

Longbenton Community College

# The Pancake

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Volume II

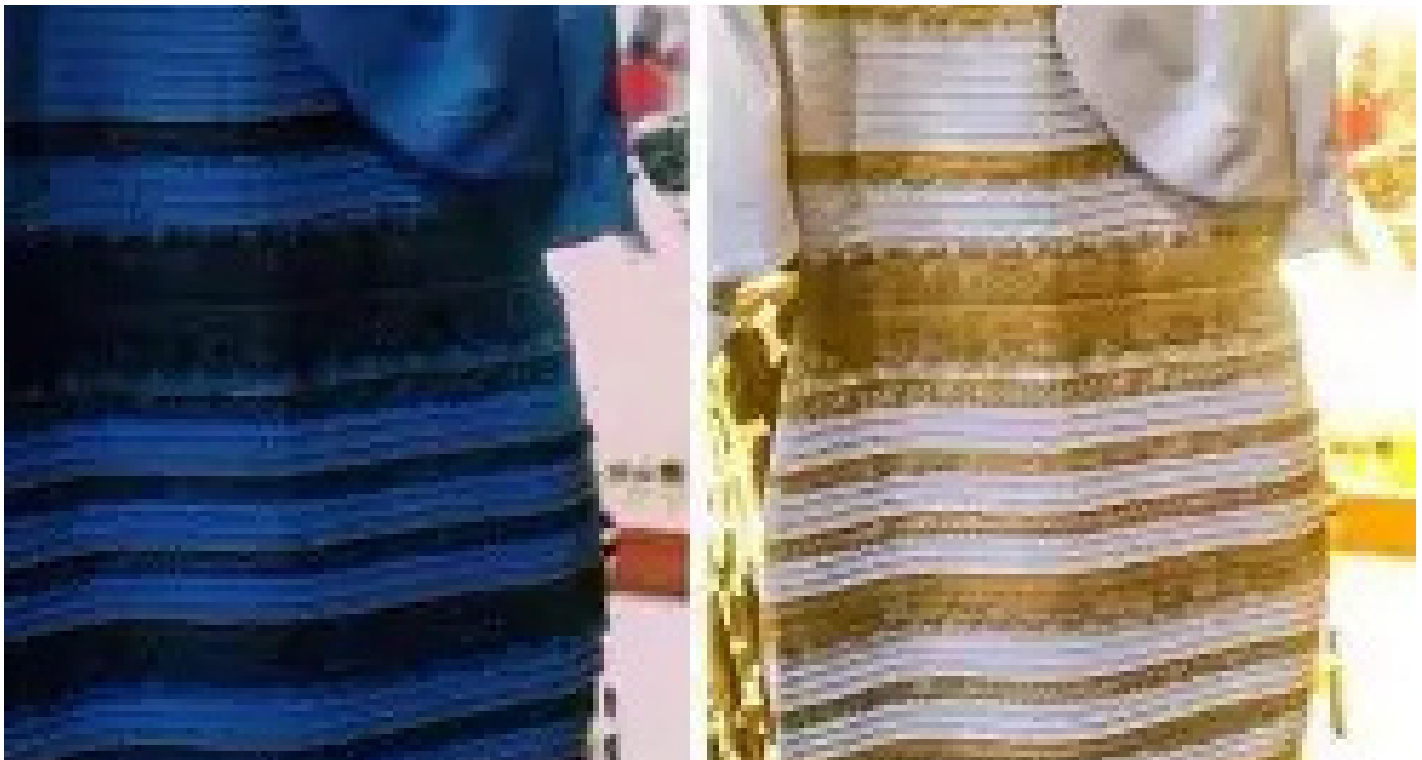
Issue 8



## The Pancake

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As the Spring arrives, we, the editorial board, have decided that a few changes are in order. We feel as a team that the term 'Waffle' is an offensive and inaccurate way to describe the high-brow journalism that we fight tooth and claw to publish. Here at The Pancake, we say what others are not prepared to hear. And if you can't handle that, we don't care! You're just mad because your opinions are wrong! We're a dignified group of people, and we have taste; we're not something that you can just throw into the toaster last minute. No. We're a delicacy that demands proper attention. The issues we tackle here are those of utmost important to everyone's lives, issues that threaten our very humanity. For you lucky, indebted readers, we've fought long and hard put to together an issue that demonstrates exactly the kind of hard-hitting journalism we at The Pancake stand for—and it's not for the faint of heart. So read it, if you dare, but don't come crying when it's too much to handle! Peace out.



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

## Ms Doucet's Poem of the Moment

### Dirty Face

Where did you get such a dirty face,  
My darling dirty-faced child?

