being cited as one of the best video games ever. It was actually the third game in the series, the prior two being much older and being completely different depending on region. However, these games are not required as the events that take place in them are woven throughout the game's story. I haven't even played them yet, and I played Portable Ops. The franchise was the brainchild of one Hideo Kojima, a man who trained to be a film director but pivoted to video games because he liked the Famicom. His passion for film is very evident in his works, leading him to be cited as one of the first video game auteurs.

Metal Gear Solid's gameplay pretty much invented stealth, building on the foundations of the older games but with updated AI and much better graphics. The game explores some existential themes such as: Is fate pre-determined, What is identity, and is war bad? The game features a wacky slew of crazy characters, each with their own silly quirks and devious mannerisms. The game can effortlessly switch between goofy shenanigans and dead-serious, treading the line between comedic satire and drama. Many of the bosses offer creative solutions, really forcing you to think outside of the box which brings me to something special. This game features one of the best fourth-wall breaks I'd ever seen. There are multiple instances where characters will talk to the player themselves as if they were Solid Snake (The main character) or refer to real world concepts. In certain cutscenes, real-life recordings are used of things such as Manhattan project tests and general lab footage which brings a sort of chilling feeling; the juxtaposition between the admittedly crap graphics and low-res footage, bolstered by the fact it only happens in the most intense moments and the ending.

Spoiler warning after this sentence for the bosses and general story because I think it's best to go into the game with no knowledge of the story or characters so skip this paragraph if you are even considering playing this game. The game (and series as a whole) offers a well-rounded, diverse team of villains that will be defeated over the--



Solid Snake



Liquid Snake



Revolver Ocelot



Psycho Mantis



Sniper Wolf



Colonel Campbell

--course of the game. The team in this game are FOX-HOUND, Snake's old unit, consisting of: Decoy Octopus - a master of disguise who isn't even fought as a boss, Revolver Ocelot - an ex-KGB soldier who is extremely important to the over-arching story but only hints of it are seen in this game, Psycho Mantis - a psychic (yes, really) who can anticipate Snake's every move, can move the real-life controller with his mind and read the player's actual save file (only certain games and only on Ps1 and Gamecube), the way to defeat him being to plug the controller into the player 2 slot (I wasn't joking with the fourth-wall breaks). Also, there is Sniper Wolf - a Kurdish sniper whose boss is a very slow sniper battle, a welcome change of pace from the previous bosses who impacts a lot of yet to be introduced teammates and Vulcan Raven, a huge Inuit man who carries an F-116 fighter jet's Vulcan gun on his back and is ironically, the only stealth boss in the whole game. Finally, their leader, Liquid Snake - a man with an English accent who claims to be Snake's brother and initiated the coup alongside Ocelot. Also, the title isn't just something that sounds cool, there is a machine called a Metal Gear but I'll let the game handle that can of worms.

Snake's mission: infiltrate Shadow Moses Island (a small island off the coast of Alaska), defeat the terrorists, rescue the DARPA chief and ArmsTech president, find out whether the terrorists can actually launch a nuclear strike and stop them by any means necessary. The terrorists' demands? One billion dollars and the remains of Snake's old mentor, legendary hero, and founder of FOXHOUND itself: Big Boss, who is so important to the franchise but, like Ocelot, there's not much in this particular game. The stakes? A nuclear strike. The team? Colonel Roy Campbell - your old commander, Dr Naomi Hunter, the medical advisor, Mei Ling - the technology advisor, Master McDonell Miller - survival expert and Nastasha Romanenko - nuclear weapon engineer as well any allies made in the base itself.

I'm really trying the hard sell here, the plot is so well-written and impactful, you just have to see for yourself. The story twists and turns so much, it just has to be seen for yourself. Nobody can tell it better than the game itself. If you enjoyed the game then there is a huge franchise with equally, if not better, stories that take the characters and world to the absolute extreme. Seriously, there is no other game in the world like it despite its generic initial premise.

Writers note: At the time of publishing, the Game Awards will be in 2 days. Half-Life 3 will be announced. Look forward to it, my dear readers.



