

Longbenton High School

The Waffle

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Issue 5



Dreams and Drama



In This Issue . . .

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- Alma dreams big dreams.
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Art by Matthew Ward, Year 11

‘Every Unwaking Moment’

A Reflection on Dreams by Alma Finnegan

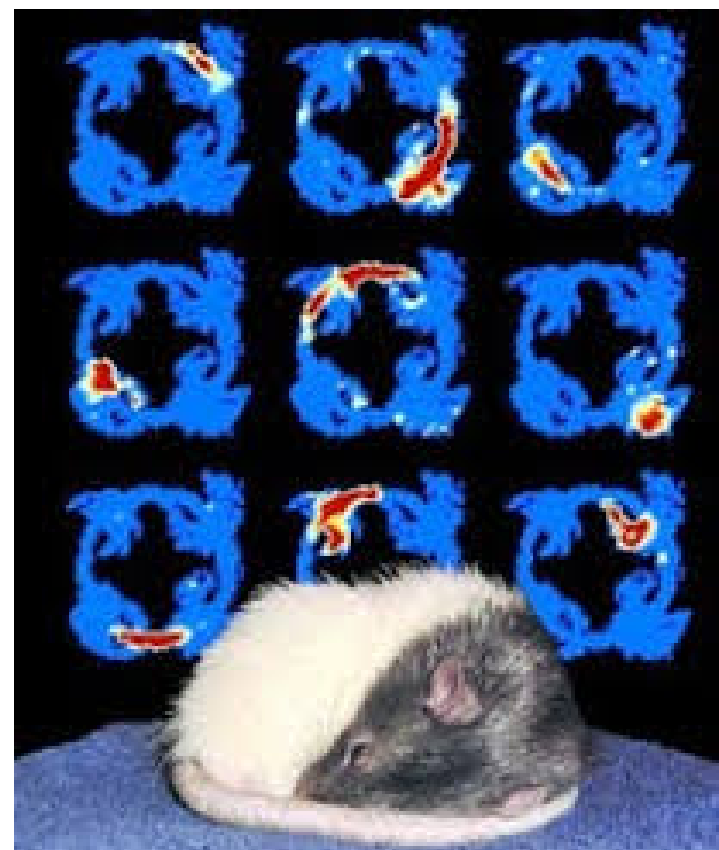
Since October 2021, I've had a formalised dream log. Nearly every day over the years since, I've noted down every dream I could remember first thing in the morning. Now, I wasn't always a huge dreamer, though I have always dreamed. I used to have maybe 3 dreams a week that I could remember. That might sound like a lot, but since logging my dreams, I now remember on average 3-5 dreams every single night—you'd think it would get tiring! Most people I meet reckon that they don't dream all that much, but science tells us that in reality, nearly everybody on earth dreams every single night—the challenge is remembering them.

We're affected so much in our day-to-day lives by our subconscious. It's almost like there exists a second person hidden locked away in our minds, that a lot of the time, causes us to act in ways that even we don't understand or pick up on. But in our sleep, that person lays it all out, but can speak only in metaphor. The way I imagine it, which I can't promise is scientific at all but oblige me, my subconscious is trapped in a pitch black bone box. It's the same brain that evolved millions of years ago, the same structure and wiring that the very first humans had. In this darkness, it experiences only sensations, whether those are of joy, fear, sadness, on a base, raw level. And it processes these sensations through the only information it's given, through fallible senses and an outside world that has vastly changed since the subconscious was evolved into the world—I mean, isn't it crazy to think about how we can dream of space, of computers, things the first humans could never have imagined? I see the subconscious in dreams as some primordial beast wrestling with modernity, to reduce them down to the raw sensations, emotions, the terms it can understand. Understanding reality from its impression, its effects, rather than logically as we can while conscious. So it works in metaphors that evoke those feelings to process the signals that it receives in its black box. Trying to understand the source, processing, preparing, understanding where it might be experienced again. Whether or not we pay any attention, our brains are processing our experiences as we dream. But there's a door open there, and each night we're invited to watch it happen. How many bodily functions can you backseat like that?

I mean, when you think about it, even if you don't remember it, you have experienced forgotten dreams in the present. You've experienced it from the first person, but in the morning you're left only with the afterimage of that experience affecting the way that you interact with the world, as is the function of dreams--

--evolutionarily—to process the past in order to be better prepared for the future. The way you interact daily is partly coloured by how you've processed your past in your dreams, but to those who can't recall their dreams, it's not so easy to be clued into what is affected, and why. The way I see it, making an effort to recall your dreams (and in doing so, actively participating within them more often) is an incredibly potent way to understand yourself better.

I don't really buy the idea that anyone but yourself can interpret dreams, especially not in regards to 'symbols'. It matters far more what the feeling evoked in the dream is, and the chances are it's the same feeling that is tugging at you in your everyday life. Because that's what dreams are, really. An MIT study in 2001 placed rats in a maze and monitored their brain activity as they navigated it. Then, when the rats next went to sleep, they monitored their brain activity too. They found that 'brief segments of awake sequential experience were replayed in the hippocampus at high speed during slow-wave sleep following awake behavior, revealing the early processing of sequential event memory during this sleep period', in short, indicating the rats returned to the maze in their dreams to process the memory.



I can't help but be obsessed with the utility of dreams that is, quite literally, slept on. I think I speak for a lot of us when I say that everyday life is, in and of itself, hard to process. And when every waking moment is spent barrelling from one task to another, why don't we make good use of those unawaking moments? Surely the person that remembers their dreams ends up living more of their life than someone who forgets them, right? I mean, if you can't remember it, were you living that moment? Does it count to your total of lived moments? Is forgetting your dreams wasting your life??? I'll stop talking before we both spiral...

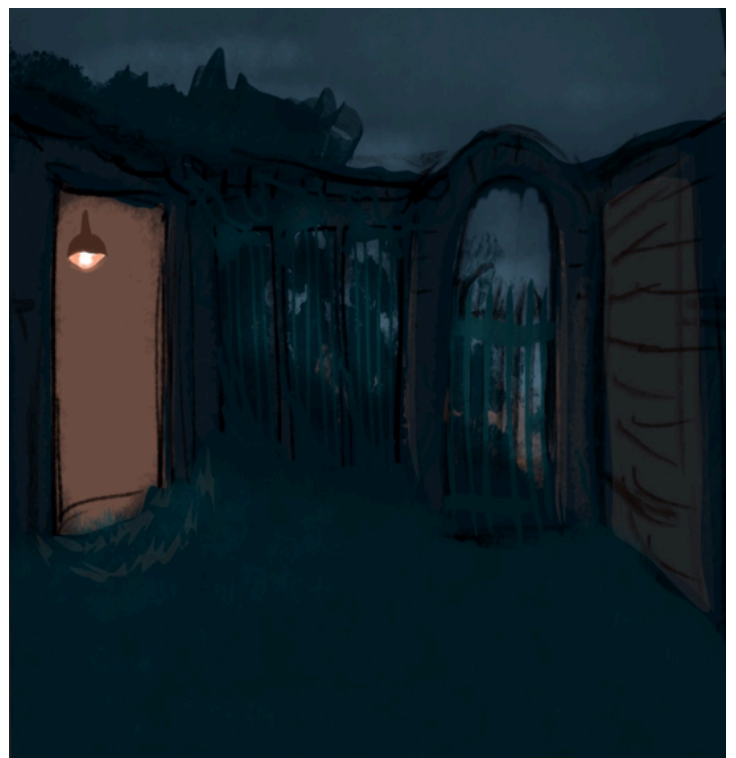
Every once in a while, I have lucid dreams. Definitely more so since I started the dreamlog. And lucid dreams have enormously changed my perspective on the world. I mean, these dreams are spot-on, perfect replications of real life. The 'graphics'? In one dream, I realised I was lucid and so grabbed the nearest person's face I could find. I looked into their eyes, and they were just picture perfect. I could see the tiny fibres of the iris, green and jade coloured, in perfect detail. In another dream, I wrote something down and could re-read it, albeit with a lot of effort. And, most frustratingly, I discovered that when I remove my glasses in a lucid dream, it makes my eyesight blurry. I mean come on, how is that fair? On a more personal note, lucid dreams are precious to me for one crucial reason. The time I get the most lucid dreams has always been after losing a loved one. I suppose, to realise that you're dreaming, there often has to be something disharmonic enough to break the illusion. After losing someone important, that knowledge that they're gone permeates so deeply that, even when faced with a mundane moment with the person, there's the dismayed knowledge that it just can't be true. I don't ever share these dreams, but they're quite possibly the most precious moments of my life. I'm provided this place where time does not exist, and the rest of the world, quite literally, disappears. Every sensation is there, the sound of their voice, the feeling of holding their hand, their skin. Otherwise, I have lucid dreams around things crucial and unresolved, but in all cases, lucid dreams come to me at the times where I need them the most. They provide a euphoric clarity that I don't think can be found in the waking world. Again, that collapsing of time, of all other concerns. Knowing that the space around me is entirely myself, the space is living, and silently wills me forwards, to resolve.

Having a dreamlog has helped me in more ways than I could've ever imagined, and I couldn't recommend it more that others take up the practice in their day-to-day lives. If nothing else, it feels like my memory is far sharper and is being actively tested and worked upon each day. For those interested in training their dream recollection and starting a log, the first thing that--

--you should think when you wake up ought to be "Where have I just been? What was I just doing?". Ideally before you even open your eyes, and especially before you speak or hear another person speak (if possible). Really stretch your brain back, don't give up trying for a couple minutes. And if you seriously can't remember, don't worry one bit. The simple act of trying to remember builds that muscle, and when trying again tomorrow, you build it again. Until, one morning you'll remember. At which point, you should write it down. I have my dream log in my notes app on my phone, primarily because I can type faster than I can write (but also because I can type with my eyes closed, no matter what that says about me!) It also means I can copy-and-paste them, and they're easily organised within the app. Each new note is a month, and the dreams within it are on a numbered list for each day of the month. Dreams can be really weird to convert to words. If you find yourself trying to rationalise a weird concept into words, don't bother making sense of it. Say it exactly how it is, even if it's impossible or makes no sense. It can be two things at once, something can simultaneously have happened in one place, and in another, or in neither, or at different times of the day. Don't sweat it, your subconscious doesn't know the laws of physics!