I got it from crawling along in the dirt  
And biting two buttons off Jeremy's shirt.  
I got it from chewing the roots of a rose  
And digging for clams in the yard with my nose.  
I got it from peeking into a dark cave  
And painting myself like a Navajo brave.  
I got it from playing with coal in the bin  
And signing my name in cement with my chin.  
I got it from rolling around on the rug  
And giving the horrible dog a big hug.  
I got it from finding a lost silver mine  
And eating sweet blackberries right off the vine.  
I got it from ice cream and wrestling and tears  
And from having more fun than you've had in years.

Shel Silverstein

## Sophia's Stanzas

### Bada Bing Bada Bong

Ipsie do ipsie dee  
Off I go don't mind me  
Bada bing bada bong  
Sing this song, you're never wrong

Ipsie doo ipsie dee  
What you hear is what you see  
Colour the world through your mind  
Leave the real world behind

Ipsie doo ipsie dee  
Never ignore hidden fees  
Bada bing bada bong  
Sing this song, you're never wrong

Ipsie doo ipsie dee  
This has nothing to do with me  
Be yourself and you'll be free  
Ipsie doo ipsie dee

By Sophia Donnison, Y13

## Creative Writing Prompt



This photo was taken onboard the Ning Nang Nong by wildlife journalist Spike Milligan. In never-before-seen footage, he captures not only the cows going bong, but the monkeys all saying boo. It's an extraordinarily rare photograph, the like of which has never been captured by any thrill-seeking photographer before or since. This is due to the catastrophically high fatality rate of encounters with the inhabitants of the ecosystem—a threat Milligan was certainly aware of before embarking on his mission.

This is not to be confused with the Nong Nang Ning, wherein the layman might not notice the crucial identifying feature of the trees going ping, whereas normally this wouldn't occur. Most realise their error when the teapots jibber jabber joo, by which time they are likely to have already passed the point of no return. Likewise, the landscape is often confused with that of the Nong Ning Nang, but is easily differentiated by the presence of its infamously elusive clanging mice.

Write a short story, poem or description about an environment and/or creature that appears natural on the surface, but that becomes noticeably a mimic or illusion in some crucial, uncanny way. This could be a natural environment or creature, or something manmade, like a building or an everyday object.

by Alma Finnegan

## Celebrity spotlight with Sir David Attenborough

### What's your proudest achievement?

"I once entered a polar bear racing competition and won first place! It felt amazing to tame and control such a dangerous beast. I'll never forget the feeling of racing across the North Pole, sitting on its plush, white fur, all the other kids cheering me along."

### What's your favourite animal?

"Probably a rabbit."

### Describe a perfect day in your life.

"I'd lie in bed watching Instagram reels. At some point, I'd walk to the local cafe and buy an iced caramel latte, before heading to football training. Later on, I'd go to the local pub with my husband, get blackout drunk, then go to our favourite club in town. Once home, I'd make a pot noodle, and fall asleep watching The Simpsons."

### What's something you wish more people knew about you?

"I love the colour purple. It's just the best. I feel like people don't understand that. Also that I was The Beatle's first guitarist! Me, Paul and Ringo are still good pals."

### What's your favourite food?

"I like an ASDA meal deal. I typically go for an ultra blue monster, sushi and either hard-boiled eggs or a Yorkie. Having said that, I am quite an adventurous eater. Recently, in Iceland, I tried shark fin soup - the meat was surprisingly tender and delicious!"



By Daisy Jones

## Alesia's Shallow Suggestions . . .

### Free Will

Free will is one of the most debated topics in philosophy, it is a concept that has stumped both theists and atheists. Are all of our actions determined beforehand? As humans, we (for the most part) believe we have free will, and we act according to that belief. But, if our 'fate' exists, if there is a God that is always watching us, or even if our body knows what we will do milliseconds beforehand, does that mean we have no free will?

You know who didn't have free will? Will Smith. You're seriously expecting me to believe that the infamous slap *wasn't* staged!? It's the Oscars, publicity is everything. Obviously they would have wanted to have a crazy scandal. Not to beat a dead horse or anything, but that slap destroyed his whole career. I love Will Smith movies, and now they're gone. What am I to do now? I can't just watch the 2018 YouTube Rewind on repeat. We need to free Will Smith from the shackles of the media, throw him into a big blockbuster and make the man he used to be before his life got flipped upside down! To anyone doubting this, consider what Socrates said before drinking that poison, "Chris Rock was wearing a cheek pad, goodbye world." (Rough Latin translation)

Anyways, I've been volunteering at this care home for people with dementia. Seeing them unable to do basic tasks without help made me consider the fact that maybe we do have *some* variation of free will, the fact our bodies can do whatever we want it to, on our own (even if we can't do it effortlessly) is solid evidence for free will. I could've probably thought of a more coherent argument against that, but my train of thought was disrupted by an ad on the TV. "Free Will Services" seriously? I'm supposed to believe that that happy old man on the screen had *all* of his assets taken care of for... free? In this economy? How does a company like that even make money!? It's not like financial services have been known for their generosity or anything. All I know, is I'm not falling for these phony services when I reach that age, or maybe I will... free will...