Entrance to Shadow Moses. (Btw this art is really cool, there's a picture for every character from almost every game)

By Max Eagan, Y12

Avneesh's Aviation

by Avneesh Mohapatra, Y12

Planes, Plans and Problems: Boeing

Boeing has always been impossible not to admire. The company is audacious, always pushing the boundaries of what humans can achieve in the air. From the fragile mail planes of the 1920s to the cultural phenomenon of the 747 and the highly efficient 787 Dreamliner, Boeing has consistently redefined the limits of aviation. Yet today, the company is struggling. Production delays, safety scandals, and intense competition from Airbus have shaken what once seemed unshakable. Watching Boeing stumble is frustrating, even heartbreaking, but it is also magnetic. It is like watching a giant attempt to regain its balance, faltering under its own weight but refusing to collapse entirely. It is messy, it is human, and it is fascinating.

The story of Boeing begins with vision and ingenuity. Founded in 1916 by William Boeing, the company did not treat airplanes as luxury toys or novelties. For Boeing, flight was a tool that could transform society. Early aircraft such as the Model 40 and the Boeing 247 were remarkable because they combined ideas that were revolutionary at the time. They had all-metal construction, retractable landing gear, and twin engines. Each of these innovations was a statement about what aviation could be. In a time when flight was fragile, experimental, and often unpredictable, Boeing offered reliability. Flying on a Boeing plane was more than just a means of transport; it was a tangible glimpse of the future, a demonstration that human ambition could conquer the sky.



Boeing's first commercial passenger plane!!!

(The Boeing 247 first flew on February 8, 1933.)

The post-World War Two era cemented Boeing's place in history. The 707 introduced jet engines, pressurized cabins, and swept wings, enabling faster, more comfortable intercontinental travel. The 747, known as the Queen of the Skies, was the pinnacle of ambition. Its high-bypass turbofan engines could generate incredible thrust while remaining efficient enough to carry hundreds of passengers across oceans. Every takeoff involved thousands of calculations, precise coordination, and engineering mastery. The 747 did not merely transport people; it transported culture, ideas, and aspirations.

Boeing's real genius has always been in the integration of systems. Engines, wings, fuselage, avionics, and controls are not separate components; they function as one highly tuned machine. Take the 787 Dreamliner for example. Its wings flex mid-flight to reduce stress and improve aerodynamic efficiency. Its composite fuselage is lighter and stronger than traditional aluminum. Its engines provide unprecedented fuel efficiency while producing enormous thrust. To passengers, the flight feels effortless, almost magical. Under the surface, every part is the result of thousands of engineers solving thousands of simultaneous equations, performing simulations, testing materials, and designing systems that interact perfectly in the air.



Despite this brilliance, Boeing is not infallible. The 737 MAX revealed the consequences of mixing engineering compromises with corporate pressure. Boeing was competing with Airbus's A320neo, a plane that was more fuel-efficient than the older 737. Boeing's solution was to fit larger engines onto the same airframe. This changed the aerodynamics, causing the plane to pitch its nose upward in certain conditions, which could lead to a stall. The engineers designed MCAS, software that would automatically push the nose down to stabilize the plane if it detected a stall. On paper, it was elegant, but in practice, it relied on a single angle-of-attack sensor. If the sensor failed, MCAS could activate incorrectly, repeatedly pushing the nose down even if the pilots tried to counter it.

Corporate pressures made the situation worse. Boeing needed the MAX to compete with Airbus quickly, and management emphasized speed and cost-cutting over careful testing. MCAS was marketed as a minor software change that would not require pilots to undergo extensive retraining. This combination of technical compromise and organizational pressure led to disaster. Two crashes occurred, hundreds of lives were lost, and Boeing's reputation was shaken. The MAX crisis is a stark example of how even the most advanced engineering can fail when human factors and corporate culture are ignored.



Production issues have plagued Boeing beyond the MAX. The 787 Dreamliner, despite being a technical marvel, faced repeated delays due to its global supply chain. Components were manufactured around the world and assembled in Everett, Washington. Parts did not always meet quality standards, shipments were delayed, and assembly slowed down. The 777X has faced similar delays, highlighting that modern aircraft are not just feats of engineering but also feats of logistics, organization, and corporate coordination. Brilliant engineering alone cannot guarantee success if the systems surrounding it are mismanaged.

Boeing's culture has shifted over the decades. Once an engineering-first company, it has gradually become more finance-focused. Cost-cutting and deadlines have sometimes competed with technical priorities. Engineers have reported that their warnings were overlooked in the rush to deliver aircraft on schedule. Meanwhile, Airbus has taken a slower, steadier approach, emphasizing consistent delivery, diversified suppliers, and incremental innovation. Boeing's technical genius remains unmatched, but without the proper organizational structure and culture, even the most brilliant designs can be undermined.