Thank you for reading and I hope to have inspired you to live your best unawaking life!

by **Alma Finnegan, Y13**



A sketch I made of a beautiful garden I saw in a dream last year. What I remember most is the teal cast-iron bars and gate, and the dusty blue light of the evening against the bright orange light inside the house spilling out of the window.

Alesia's Deep Dives . . .

Interview With the Philosopher!

For this issue, I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to do an interview! Dr. Mathieu Doucet is an Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department at the University of Waterloo who specialises in ethics. I asked him about his research as well as general philosophical questions. I had a lot of fun hearing a professional's point of view on topics we hear discussed in the media every day. Now, without further ado, I hope you all enjoy reading this!

1: What got you interested in Philosophy, and how did that lead to your work in ethics and moral psychology?

I didn't know I was interested in Philosophy until well into my second year of university; I was not exposed to it in high school and didn't take any Philosophy classes in my first year of University. I had always been very into Politics and so I thought I wanted to study Political Science. But when I took Political Science classes, it turned out that the questions I wanted answers to weren't being covered: I wanted to talk about justice and fairness and equality and the best way to organize social institutions. When I brought those topics up, my professors would tell me that they were really questions for Political *Philosophy*, not Political *Science*. So that's what I started to study.

2: If somebody is aware that an action is wrong but continues to do it, is that action still their own, and to what degree?

This is a great question! The short answer is "it depends." The long answer is **very** long, and has been the subject of intense philosophical debate for centuries. Plato, for example, thought that it was impossible for people to knowingly do the wrong thing; in his view, all wrongdoing was ultimately done out of ignorance.

My own view is that it's absolutely possible that an action can be 'your own', and so one for which you are morally responsible, even if you know that it is wrong. People knowingly do things that are morally wrong, and while they often think that they have a good reason or an excuse, that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't know it's wrong. It might just mean that they (mistakenly) think their reason or excuse outweighs the fact that it's wrong.

Having said that, most people most of the time think that "it's wrong" is a strong reason not to do something. Knowing something is wrong but doing it anyway is relatively unusual. So whenever we **do** see someone doing something that they think is wrong, it's always worth asking whether in fact they don't really want to do it, or are confused, or acting under some kind of compulsion that wouldn't make the action truly 'theirs'. Some people think of drug use in addiction in something like this way.



University of Waterloo, Canada

3: What do you believe is the most misunderstood or forgotten thing about drug ethics when it's being judged legally?

There are a lot of misunderstandings about drugs, addiction, and drug policy, but if I had to pick one, it would be this: it's very tempting to think that drug use is bad and harmful, and that **because** it is bad and harmful, drugs should be illegal. Even people who think drugs should be legal often endorse this reasoning: a lot of the debate about cannabis legalization in Canada focused on the question of whether cannabis use is harmful to health, and if so, how harmful.

I completely understand why people link these two things: the reasoning is that drug use is harmful, making drug use illegal will lead to far fewer people taking drugs, and this will reduce the overall harms of drug use. This seems reasonable, but in fact it's often a mistake.

That's because one important feature of drug use is that drugs are very often more harmful for people who use drugs when they are illegal than when they are legal. This is for a whole bunch of complex reasons, but the big picture is that, even if our only goal is to prevent the harms of drug use, that doesn't mean that we should make drugs illegal. So we might want to legalize drugs not because we think drug use is good, but instead because we recognize that it's harmful and want to avoid those harms. This basic point is the motivation for the 'harm reduction' approach to drug policy, which aims to reduce the harms of drug use without reducing the prevalence of drug use: harm reduction advocates tend to favour decriminalization or legalization as one of the key ways of reducing the overall harm of drugs.

4: What question surrounding drugs do you believe is the most relevant today?

I think the most important question is "what policies and approaches will make drug use safest for people who are dependent on drugs?" If we focus on the people who are most at risk of serious harm, we are likely to come up with very different policies than if we focus on, for example, preventing people from using drugs in the first place.

That's a complicated question for a few reasons. I'll mention just two. First, many of the harms of drug use and drug addiction aren't caused directly by *drugs*. Overdose deaths are an obvious harm of drug use, but so too are homelessness, lack of access to medical care, and exploitation. So the policies that will help aren't all going to focus directly on drugs. Mental health and housing policies are also part of the right approach to drug use. Second, "drugs" is a broad category, but each drug is different, and it's likely that the right policies for each drug are different as well.

5: Is it worse to hurt yourself or someone else, and why?

Another really great question! First, let's assume that the degree of hurt is the same in both cases— a broken leg, say. Otherwise, our answer might just depend on the degree of hurt, not the person being hurt. It might be worse to paralyze yourself than it is to stub someone else's toe.

Second, let's notice that 'worse' can mean a few different things here, and that will affect the answer. Philosophers sometimes distinguish between 'prudential value' and 'moral value'; prudential value is something's value to you, while moral value is its value overall, or from an impersonal moral perspective. So it's probably prudentially worse for you to break your own leg than for you to break someone else's leg. Breaking your own leg hurts and makes it difficult to move around. If you break someone else's leg, you'll be able to move around just fine! (At least if we assume that you won't face any bad consequences for breaking their leg.)

But that's probably not the point of the question. If we're interested in whether it's worse for you to hurt yourself or someone else, we're probably interested in whether it's morally worse to do so. To me, the most plausible answer is that it's almost always morally worse to hurt someone else than to hurt yourself. Ultimately, you should have the right to decide what happens to you, and that's probably true even if your decisions are bad for you. For example, we normally let people refuse even life-saving medical care because we think that respecting patient autonomy is so important. So there's a sense in which we often have the moral right to hurt ourselves if we want. But a big part of having the right to decide what happens to you is that it's up to you, not other people. So hurting someone else violates their rights in ways that hurting yourself does not, because it takes the decision about what happens to them out of their hands.

6: If you could give one piece of advice to someone wanting to get into philosophy as a hobby or academic career, what would it be?

I don't think I can give just one piece of advice, but I'll give a few linked ones that I hope might be useful to students who are thinking about what to study in university. First, Philosophy is a *really* broad subject, and so my advice would be to read widely and not have too narrow a view of what counts as Philosophy. In my own small Department, I have colleagues who do philosophical work and teach philosophy classes on Logic, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Consciousness, Language, Politics, War and Peace, Gender, Sports, Drugs, Disability, Knowledge, Science Fiction, Animal Minds, Medicine, Race, Education, and more. Students who are interested in *any* of those topics might well be interested in Philosophy, and students who first get interested in one small area of Philosophy should be open to seeing connections to many other areas.

Second, Philosophy is more about questions than it is about answers. Not that we aren't trying to find answers, but what makes Philosophy interesting and exciting, at least for me, is discussing questions where the right answer is not at all obvious. Being good at Philosophy is more about understanding why questions are interesting and challenging than it is about identifying the single correct answer to any question. So the advice would be that if you go into Philosophy thinking that you need to figure out the single correct answer to any particular debate, you're probably missing out on most of what is valuable in it.

Third, I'd say that it's not a good idea to go into Philosophy at university with the main aim of making it a career. Students should study things that interest them, and if that's Philosophy, great! But a career in academics is a long-shot. There just aren't that many jobs. So my advice is to only study Philosophy—or any subject—if you find it interesting and rewarding. Training in Philosophy can lead to many interesting jobs other than 'Philosophy professor', and so it's well worth doing even if you aren't going to be a professional philosopher.



By Alesia Macovei, Year 12

Ms Doucet's Poem of the Moment

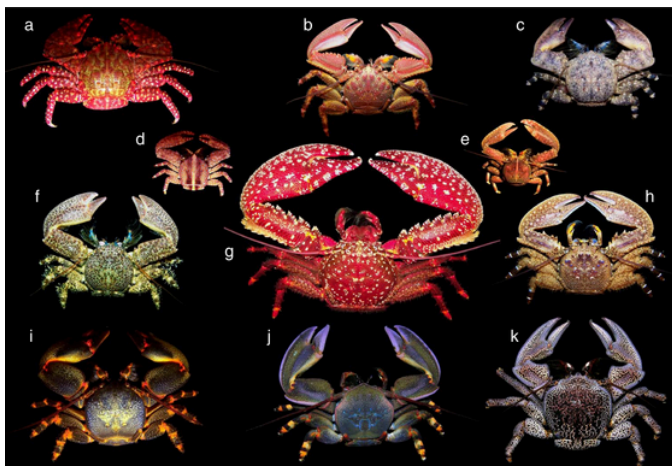
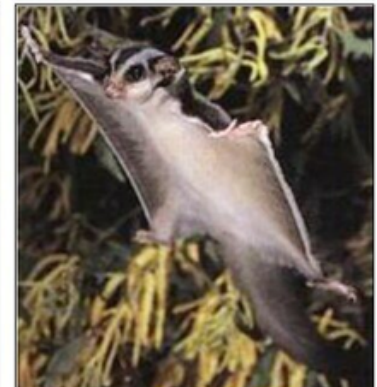
The Moment

The moment when, after many years
of hard work and a long voyage
you stand in the centre of your room,
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,
knowing at last how you got there,
and say, I own this,
is the same moment when the trees unloose
their soft arms from around you,
the birds take back their language,
the cliffs fissure and collapse,
the air moves back from you like a wave
and you can't breathe.
No, they whisper. You own nothing.
You were a visitor, time after time
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.
We never belonged to you.
You never found us.
It was always the other way round.
-Margaret Atwood

Creative Writing Prompt

Convergent evolution is the occurrence of similar evolved traits in living organisms of differing lineages. For example, in the case of the Flying Squirrel and the Sugar Glider. The Flying Squirrel is a mammal found across North America, while the Sugar Glider is a marsupial endemic to Australia. The two have both developed gliding membranes between their front and hind legs independently of one another, seeing as mammals and marsupials diverged from one another around the Jurassic period (~201.3 to 145 million years ago).

Write a short story or poem with the idea of convergent evolution in mind, for example, an encounter with something uncannily similar to oneself, but uncomfortably different. Or, you could consider this prompt more broadly as an interaction between two very different individuals' lives intersecting, or finding common ground emerging out of vastly different circumstances.



