

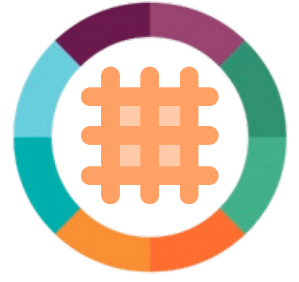
Longbenton High School

The Waffle

19 March 2026

Volume II

Issue 7



The Machine and You



Art by Ava Buglass, Year 10

- Lincoln builds a computer!
- Alesia wonders who you think you are!
- Grace has her Wuthering Heights Hot Take!
- Alma takes on AI!
- Elliott's Surreal Snaps!
- And more!

Ms Doucet's Poem of the Moment

from 'The South Country'

A lost thing could I never find,
Nor a broken thing mend:
And I fear I shall be all alone
When I get towards the end.
Who will there be to comfort me
Or who will be my friend?

I will gather and carefully make my friends
Of the men of the Sussex Weald;
They watch the stars from silent folds,
They stiffly plough the field.
By them and the God of the South Country
My poor soul shall be healed.

If I ever become a rich man,
Or if ever I grow to be old,
I will build a house with deep thatch
To shelter me from the cold,
And there shall the Sussex songs be sung
And the story of Sussex told.

I will hold my house in the high wood
Within a walk of the sea,
And the men that were boys when I was a boy
Shall sit and drink with me.

Hillaire Belloc

Sophia's Stanzas

Live in the moment

It's so easy to get caught up in life,
And forget to appreciate
All the little things
That we take for granted

Like flowers and chocolate,
And long family walks;
The beach, icecream,
And effortless talks

Life is too short to forget what it means,
What it means to be yourself,
What it means to live free,
What it means to look after your health.

So stop endlessly worrying
And you'll thank yourself for it
All will work out in the end
But life is too short to not live in the moment

Creative Writing Prompt

"The car is on fire, and there's no driver at the wheel...

*The sun has fallen down
And the billboards are all leering
And the flags are all dead at the top of their poles."*

*The skyline was beautiful on fire
All twisted metal stretching upwards
Everything washed in a thin orange haze."*

This is an extract from a piece of music entitled 'The Dead Flag Blues' by one of my favourite bands, 'Godspeed You! Black Emperor'. It evokes a dystopian setting, but one that seems not so drastically distant from our world.

Write a story, poem or description about realising the subtle approach of a dystopian situation, as inspired by the above quote. The 'song' is available on YouTube. It's 16:27 minutes long. You could challenge yourself to write a first draft in this time while listening to the piece!

by Alma Finnegan

Student Spotlight with Giselle!

What's your most unpopular opinion?

"I have a theory about attractive men. Mostly, people find men attractive if they're taller, and have big, broad shoulders and better jaws - (traits associated with) high testosterone.

If you think about it, people who were taller and more muscular would've gotten drafted in the war, and died probably in war. So the reason there are less 'attractive' men now than before, and more attractive women than men, is that all the men with high testosterone died, and reduced the pool of high testosterone men in current people.

My (other) unpopular opinion is that you should vote green and not reform."

Where's your happy place

"In my bed, because I'm introverted and I like to be away from everyone."

If you could move to any country, where would you go?

"Cyprus, because I was born there and it's hot—niche lore drop."

What career would you hate?

"This might sound bad, but anything to do with Humanities. Imagine you wake up and you're a professor of history—I'd be so sad."

What's your spirit animal and why?

"A panda because they're useless and cute. They're so adorable."

By Daisy Jones

Alesia's Deep Dives . . .

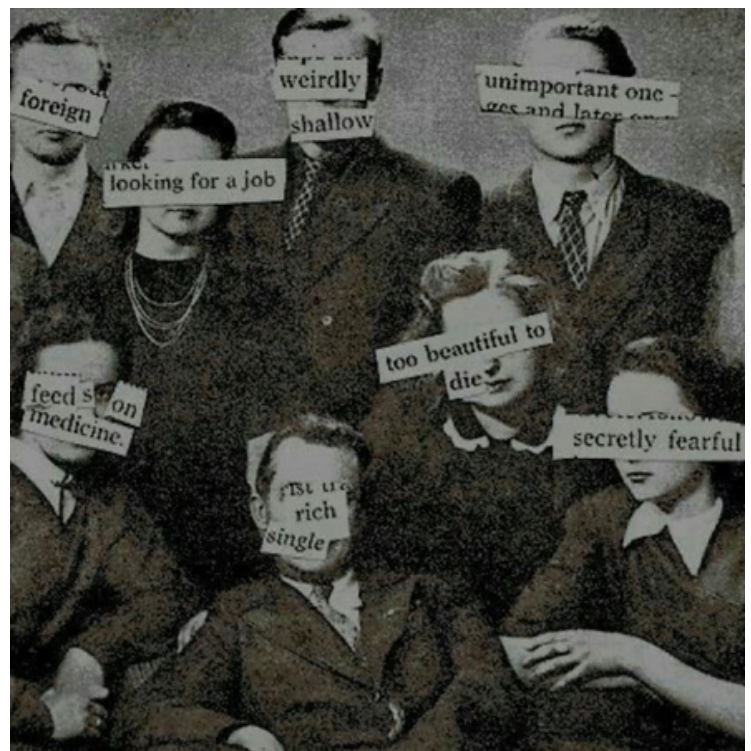
The Art of 'Being Yourself'

Growing up, we were always told to "Be unique!" It's a good point, and definitely something children would benefit from hearing. But how unique can we really be? If everything can be separated into a specific 'aesthetic' so to speak, then where does our individuality begin, and does our need to fit in play a factor in this?

Pretty much everyone I know acts differently with friends than with teachers, or with strangers. They're completely different online than in person, too. Which personality is the real one? Surely it's the one someone feels most comfortable with, but comfort comes with familiarity. The personality you have, and the way you present yourself around friends might be the one you feel the happiest with, but isn't it also partially because you're used to it? Or perhaps, you feel like you don't have to 'perform' to fit someone's standards (at least, hopefully not). Maybe you won't even know your true personality until you're 90, and even then you can't know for certain? How can we be ourselves when there is no set sense of self to base it on?

'Poser' or 'performative' are both extremely notorious ways to tell someone you don't think that they're expressing themselves because that is who they are, but instead because they want attention. To me, I don't see how this invalidates them; perhaps that person's personality is to perform or to get attention. Unless they're actively doing things that contradict the subculture they're in then that is most likely who they genuinely are. I'm sure a lot of you have heard this argument before, but humans are performative! As unique as you may think you are, you will have picked up certain traits from others you have looked up to, which will have defined who you are today. However, even when we are being our authentic selves, we can be put into these rigid categories like 'alternative' or 'basic'; can one human ever exist outside of these categories? Short answer: no. Because we are always perceiving others and will change as a result, whether we do so willingly or not.