Let's assume William Shakespeare existed. If he were to get arrested, could his fans hypothetically create a GoFundMe page titled "Free Will"? The answer is yes. Yes they could. Not that it would mean anything outside of this article, but that can be our little inside joke, ok? The earth is flat and the moon doesn't exist.



**By Alesia Macovei, Year 12**

# Strange Hill High - Crushing Embarrassment

## (Series 2, Episode 8)

Strange Hill High is a CBBC puppet-animated TV series. It follows the school lives of three friends - Mitchell Tanner is quick-witted, energetic and reckless, Becky Butters is nerdy and unpopular, and Templeton is alien-like and completely socially unaware (and also my favourite character). I have always loved this show for its random, unusual and completely unrealistic plots and characters. Each episode hosts a new adventure, and a new challenge for Mitchell, Templeton and Becky to overcome. My favourites include 'Big Mouth Strikes Again', in which an evil tooth fairy disguises as the school cook, feeding children sweets to collect their teeth for her xylophone, and 'Invasion of the Templetons' where a group of aliens come to pay homage to the creator of the universe - Templeton. Also the theme tune is insanely good - my brother once performed it at a talent contest on holiday and I too have memorised it word-by-word. I have so many references from this show with my siblings, and it's in our top childhood TV programmes. Despite this, it's one of those shows that I think is suitable for all ages - I find it just as funny and absorbing now as I did when I was younger. For me, watching something so fun and eccentric that doesn't make much sense feels comforting and freeing, and for this reason I encourage more people to rewatch their favourite childhood shows.

This April Fools episode was always one of my favourites. Mitchell is told by Mr Abercrombie that April Fools is banned, and warned of the story of Michael Barassment - the boy given ultra detention for his pranks and left for 25 years. However, this does not stop Mitchell. His first victim (wannabe gangster - Bishop) sits on a pile of spaghetti and meatballs, and subsequently sinks into the ground

in a state of embarrassment. Throughout the day, students are flushed with shame and taken underground by a set of fat red claws as a result.

One of my favourite bits is when a smiley boy (Mathews) walks into the girls toilets. He opens a cubicle door and sees a girl (Croydonia) reading a paper. 'This is the end of me', she says. 'Actually, we can't see your end', Templeton interjects. And down she goes. Some other boys then walk in, and tease Mathews - now he's gone. A girl (Stephanie) walks out of a cubicle and sprays Tyson with her perfume, only to get covered in snot from Tyson's sneeze. 'Snot my fault' he says accidentally. They both get pulled under.



Eventually, Templeton and Mitchell figure out that embarrassment is the reason the students keep getting snatched under, when the History teacher himself gets pulled under, whilst trying to teach a lesson about making babies. Finally, Templeton embarrasses himself, after making a sci-fi fact mistake, and he grabs Templeton's hand as they get sucked under together.

Here, they come to meet ex-student 'M. Barrassment' in the 'Pit of embarrassment' (actually the school gym). After all these years, M. Barrassment appears as a massive round, red and spitty blob, with fangs and yellow eyes, covered in slime and boils. He is keeping Mitchell's school mates imprisoned in this pit and Mitchell can only free them by winning 'The Shame Game'. But if he loses, they remain forever and M. Barrassment takes over the world. After three rounds, one involving a picture of himself naked in the bath as a baby, Mitchell remains unphased. It's not until a Newspaper from his old school is shown, headlined 'Boy calls Teacher Mummy in Class', when Mitchell begins to feel humiliated. As everyone is laughing at him, and Mitchell starts to panic and flush, it is Becky Butters who saves the day. She urges Mitchell to 'face it and laugh' - she realises that it's their own shame that's keeping them tied up. As she laughs at her wonky glasses in the mirror, the ropes around her begin to loosen. One by one, the students laugh at themselves, fighting off their own shame, M. Barrassment sagging down as they do so. Eventually, they are rescued by Mr Abercrombie, who falls through the ceiling after getting caught playing with 'Pinky the Pony' and gives M. Barrassment eternal detention. That's one thing that I miss about children's TV shows - that no matter what crazy, catastrophic event happened in the episode, there would be a happy ending, and the characters would return to normal as if

nothing had happened, until the next episode when something completely different happens. It's so different from adults programmes, when plot lines drag across episodes, love interests take up so much time and problems take much longer to resolve.

I think most children's TV programmes offer a message that children and adults alike should pay attention to. I really like the message that this episode gets across - that embarrassment is made up. I think all the time about how a situation is only embarrassing if you make it embarrassing in your head. Sometimes, we take things, including ourselves, too seriously. But, as Becky Butters said, 'if you laugh at yourself, you can break free'.