Bonus convergent evolution fact:
'Carcinisation' is the occurrence of non-crab crustaceans evolving crab-like body plan. It happens weirdly often. Will we all one day become crabs?



Prompt by Alma Finnegan, Y13

Game Review: Half Life 2

by Max Eagan, Y12

The right man in the wrong place can make all the difference in the world...

~ G-Man

The first time I ever played a Half-Life game it was an afterthought, the other single-player game in The Orange Box, which I got to play the first Portal game on Xbox 360. Once I made it to Black Mesa East, it had already surpassed Portal in my mind. The desire to play the previous game was so large that it pushed me to get a computer just to play it.

Half-Life 2 released on November 16th 2004 for PC and later, Xbox on 15th November 2005 and then in The Orange Box alongside its expansions for Xbox 360 on October 19th and PS3 on December 11th 2007. The game was a huge hit: praised for the use of the proprietary Source engine which allowed for realistic physics simulations and fine-tuned facial animations as well as its bleak, detailed art direction and story. The ripple effect of this game has grown so large over the years that it still influences games today, especially through the engine.

This game got the standard Valve treatment i.e. no cutscenes, focus on worldbuilding and technical advances. The secret New Mexican Lab aesthetic has been replaced by an oppressive, Eastern European urban area environment and most of the cartoon-y art design has been replaced by a focus on body-horror and abstract sci-fi. The nameless clones of Black Mesa have been replaced by real characters with their own voices and models as well as generic citizens and rebels. Probably the best instance of good writing in this game is the 'Breencasts'. Wallace Breen, Black Mesa and later, Earth administrator, delivers these messages at various points in the game where he spreads propaganda about the Combine (who are an evil alien empire who have taken over Earth); the most famous of which is the welcome speech at the very start of the game. His speeches are eloquent yet deeply disturbing, stating things about humanity surpassing base instincts to become, one day, as great as the Combine. However, this involves a suppression field put in place to render reproduction impossible and the water containing who-knows-what to suppress memory. Can he really be blamed though? Without him, Earth would have been razed from the galaxy and, as learned through his desperation to kill Gordon, he doesn't hold much power with the larger Combine. One thing that a Half-Life 1 player would notice almost immediately is that the Vortigaunts from the

HALF-LIFE 2



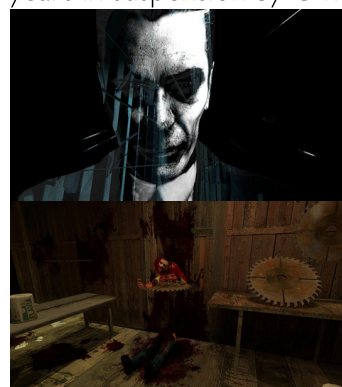
TOP HALF-LIFE 2 MODS

Entropy Zero duology
 TWHL Tower Source
 The Burton Equation
 Raising the Bar: Redux
 Hunt Down the Freeman
 (don't actually play this one)

first game aren't evil anymore. They are free from The Nihilanth's control but have been assimilated by the Combine alongside the rest of the planet.

Spoiler warning for the next paragraph!

Let's address the elephant in the room. Why did we go from a secret, underground lab in New Mexico to a dystopian Eastern European city? Well, after Gordon got abducted by the G-man after he killed The Nihilanth, it is generally considered that Black Mesa was nuked by the G-man. This is seen in Half-Life Opposing Force which is pretty loose with canonicity because it was made by Gearbox instead of Valve. I consider it to be canon though, because I think it would be cool. After The Nihilanth died, aliens kept getting teleported but it wasn't localised to Black Mesa, it spread across the whole of America, turning it into a Xenian-infested wasteland. A lot of this is figured out through implications in certain areas, mainly Black Mesa East which has a world map with America crossed out. Anyway, The Nihilanth says some things to you in the previous game that sound like he was the slave of something bigger. That thing? The Combine. A huge multi-dimensional inter-galactic empire spanning countless lightyears which, upon the death of The Nihilanth, has just been alerted to Earth. This starts an event known as 'The Seven Hour War' where all of Earth's defences are destroyed in just seven hours by The Combine. As I alluded to before, the only reason humanity still exists is because of Breen's organisation of surrender. After this, the oceans are drained, the suppression field is set up and anyone who dares resist are subject to horrific procedures to completely remove their humanity, becoming a mindless husk, slave to The Combine. This is what is waiting for Gordon after 20 years in suspension by G-man.



The real impact this game made though was the physics engine, and you can't talk about the physics engine without mentioning the gravity gun. The gravity gun allows for full control over all nearby physics props; a level of interactivity that was unheard of at the time. Any object in the level that wasn't bolted to the ground can be manipulated in some way either pushing around large objects (such as a washing machine) or picking up and throwing smaller objects (such as a buzzsaw or crate). This means that anything nearby can be considered a weapon creating many unique and nuanced combat encounters. Speaking of: the combat has been changed slightly. The movement speed has been decreased slightly in favour of a dedicated sprint key and there are less weapons that carry less ammo but do more damage. In return, the HEV suit charge drains faster and they have a much, MUCH better AI than the first game. Gone are the days of soldiers planting grenades at their feet and letting it blow them up; this is the age of coordinated strikes against Gordon, using cover, flushing him out with grenades and knowing when to retreat or stand their ground.

When this game was released it was a phenomenon. It was everywhere. People had gotten used to the older Half-Life, so when this dropped, it changed everything. Valve maintained their very open views on modding and fan-made content which lead to an even bigger modding scene than the first game. The main mod, the one that made the most impact, the one that still gets over 30,000 daily players (from [Steamdb.info/app/4000/charts/](https://steamdb.info/app/4000/charts/)), Garry's Mod. This was just the right place at the right time. Released in 2006, one year after YouTube, Garry's Mod, or Gmod, is a complete sandbox, built off of the base of Half-Life 2. This was THE thing to create skits with Half-Life characters, or to just make up whatever you want. The detailed ragdoll system the Source engine uses allows for dynamic poses to be created with any ragdoll available with ease and precision. This also allowed fan-made content which, using the huge popularity of Half-Life 2, caused a massive influx of maps, models, weapons, NPCs, vehicles and more to be created for the game. People recorded short films and uploaded them to YouTube where they would receive massive success. There were online servers to play gun games, roleplay, play minigames and more. It was its own thing spawned from Half-Life 2. Another thing was a little known piece of software called Steam. In a time where downloading games off of the internet was something to be laughed at, Valve launched Steam as a way to distribute Half-Life 2 faster and to increase accessibility. It still got a physical release and Steam was pretty bad back then but that was the catalyst for digital video game storefronts as we see them today.

One last thing I will mention is Source Filmmaker. This came out much later in 2012 but basically, it was a free 3D animation tool to encourage people who made videos on Gmod to take the next step in animation, still with the source engine safety net, but was more professional software than a sandbox game and had much less limitations on filmmaking that Gmod did.

The story for Half-Life 2 was so epic that Valve decided to follow it up with a trilogy of shorter 'episodes' to bridge the gap between this and the third game. They got to two episodes before they just stopped making them. Episode 2 ends with one of the most diabolical cliffhangers I have ever seen so once you play these, join me for the long wait for the mythical, elusive, long overdue Half-Life 3. Don't let this ending dissuade you from playing these games because they really are something special and worth your time.

By Max Eagan, Y12



Yes, This game is from 2004.



Avneesh's Aviation

by Avneesh Mohapatra, Y12

Tu-144: The Cost of Flying First

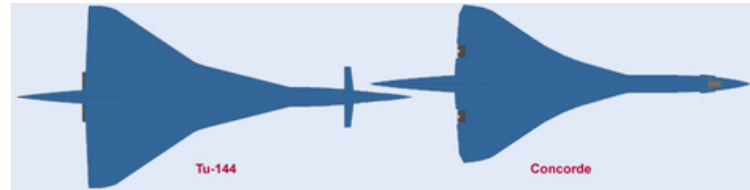
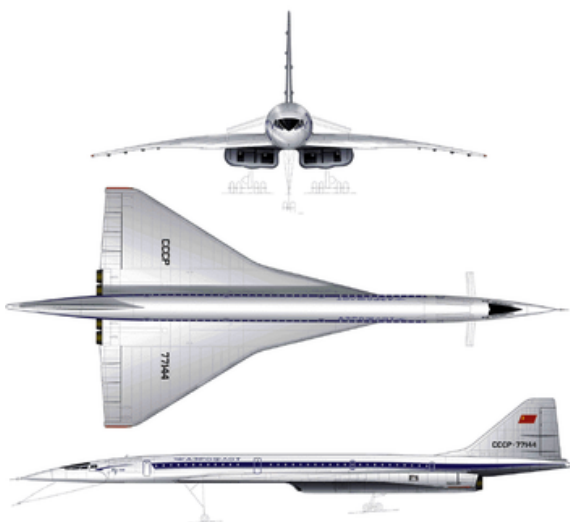
The Tu-144 did not fail because the Soviets were bad at engineering or something. That story is simple and complex at the same time. The Tu-144 failed because it was only made to win a race that should never have been run the way it was. The race began in the late 1950s during the Cold War, when supersonic passenger flight stopped being a technical curiosity and became a geopolitical matter.

The West had Concorde and the Boeing-2707 (which never left the drawing board). The Concorde was a joint Anglo-French statement that the West was technologically superior to the East. The Soviet Union could not allow that statement to stand unanswered.

Prestige mattered. Being first mattered most of all. And so, in 1963, the Soviet government issued a blunt directive.

build a supersonic airliner. Not a prototype. Not a research aircraft. A production passenger jet. The design bureau chosen was Tupolev, an organisation with enormous experience building bombers, transports, and military aircraft, but almost none designing commercial airliners meant to be quiet, economical, or forgiving. That mismatch would haunt the Tu-144 from the start. On paper, the Tu-144 was astonishing. It was larger and faster than Concorde, with a higher cruise Mach number and greater theoretical range. Its platform echoed Concorde's slender ogival delta wing (because it was copied)

but with key differences: sharper leading edges, a more aggressive sweep, and later, retractable canards to tame its low-speed handling. How did they get there? Well the typical Soviet way, spies stealing hundreds if not thousands of documents on the design and research of the Concorde. And it flew first. On December 31st, 1968, the Tu-144 lifted off two months before Concorde. In the Cold War scoreboard, that single fact mattered more than anything that came after. The Soviet declared "victory". The West quietly noticed something else though. The aircraft barely worked?