Despite these challenges, there is reason for hope. Boeing's engineers are still among the best in the world, and the company has shown that it can produce revolutionary aircraft. The 787 Dreamliner demonstrates what is possible when technical skill, careful design, and execution align. If Boeing can return to an engineering-first mindset, regain control of its supply chains, and allow sufficient time for testing and iteration, it can recover and continue to innovate. The brilliance is still there; it is just a question of whether the company can support it effectively.

Boeing is fascinating because it embodies both the triumphs and fragility of human ambition. Its airplanes are technological marvels, but its history also illustrates that innovation is vulnerable to human error, corporate pressure, and organizational misalignment. Watching Boeing stumble while still producing machines that defy imagination is both frustrating and awe-inspiring. Its story is messy, human, and compelling all at once.

Ultimately, Boeing is more than a company. It is a story about ambition, ingenuity, and the delicate balance between human skill and human error. Every time a Dreamliner lifts off the runway, it is proof of what is possible when physics, engineering, and imagination are combined with determination. The MAX crisis and production struggles serve as sobering reminders that even genius is not immune to organizational flaws. Sitting on one of Boeing's planes at 35,000 feet, most passengers will never consider the thousands of calculations, material tests, and simulations that make that flight possible. Boeing's journey reminds us that the sky is not a limit; it is a canvas for human ingenuity. Even in crisis, the brilliance inside Boeing's factories, wind tunnels, and design labs remains alive, ready for the next chapter in the story of one of the greatest engineering companies the world has ever known.



Elliott's Creature Feature

The Rhedosaurus

In the early 50s, not long after the end of World War Two, a film was made about a colossal lizard awakened by a nuclear bomb terrorising a city, brought down only by the combined efforts of a few daring scientists. This film was not the 1954 masterpiece *Gojira*. No, the film I'm talking about predates *Gojira*'s existence by a whole year and in fact came from America. This film is *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, a masterpiece of early special effects that is largely lost in the shadow of its more artistically valuable Japanese relative. As I alluded to at the end of my previous article I very much intend to cover *Godzilla* over the course of a few issues but I thought it important to give some attention to this underappreciated monster before I get wrapped up in talking about *Godzilla*.

Although they bear many superficial similarities, the two monsters are rather different in a few important ways. Namely, the titular Beast (from *20,000 Fathoms*) was a creation of stop motion aficionado Ray Harryhausen, a master of his craft who made countless films instant classics with his stunning creatures. *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* was only the second feature film that Harryhausen had ever worked on but already his staggering genius was on full display. The beast, named the Rhedosaurus, is a loose adaptation of an unnamed creature from a short story by the name of *The Fog Horn*. The original short story however doesn't particularly focus on describing the creature in any great detail; there is some metaphorical description of its eyes and it is mentioned to have both a long neck and a tail but other than that it's left mostly up to the interpretation of the reader. Or rather, for the film, it was left up to the interpretation of the special effects team who went through a few iterations of the design before settling on their final idea. The Rhedosaurus was at one point intended to more closely resemble a Ceratopsian dinosaur, with a beak, spikes coming out of its jaw and a plate protruding from the back of its head. However, the designers would eventually settle on a design that looks more like a cross between a *Tyrannosaurus* and a *Crocodillian*, walking on all fours with a long tail but an upright neck. Additionally, the early concept of the Rhedosaurus being able to spit fire would later go on to inspire *Godzilla*'s atomic breath, an iconic staple of the franchise.

Many people are none too pleased with the appearance of the Rhedosaurus because of its baffling scientific inaccuracy. No predatory creature as large as the Rhedosaurus has ever walked the Earth and no creature with its body shape has ever come close. The beast was originally intended to be an *Allosaurus*, despite these dinosaurs not remotely matching the description of a long necked aquatic creature, before the decision was made to create a wholly original creature. Frankly I don't think that realistic dinosaur design is something that could be expected of a giant monster movie from the 50s, although I am glad that they invented a new monster rather than giving us a poor depiction of an *Allosaurus*.