By Daisy Jones



## Avneesh HATES Aviation

In 2002, a businessman by the name of Keith Irwin came to Miami. Basically he and his partners had secured a contract to deliver fuel to diamond mines in Angola. Soooo a small problem, there was kind of a civil war going on there. Now wars and ground-based fuel supply chains obviously go well together.

So being the brilliant American he is, he found a 25 year-old Boeing 727 that had recently been retired from service with American Airlines. The plane was in good condition but had been around for about as long as Angola had even been a country, so the agreed purchase price was a reasonable \$1 million (for planes) with \$125,000 paid upfront as a down payment and the rest due within 30 days. Irwin and the crew he hired to operate it then flew the plane to Luanda, Angola's capital. The company that had hired Irwin was supposed to pay him \$220,000 once the plane arrived in the country but instead, they decided to not, which was disappointing. The other totally unpredictable disappointing thing was that apparently the accommodations and quality of life in the middle of the WAR ZONE were less than stellar. Finding that out the hard way, two of the three of the airplane's hired crew turned right back around and returned to the US.

You would have thought that American pilots, given that they have to spend lots of time in places like Newark, would be used to war zone conditions, apparently not.



Since the first client seemed to not really exist anymore, Irwin found a new one and they got to flying. Through time, each crew member experienced their own set of terrifying and traumatising events that made them each eventually decide to return back to the US and so the plane ended up being operated by an all Angolan crew and Irwin was left pretty much alone. Irwin still owed a lot of money on the plane and eventually picked up a tail. Some guy would follow him around constantly. Irwin apparently believed that this tail worked for one of his partners. Growing increasingly paranoid, Irwin would blockade his hotel room door during the night by wedging a chair under the handle. Then, one night, someone, nobody knows who, bribed the hotel security guard, got a room key, and tried to get into Irwin's room.

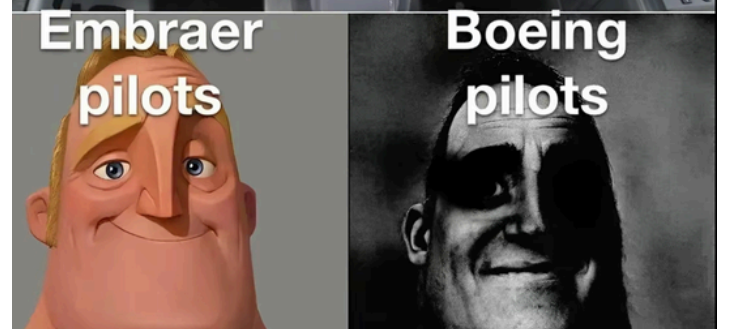


He yelled and scared them off, but the next morning he packed his bags and got out of Angola for good. With that, the plane was left all alone in Angola. The original owner from Miami, who had never been paid the full balance by Irwin, hired someone named Ben Padilla to go to Luanda and repossess the plane. The problem, though, was that by the time Padilla got to Luanda, the 727 had been sitting around for a while with nobody responsible for it, racking up parking fees, fines, and getting into a progressively more dysfunctional state. It would take some time to get it back to working order so Padilla hired a local mechanic crew to fix it up and, after some months of work, it was almost ready to be flown down to Johannesburg to a new client.

On May 23, 2003, though, the aircraft was powered on, taxied to the runway without contacting air traffic control, and took off. There were no plans for the plane to take off then, it never talked to air traffic control, best anyone could tell it was only Padilla and a mechanic, who was not a pilot, onboard and the 727 typically needs three trained aircrew to fly. Everyone was well and truly baffled. As this was only two years after 9/11, the US was understandably concerned about a large plane being completely unaccounted for so they immediately began searching for it. The plane had enough fuel to fly 1,500 miles or 2,400 kilometers meaning it could have not made it out of Africa however it was a pretty large search radius, but with planes there are really only two choices, they either land or they crash (or those stupid rumors of the Bermuda triangle that I totally believe in). Now, option one's problem is that the plane was never found at any known airport. That seems to support option two's plausibility but the thing is, in the 16 years since its disappearance, not a SHRED of wreckage of the 727 has ever been found, and that would be quite rare. To date, only one plane larger than this 727 has truly disappeared without a trace. planes are large and it's just hard for them to truly disappear. Some have suggested that it was stolen in order to run drugs for cartels or something like that, but that wouldn't explain why the plane still hasn't been seen.

Some others have suggested that this was a case of insurance fraud, but that seems unlikely given that the owner had just spent a considerable amount of money fixing up the plane and paying off fines. It wouldn't make sense for them to go and destroy it then for the insurance money. Also, since there has never been any proof that the plane crashed or was stolen, the owner has never actually received any insurance money. The location or fate of this plane is just a true and complete mystery. Despite extensive efforts by the FBI, the US state department, and plenty of investigative journalists, not a single piece of evidence supporting any explanation for the 727's disappearance has ever been found. It's like it never existed.