The Tu-144 was not aerodynamically unstable, but it was aerodynamically hostile. Supersonic deltas are CRUEL. They demand speed on approach, precision in control laws, and engines that respond instantly when pilots need them most. Concorde had Olympus from RR, engines refined through years of incremental testing and a flight control system tuned with almost pathological care. The Tu-144 in the typical Soviet way did not get that luxury. Its original engines, the Kuznetsov NK-144, were thirsty, underpowered at low speeds, and REALLY loud. They forced takeoff and landing speeds far higher than airlines were comfortable with, especially from Soviet runways that were often shorter and rougher than their Western counterparts. Fuel consumption was so severe that early Tu-144s could not cross the Soviet Union non-stop without careful planning for fuel stops.



Then there was heat. At Mach 2, aluminium heats up exponentially. It expands, creeps, and slowly forgets its original shape. Concorde's entire structure was designed around this reality. The Tu-144 was too, but with less margin, less testing, and less tolerance for imperfection. Small manufacturing variances turned into persistent maintenance headaches. Panels warped. Systems drifted out of alignment. Keeping one airworthy was labour-intensive in a way Aeroflot had never experienced. And yet, the programme pressed on. Because stopping was not an option. The Paris Air Show disaster in 1973 became the Tu-144's defining image, though it explains less than people think.

During a demonstration flight, the aircraft entered a violent maneuver sequence and broke apart mid-air, killing all onboard and several people on the ground. The exact cause remains debated, pilot overcorrection, structural failure, possible interaction with a French Mirage; but the deeper truth is simpler. The aircraft was being pushed to perform for politics, not safety margins. The crash did not kill the programme, but it wounded it.

Commercial service began in 1977, quietly, on the Moscow - Alma-Ata route. It lasted barely seven months. In that time, the Tu-144 accumulated a catalogue of failures that would have grounded any Western airliner permanently. Electrical faults were common. Pressurisation issues unnerved passengers. Cabin noise was extreme. Heat seeped into places it shouldn't. Reliability hovered near unacceptable even by Soviet standards, which were famously forgiving. One in-service flight reportedly suffered over twenty system failures in a single journey. The final blow came in 1978, when a Tu-144 crashed during a test flight due to an in-flight fire. That was it. Passenger operations ended.



What's often missed is that the Tu-144 did evolve. Later versions received the Kolesov RD-36-51 engines, which were more efficient and capable of sustained Mach 2 cruise without afterburner. The addition of retractable canards dramatically improved low-speed handling. By the early 1980s, the Tu-144 was, in many ways, a better aircraft than it had ever been. But by then, the world had moved on.

Supersonic transport had revealed its fatal flaw: simple economics. Fuel was expensive. Sonic booms were loud and disturbing. Maintenance costs were crazy. Concorde survived not because it made money—it didn't—but because it was treated as a national symbol and operated accordingly. The Soviet Union did not have the luxury of sentimentally subsidising a prestige machine that drained resources while delivering little practical value.

The Tu-144 ended its life ignominiously, then strangely. In the 1990s, one airframe was resurrected as a flying laboratory under a joint NASA-Russian programme, used to study supersonic aerodynamics. It flew safely and reliably. That version of the Tu-144 worked because it was finally allowed to be what it should have been from the start: an experiment.

The Tu-144 was not a failure of intelligence or capability. It was a failure of incentives. Tupolev engineers were asked to compress decades of learning into a few frantic years, under political pressure that punished delay more harshly than disaster.



Concorde, for all its flaws, was built slowly, conservatively, and almost obsessively. The Tu-144 was built urgently, defensively, and loudly. One treated supersonic flight as a craft to be mastered. The other treated it as a finish line to be crossed. History remembers which approach lasts. There is a reason almost anyone you ask will say "Concorde was the first and ONLY supersonic plane to fly". The tragedy of the Tu-144 is not that it failed. It's that it proved something profound and then got laughed off the stage. Supersonic passenger flight is not impossible. It is simply intolerant of shortcuts. Aluminium remembers heat. The air remembers mistakes. And Physics doesn't care who took off first. The Tu-144 won the battle but the Concorde won the war.



Why I Love: The Greek Gods

by Emmett Canny, Y13

Apollo

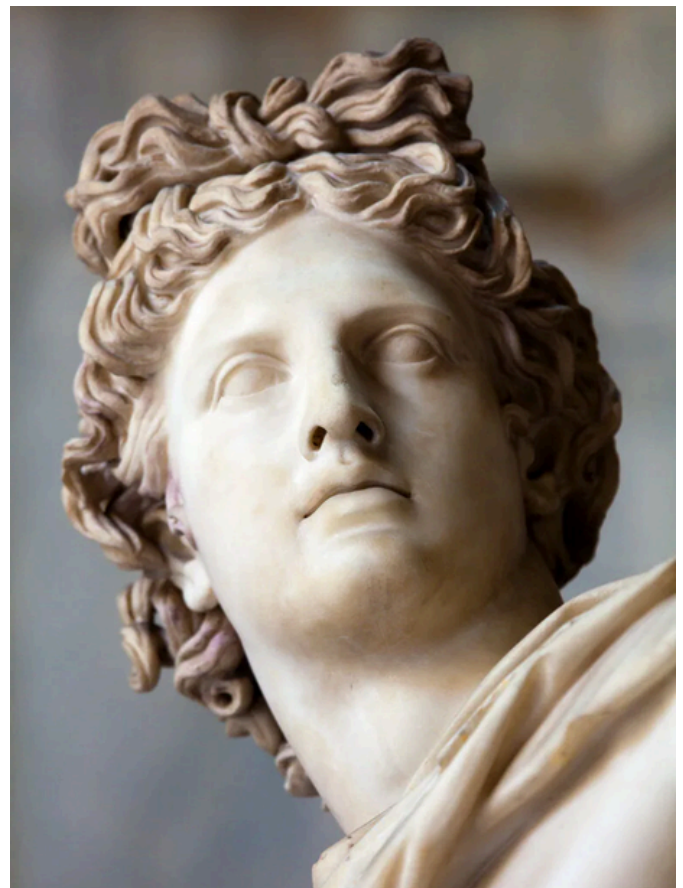
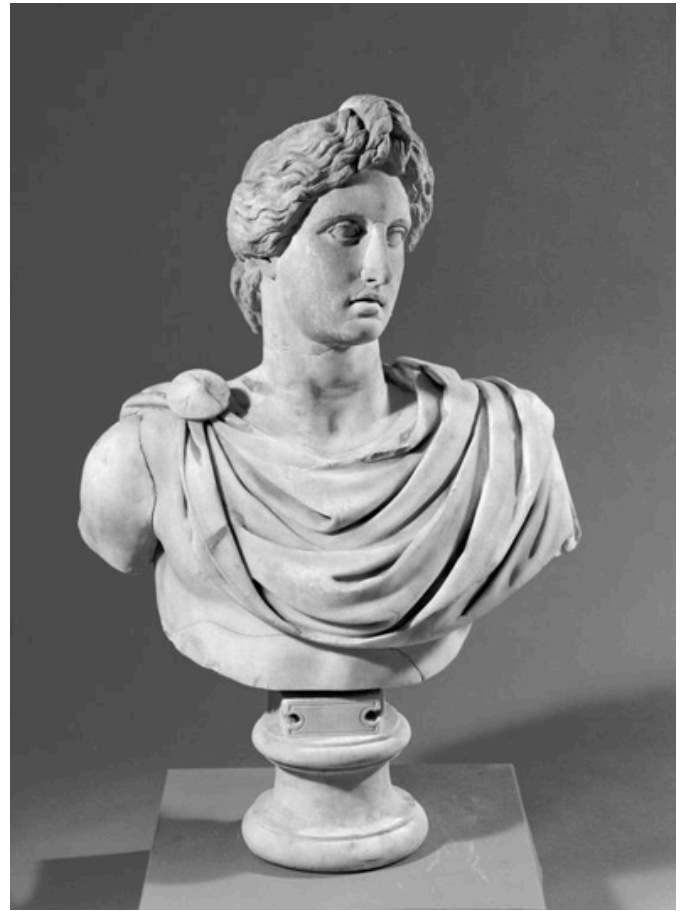
Apollo is one of my favourite deities from all of mythology if not my absolute favourite. Apollo is an Olympian god who functions as the God of healing, poetry, prophecy, music and archery. He is the son of Zeus and Leto and the twin brother of Artemis, goddess of the hunt. He is considered to be the most beautiful god and is considered to have the ideal physique from the time of the Greeks.

Who is Apollo?

Acting as the patron deity of Delphi, an ancient sacred precinct in central Greece, he is an oracular god whom the Greek population consulted for multiple matters such as plague, medicine and evil. He was credited with saving people from epidemics but also unleashing horrible illness upon the people of Greece. The invention of Archery is credited to both him and Artemis. Apollo presides over all music, poetry and dance and is said to have been the inventor of string music with the lyre being most commonly associated with him. He is also a pastoral god and the patron of herdsmen and shepherds, shielding flocks, herds and crops from disease and predators. As well as this, Apollo encouraged the development and founding of new towns and civil constitutions. He is known as giving dominion over colonists and establishing new laws. His oracles were often consulted before the establishing of new laws within cities and towns.

In Archaic Greece he was an oracular god, a prophet who in older times was associated with healing. In Classical Greece he was the god of light and music, but in the more popular religion he warded away evil. He was venerated as the slayer of the legendary serpent, Python. To the Greeks he was the most Greek god of them all.