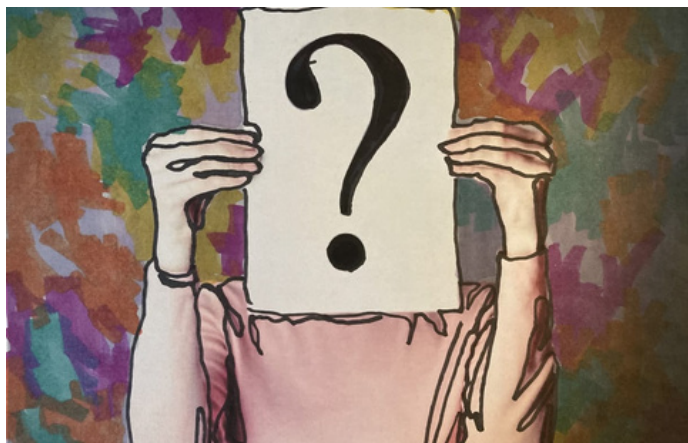
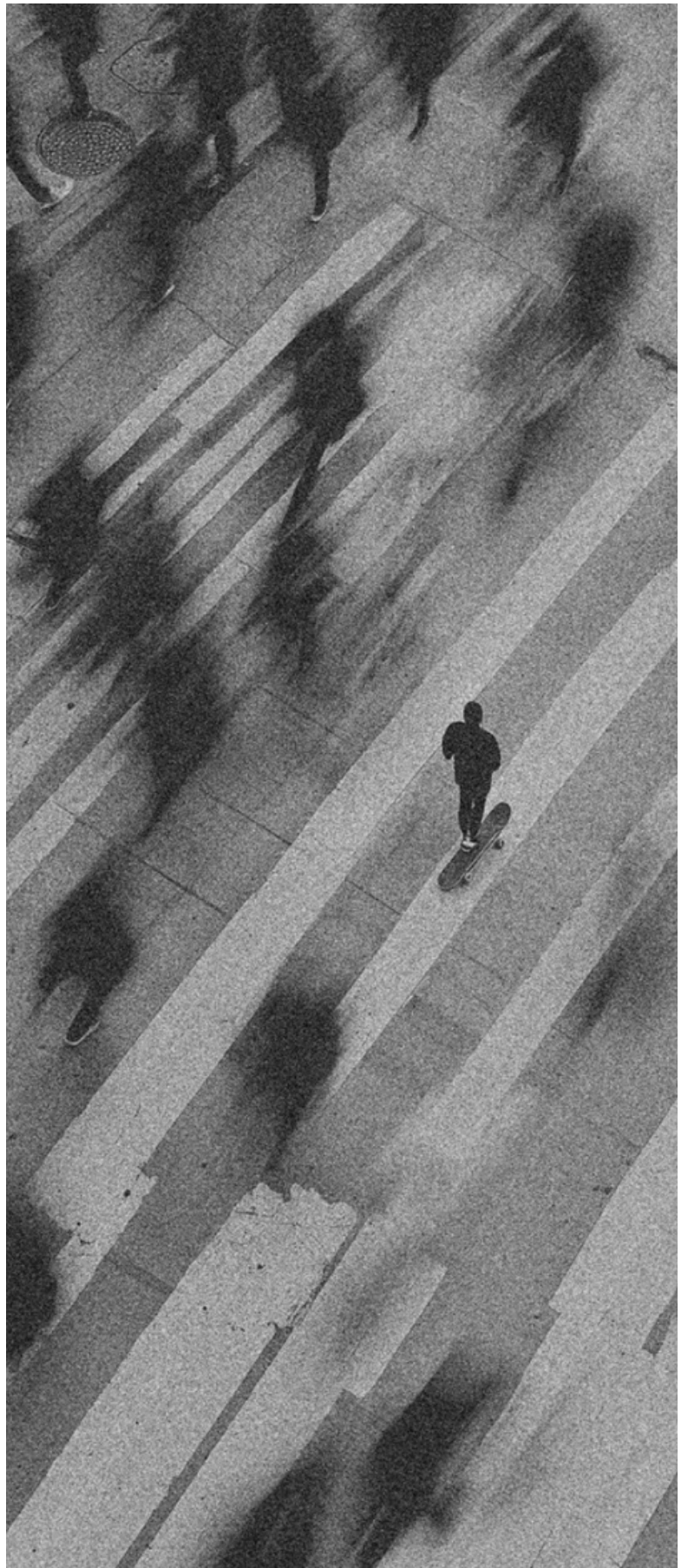
At home, I was raised as an Orthodox Christian. That made sense since I was born in Romania, I only speak Romanian at home and I participate in Romanian/Orthodox traditions. However I was raised in England. In primary school, they would teach us about Catholicism and Protestantism. I participated in those traditions and I would only speak English there, too. My point here is that religion, something that such a large population of the planet bases their life on, is dependent on chance, which makes me believe there is no real 'sense of self'. If a Christian were born in the Middle East, they'd perhaps be Muslim; and vice versa. I'm not trying to insult these religions. However, you must admit that one cannot be themselves if they have the exact same views they had growing up. Now, that's not to say everyone should become an atheist if they have a religious family. Still, once again, you simply cannot be yourself if your personality was predetermined before you were even born. This goes for atheism, too.



A good example of someone unique could be Alysa Liu. In the past month, she has skyrocketed to fame, obviously because of how talented she is and her phenomenal performance during the Olympics, but also because she is relatable to younger people. She expresses herself in ways many people are afraid to. For example her piercing, or her hair, has made her instantly recognisable. That's exactly what people mean by "be yourself", but Philosophy will never give you a simple enough answer; That would be too easy. Liu will have seen others with unique hair styles, and those people will have seen other people with unique hairstyles, and so on. Someone with a 'simpler' hairstyle will have also seen others with simple hairstyles and that person will have, too. If our individuality all comes from our perception, then why are 'eccentric' or 'alternative' people seen as the unique ones?

A response to this that I think offers the best perspective is by 18th century philosopher David Hume. He argued that the idea of a fixed identity is merely an illusion, and instead we are just a "bundle of perceptions" as in, we are just loosely connected by memories and habits. This would allow us to change freely, without the pressure of being the most unique person we can be.

Ultimately, society puts way too much importance on how 'unique' we should all be, and Social Media has only made it worse. If there is one thing people should take away from this, it is that maybe you aren't as original as you thought you were. That's okay! Nobody is! We should appreciate and admit the fact that individuality is more or less exaggerated in an attempt to give humans another reason to be divided, be who you want to be, no matter what external factors might be affecting you from doing so.