(Spoilers going forward)

The reason for the film's beast being so different from the sad and existentially lonely dinosaur from the original story, written by Ray Bradbury, is because the film wasn't originally meant to be an adaptation; it started out as an original idea but, upon noticing similarities to the story, the studio bought the rights from Bradbury and it retroactively became an adaptation. Really only one scene, in which the Rhedosaurus attacks a lighthouse, bears any resemblance to the original short story; the rest of the film's plot is completely new. The film's Rhedosaurus, rather than surviving through unknown means in the deep sea, is in suspended animation, cryogenically frozen in the far north. The beast is then awakened by nuclear bomb testing, performed by our main characters, and leaves the arctic. After going on a brief rampage as it travels towards America, the Rhedosaurus finds itself in New York City, where the destruction is brought up to the next level: killing hundreds and injuring thousands with the military helpless to stop its destruction. It takes a bazooka being blasted into its neck to wound it, which prompts the beast to flee into the ocean as it bleeds across

the streets. It resurfaces in Coney Island where the main character joins a military sniper in ascending a roller coaster in order to fire a radioactive isotope into the Rhedosaurus' neck, which finally kills the beast.

Although the *Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* itself was inspired by the success of the 1952 re-release of the 1933 *King Kong* film, the Rhedosaurus would go on to inspire countless films; so much so that it could be considered the foundation that almost all giant monster movies going forward would take inspiration from. Almost every film featuring a giant monster released after this was either inspired by it or inspired by something that was inspired by it. The success and iconicness of the film would go on to inspire *Gorgo*, *Gamera*, *20 Million Miles to Earth*, *The Giant Behemoth* and of course *Godzilla*. Reflecting the enormous quantity of monsters the Rhedosaurus inspired, it has been referenced many times throughout various media. The beast has appeared in *Batman* comics, along with various other comic books, it appears in the 1977 film *Planet of Dinosaurs*, *Gremlins 2*, *Cloverfield* and *Godzilla Singular Point*, the 2021 anime. Additionally, Harryhausen would reuse the model of the Rhedosaurus to depict the dragon in *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, albeit with some additional design elements to make it more dragon-like. Despite having cameo appearances in many movies, shows and comic books, some of which were partly or entirely inspired by the Rhedosaurus, there has never been any form of sequel or remake for the original 1953 film, meaning that the beast has only been the star of one feature film, which is especially surprising considering Hollywood's love for milking franchises for all their worth and the colossal success of *Godzilla*.

While the Rhedosaurus may be notable mostly for what it inspired, it is still a brilliant creature in its own right that deserves a spotlight of its own. The *Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* birthed a genre home to countless icons of horror. Including the subject of my next article...

By Elliott Savage, Year 12



Falsettos Review

Falsettos by William Finn and James Lapine is by far my favorite musical; this absolutely gut wrenching musical is deeply important to me. The musical is from a set fans call the 'Marvin trilogy' since Marvin is the main character in all three versions, my favourite being the 2016 revival including famous actors like Christian Borle, Andrew Rannells, and Stephanie J Block. Every time I want to laugh I put it on; every time I want to cry I put it on. It perfectly balances comedy with heart crushing storylines. The trilogy's first addition was 'In Trousers' which I think is the most underrated musical known to man. The musical handles multiple different issues including the AIDS epidemic, relationship challenges, and mental health.

The set is so simple and yet perfect: they use these grey blocks and move them around to make whatever set they need, in Act 2 they don't follow this format though since they add things like the hospital bed which shows the disorder now in their life. This musical is, in my opinion, the best musical ever made, it explores so many themes and has loads of hidden meanings to it which makes it enjoyable to research about later (for those who like to find out everything about something you've watched). Hard to believe it but I actually had a phase of pretending to hate musicals and something about Falsettos turned me around completely.

Now let's answer the big question: yes it is superior to Rent in every possible way.

Marvin and Whizzer are both written with amazing complexity. I often have issues with characters with zero flaws as they are completely unnatural and overall clunky. All the characters also have this complexity which means nobody is the main 'hero' or 'villain' of the story. The ending then is about ten times more agonising since you can appreciate all the characters.

By the way: another play including well written gay characters I recommend would be The Boys in the Band which in the revival also includes Andrew Rannells (it's also where Andrew met his husband) and Jim Parsons (yes the guy who plays Sheldon in Big Bang Theory). It is actually the first play in which gay characters were written with that much depth, they obviously received an unlawful amount of backlash for this at the time but has now been turned into a beloved play.

Circling back to Falsettos, the playbills for it included artwork from Keith Haring adapted to include a child to represent Jason. The musical gives the message of sticking close to those you love, standing up for what you believe in, and coming to terms with growing old. It may not be everyone's cup of tea but I love it.



By Kitty Frain, Year 12

The Melomaniac: Music Recs

The Last Dinner Party

To be completely honest, I wasn't all that interested in The Last Dinner Party when I first discovered them. I thought their instrumentals were too thin — something I've become very particular about since discovering the world of experimental music — and their overall sound didn't stand out to me very much. However, something kept drawing me back to them, much like coffee or popcorn, and they've now become one of my biggest obsessions. I realise now that their "thin" productions are one of the things that make their songs so charming: a deliberate lightness that lets their melody breathe and every lyric cut deeper.