During the Classical period of Greece where he was the protector against evil he was known as "Apotropaios" (averting evil) and "Alexikakos" (keeping off ill). Some of his names that came from his role as a healer were "Paion" (healer or helper), "Epikourios" (succouring) and "Lomios" (of the plague). In regards to his role of "healer" he has a connection to the primitive god Paeon who was the physician of the gods in the Iliad. Apollo is the healer under the gods in the Iliad but also the bringer of disease and death with his arrows, having a similar function to other gods in mythology such as Rudra. Apollo sends a plague to the Achaeans who know that Apollo can also prevent a recurrence of the plague he sent, therefore they purify themselves in a ritual and sacrifice a large amount of cows, this practise being called a hecatomb.



Why Apollo is my favourite



For starters, as a kid I read a lot of books featuring mythical creatures and mythological figures so I was always bound to have something as my favourite: my childhood favourite being the classic dragon. I also loved the Percy Jackson book "The Hidden Oracle" where Apollo was turned into a teenager by Zeus and the character of Apollo was always my favourite due to his godlike and arrogant personality being shoved into an incapable body. Another appearance of Apollo in media that I quite like is in the Star Trek: The Original Series episode "Who Mourns for Adonais" where an alien lifeform adapts the visage of Apollo and demands the Enterprise members kneel down and worship him.

After reading the Percy Jackson book I researched Apollo more thoroughly and became quite enamoured in the folklore and beliefs that surrounded him, as well as the new insight I got into the character of Apollo who appeared in movies, tv shows and books. I especially like his depiction as a sun god (not to be confused with being THE god of the sun) where he is shown as the light of the sun and the sun's representative being paired with Helios, who is the sun itself, in a similar way to Ares and Athena.

Overall the different depictions as well as the actual mythology around Apollo have made him a very strong contender for my favourite mythological figure/god with some others being The Dagda, Ra, Osiris, Anubis, Ares, Jupiter etc. (if you couldn't tell I am absolute nerd for mythology and I have been since I was about 10)

Thank you for reading my little nerd out about things I don't even believe in. I would highly recommend both the Percy Jackson book I mentioned above as well as the Star Trek episode "Who Mourns for Adonais?" because holy moly they are absolutely amazing and the second I can get my hands on more books about Greek mythology and other mythology I will be grabbing it with the utmost force from the shelves and speeding away quickly.



By Emmett Canny, Y13

Elliott's Creature Feature: Godzilla

In my previous two articles I discussed the Gill Man, an icon who is underappreciated compared to its peers, and the Rhedosaurus, an incredibly influential creature largely overshadowed by its successors, but the monster I'll be talking about today is a veritable juggernaut whose popularity has hardly wavered since its debut. Godzilla is a genre icon who has appeared across 38 films, 11 TV shows, 9 video games and countless novels and comics, by far the most widely appearing of any of the monsters I've covered thus far and indisputably the most popular. Godzilla, also known as Gojira in Japan, is among the most popular movie monsters of all time and the most popular giant monster by a mile. Unlike the Rhedosaurus, whose greatest contribution to culture was inspiring Godzilla, the impact that the Godzilla franchise has had on the world is hard to understate and impossible to cover in just one article; in fact, Godzilla is recognized as the longest running film franchise in history. That's why my coverage of Godzilla will be split over several articles, divided into the four eras of the franchise: the Showa era, the Heisei era, the Millennium era and the Reiwa era. On account of this being a movie monster publication, I won't be covering any of Godzilla's TV, comic, novel or video game appearances in detail.

It was when executive producer Tomoyuki Tanaka was on a plane back from Indonesia, having failed to convince an Indonesian film crew to work with him due to anti-Japanese sentiments in the country, that the idea for Godzilla was first formed. Tanaka was inspired by the success of *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* and the Lucky Dragon No.5 incident, an event in which a Japanese fishing boat was contaminated by nuclear tests conducted by the US military, to begin a fully Japanese production of a monster movie about a creature awakened by nuclear weapons. The original plan for the monster's design was to have it be more obviously aquatic to reflect the name of Gojira, a combination of the Japanese words for gorilla and whale, but the special effects team eventually landed on a more dinosaur like design, likely due in part to the influence of the Rhedosaurus.

Director Ishiro Honda, the son of a Buddhist monk who chose to become a filmmaker despite the wishes of his family, was not production company Toho's first choice for the film's director. In fact, several other directors had declined to work on the project, as many felt it was stupid and too hard to take seriously. Honda however had a natural curiosity for science, fostered by his early education before he chose to go into film, and said that he had no problem taking the film seriously on account of his interest in "unusual things". Part of the reason Honda was approached for the project was on account of his military service in the Second World War; in which Honda served for many years and was noted as being uniquely kind to the Chinese soldiers and civilians that he interacted with, even befriending



his own kidnappers who offered him a permanent home in China. Despite his unexpectedly friendly kidnapping incident, Honda did still experience many battles in the war that left him with somewhat frequent nightmares for years. Tanaka felt that Honda's experience in the war would make him perfect to convey the horror of a character embodying the most powerful weapon of war conceived by mankind at the time. In fact, Honda had previously been set to direct a film about the war but was let go from the project due to Toho feeling that his script was too openly critical of the war. There were worries that making a monster movie about such a serious subject would be insensitive and could easily cause public uproar if they mishandled it. The film was originally supposed to be much more obviously critical of nuclear weapons, even starting with a monologue decrying nuclear weapons testing and featuring footage of the Lucky Dragon No.5 incident, but Ishiro Honda decided it was inappropriate and instead opted to make their political commentary more subtle.

Although the film was originally intended to be stop motion, much in the way that *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* is, eventually the decision was made to use a technique known as suitmation. Suitmation differs from the regular use of suit actors, such as in *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*, as it specifically focuses on making a regular sized human in a suit appear as if they were a giant monster. This is achieved primarily by using scale sets in which miniature buildings and landscapes are used to give the impression that the human in the suit is much larger than they actually are but additional techniques, such as using higher framerates to make the suit actor appear slower, are also used. Despite the producer's initial wishes to use stop motion, which were denied due to limitations in budget and time, Godzilla ended up pioneering the medium of suitmation,--

--with special effects director Eiji Tsuburaya going on to use similar techniques in the incredibly influential Ultraman franchise after helping to create the technique for Godzilla. The first Godzilla suit, worn by Haruo Nakajima and Katsumi Tezuka, was incredibly cumbersome and was almost impossible to properly act in. Due to the potential health risks of acting in such a heavy costume; the first suit was cut in half to be used in closeup shots and a second, much lighter, suit was constructed. In addition to the two suits, a smaller puppet was created that could achieve the effect of spraying Godzilla's now iconic atomic breath.

The film, released in 1954, immediately set a new opening day record for any Toho produced film, thanks in part to the massive marketing campaign surrounding the film, and Ishiro Honda was personally thanked by the film's director. Thanks to the massive domestic success of the film, it was chosen for a world wide release only a year later. However, to accommodate foreign audiences, the film *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* is an Americanized version of the original; rather than simply dubbing over the film with translated dialogue, *King of the Monsters* inserts a new American protagonist into the story, although it is still set in Japan. Additionally there was an Italian re-release of the American re-release, an edited version of the film known colloquially as *Cozzilla* due to director Luigi Cozzi. However, *Cozzilla* is no mere translation or localization, it makes two massive changes to the film. The first is the choice to colourise the black and white film and the second is to extend the runtime, both done to comply with regulations on the showing of films in Italy. Now most people, faced with the challenge of extending a film without shooting any new footage, would probably repeat shots already in the film or something of that trivial nature. Not Luigi Cozzi though, Cozzi had a unique vision for his version of the film, he cut in shots from war movies and other monster movies including *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*; but he didn't stop there, in order to give the film a more "up-to-date and more violent look" he chose to cut in real war footage, including images of real death and destruction.

Thanks to the success and critical acclaim of the first film, a sequel was released only a year later. This film, *Godzilla Raids Again*, would immediately set the mould for the franchise going forward as it introduced the idea of Godzilla fighting another giant monster. Technically the Godzilla that appears in this film, and the films going forward, isn't the same Godzilla from the 1954 film; instead it is another member of the same species, confusingly given the same name and an almost identical appearance. The monster Anguirus, a quadrupedal dinosaur inspired mostly by an ankylosaurus, holds the honour of being the first monster to do battle with Godzilla but it certainly wouldn't be the last; seven years after *Godzilla Raids Again*, Godzilla would return to--

--face off with another giant monster icon, King Kong. Although these films were not quite as serious as the original they still maintained a similar atmosphere, however, the release of *Mothra VS Godzilla* and *Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster* would see the franchise head in a new direction.



Mothra VS Godzilla centers around a crooked businessman trying to profit off a giant egg until, inevitably, a giant monster, *Mothra*, emerges from it to fight *Godzilla*. *Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster* is essentially a sci-fi detective film that happens to feature some monsters. The plot of this film focuses on a princess, who comes to believe that she is an alien from *Venus* after a plane crash and that she is able to predict the future; a power largely used to warn people about impending monster attacks. This story, whilst one of the most entertaining human stories in the franchise, is incredibly silly and this silliness would only grow as the films went on. The titular *Ghidorah* is an incredibly designed monster who would go on to become essentially the main villain of the whole franchise but he would unfortunately be the last good monster for a while after his appearance in the subsequent *Invasion of the Astro Monster*.

The previous three films had all struck a decent balance between being entertainingly ridiculous and legitimately good, featuring great monster designs and engaging stories. This is not true of *Ebirah, Horror of the Deep*, a ridiculous film that spits in the face of the entire franchise. When I watched *Ebirah, Horror of the Deep* for the first time I immediately concluded that it was the worst film in the franchise, excluding the Roland Emmerich film (1998), and that the titular *Ebirah*, a giant lobster, was--

--the worst villain in the franchise. This hypothesis would be disproven when I watched *Son of Godzilla* and I was formally introduced to Minilla, the most turgid, repulsive, unbearable creature I have ever had the displeasure of seeing. Naturally I concluded that actually *Son of Godzilla* was the worst *Godzilla* film. See, the introduction of Minilla signals dark times for the *Godzilla* franchise as it transitioned from being a bit silly to borderline self parody. Director Jun Fukuda claims that targeting a younger audience wasn't the intention of introducing *Godzilla's* young and utterly incompetent son but, regardless of his initial intentions, Minilla's presence would lead to the franchise briefly taking a turn to being much more childish. How exactly *Godzilla*, presumably the last of his species, came to have a son is never explained, why Minilla comes out of an egg is also never explained.