By Alesia Macovei, Year 12

Construction of a Computer

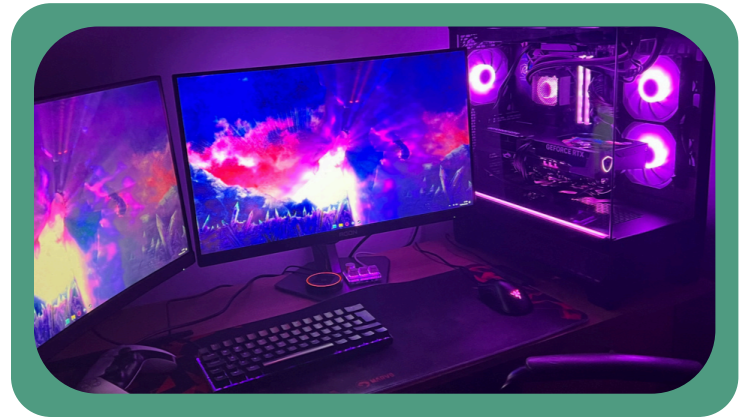
by Lincoln Minhinnick, Y12

Since I was around 9 years old, I have dreamed about having my own desktop computer. I have always been amazed by computers with both performance in games and physical styles. You can give computers such a unique identity with different cases and light setups. Recently at the beginning of January, I made this dream come true by building my own computer.

Before the exciting part of actually building the computer, I had to research and buy the parts. Most people believe that building the computer is the hard part and finding components is easy, but in my opinion it's the other way around. It took me months to find the perfect combination of components that actually connect to each other. I bought most of the parts a month before building the computer. I luckily bought the RAM a few weeks prior to that and I managed to buy my RAM before the prices went up. Without going into too much detail on why the prices went up, AI datacentres have been buying so much RAM that manufacturing companies have switched to focus on producing RAM for the datacentres, so RAM is at a much higher demand now for PC builders.

The building process was way more unexpected than what I was expecting, it was almost as if everything was reversed in a way. Installing certain components that I was worried about were easy, and the parts that I expected to take no time took hours.

I started with the motherboard, which is what most components are installed onto. The motherboard is one of the hardest parts to pick when purchasing parts. You need to make sure that you pick a suitable motherboard that is compatible with other components you have in mind. This includes the CPU, which different brands and generations use different sockets, and the RAM which, depending on the generation, has different slots. I decided to go with a motherboard that has the newest AMD CPU socket and DDR5 RAM slots to future-proof my build so I don't need to upgrade my motherboard in the future as well. The motherboard also has all of the ports that you plug peripherals into (keyboards, mice, microphones etc), so you should pick one that has suitable ports for whatever you will use the computer for; I found that with my laptop I never had enough USB ports for all of my peripherals so I decided to go with a motherboard that had 10 USB ports. Thinking about it now I think having 10 is probably overkill, but at least I won't have the same problem with my laptop.



The first component that I installed onto my motherboard was the CPU (Central Processing Unit), one of the parts that I expected to be scary. The CPU is basically the brain of the computer; it executes billions of instructions per second. The thing that made me expect it to be scary is the way it needs to be installed. The processor must carefully be placed into the socket on the motherboard that has over 1000 tiny gold pins. If you were to accidentally bend a pin, the processor may not work at all and you would need to buy a new motherboard. You must also install the processor rotated a certain way, which is indicated by a little triangle on the CPU which lines up with another marking on the motherboard next to the socket. After inserting the CPU into the socket you need to push a lever down to secure the CPU in place. The lever scared me a little as well as it needed a considerable amount of force to push it all the way down.

Next I installed the RAM (Random Access Memory), which I wasn't worried about but I have seen some videos of installing the parts going horribly wrong, which did make me a little anxious. RAM usually comes in kits of two, to take advantage of dual-channel technology. Without going into too much detail, dual-channel technology allows two identical RAM sticks to be accessed simultaneously by the CPU. To utilise this technology you must either insert your RAM into the slots 1 and 3, or 2 and 4 depending on your motherboard. To physically install the RAM sticks, you must first open the latches on both ends of the socket. You then need to line up the RAM stick and push down with an equal amount of force on each end. When I was attempting to install the RAM I was scared as I didn't realise that so much force was required and I could see the motherboard starting to bend. You will know when you have successfully installed the stick as the latches at each end will close and lock the stick of RAM into place. Thankfully after installing the first stick the second was much easier.

The final component I installed before fixing the motherboard into the case was the SSD (Solid State Drive). There are multiple types of SSDs including M.2, and SATA. I went with M.2 as it provides much faster speeds for reading and writing data. This was probably the easiest part of the building process for me, which was a nice change after the CPU and RAM. The SSD I have is very simple to install, only requiring you to insert the SSD into M.2 slot and locking it in place with a screw. Some motherboards, including mine, come with shields over the M.2 slots which require you to remove the shield to reach the slots. However, SATA SSDs are not installed directly on the motherboard. Instead they have two different cables, one for power, and one for data transfer unlike the M.2 slot which does both directly through the motherboard.

After installing the SSD I decided to install the motherboard into the case. It was a little bit scary removing some of the panels from the case as I picked a case with glass panels so I can see the lights on the components. I recommend using gloves while handling glass panels as I learned the hard way that fingerprints are annoying to get rid of on glass. After lining up the motherboard correctly with the screw holes, I screwed the motherboard in place with a Phillips screwdriver.

The next component I decided to install was the GPU (Graphics Processing Unit). The GPU handles everything graphics related, like generating what appears on your screen. If you are reading this digitally, a GPU has made it possible for you to see this! Higher end GPUs for gaming require a LOT of power, to the point where even though it is plugged directly into your motherboard, it requires an extra cable to provide enough power. GPUs are usually the most expensive component in a build as they are in high demand due to AI and crypto mining. The reason I waited until the motherboard was installed in the case is because the GPU is installed on the motherboard and the case. You need to unscrew a few metal brackets at the back of the computer to allow the GPU to take the place of these brackets, providing DisplayPort and HDMI ports to connect the computer to monitor(s). Inserting the GPU into the motherboard is simple, as you just need to insert the GPU pins into the PCIe slot which should be lined up perfectly with the metal brackets if you installed the motherboard in the correct orientation.

Due to the CPU generating so much heat from its billions of calculations per second, it requires something to keep it cool, preventing it from overheating. This is where the CPU cooler comes into play. There are different types of coolers which include air coolers, liquid coolers, and AIOs (All-in-one). I used an AIO for my build as it is simple and efficient for cooling the powerful CPU I picked. The AIO consists of a CPU block, AIO pump, a radiator and fan(s). The CPU block and AIO pump are attached to the CPU and pump hot coolant from the CPU through the tubes to the radiator where usually two or three fans are used to cool the coolant in the radiator. Then the coolant loops back around to collect more heat from the CPU block. I didn't expect this part to be so problematic while building, I had to hold the radiator and fans up while my cousin screwed them to the case.

I had to finish connecting the wires for the motherboard and case lighting the next day, as I was too tired to finish the build in one day. After a while of figuring out where each cable goes I finally completed the build. If you are wanting to get a job related to computers in the future, this is brilliant practice and also good fun. If you have the money and the confidence, I 100% recommend building your own computer!



The motherboard after being installed into the case.



The finished product with functioning lights!

Life is For the Living: The Harms of Generative AI

By Alma Finnegan, Y13

I waffle to you today on a topic close to my heart. One that remains persistent as each day passes. This being the subject of Generative AI tools, and their adoption into the lives of each of us, whether by choice, accident, or reluctant force. I'm writing with a sense of guilt. There's undoubtedly an allure to time-saving, low-effort solutions in a world that endlessly burns us out. When these tools are free and readily available, and produce content that, while it varies in quality, often does the job, it's almost impossible to resist.