The Last Dinner Party has been taking the British indie scene by force ever since 2023. The band consists of Abigail Morris (vocals), Lizzie Mayland (vocals, guitar), Emily Roberts (lead guitar, mandolin, flute), Georgia Davies (bass) and Aurora Nishevci (keyboard, vocals). You may know them from their hit singles 'Nothing Matters' and 'Sinner' (the former of which was used in the EA Sports FC 24 soundtrack), though I dare say the rest of their discography is even more wonderful. Their sound is best labelled as this baroque art-rock, with orchestral, jazz and pure pop elements sprinkled in — I once heard TLDP be described as "Kate Bush fronting Queen while Freddie Mercury backs on piano," and I wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment. Genuinely, the entire group feels like a bunch of theatre kids who were left unattended in the studio and ran wild with whatever theatrical fantasies they could come up with.

Their debut album 'Prelude to Ecstasy' (2024) received wide acclaim from critics and hit number one on the UK albums chart. It's a burning LP, filled with desire, femininity, an obsession for power, and self-destruction. It's hard to find a band that immediately establishes their musical style so strongly like this, especially one that releases such a legendary debut, but The Last Dinner Party have yet to fail to impress. Songs like 'Caesar on a TV Screen' and 'My Lady of Mercy' are fan favourites: the latter being a gothic lament to queer love in a strict, religious upbringing, and the former, an imperial strut of power through the lens of masculine fragility and a desire for recognition — both are absolute bangers. Every track on the album has become precious to me in some way, from their poignant instrumentals to relatable themes and lyrics, and each has a sound different enough that they all contribute something unique to the project. I won't go through every track on the album but trust me when I say that the four I've mentioned are just the tip of the iceberg; there are some real gems in there.

As said before, I've heard TLDP's sound be likened to names like Kate Bush, ABBA, Siouxsie and the Banshees, David Bowie, Florence and the Machine, Queen, and so on. You can probably get the gist from just this list alone. The group manages to blend rock and baroque music so seamlessly together — it's a wonder to hear. 'My Lady of Mercy', for example, is a bubble of sonic force: surging quasi-choral arrangements and soul-striking guitar lines



From left to right: Aurora, Lizzie, Abigail, Georgia, Emily



are what make this one of those tracks that worms its way into your head, and has been compared to the likes of Roxy Music. 'The Feminine Urge' is their most theatrical tape yet: blending harpsichord, guitar, string quartets, piano, drums, and so on; and delivering playful yet sarcastic lyrics on the shared traumas of womanhood. As you can probably tell by their name, the band deploys a host of religious themes and allusions — something that I feel is reflected very well in their artful, chamber-like rock sound.

Another thing I love about TLDP is their willingness to deviate from standard lyrical structures. While the majority of their tracks do follow the orthodox song structure, we do get the occasional gem where they go all



out, and it's a wondrous treat. Take 'Beautiful Boy' for example — a track lamenting the jealousy a woman feels towards the privileges and power granted to (good-looking) men. This track begins with two slow quatrain verses, describing the envy of the narrator, before simply swelling for the rest of the song into a gorgeous amalgamation of dreamy guitars and vocal harmonies, while Abigail repeats just one line: "I wish I could be a beautiful boy."

Continuing with the trend of greatness, the band have just released their sophomore album 'From the Pyre' a couple months ago, and it's been listed as one of the top albums of 2025. Of all the records this year, I have to say, this is the one I've had most fun with. The band's sound has noticeably matured with this project, with thicker textures and an overall earthier tone; departing from the maximalist, glamorous, Renaissance aesthetic of their first LP to explore a more mystical, mediaeval, witchy look — and they absolutely pull off both. The album touches on themes of womanhood, fame and rebirth, as well as good old angsty heartbreak, bringing us heavenly tracks like 'Second Best' (I cannot overstate how amazing this one is), 'Rifle' (one of my favourites) and 'Woman is a Tree' (hypnotising). There's this one track, 'The Scythe', near the end of the album that delivers these heart-rending lyrics regarding death and acceptance, while using a surprisingly restrained, wistful instrumental that has yet to fail to make me cry.