The next film in the franchise, *Destroy All Monsters*, sees the triumphant return of both Ishiro Honda and genuine quality to the franchise. It's far from the best that the series has to offer but, coming off the back of the two Jun Fukuda films, it serves as a welcome relief; thanks in part to the lessened screentime of Minilla and the return of series staple King Ghidorah. *Destroy All Monsters* had been intended to be the last *Godzilla* film, hence its huge monster cast and decisive final battle, but a failed pitch for a *Godzilla* cartoon inspired Toho executives to make a new film that was made specifically to appeal to young audiences. That film would be *All Monsters Attack*.

How a creative genius like Honda, the mind behind some of the greatest monster movies in history, could come to make such a loathsome film, devoid of any redeeming qualities, is a mystery to me. I had expected to find that this was Honda's greatest shame, a monument to selling out that haunted his career, so I was shocked to find that he somehow considers this one of his favourite *Godzilla* films. I struggle to imagine how anyone, even a child, could like *All Monsters Attack*. All the monster appearances in this film are strictly in the dreams of the main character, a child struggling to deal with bullies and the frequent absence of his parents, and the most prominent monster featured is, of course, Minilla. Not only does Minilla still bumble about, only making himself useful when he's practically forced to, but now he can shrink down to human size and even talk to our human protagonist. The villain of this film, Gabara, has one of the most bland and uninspired designs of any monster in the franchise, even when compared to ideas as boring as Ebirah the giant lobster and Kumonga the giant spider.

Not only is *All Monsters Attack* conceptually baffling but it's also executed very poorly. Most of the monster action in this film is reused from older movies, which becomes especially obvious when you watch them close together. This creates several plot holes ranging from the weather changing from a storm to a sunny day in between shots to the appearance of Ebirah on Monster Island, despite the fact that he never appeared on the real Monster Island in *Destroy All Monsters*. Somehow the original action, mostly featuring the villain Gabara, manages to be even worse than the stock footage. Despite Honda's--

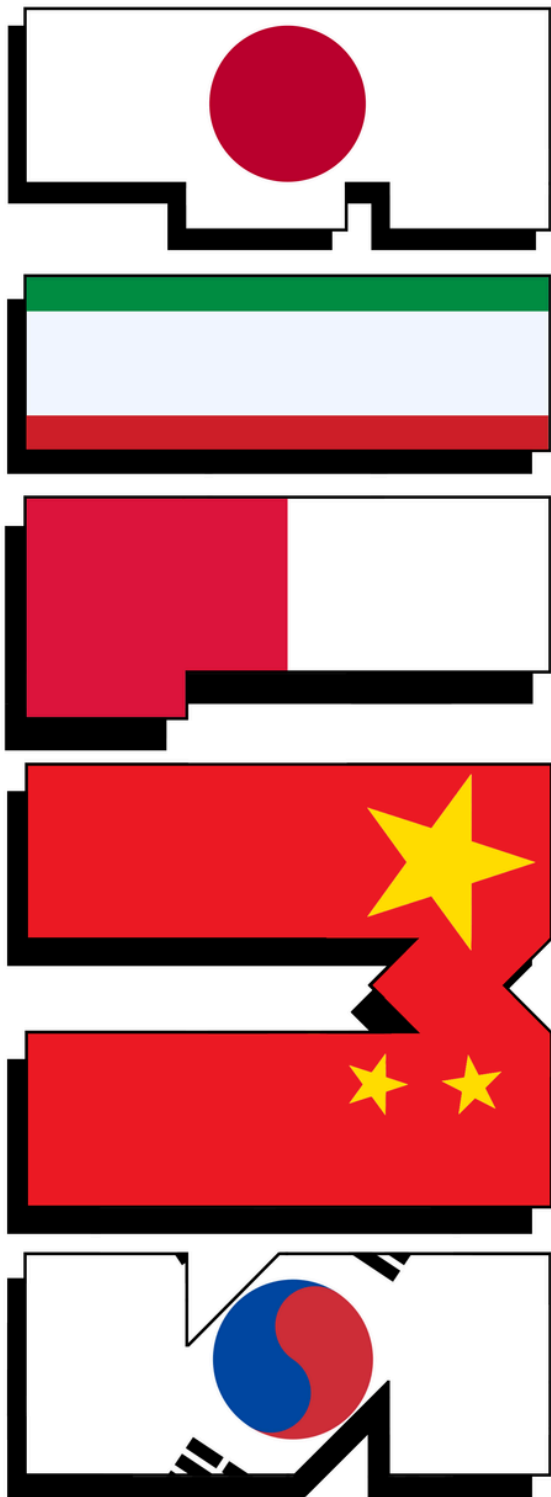
--direction of action sequences in the past being brilliant, for some reason most of the fight scenes in this film are shot to be sickeningly disorienting; using countless fast cuts and extreme close ups during quick camera movements that make every fight look like a blur. Although, watching a blur of colours may be preferable to looking at such ugly suit designs. Minilla is as disgusting as ever, Gabara's design is as uncool as it is boring and the *Godzilla* suit design used in this film, while not the worst, is still significantly worse than the suits used in the first few films.

This downward trend in the quality of *Godzilla's* films left me with a lingering pit of dread. Not only because I had to watch a few bad movies but because I had already locked myself in to reviewing the entire franchise, which would be very unfortunate if all the proceeding films were as bad as *All Monsters Attack*. However there was hope yet, a shining light at the end of the tunnel that brought with it the promise of no more Minilla. That light was the 1971 film *Godzilla VS Hedorah*, a return to form for the franchise that sees *Godzilla* doing battle with a gigantic and constantly metamorphosing sludge monster named Hedorah. Far from the trite and uninteresting monsters of the previous film, Hedorah is both a genuine threat and an incredible design. Not only is Hedorah a tangible threat to *Godzilla* but for the first time we see close up how Hedorah affects the humans that are usually relegated to offscreen trappings. Hedorah drowns people in pools of sludge and even surviving an encounter with it leaves characters with lasting wounds; the main character is left bedridden for the entire film after being attacked by Hedorah in the first few minutes. All this comes together to make Hedorah one of the greatest monsters in the entire franchise so far. Unfortunately *Godzilla's* suit design still looks a bit off but the monster action is finally back on form.

Due to the sheer length of this franchise I couldn't possibly cover *Godzilla* in just one article. So, to truly do him justice, I'll be returning to *Godzilla* next issue to discuss more films from the franchise, starting with *Godzilla VS Gigan*.



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WEDNESDAY

Why I Love: Love Game in Eastern Fantasy

C-drama Review (Minor Spoilers)

After discovering what I can only describe as the greatest C-drama (Chinese Drama) ever created, I had to pull out my computer and start writing about it. *Love Game in Eastern Fantasy* is no doubt one of the most entertaining, hilarious shows I've ever seen. It does everything right: it's lively, wacky, visually stunning, contains a cast of characters you'll obsess over, and has an excellent plot to boot. The joyful, amusing spirit of the series is wonderfully harmonised with the meaningful messages it is trying to convey, and it is my joy to be sharing it with you today.

Love Game in Eastern Fantasy follows Ling Miaomiao, an overworked corporate employee who avoids work to read 'Catching Demons', a new novel by her favourite author Fu Zhou. After being thoroughly disappointed, she writes a scathing review online, only to suddenly be sucked into her computer and enter 'the Game'. There, she enters the world of *Catching Demons* and takes on the role of Lin Yu, the vicious supporting actress of the novel. In order to exit and return home, she must complete a set of tasks set by the game system, as well as follow famed demon catchers Liu Fuyi, Mu Yao and Mu Sheng on a quest to defeat the evil queen of demons, Resentful Woman.

Now there are many things about this drama that make it particularly outstanding. It's an isekai, for starters - a genre where a person living a regular, boring life suddenly gets transported into a fantasy realm - which already sets it apart from other fantasy period pieces. The xianxia (a genre of fantasy based off of Chinese mythology and Daoism), old-timey setting blends hilariously with Miaomiao's modern upbringing. She uses her present-day knowledge to accelerate her teammates' mission to defeat demons, as well as confusing everyone around her with her informal demeanor and modern slang. There are some priceless jokes and miscommunications throughout the show that sadly don't get translated very well, but they still stand as a testament to the writers' ingenuity. Esther Yu is a goddess at portraying Miaomiao's character - a bubbly, quirky personality who doesn't truly believe anything around her is happening, while also balancing it out with heartfelt moments of vulnerability and despair. There are times when Esther has to play the villainous Lin Yu in a flashback to before she was possessed by Miaomiao, and the switch-up from adorable to downright malevolent and terrifying is chilling.



Mu Yao, my love. Renowned fighter and leader of her group



The main FLs being besties

Of course, I must mention the rest of the compelling cast. Honestly, these characters and their interactions are probably the best aspect of the show. In the original novel of *Catching Demons*, before Miaomiao entered the game, Mu Yao and Fuyi were the protagonists (and also love interests - hint, hint), while Mu Sheng and Lin Yu were the semi-antagonistic supporting leads. Mu Yao and Mu Sheng are the last surviving siblings of a legendary demon-catcher clan that was exterminated by Resentful Woman years ago (hence their vendetta to defeat her for good), leading Mu Yao to be reserved, yet still kind and unwavering, while Mu Sheng is a selfish, ill-tempered sison who cares only for himself and his sister. Fuyi is a famed demon-catching master himself - though adorably naive and bashful - and together with Miaomiao's added silliness, the four form an unlikely, formidable team who hunt down demons while clashing with each other's personalities. Around Episode 3, the game system sets Miaomiao the task to make the unmannerly Mu Sheng gain 100% favourability towards her by the end of the game (the so-called 'Love Game'), and this brings about some hilarious plot points. Miaomiao is an adorable beam of light while Mu Sheng is a terrifying, slightly sadistic tsundere who regularly bullies her. He tries to intimidate her so many times throughout the show and Miaomiao doesn't take him seriously at all, simply making jokes and silently seething that the system gave her such a difficult task.