Unfortunately, AI tools don't pose a real solution to overworking, especially in a workplace context. Rather, AI is demonstrating a real global shift towards quantity over quality, causing a frightening obfuscation of workers' rights. Thanks to AI advancements, an employer's expectation for a reasonable amount of time a person ought to take to perform a task is diminished. Thanks to this, the workload increases with no pay rise to account for it. After all, do you expect to be paid for the time 'saved' through use of AI? More work arrives to fill those spaces. AI simply places a plaster over the issue of chronic overworking and undervaluation of peoples' time. And consider, does your burnout come from extended, steady, long-term work, or frequent, rapid, shorter tasks? There's a real risk for exploitation in forced adoption of AI tools. You'd retain the same working hours, but more tasks with less time to complete them. Then, it's those that refuse the tools, even for the sake of simply enjoying their job, if not from an ethical standpoint, that are considered to be poor investments to employers. There exists no protections for workers that would choose not to use AI. Your time is a resource being exploited and sold cheap, I invite you to demand protections amidst this. While time remains precious, I encourage you to—rather than covet your time—choose to spend it in a way that fulfills yourself.

I understand that personal use of AI for study is common and less glaringly problematic. The main concerns that arise from this usage is that of misinformation, conflation of information with meaningless 'bulk words', and deterioration of necessary research/writing skills. The way I see it, in choosing to use these tools, you run those risks knowingly. Nonetheless, I discourage this use of AI for these reasons, alongside the more general ethical reservations I'll come onto later.

Arguments for AI likewise come from the standpoint of accessibility. One consideration being for those who 'aren't good at art'. The perfect demonstration of my response came recently in the online 'Frieren Angle' trend. A user posted this image, a piece of fan-art for the animated show 'Frieren', in which they struggled to draw the difficult angle, but shared it nonetheless:



Countless other artists, professionals and beginners alike, sympathised with the struggle in the comments, attempting the drawing themselves: Others posted perspective advice, drawing exercises, and other beginners felt comfortable to share their own efforts. I adore this work for the person and their struggle behind it, and knowing how little I'd care for any AI generated image that would look conventionally 'incredible' in comparison. I don't care how 'good' you are, I care for your striving. For all the art in the world, the artwork of children and beginners remains my favourite, above any professional work, above my own.

Secondly, some argue that AI makes art accessible to the physically disabled. In response, I'd like to point to the art of Frida Kahlo, who suffered from severe pain, the complications of a bus accident and polio:



Rakan Kurdi, with muscular dystrophy, who pursued art nonetheless:



Tom Yendell, the double-amputee who paints with his feet and mouth:



To suggest that art is inaccessible to the physically disabled discounts the determination of these incredible people, and deters disabled beginners, leading them to believe that their dreams are unachievable through their own autonomy. Each of us suffer from obstacles in our journeys, some larger than others. No matter how or in what way may we are disadvantaged, expressing your perspective through art is accessible. It's the way that people value the products of these artists that is affected by

AI, and parameters of 'quality' as defined by conventional, subjective traits, such as 'realism', 'accuracy' and 'beauty'. I would be lying if I said I haven't been fooled by some AI generated works. All admiration I have for a piece disappears upon discovery of AI. For others, this isn't the case, but my awe for artworks comes from a recognition of the artists. I care more about what is being said to me, than what I am hearing. This in itself is a methodology to avoid echo-chambers, and demonstrates art as a tool for connection, one that surpasses time and language. It reminds me a lot of the 'Death of the Author', the argument against considering the creator's identity or perspective in the outcome of their works, preferring the multiple meanings that may be extracted by the critic. To me, this comes with an enormous loss, and a level of regrettable ignorance. We're humans, and we can only exist within the contexts that shaped us. Considering only our own appreciations isolates us.

I've avoided speaking on the environmental concerns with AI up to this point, knowing the unfortunate reality that environmental concerns rarely succeed in changing our behaviour. It's an insurmountably important consideration and one that during the worldwide investment and uptake in AI, is being unceremoniously brushed under the rug. For those concerned with their own carbon footprint, the use of AI is a very convenient way to increase it. Powering AI datacentres (of which 60% are powered by fossil fuels) is among the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse emissions, expected to amount to an additional 0.4-1.6 gigatonnes (1,600,000,000 tonnes) of CO₂ equivalent emissions by 2035—over three times the UK's net CO₂ emissions (413.7 million tonnes in 2024)³. These statistics are unable to include those of commercial models, such as the most common models as owned by Google, Microsoft, etc. These models' energy consumption remains undisclosed. Fossil fuel mining infrastructure--

--is being built for the sole purpose of powering AI datacentres, such as xAI (Grok) is investing in, with their Memphis centre now one of the largest emitters in the area. Another issue is that of water usage, with clean water required for the cooling of these data centres. Scotland centres alone already use the equivalent of 27 million bottles of tap water¹. These centres are being built in low-income areas where it is cheapest to build, causing shortages in already vulnerable communities.

It should also be carefully considered that both Microsoft and Google's AI models are heavily complicit in the mass military surveillance being employed in the Israeli military's destruction of Gaza, with the pair signing a \$1.2 billion contract with the Israeli government in 2021² to provide their military with advanced facial detection and recognition, object tracking, automated image categorisation, and facial targeting in Gaza⁴. The pair were named as "central to Israel's surveillance apparatus and the ongoing Gaza destruction" by UN Special Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese. These companies directly profit from the ongoing genocide⁵, and it should be gravely understood that profit gained from the use of their respective AI tools, Copilot and Gemini, go towards the tools used in the conflict. Boycotting is a free and unintrusive step in condemning the violence. Additionally, the president of OpenAI (the organisation responsible for ChatGPT) enthusiastically revealed that he donated \$25 million to support Donald Trump's campaign for presidency, making itself one of Trump's largest individual donors⁶. Though your use of AI may be pure, the funding that you provide the tools through both free use and subscriptions equally benefits those who use the software maliciously.

I want to make it clear that I don't blame the people who use or have used GenAI--the world is hostile and life is hard! But while I don't want to drain you with the doom and gloom, there is just too much of it to be ignored. But we remain at a unique moment in time: this technology is new. The public's adoption of it remains uncertain, and there exists in our memories a recent history when our day-to-day lives remained unencroached upon by AI. As such, my earnest hope is that, moving forward into these uncertain times, you might consider involving yourself with the issue. If GenAI threatens something important to you, whether that be your job, your privacy, your hobbies, the content you consume, I hope that you will take a stand in this time where it matters so much, if not for the sake of your own rights to privacy, freedom, and workplace protections, then for its complicity in horrors against humanity and the natural environment. Thank you once again for reading!