The explanation that most people seem to most accept at this point is that someone was on board when Padilla and the mechanic boarded the plane on that fateful night and held them at gunpoint, forcing them to take off in order to steal the plane. Then, they presumably crashed, somehow, improbably, without a trace.



## The Melophobe: Artist Sinkhole

### ATARASHII GAKKO!

There was no better group to cover for an April Fool's issue than ATARASHII GAKKO!, I thought. They've become adored in Japan for their silly shenanigans and joyful chaos, yet hide a surprising depth and real iconoclastic messages below their front of tomfoolery that subverts many new listeners' expectations. Over their long career, they've brought a wave of silliness and refreshing unorthodoxy to the J-pop scene, and I'm so glad to finally be covering this underrated group.



From L-R: Mizyu, Kanon, Suzuka, Rin

Atarashii Gakkou no Leaders (aka New School Leaders) are a Japanese alternative girl group formed in 2015, consisting of Mizyu (leader), Rin, Suzuka and Kanon. The members met in a supermarket discount aisle of all places - fitting given the comical quirks they put into their music - and debuted when they were only 13 and 16. Since then, they've released three albums, three EPs, and a litter of singles. The group's core philosophy is freedom of self-expression: they consider themselves the 'representatives of modern youth', primarily focusing their songs on changing the world and aggressively critiquing what can feel like a social dystopia. As they themselves put it: "In a time when only exemplary citizens are acknowledged, we strive to defy a narrow-minded society by embracing individuality and freedom." Their music often challenges the norms of Japanese society by protesting things such as conformity, academic pressure, toxic work culture, family expectations, the monotony of the adult grind and so much more, while also pushing the boundaries of J-pop. As our New School Leaders, they always wear some variation of a school sailor uniform - embellished with red armbands to signify their 'student council' status - and bring an empowering, rebellious energy wherever they go.



Musically, ATARASHII GAKKO! are gloriously genre-bending. They pull from '90s hip-hop, electro-pop, phonk, jazz, punk, math rock and Showa-era kayokyoku (a kind of '60s-'80s J-pop). While you can never quite tell what genre their next song will be, you can always be sure it'll be full of energy and pep - AG! never fail to make their instrumentals a dynamic surprise. Their debut album 'Maenarawanai', for example, has a very jazzy, mellow (at least, mellow for AG!) punk sound, whereas their most recent album 'AG! Calling' has a much more frenetic, phonk/synth, pop style - yet both have that bouncy, zany energy that is unequivocally the group's. The quartet especially gained fame for their 2023 single 'OTONABLU', which people fell in love with for its nostalgic '80s pop sound and lyrics about teenage struggles. Their most recent single 'Sailor, Sail On', on the other hand, is a cinematic epic combining orchestral string arrangements and electro-dance pop, written for the anime film 'Labyrinth' (one of the many films they've featured on). My personal favourite project of theirs is the absolute feverdream that is their debut EP 'SNACKTIME' - an eclectic mix of retro Italo-disco, pop punk, dance pop, electronic rap and much more, and is the musical embodiment of a sugar rush.

Suzuka's vocals often take the lead in the quartet's songs, and has a refreshingly deep, fierce voice that usually features more on the tracks that deal with the heavier topics. Rin acts as the rapper, with a passionate voice that stands out quite a bit and has a tang to it that makes it so enticing to listen to. Mizyu and Kanon both have much lighter, sweeter vocals, and are often paired together on songs to blend into each other beautifully. In the past, each track used to be dedicated to a specific member, though nowadays they tend to share vocals on each track for a more balanced vocal design, and their four unique voices work to make quite the experience.

The main reason I chose this group for an April Fool's issue is their energy. These girls are on Redbull 24/7 - just watch any video of theirs and you'll understand. Suzuka especially is known as the 'crazy one', hailing from Osaka, the land of comedians. AG! are fearless in self-expression, unafraid to make 'weird' choreographies or use silly facial expressions or act wild in general. They are so unapologetically wacky and expressive, it's no wonder they've become a fan favourite amongst Japan and internationally. This absurdist, theatrical energy is especially reflected in their choreographies, which are one of the most eye-catching parts of the group's songs. The girls are AMAZING dancers - their synchronicity and stage awareness is unmatched. They have scarily exceptional muscle control - watching choreographies to songs like 'Candy', 'MANINGEN' or 'Tokyo Calling' is hypnotic - and they truly move like one body. Out of all the girl groups I know, I have to say, ATARASHII GAKKO! are undoubtedly the best dancers out there. The members have been in charge of choreography for all their songs since their debut, and you can tell they've put a lot of personality and soul into their dances, blending butoh (a style of avant-garde, rebellious Japanese dance) and gymnastic formations into their routines, as well as that comical, unhinged energy they always bring. Their stage presence is crazy and you will not fail to see every fan in the crowd bewitched by their dance moves. I can't fully describe what a marvel their choreography is - you'll have to watch it yourself - but you'll just have to take my word for it that it's a sight to behold.