From L-R: Mu Sheng, Mu Yao, Miaomiao and Fuyi at a lantern festival



Miaomiao being gorgeous

The show's main message is the disappointment of failed art and the potential that could have been. Miaomiao doesn't write that terrible review for nothing. In the original novel, for example, Fu Zhou writes completely needless and honestly exasperating drama between the two female leads, constantly pitting Lin Yu against Mu Yao in a fake friendship, having the two fight over Fuyi. Never once does he explore the backgrounds and reasonings behind each character, nor does he showcase this grand world he has created. Everyone in the book hates each other, the reader is left with completely unanswered questions, and, of course, he gives the original book the tragic, unfortunate ending where everyone in the main cast dies and Resentful Woman destroys the world (don't worry, that isn't a spoiler!). Fu Zhou didn't respect his characters or his story at all, and the result is this infuriating tragedy that doesn't teach his readers any lessons. Thankfully, Miaomiao rejects the role of villainous supporting actress almost immediately, instead choosing to spread love and light throughout the journey, which has a surprisingly drastic effect on the rest of the story. Near the beginning of the game, Mu Yao forms this beautiful sisterhood with Miaomiao (so much so that I was honestly expecting them to get together by the end), and the moments these two have together are so magical that I can only imagine how stifling the show would have been had it followed the original plot and made the characters mistreat and deceive each other. The vibes of the show are an overall good time (and I mean AMAZING time) because the characters learn to open up to each other, enjoy themselves, and the growth they all go through is substantial. The show's literal translation "Eternal Night Star River (永夜星河)" is a nod to the light that Miaomiao brings to the otherwise eternally dark night that is the main cast's lives. Miaomiao's actions cause the group to meet new characters with new narratives, see unexplored parts of the world, and unveil an epic, multi-generational storyline full of nuance that explains everything that went unanswered in the

original book. There are so many hidden stories and lore the group discover that really link everything together and showcase the impressive world Fu Zhou has built. That there was this hidden, grand story lying underneath the main plot of *Catching Demons* that goes completely unwritten is another example of what could have been had the author actually valued his work. Even the side characters and minor antagonists are given incredible depth and take the spotlight of the show for a while, and it's one of those things where you can't truly call any antagonist "evil" because you can understand the reasonings behind their actions.

Other themes that the drama explores include siblinghood, prejudice, found family, and the profound impact that art can have on people's lives. The SFL and ML (Mu Yao & Mu Sheng) are siblings who have survived a family massacre, and the bond between big sister and little brother in such extreme circumstances is emphasised tremendously throughout the show. As it was *Resentful Woman* who eradicated the family, Mu Yao develops a deep hatred against all demons and treats them with extreme prejudice, and even the rest of the world oppresses demons in disturbing ways. Over the show, however, the main four are exposed to all kinds of demons and their histories, and we learn that not all demons are terrible creatures deserving of eradication. The bond between Fuyi, Mu Yao, Mu Sheng and Miaomiao is immense, and the scenes where they all stand up for each other and fight as one are stirringly empowering. This series is basically Chinese KPop *Demon Hunters*, and you'll understand exactly what I mean when you watch it. The show places a great emphasis on showing the complex, morally ambiguous circumstances that cause the antagonists to commit their immoral deeds, which may even make you side with them, and only further fleshes out the world of *Catching Demons*. I really appreciate the way each character of the show is shown to be their own multifaceted person with individual goals and ideals, and the way this affects other people, especially with the example of Mu Yao's and Mu Sheng's relationship which is so rarely portrayed in popular media.



Mirror Demon, an antagonist from Episode 1 - and my favourite



Liu Fuyi in a wedding gown. Why? You'll have to watch the show - wink, wink.

Of course, no show is without its faults. The episodes do tend to drag, and there were certainly still some plot points that I felt were entirely fickle and that could have been addressed better. The drama is an adaptation of the web novel 'The Guide to Capturing a Black Lotus' by Bai Yu Zhai Diao Gong, whose ending was rather convoluted and left many unsatisfied, resulting in the writers changing a lot of content for the show. I admit, the storyline can become a tad complex to follow sometimes, and the ending was still rather feverdream-like, but it's manageable and still enjoyable all the same. Aside from these things, the drama is phenomenal. The cinematography is gorgeous - the camera crew definitely knew what they were doing when shooting these frames, and that's not even to mention the costume designs and accessories, which are absolutely STUNNING. Each character's outfit is iconically theirs, and the creators clearly hid deeper meaning behind them which I could rant about for paragraphs, but I'll keep this short. I'm not exaggerating when I say the chemistry and stories behind the leads and side characters are beautiful. This show's experience basically consists of doubling-over in laughter at one episode, only to completely sob through the next. Not only that, I find that the world-building is explained just enough and is actually used enough so as to not be overbearing, and even the OST is pretty nice - consisting of 10 songs (some of which are sung by the main leads) and used perfectly throughout the show so you don't get sick of them. It's no wonder this show garnered such success both in China and overseas, and won multiple awards for Best TV Series. I even believe (though don't quote me on this) that a videogame based off the show was released, which appeared to have been pretty popular as well.

There are a million more things I could say about this show - the side characters, the story arcs, set designs and the like - but I'll keep this spoiler-free. The only thing I can say is that this programme brought a lot to my life, and I can only very strongly recommend that you watch it too. You can find it for free on YouTube and Rakuten Viki, or on Netflix, WeTV and Tencent Video. I hope this show can give you the same lessons it taught me, and have an amazing time watching!

By Keira Nightingale, Year 12

This show has such nice cinematography



Mu Sheng being arrogant



The main cast being cool



Lin Miaomiao with her father



Miaomiao & Mu Sheng in their iconic outfits



PERFORM

What we're listening to:

Alesia M



Bite My Hip by Bauhaus

Kitty F



Perfect System by Oingo Boingo

Keira N



寄明月 (Send to the Bright Moon)
by Super Impassioned Net Generation 女团

Aidan R



Drinking Age by Cameron Winter

Avneesh M



IN_MY_HEAD by Kaori Natori

Max E



Alley Way by Ken Ford

Alma F



Wild Bill Jones by Charlie Parr

Elisha M



Kiss Me Now by Pierce the Veil

Sophia D



I Miss You by Blink 182

Important Dates . . .

- 5 February – Y13 Parents' Evening (at GSHS) 16:30-19:30
- 9 February – Access Arrangements Information Session 5pm
- 14 February – Valentine's Day
- 16-20 February – Half Term Break
- 17 Feb (approx) – Ramadan Begins
- 23 February - 6 March – Y11 and Y13 Mocks
- 23 March - 27 March --Y10 and Y12 Work Experience Week
- 31 March – Y12 Mock Interviews
- 2 April – Staff Training Day: no classes
- 3 April - 17 April – Easter Break

Grace's Theatre Review

Inside No. 9: Stage/Fright

Summary and review - Spoilers

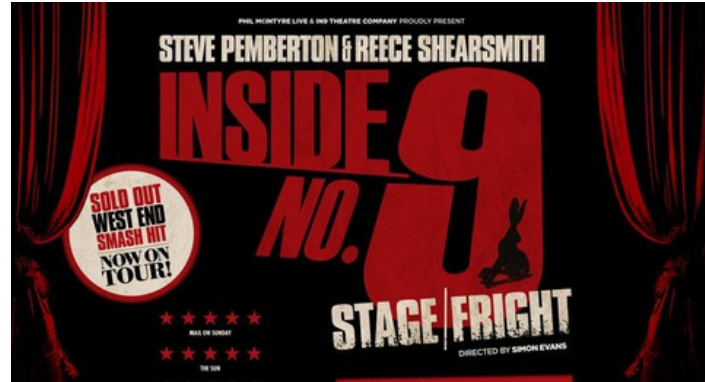
Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton bid farewell to their BBC anthology tv series 'Inside No. 9' with 'Inside No. 9: Stage/Fright', which serves both as a tribute to the series and a stand alone theatrical experience, combining comedy with horror; twists and turns with various sketches and stories, featuring plenty of spooky new material as well as adapting classic episodes for the stage.

I was able to see the matinee performance of 'Inside No. 9: Stage/Fright' at the Hammersmith Eventim Apollo theatre in London's West End during the show's final run on 3rd January 2026, and I can say 'Inside No. 9: Stage Fright' is one of the most thrilling and immersive theatre experiences you can have. Its blend of humour and horror is thoroughly engaging throughout and just reinforces the fact that Shearsmith and Pemberton are true masters of dark comedy and horror and their ability to engage and misdirect audiences is truly enhanced in person.

The play wastes no time spooking the audience with an instant jump-scare, a sudden loud thunder and the theatre descending into darkness, then going immediately into its first sketch, this sketch finds Reece Shearsmith's character in the theatre, attempting to watch a performance of Hamlet, though he is disturbed by a woman loudly tending to her elderly father in the row in front, and a noisy business man, played by Steve Pemberton, whose phone won't stop ringing in the row behind. Shearsmith's bubbling frustration soon turns murderous as he sprinkles peanuts into the old man's food, resulting in a fatal allergic reaction, he then pours water over the second man's electronics, electrocuting him, and finally strikes the woman on the back of the head with a blunt object. The sketch then ends with a request from Shearsmith and Pemberton, as well as the theatre staff to silence phones and respect theatre etiquette.

After applause from the audience this is followed with a title sequence cast by shadows projected onto the curtains as live violinists on stage play the show's theme. Afterwards, Shearsmith and Pemberton re-emerge on stage to greet the audience and explain the haunted nature of the theatre, they explain that the theatre is haunted by the spirit of an actress who died during a production of the play *La Terreur de L'asile* and bring out a ghost light, that glows whenever there is a supernatural presence. Shearsmith exits the stage, whilst Pemberton, with help from the audience, attempts to summon the spirit, after nothing happens Pemberton then exits the stage, however this ghost light will recur throughout the play.

From here we soon find ourselves in our next sketch, a performance of one of Inside No. 9's most well loved episodes known for its slapstick comedy and emotional plot twist titled 'Bernie Clifton's Dressing Room'. This episode follows a comedy double act after 30 years after one walked out on the other, they reunite for a one-off performance and in the rehearsal room past issues begin to reemerge. Despite this sketch being a reenactment of the episode it is still just as comical and moving as the original episode, leaving the audiences roaring with laughter and resulting in numerous instances where Reece Shearsmith would corpse, leaving him unable to finish his lines due to Pemberton's performance, and even having to go to the back of the stage to compose himself before continuing.