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LEGO Dimensions: Victim of Circumstance

by Max Eagan, Y12

Crossovers are a funny thing. The main crossovers that would come to mind would probably be something like the Avengers movies, Alien vs Predator, Super Smash Bros. or even Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games, but I think Lego Dimensions deserves to be remembered alongside these. Lego games are often dismissed as a nostalgic experience and nothing more; sometimes rightly so. However this one offers something more. This game feels like it had the most time spent on it compared to the rest, probably with a higher budget as well. Well it must have been based on some of the franchises it crosses over with. The levels are way longer (some extra levels can take about an hour!) and each franchise has its own hub world to explore. Besides the crossover element, the game also pays homage to the history of the series as a whole, kind of...

To say why, first I must introduce the main gimmick of the game. This was released in 2015 for Xbox 360, Xbox One, PS3, PS4 and Wii U. Can you see the problem yet? No PC release to this date. Worse, you can forget about getting the game digitally because this was a part of the 'Toys to Life' trend meaning the game requires both a large 'Portal' peripheral and the characters must be bought separately. This means that today, it is nigh on impossible to play this game without spending a considerable amount of money and you can forget about remasters because all of the franchises would have to be licensed out again. The cherry on top is that a rival game: 'Disney Infinity' meant that no Disney characters could be used in this game, barring some of the biggest games that would have fit in perfectly, aka Star Wars and Marvel. It sounds like I am being very critical of this game and it's true, I hate how inaccessible it is and—for the record—I would love to be proven wrong about the remaster situation.

Content was released for Lego Dimensions in waves, much like standard Lego sets, albeit more frequently. There were 3 types of 'Packs' aside from the starter pack. There were Level Packs featuring 1 character, 2 vehicles/gadgets and an extra level, Fun packs featuring 1 character and 1 vehicle/gadget and Team packs featuring 2 characters and 2 vehicles/gadgets. The franchises released here were: DC Comics, Lord of the Rings and the Lego Movie (the three starter pack franchises), Lego's own Ninjago and Chima, The Wizard of Oz, The Simpsons, Doctor Who, Back to the Future, Ghostbusters, Midway games (its arcade stuff), Scooby-Doo, Jurassic World and, saving the best for last, the most important one, the one that elevates this game above all other Lego games, the one, the only, PORTAL 2! Hooray! It even gets its own level pack with Half-Life references! There is even a new GLaDOS song over the credits, like the Portal games.



Missing a few pieces because this thing has survived 4 house movings.



Look at these crazy characters!



Chell's character tag

The main story is what really ties the game together, a breezy adventure throughout all of these completely different worlds. I remember in the Portal 2 level, there is a part in the boss fight against GLaDOS where you summon HAL 9000 from 2001: A Space Odyssey to distract her and that really stuck with me. The game feels like it was made with love and that the developers were themselves fans of a lot of the properties they were working with, adding towards the overall charm of the game. However, the gameplay, outside of the portal mechanics, is the standard Lego game affair. Levels with simple puzzles and hidden collectables and hubworlds full of things to do. The gameplay that the portal adds can be clunky, however. Basically, sometimes you need to move the physical characters around on the portal base to change things in the game. This requires you to sit really close to the console as the cable is not the longest and you have to constantly look away from the game to see what to do with the characters. You kinda get used to it though.

Once all of the waves were released, things went quiet for a while. Then out of nowhere, a 'Year 2' was announced alongside a trailer showing off a slew of new characters and levels. There was also a new pack type: the Story Pack featuring 1 or 2 characters, 1 vehicle/gadget and 6, yes SIX extra levels alongside a new build to be placed on top of the portal base which doesn't actually do anything but it looks cool. These new franchises are as follows: Ghostbusters 2016 (Yikes), Adventure Time, Mission Impossible, Harry Potter, The A-Team, Fantastic Beasts, Sonic the Hedgehog, Gremlins, E.T, The Lego Batman Movie, Knight Rider, The Goonies, Lego City Undercover, Teen Titans Go (Yikes again), The Powerpuff Girls and Beetlejuice. These characters were obviously of a lesser scale than the Year 1 stuff (with exceptions - Sonic the Hedgehog!!!) but still, it was unexpected and I think the game is better off for it.

Alas, there was no year 3. There have been leaks stating that Minecraft was going to be there as well as Thunderbirds and Shrek. That would have been nice. I wish I could recommend this game but due to the hassle of playing it in the modern day, I can't recommend it in good faith. Maybe if you had a large amount of money you need to spend Brewster's Millions style, then you could get into this game. The game's story can be fully beaten with the three starter characters so if you only care about that and no bonus content then it's not as bad. Also, I must mention, if you get the Xbox 360 or Wii U versions of the game, their online storefronts have been shut down meaning you can't download the Year 2 content anymore, so I would steer clear of these versions. If only there was a Gordon Freeman level pack...



The Melomaniac: Artist Spotlight

Yaelokre

Yaelokre's career has been a fun one to follow over the last couple of years. Ever since 2024, they've become the talk of the folk scene, rising to remarkable heights in just a short time. They've become a comfort artist for many, not only for their whimsy, fun, and overall good vibes, but also for the healing and relatable themes they explore through their storytelling. They started off as a small indie folk artist drawing their characters in a little corner of the internet, and have now evolved a gorgeous narrative full of lore and passion that many find themselves hyperfixating on today.

'Yaelokre' is the name of a music storytelling project developed by Keath Ósk, a Filipino-Icelandic singer/songwriter and multimedia artist. You may know them from their 2024 debut 'Harpy Hare', which went viral in just a few months and shot them to fame with dizzying haste (I remember seeing their subscriber count increase by about fifty thousand per day during this period). Since then, they've released three EPs, opened for renowned Norwegian artist Aurora, and collaborated with fellow Filipino artists medyo maybe and Emil Ortega. Yaelokre is most known for the narrative world behind their music, named 'Meadowlark', that comes with its own lore and characters that I am absolutely going to ramble on about for a few paragraphs.

The story of Meadowlark is set in a world named Eld - a whimsical, Renaissance-style place full of wonder and mystique. In the World of Eld, there exist four 'Harkers' - mythological beings from fairytales and concepts brought to life, who each represent a fundamental aspect of nature: the Storyteller represents the past, Yarrow the Bell-ringer represents the future, the Croon represents entropy, and the Enkindled represents truth and equilibrium amongst chaos. Long ago, the Harkers wandered Eld as storytellers, rarely crossing paths and called forth wherever they were needed most. At some point, each Harker chose a human child to represent them and continue spreading their message, named Cole, Clémente (or Clémentine), Peregrine (or Perrine) and Kingsley respectively.



Together, these four children formed a musical ensemble known as The Lark, performing plays about the Harkers and singing the tales of Meadowlark, carrying on the Harkers' legacy by trying to bring back a type of magic/energy called 'Wonderment'. The children act as the main protagonists of the story, with their own mysteries and lore being the main focus of the songs, as well as their role in the Harkers' plan.