My personal favourite tracks of theirs are 'Night Before the Exam' and 'Giri Giri' - the former a frantic rock-rap track that sounds exactly the way you think it would, featuring a chaotic choreography in which the members furiously destroy all their schoolwork in a vandalised classroom; and the latter a raw track voiced by a girl lamenting her unseen struggles. These songs are just two of many others in their discography that



ATARASHII GAKKO! with BABYMETAL!!

provide powerful catharsis for so many young people and adults alike. ATARASHII GAKKO! have a knack for uniting people across age groups and cultures, creating joyful yet defiant anthems calling for us to unify as a society and have empathy. In a divided world, this eccentric girl group proves that music can be rebellious, healing, and irresistibly fun all at once.

### Top tracks:

'OTONABLUE', 'One Heart', 'Superhuman'

By Keira Nightingale, Year 12

## Elliott's Creature Feature: Top 10 Real monsters

Throughout my articles I have spotlighted some of my favourite fictional monsters but, for this April Fools issue, I thought I'd give some attention to the real monsters that walk our Earth. From the astonishingly huge to the deceptively impressive, the real world holds just as many fascinating creatures as the silver screen.



### Number 10: Eastern Lowland Gorilla

Despite their critically endangered status, Silverback Gorillas are still immensely formidable creatures. They feed primarily on vegetation and small insects but they are nevertheless incredibly powerful creatures; so much so that there was an inescapable internet trend last year positing that not even one hundred human beings would be enough to defeat a single Gorilla in open combat.

### Number 9: Mokele-Mmbembe

The Mokele-Mbembe is a large animal native to the Republic of the Congo sporting a huge snake-like neck. It is noted as being among the largest terrestrial animals, being about the size of an African elephant. Due to the large plumes on its head, it is often confused with the black rhinoceros which also once lived in the region.

### Number 8: Goblin Shark

The goblin shark is a species of deep sea shark that roam the sea floor, using their unusually protruded jaws to feed on all manner of bottom dwelling prey. Although they pose no threat to humans, largely as a result of living so deep, they are nonetheless frightening creatures thanks to their distinctive faces and large size, averaging around ten feet but supposedly reaching up to twenty feet in some instances.

### Number 7: Mongolian Death Worm

The mongolian death worm is an enormous worm often known as Olgoi-Khorkhoi, the large intestine worm, due to its immense size. Little is known about its lifestyle or feeding habits but it is known that the creature's skin is incredibly venomous, so much so that a single touch would be enough to kill a fully grown man in an instant. Despite this incredibly dangerous power, deaths as a result of mongolian death worm poison are exceptionally rare due to their habitat, living deep in the Gobi desert, and their tendency to avoid humans.

### Number 6: Giant Golden-Crowned Flying Fox

The giant golden-crowned flying fox is a species of megabat often considered the largest species of bat in the world, with its weight challenged only by Indian bats and great flying foxes and its wingspan record remaining unchallenged. They thrive mainly on fruits and, due to their large size, have very few predators; the only animals known to regularly hunt them are a select few eagle species, the reticulated python and, of course, humans.

### Number 5: Fur Bearing Trout

The fur bearing trout is a fish species native to the waters around Canada that developed a thick coat of fur in order to survive the cold waters of its habitat. Fur bearing trouts are commonly used as decorative taxidermies, hung up on people's walls and given as gifts. This practice began when a European settler in the region sent a specimen home to his family back home after they were duly skeptical about the existence of such a creature.

## Number 4: Hogzilla

The creature known as Hogzilla was initially suspected to be a hoax upon initial sightings, due to the notion of a gigantic pig being a tad unbelievable. Despite this suspicion it was eventually proven that Hogzilla was indeed a real pig. A hunter by the name of Chris Griffin shot and killed the animal and, from the body, it was determined that the creature had grown so large as a result of being a natural hybrid of a wild boar and a domestic pig.

## Number 3: Loveland Frog Man

The Loveland Frog Man is an unusual creature found largely in Loveland Ohio, the area from which it gets its name. Despite looking very much like a regular frog, Loveland Frog Men are differentiated by their unique bipedal posture, with their tendency to walk on two legs earning them the "frog man" moniker. Another unique trait of the Loveland Frog Man is its affinity for magic, often bearing a magic wand from which it can shoot out sparks to distract predators.

## Number 2: Mantis Shrimp

Mantis Shrimp are large crustaceans known for their incredible power. Using their raptorial appendages, which tend to take the shape of either large clubs to bludgeon prey or sharp blades to grasp prey, they can deliver strikes up to 1500 newtons. In addition to these powerful strikes, the force of the punch generates a massive shockwave that is often enough to stun or kill prey if the initial strike fails to. Mantis shrimp are also noted as the only animals known to be able to perceive polarized light, an ability which is most likely used for communication that can evade the detection of predators.