However, despite this segment being a reenactment of a classic episode, it features a new addition to its story, a sketch within a sketch, Shearsmith's character finds a screenplay written by his comedy partner and begins to read it, then the curtain falls and the screenplay is projected, the curtains lift and Shearsmith and Pemberton reappear on stage as robbers who have kidnapped the wrong person. At every performance of 'Stage/Fright' this hostage has been played by a different celebrity guest, including the likes of Sir Ian McKellen, David Tennant, Michael Sheen and many more, these celebrities roles are largely improvised, making their performances incredibly spontaneous and having to bounce off the absurdness of Reece and Steve's incompetent kidnappers and leaving this sketch unique and unpredictable each performance. At my show this celebrity guest was revealed to be Comedian Bill Bailey who is given multiple prompts of things to do such as speak Spanish and do a tango. The sketch concludes with Shearsmith accidentally shooting Bailey with his finger gun and a dummy of Bailey's body comically plummeting down the stairs.

As this sketch ends it is then followed by the rest of 'Bernie Clifton's Dressing Room' which continues, with the emotional twist being that this isn't a reunion of a comic act but Shearsmith preparing for the funeral of Pemberton's character, who has been dead all along and the episode being a hallucination of a final goodbye. However, it concludes with Shearsmith exiting the stage with the ghost light illuminated, leaving the audience in darkness with the ghost light and haunting whispers, ending with the audience being jumpscared by the summoned spirit of the theatre, the curtain then falling for the interval.

Once again the show commences with a loud sudden thunder to frighten and grab the audience's attention before going into the next sketch, a completely new and original sketch written by Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton entitled 'Terror at the Asylum'. A sketch opening in an old asylum full of mad inmates and murderous doctors. However, the tension is soon broken when it is revealed that this sketch is a play within a play, being directed by Shearsmith's character Marcus. We follow the cast through rehearsals, with a particular segment where the actors are using a camera to film each other, with a large screen behind giving us a close up view of the actors faces and performances, making the theatrical experience so much more immersive. After multiple supernatural hauntings targeting the main actress, she brings the camera backstage in search of the supernatural entity, the ghost light is illuminated, centre stage as we watch the screen in a suspenseful few moments of silence as she explores the theatre, as tension permeates the room, the actress is then spooked by the spirit and flees, we then discover the supernatural occurrences have been part of an elaborate plot to get her to exit the play conceived by the director and his assistant who hopes to be given the leading role, however he tells her that she isn't experienced enough to play the role and suggests they go back to his room, as he speaks the ghost light at the back of the stage begins to illuminate, the sketch ends with his assistant becoming possessed by the summoned spirit of the dead actress haunting the theatre, lifting the director and snapping his neck.

The lights come up and the cast return to the stage to massive applause to give their final bows, however, the twists and turns of Inside No 9 have not ended just yet, as a new actor appears in Shearsmith's place as if he had been there all along, and Pemberton begins to pay tribute to his late comedy partner and declares that Reece passed away during rehearsals and an in memoriam is projected onto the screen, the cast give their bows and the curtains close. At this point audience members begin making their way down the stairs believing the show has ended, yet we hear a commotion from the actors behind the scenes and hear Steve be struck by the set and fall to the ground. The curtain re-opens on Reece greeting Steve on stage informing him they are both dead and stuck haunting the theatre for the rest of time, the curtain then closes. Shearsmith and Pemberton then return to the stage in white suits and top hats, with the stage surrounded by angelic imagery and are joined by the rest of the cast, for their final bows ending in a musical number.

Inside No. 9: Stage/Fright is a perfect farewell to the iconic series. The show is billed as "weaving its signature web of twisted tales and black humour" and this couldn't be more true and proves after over 30 years of working together that Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton are still at the top of their game as a formidable partnership and the presence they have on stage is undeniable, bringing life to a diverse range of characters and crafting effective, thrilling, humorous, and moving stories that keep you guessing till the very end, and to witness them in the flesh doing what they do was a joy. It is a true tribute to the medium theatre and stage life, elevated by outstanding set design, sound system and the second half's found-footage aspects. Stage/Fright is a true gift to fans, maintaining the charm of the original series with the most thrilling new innovative material, it is so much more than just a stage show but a celebration of over 30 years of frightening and exciting audiences with The League of Gentleman, Psychoville, and Inside No 9, with Stage/Fright being the perfect final chapter.



The Melomaniac: Artist Spotlight

Magnolian

When I first discovered Magnolian's music at the end of a YouTube video, I was hypnotised. I sat through his song 'The Bride & The Bachelor', completely entranced, and I knew right then and there that I had to listen to his entire discography immediately, and thank the gods that I did.

Dulguun Bayasgalan, AKA Magnolian, has been performing as an indie singer-songwriter since 2015. His debut at the Playtime Festival (the largest music festival in Mongolia) caught the eye of the crowd as he was the only solo act at the entire gig, and audiences were quickly charmed by his uniquely lonesome, sensitive performances. Since then, he has shot to incredible fame in his home country, becoming the second-most streamed Mongolian artist on Spotify, and collaborating with numerous household names internationally. He's worked with filmmakers and game developers alike, as well as co-founding one of the most successful jazz venues in Ulaanbaatar.

Magnolian's sound is best described as an almost alt, indie folk-rock/pop, with the occasional jazz element sprinkled in. He has a habit of mixing traditional and modern instruments together to create these gorgeous soundscapes that blend incredibly well: the traditional elements create these calming, mellifluous instrumentals that worm their way into your head, while the modern influences give it that little extra bit of pep to really drive the whole thing forward. The result is this dreamy, mellow sound, filled with dulcet tones, that leaves you spellbound.

His songs never fail to fill you with a sort of positive conviction that boosts your energy, and are perfect for



Once the first few seconds of tracks like 'Someone leaving on in the background' - I often listen to them while studying or simply for the peaceful ambience they bring. 'New', 'Pearls Around My Neck' and 'Indigo' start playing, you just can't resist bopping your head in satisfaction. As our own Alma herself put it when hearing him for the first time: "THIS IS LIFE-CHANGING." Magnolian's music isn't exactly slow (it certainly has a lot more force than that), but it's not like the explosive, attention-grabbing sound that widespread pop takes on. He's cited Bon Iver, The Weeknd, Vincent, and Arcade Fire as inspirations to his art, though sonically, he more resembles The Handsome Family, Joanna Newsom, and even Absynthe Minded, albeit with a tad bit more pop.

While he leaves a lot of the work up to his instrumentals, Dulguun's own voice is the added perfection on top of it all. Utilising both the Mongolian and English languages, Dulguun sings in a soft, crooner style - bordering on whispering - that blends euphoniously with the soothing instrumentals he employs. While he writes lyrics and music by himself, you'll often see collaborations with fellow bands and musicians - including his wife, Enkhjin Batjargal - and I find that these tracks make for some of his best work yet. The other singers' vocals are expertly chosen to suit Dulguun's own voice and instrumentals, no matter their individual style of music, and the result is a sound so mesmerising and tranquil that I really can't describe. I highly recommend you listen to tracks like 'The Bride &



The Bachelor', 'Someday' and 'Баавгай Болохсон (The Bear Has Been Born)' to get a feel for what I mean. These songs often deal with love, hope, loss, and battling with the dark side of life - with slightly abstract, yet refreshingly sincere lyrics that make you want to dance around.

Dulguun himself has been playing guitar since he was 12-years-old, writing songs from around the age of 15/16, and since learning to play the keyboard and synthesiser personally in his productions. The name 'Magnolian' was lovingly chosen due to how similar it sounds to 'Mongolian' (I, indeed, get the two mixed up regularly ever since finding this singer) - and also to separate his art from his individual self. What's most compelling about this artist is that you can tell Magnolian's not trying to take the spotlight or chase fame, more just to share his truth and create a beautiful sound for people to unwind to. His extensive participation in the music community that goes beyond just making songs himself, both in Mongolia and internationally, is a testament to his honest care for the craft and passion to expand the indie (Mongolian) art scene. In the 10 years since his debut, he's released only one EP ('Famous Men', 2016), one studio album ('Slow Burn', 2020), and around four singles - though I assure you, he is far from inactive.

In July of last year, his music was chosen to feature heavily in Hideo Kojima's 'Death Stranding 2: On the Beach', including a new original song that got its own MV. He's worked on multiple picture projects, making the OST for the film 'If Only I Could Hibernate' (2023) and starring in the drama-comedy 'They Sing up on the Hill' (2019), as well as working on a few documentaries such as 'Live from Ub' (2015) and 'Nomad Meets the City' (2020) (which his wife even helped out with!). In fact, his music was included in the American Netflix programme 'Outer Banks' (2020) - an amazing feat for an indie Mongolian artist in general. Nowadays, Dulguun participates in interviews and podcasts semi-regularly - discussing the future of musicianship and the like - and holds the occasional live performance, with even an upcoming Valentine's Day show featuring a plethora of fellow Mongolian artists.



Magnolian has brought a special accompaniment to the quiet moments in life. My absolute favourites of his tracks are the two which introduced me to him. 'The Bride & The Bachelor' and 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man' are two of his most popular tapes and for good reason. The former features fellow artist Tselmuun, whose lighter but still soft vocals blend GORGEOUSLY and Dulguun's low singing voice, and the use of traditional instruments which I can't even name in that song is actually evolutionary. The poignant delivery of lyrics describing a coming-of-age story almost makes me cry every time I hear it, and this is no doubt Magnolian's greatest track yet. 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man' is a hazy, dreamy interpretation of the Dostoevsky novel of the same name, and details the absurdity of the desire for human connection and recognition, and the resignation that you will never get it. I'd highly recommend both of these songs to begin with if you want to get into Magnolian's music, and I hope he brings you the same peace and joy he's brought me.



Top tracks:
 'The Bride & The Bachelor',
 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man',
 'Woods'

By Keira Nightingale, Year 12