Keath voices each of these four children themselves, as well as two other characters known as the Playwright and Cooper, who oversee The Lark's performances and act as kind of parental figures to them. Keath's ability to voice six separate people so distinctly is astounding, especially during live performances where they have to switch from one vocal register to another within a single line. Each character has their own easily identifiable voice, and you can really hear the improvement in Ósk's voice acting since their debut. Of lyrics, Yaelokre mainly explores themes of childhood, found family and parent-child relationships - so far most of their songs have detailed The Lark's relationships with each other and their parents, whom they all ended up leaving. In 'Bird cage blue and yellow', for example, we learn of Clémente's backstory with their mother - the Baroness - who kept them under very strict conditions and treated them like a doll, eventually forcing them to run away. Peregrine's song 'To douse a scalded tongue' is an angry ballad that tells the tale of caregivers who are unable to provide for their children and take seriously the role of raising them, leaving the child to fend for themselves.

It's so entertaining to watch videos and audio clips of the kids just messing about and having fun. They each have an individual personality that shines through, with likes, dislikes, quirks, idiosyncrasies and the like that make these characters feel so real. These silly children have brought consolation and solace to many listeners who relate to their stories, and is probably the main reason Yaelokre's project got as big as it did.



That's enough of me rambling about the lore of Meadowlark, however. Onto the actual sound itself, Yaelokre's genre is predominantly contemporary folk and Original Pilipino Music (a type of Filipino pop), though they also employ some orchestral and rock elements. Their signature instrument is the guitalele, a hybrid of guitar and ukulele that was customised especially to suit Keath's aesthetic. One part of Yaelokre's music that I obsess over is their lyricism: they speak in a very archaic, old-fashioned English, both in lyrics and when in character in general. I can say that their English prose is gorgeous, especially when it comes to alliteration and rhymes and cleverly conveying their meaning through metaphors of yore. Whenever I hear their poetry-like speech, I think I must be experiencing what Shakespearean audiences felt back in the day. They sing in Tagalog and Icelandic as well and apparently speak in a similarly archaic version of Tagalog, allowing their Filipino audience the same experience. Their prose matches the overall aesthetic of the world they've cultivated perfectly: a very neo-classical, almost medieval style that is part of the reason their sound is so enchanting. Nowadays, they collaborate song productions with the aforementioned medyo maybe and Emil Ortega, as well as performing with them in a live band, where they're known for being goofy.

Another thing people love about Yaelokre is their aesthetic. Part of the reason so many find comfort from their music is because of the cosiness and whimsy engrained throughout their storytelling - a very comfy, folk feeling. The name 'Yaelokre' literally derives from 'yellow ochre', which is the main colour used in their illustrations (which they draw themselves!!) and that Keath associates with childhood nostalgia. They frequently perform in-character at live shows, with animal-themed masks (each associated with a different Harker) and Renaissance-esque outfits, performing in prose. Their artistry has been compared to Lord of the Rings, with Keath being named our own whimsical minstrel (they even began their career performing at renfairs). Their fandom are even referred to as 'Wonderfolk', who are known in-world as carriers of the special Wonderment energy.

Their first EP 'Hayfields' consists of old songs the Harkers used to sing, with one song dedicated to each Harker, and acts as a kind of prelude to the entire story (though I will say this project contains some of their best productions to date). The 'Origins' EP acts as Chapter I of Meadowlark and focuses on the backstory of the Lark and their parents, and how the children came to form this ensemble. As the story goes, Cole survived a childhood tragedy and was eventually rescued by the Storyteller and another figure named The Feathered Lady. Not much is known about Kingsley's past, except that they're the only member of The Lark who doesn't have a surname and were raised communally by their town of Felicity. Both Cole's and Kingsley's stories are linked to the downfall of the ancient kingdom that preceded Felicity, and the foolish Majesty who ruled it, though not much has been revealed about this yet.

Regardless, the two children basically grew up around each other and at some point, met a standoffish, closed-off Perrine, who had to suffer incompetent and emotionally-immature parents and who trusted no-one, though they eventually warmed up to the two and joined their little group. After Clémentine ran away from their mother, they fell off a cliff and into a lake, where they were found by Cole and was the last one to join the circle of friends. Together, the four formed an unbreakable sibling-bond, teaching each other lessons, helping each other navigate the world and form their own identity as simply children who should be allowed to be. These kids have been through a lot, and do not hesitate to spread their stories far and wide so other people can learn from them. 'Composing Colentine' is Yaelokre's most recent EP, released only a few weeks ago, that explores the relationship between Cole and Clémentine, who are partners. After Cole rescued Clémme, they stuck to them like glue, constantly asking questions about this terrifying new world they had never been allowed to explore and eventually leading to a relationship that's beyond romantic or platonic, though Keath has stated they prefer not to put a label on it. Their relationship mirrors how the people of Eld often ship together the Storyteller and Bell-ringer (the two Harkers they represent), and their chemistry is ADORABLE. There's this one track 'Cole's Response' on the EP that shows Cole's emotional response to Clémentine's overwhelming affection, and Keath's voicing of a bashful child with a crush is enough to make you kick your feet. The release of this last EP marks the end of the 'Foreword' of Meadowlark, and I cannot wait to see where the story goes in the future.



The official designs of the main four!
From L-R: Cole, Clémme, Kingsley & Perrine



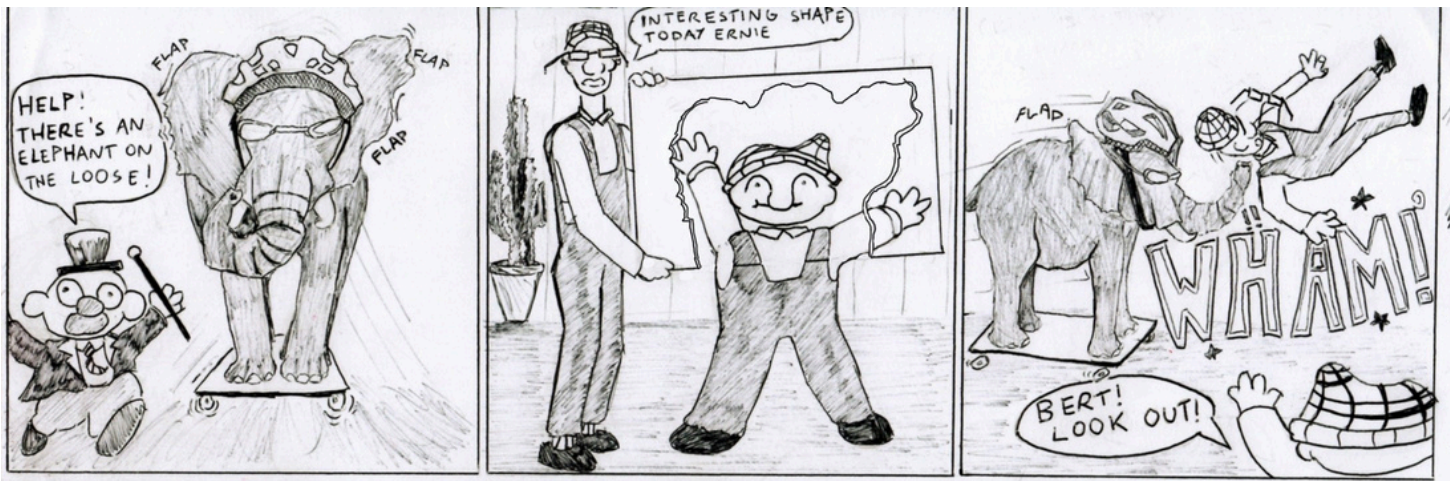
Top tracks:

'Neath the grove is a heart', 'Kid & Leveret', 'Hearken'

By Keira Nightingale, Year 12

Bert and Ernie : Glass Movers

Written and illustrated by Aidan Rickard



Each issue, these comics will share a theme. Last issue the theme was love. See if you can work out the theme this issue!