Mantis shrimp are often kept in aquariums due to their vibrant colours but many aquarists find them to be more trouble than they are worth. They are incredibly voracious eaters and can often cause immense damage to their tanks if they are kept improperly, having a tendency to smash aquarium glass if their enclosures are too small.

## Number 1: Jersey Devil

In the early 1700s a woman with twelve children became pregnant again and, out of frustration, cursed her thirteenth child. She said "Let the child be the devil!" and, a short while after it was born, the baby sprouted wings, horns and eventually transformed into a horse like monster.

The Jersey Devil is an elusive creature but it has been sighted many times throughout New Jersey, including a sighting by Joseph Bonaparte, the older brother of Napoleon. Many of these sightings involve the Jersey Devil preying on livestock, with claims of attacks on humans being rare. Despite its unusual origins the Jersey Devil is still a fascinating creature with incredibly unique characteristics.



## The Job Your Careers Advisor Won't Tell You About: Clown Doctors

Healthcare clowns, or 'Clown Doctors' are specially trained clowns who work in healthcare environments (whether that be a hospital, hospice, etc.), visiting both children and adults--whether they be patients or family of patients--to bring laughter and hope in difficult times. Clown Doctors are shown to benefit patients, families and staff alike, operating under the well-known fact that laughter is the best medicine. I interviewed healthcare clowns Alison McGowan (who works locally in Newcastle) and Noelle Murphy (who works in Canada) about working as a clown doctor.

### What's your clown name, if you have one?

**Alison McGowan:**

Dr Tammy Teacosy.

**Noella Murphy:**

So, I have a couple of clown names. I went with Bloomers, as my own visual art, and frankly my autistic special interest is flowers. More recently, and mostly for a clown show I made about dealing with chronic illness, I went by Unwella...

### What is your go-to clown attire? Do you have any special equipment you can't go without?

**Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

I have some awesome flowery trousers and wear a Teacosy on my head. Our uniform is a white Clown Dr. coat embroidered with our names--and a red nose of course! I would say that thumb lights, squeaks and bubbles are definitely in a healthcare Clown's first aid kit. Personally I am also fond of doing magic tricks badly and a fake poo always comes in handy to hide in a slipper or a Dad's hoodie...

**Bloomers:**

For clown attire, I mix it up. I love crinolines and bright colours, but I also have several pairs of dinosaur and other themed overalls which works for me as an easy uniform.

### Do you have a favourite joke or trick to pull, or a special ability?

**Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

This varies on the age of the child and their particular sense of humour - some children absolutely love slapstick while others prefer humour that's more subtle or gentle. I enjoy setting up silly stories or situations and getting my Clown partner into trouble. Invariably the tables get turned (children are usually quite honest and fair as it turns out) and I end up in hot water myself. I also play the ukelele which is great for improvising songs and stories. A fellow Clown Dr also recently gave me a nose flute which is ridiculous and sounds terrible.

**Bloomers:**

Honestly, I love pratfalls (fake falling) and I find, when delivered well, they crack almost everyone up.



### What's the most rewarding aspect of your job?

**Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

When a child / family shifts from looking serious, shut-down or scared to making eye-contact, smiling, or belly-laughing it's always incredibly rewarding. A smile is a moment of connection - and in that moment we can forget where we are, move beyond illness and find pleasure in the present moment together. I've heard parents say that they have seen their child again, as a previously poorly patient begins to play and have fun.

**Bloomers:**

The most rewarding part is when you can tell you've distracted someone from the reality of life. Laughter anywhere is important but after spending a lot of time in hospitals and as a patient as well, more light and joy is needed in those clinical spaces.

### What led you to becoming a clown?

**Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

Becoming a clown honestly never crossed my mind. It was never suggested to me as a career option, that's for sure. I was a puppeteer and became interested in improvisation. I loved working / performing with children and saw that the Arts Council in Newcastle-upon-Tyne were going to pilot a Clown Dr program. I auditioned, got a place on the team and 20 years later I'm still making a fool of myself for a living. It's the best job in the world.

**Bloomers:**

Growing up, I did a lot of theatre which I enjoyed but the minute a director gave me a clown exercise to try, something changed. Those exercises made more sense and clicked with something inside me so I started to research clown schools and teachers. I didn't know I was a clown before I took my first workshop but like the theatre bug that gets you, clowning became a passion and almost a way of life for me. The fundamental ideas of clowning, being present, being aware of your surroundings, mischievousness and finding fun in failing, really spoke to me.

Careers Advisors HATE this one simple trick!:



## What would you recommend to a starry-eyed young clown looking to get into the scene?

### **Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

I would say send in your CV to Tin Arts - they are all getting on a bit. A clown needs sensitivity to be aware of all the different people, roles and activities going on in the hospital environment. You need to enjoy being spontaneous and creative - we don't go into a room with a script. You need to be a good team player - there's a lot of trust required to work together and I would say, some resilience to keep playing in challenging circumstances! Sometimes funny can be hard to find...