TLDP's songs usually deal with femininity, power and love, as you can probably tell, and these new tracks are no exception. This sophomore album has introduced a darker sound to explore these themes, and the evolution of their lyricism since their first record is prominent. 'Rifle', for example, is a haunting ballad about the violence and unfairness of war from a mother's perspective, even containing a bridge in French which delivers some of the band's most chilling lyrics. 'Woman is a Tree' is a GORGEOUS hymn exploring themes of feminine strength over atonal, dissonant vocal harmonies in a horror-folk, ritualistic, cultish chant. Of course, this album is one of my new favourites, so I must recommend you listen to its entirety — each track is one which you could easily obsess over for months — these two are just a couple of the many that stood out to me.

The Last Dinner Party is bringing something new to the indie scene that none of us knew we needed. Their sound is quite refreshing within the Britpop genre — a scene I know can feel quite stale and stunted to many people. With their aesthetics, sound, lyrics, themes, and overall general vibe, it's no wonder the group have shot to fame so quickly. I loved them a tad bit late, but I'm in deep now — and I suspect I'm far from alone.

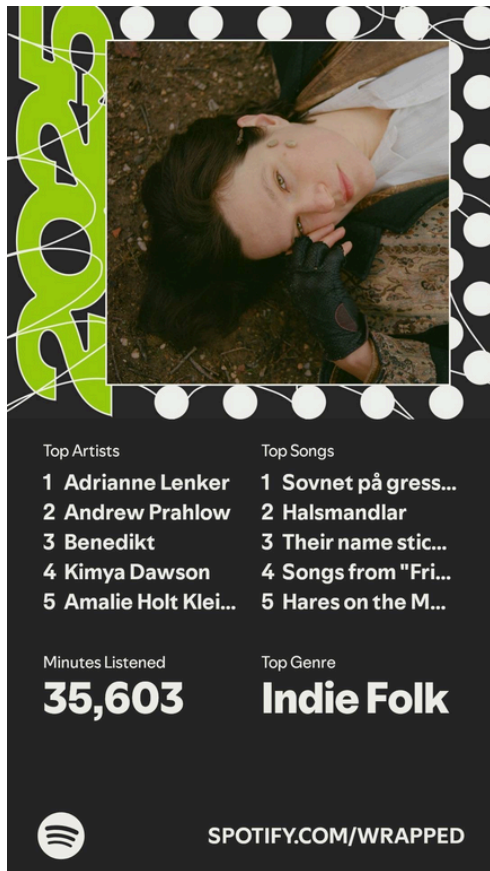
Top tracks:

'Second Best', 'The Feminine Urge', 'My Lady of Mercy'

By Keira Nightingale, Year 12

PERFORM

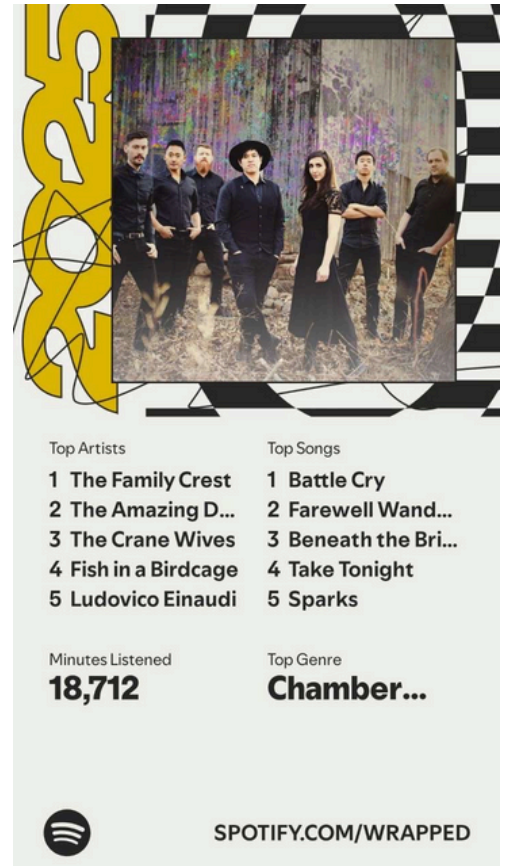
Music Stats Feature



Alma F, Y13



Keira N, Year 12



Sophia D, Y13

What we're listening to:

Keira N



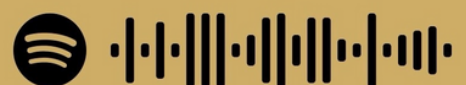
Girls on the Internet by Elita

Alesia M



(Don't fear) The reaper by Blue Öyster cult

Alma F



Philautia by samIrc