Elliott Savage: Surrealist Photography



Lincolings

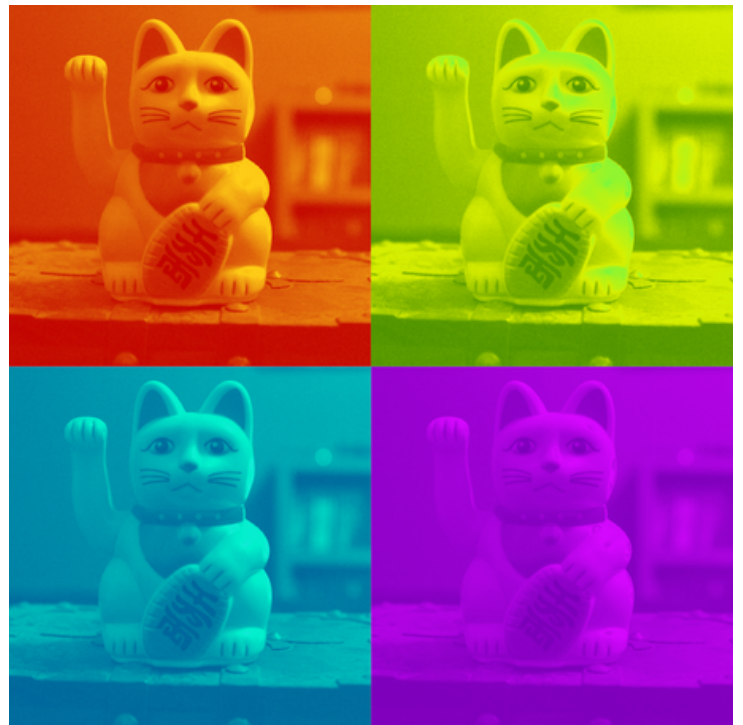


Lincoln Spiral



Lucky Cat Ascension

Over the course of my photography work I've occasionally grown bored with my main project and pursued more experimental side projects. These heavily edited pictures are intended to be humorous but slightly unsettling. Throughout my experimental work I've used the idea of repeating subjects a lot, having one person copied over and over again, often being presided over by a giant floating head. This made it a bit hard to secure pictures to include in the Waffle because for some reason it's considered embarrassing to have your floating purple head printed off for the whole school to see.



Lucky Cat Collage

Grace's Film Review

"Wuthering Heights"

'Tragedy strikes when Heathcliff falls in love with Catherine Earnshaw, a woman from a wealthy family in 18th century England.'

I think it goes without saying that Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" is not a typical page to screen book adaptation but rather an interpretation of Emily Brontë's iconic story, with Fennell having stated the story she wanted to tell is the story she imagined, having first read the novel when she was 14 years old. Fennell centres her adaptation on the "love story" at the expense of almost all of the novel's other themes, while the novel itself is far from "the greatest love story" that Fennell tries to make it, it is a story of revenge, class struggle, power, racism and generational trauma. However, I don't think it's as simple as saying "If you go in with the knowledge that it's not the book, then you'll enjoy it" or "it's a bad adaptation, but a good film", I don't believe it's as black and white as that, there are plenty of brilliant films that are major departures from the novels they were based on, such as *The Shining* (1980) and *Fight Club* (1999) as just a few examples. Whether a film is an exact copy of its source material should not be used as a way to determine its greatness as a film as they are both completely separate entities and when changes are made we need to acknowledge that they were made to enhance the cinematic experience, however with a film like "Wuthering Heights", it is important to acknowledge the film's source material and how Fennell takes themes from the novel such as abuse and manipulates them to fit her own narrative in a way that I find distasteful and unnecessary and that doesn't even work for her film despite how hard she tries to make these changes logical, they simply aren't.

The entire film feels horribly miscast, despite the controversy of Jacob Elordi's casting, it is Margot Robbie who feels most out of place. The character of Cathy who is a teenager for the majority of the novel is aged up to being in her late 20s to 30s to match Robbie's actual age of 35, this change simply does not work at all for the film, whilst being a massively inaccurate film it retains Cathy's immature and childish characteristics, which for a teenager are quite fitting however seeing these characteristics exhibited in a grown woman is grating and simply makes Cathy unlikable, and not in a good way. Margot Robbie feels out of place even amongst a cast of miscast actors and it is distractingly bad and completely takes you out of the cinematic experience, the entire performance just feels off leaving me unable to connect or care for this character at all.

Jacob Elordi's casting has been a highly controversial one, with a white actor being cast to play the ethnically ambiguous Heathcliff, who is often described as a "Dark skinned gypsy" and--

Director: Emerald Fennell
Starring: Margot Robbie, Jacob Elordi, Alison Oliver, Hong Chau, Shazad Latif, Martin Clunes, Ewan Mitchell, Charlotte Mellington, Owen Cooper
Genre: Romance, Drama
Release: 13 February 2026
Rating: 15 (Sexual content, Some violent content, language)
Runtime: 136 minutes
Where to watch: Cinemas
My Rating: 3/10



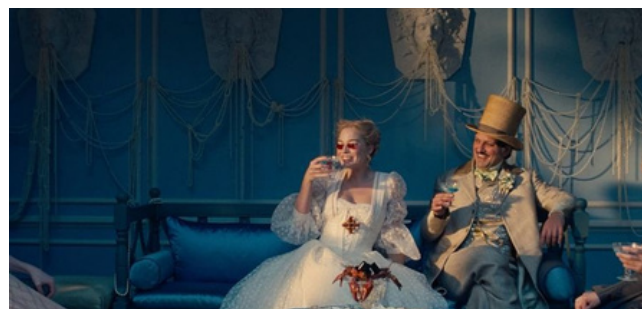
--is discriminated against throughout the novel because of this and being a core theme of his character and the novel, like I said earlier, it's ok for films to use artistic licence to tell a story but this change just feels completely unnecessary. Fennell states she cast Elordi as Heathcliff as "He looked exactly like the illustration of Heathcliff on the first book that I read," Emerald recalled. "And it was so awful because I wanted to scream. Not the professional thing to do, obviously". She also stated that "You can only make the movie that you sort of imagined yourself when you read it." Which to me, makes me wonder why it was impossible for her to imagine a dark-skinned man as the love interest of this "great love story" despite the implication of Heathcliff being of foreign origin, and taken from the streets of Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw, to be neglected, abused and discriminated against because of his poverty and his brownness and spending the second half of the novel exacting his revenge. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel undoubtedly about racism, and no matter what changes you want to make as a filmmaker, to remove this key aspect of the story and strip away of the politics of *Wuthering Heights* I find to be completely nonsensical, as Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett writes in her review of "Wuthering Heights" for *The Guardian* "Class and racial inequality aren't just themes you learn about in English class, something to be dispensed with in favour of zeitgeisty BDSM, fish fingering and boarding-school pranks with eggs. They are the mood music of life, a barrier many teenagers are already wrestling with". With all of this in mind, I think Jacob Elordi does his best with the Heathcliff he is presented with, he is clearly a very talented actor, made clear with his previous performances in *Euphoria* (2019-), his recent Oscar nominated performance in Guillermo Del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) and Fennell's previous feature *Saltburn* (2023), but he simply doesn't fit this role.

The only character I found at all interesting is Isabella Linton, played by Alison Oliver, who is portrayed as a young and naive, unusual girl. She is the only character I found to have any sort of nuance or complexity to her as it is made clear that whilst yes she lives an incredibly privileged life, she is consistently belittled and infantilized, which makes her infatuation with Cathy understandable as she longs to be as beautiful and desired as Cathy and is obsessed with her untamed nature in contrast to Isabella's repressive upbringing and this love for her manifests itself in intense and unusual ways such as Isabella making a doll of Cathy using her real hair, a doll she later leaves posed in a disturbing bloody scene after an argument with Cathy and is jealous of her relationship with Heathcliff. These unusual moments make Isabella a clear stand out amongst the rest of the cast yet the character is played for laughs and reduced to Heathcliff's complicit subservient who is literally chained up like a dog for Heathcliff's amusement. Fennell turns Isabella from a woman who whilst pregnant escapes the clutches of her abusive husband at a time when women were the property of their husbands, to a woman who is complicit and consenting to the abuse she's subjected to from Heathcliff.

With all that being said, "Wuthering Heights" is a visual feast, full of haunting imagery, the gothic set design is enthralling, having been designed not to be historically accurate but to reflect the raw emotions of the characters and often looking normal on the surface but the closer you look the more uncanny it becomes, such as for example the walls of Cathy's bedroom, that has been dubbed as the "skin room" as it was made to look exactly like Margot Robbie's skin, with freckles and veins on panels around the room and her furniture made from hair, made to be symbolic of obsession and desire and represent the objectification of Cathy. As well as this there is a recurring motif of hands which are present throughout the set design in fireplaces, chandeliers, candleholders and more which recur to represent Cathy's endless longing for what she can't have. I love the concept of using the set design to externalise the emotions and complexities of the characters, every set in the film feels like a set rather than a real place and whilst many may see that as a negative I personally loved that aspect of the film and for me felt it made the cinematic experience more immersive with interesting and unusual visuals and this is something I think "Wuthering Heights" does very effectively.

Undoubtedly the best thing about "Wuthering Heights" is Charli xcx's soundtrack. Whilst the album is inspired by the film and songs feature throughout the film it still works perfectly as a stand alone album which captures the emotional intensity of the story rather than focusing on the characters specifically. The 12 track album is heavily influenced by 1980s power ballads and melodic pop and experiments with many different sounds and genres. The album exists as a unique piece whilst not being a major departure from Charli xcx's discography with her signature auto-tuned vocals and pop melodies yet she manages to perfectly blend this with an ominous and haunting new sound, experimenting heavily with strings and synths to create disruptive, abrupt and haunting sounds. Wuthering Heights is a confident album and showcases Charli xcx's talent and range as an artist post her phenomenon album Brat.

In conclusion "Wuthering Heights" is a completely hollow film, I understand of course that every person has different tastes and many will love this film, however I feel that on an objective level "Wuthering Heights" is not a good film and despite thinking there were many interesting aspects to the film ultimately I felt disconnected to both the story and its characters.



Max's Musical Musings: Reviews and Recommendations!

Bugsy Malone

Bugsy Malone, released in 1976 and directed by Alan Parker, starring Scott Baio and Jodie Foster, is a wonderful musical set in 1920's New York. The plot is mostly focused on the main character Bugsy Malone and the situations he finds himself in.

This is an insanely fun musical where all the actors are children playing adults, and one of my favourite things included is the fact that they use pedal cars instead of normal cars. The main plot is mostly centered around Fat Sam's Speakeasy and two warring gangs, one who is more technically advanced than the other. They use these weapons called 'Splat Guns' that shoot pies, since the commonly used weapon in this is pies (because of making adjustments to make the story more child-like). My description of this musical does make it sound stranger than it actually is, but if you watch it you can see that these features all work incredibly well.

The music is all by Paul Williams, who also did a few songs for A Muppets Christmas Carol and Phantom of the Paradise; I do think that all the songs are hits and there isn't a bad song out of all of it, but my favourites would have to be: Down And Out, Bad Guys, and You Give A Little Love. The ending song 'You Give A Little Love' has to be the best ending song for a musical, it leaves it on a joyful note with (spoilers) everyone coming back alive and basically saying 'this is a musical none of this is real', which I love. After all of the murder and death they just come back to tell you nothing really mattered anyway.



Fat Sam's gang are all insanely hilarious characters, my favorite being Knuckles; I still think about that scene where Knuckles cracks his knuckles and Fat Sam irritatedly responds with "Will ya stop doin that Knuckles?" and he replies with "That's how I got my name boss." So he just responds with "Well we'll get you a new name!" I'll admit me typing that out might make it seem like the joke doesn't land, but just watch it because it's stacked full with laughable one-liners. When I was rewatching this to write about it I slowly started to realise how much of it I actually quote unknowingly. I have no other way to describe this musical than 'family fun'; if you looked in the dictionary for a definition of family fun it would just be an image from this film: the jaunty piano, darling costumes + set design, and loveable characters found their way to my heart instantly and I fully recommend this to everyone reading.



Our Longben-tunes:

Keira N



SEMI-FINAL by BABYBEARD

Alesia M



Come Together by Michael Jackson

Max E



Feel So Good by Jamiroquai

Lincoln M



Bad Men by Haven't Thought

Sophia D



Drinking Song for the Socially Anxious
by The Amazing Devil

Aidan R



Grounded by Pavement

Elliott S



Jane! by The Long Faces

Featured Lyrics

**'enthralled not by her
curious blend'**

by Matana Roberts

**"My name is your name;
our name is their name;
we are named;
we remember;
they forget."**

"I heard this song at some weird hour in the late night/early morning on Radio6Music. I just sat, *enthralled* by it. Matana's narration is so smooth and calming. It feels simultaneously fond and painful, as she describes the experience of guardianship, and then an experience of racially provoked isolation in a community. I can't get this repeated section out of my head. It keeps me thinking, over and over again."

- Alma F

Sophia's Favourite

Sophia has listened through each Longben-tune and picked her favourite:

This week's winner:

Elliott S



Jane! by The Long Faces

Any views or opinions presented are only those of the student author and not those of Longbenton High School.