- Oh and always follow your dreams little clowns! Reach for the stars and mind you don't fall over that...oh...too late...

### **Bloomers:**

For any aspiring clowns, I'd look up workshops; try more than one teacher if you can as some might suit you more than others, and find a clown you admire and study them, even reach out to them if you can. You never stop learning in clowning. Anyone can become a clown, you just have to be ok with acting the fool of course!

## Do you work alone, with a partner or part of a bigger team?

### **Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

As part of our Clown Dr program with Tin Arts, we always works in pairs. It's a tried and tested model that means we don't put children under pressure to join in. If someone isn't well enough or feels unsure, we can play with our Clown Dr partner from afar / outside their room to gauge how best to proceed. In hospitals, we are the only adults that children can effectively say "No" to and we always try to respect this. Lots of the children we see are in hospital for a long time, so we have time to build relationships and get to know what different children / families enjoy.

There are also so many opportunities for silliness in the partner dynamic too. Yesterday my partner kept disappearing a reappearing in a terrible grey wig, pretending to be someone else who I didn't recognise. A stupid game of hide-and-seek ensued until someone called security (not really!)

There are currently 8 of us in our team, each with our own unique mix of skills and silliness. Clown Drs work best when we are integrated as a wider part of the healthcare teams on a ward. Sometimes we are asked to help with physio or to help distract a child having a procedure. Through we aren't there specifically to be therapeutic, we can help children to make fun memories of being in hospital that mean they become less afraid of future appointments and even look forward to visits! Where we work on Ward 23 at the Freeman hospital and at St Oswald's Hospice, we feel really welcomed and appreciated - all the 'real' doctors wish they had our job.

### **Bloomers:**

I've worked alone and with a partner, and I do love having someone else with me. When you're in an improvising situation, it's so much easier to have someone you can bounce things off of, and allows you a tiny bit more downtime... but clowns break the fourth wall and interact with their audience so you're never alone. One on one can also feel less intense and a gentler way to ease a patient into play.

## What aspect of life do you envision would benefit the most from clowns being involved?

### **Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

Good question - there are always risks to bringing Clowns on board in any organisation as we are terrible at following instructions and are very easily distracted. When I grow up I'm thinking about working at a Zebra Crossing as I'm fond of animals.

### **Bloomers:**

I've always wanted to do Clowns without Borders, because I think society has assumptions about clowns that aren't true and the art of clowning can be so beneficial for any population struggling. It's amazing to see what clowning can do in refugee camps for example. A lot of people wouldn't deem clowning to be a necessity in a dire situation but actually helping lift moods and distractions are necessary.



Dr Tammy Teacosy



## What do you wish the world knew about clowns?

### **Dr Tammy Teacosy:**

A Clown's superpower is their capacity to be / feel vulnerable and stay connected to the world and everyone in it. It sends a powerful message that it's ok to be you, it's natural to feel confused (especially in the world at the moment) and no matter what, we still have each other.

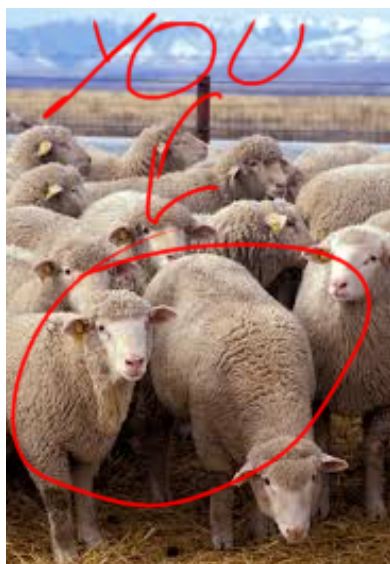
Ps: Clowns don't kill people or live in drains.

### **Bloomers:**

I wish the world would throw away the idea of a scary clown and actually go experience clowns at their best.

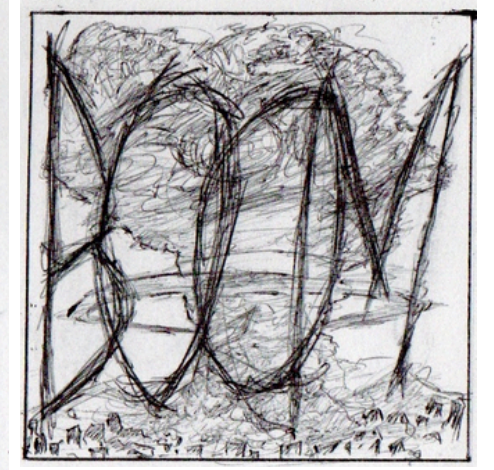
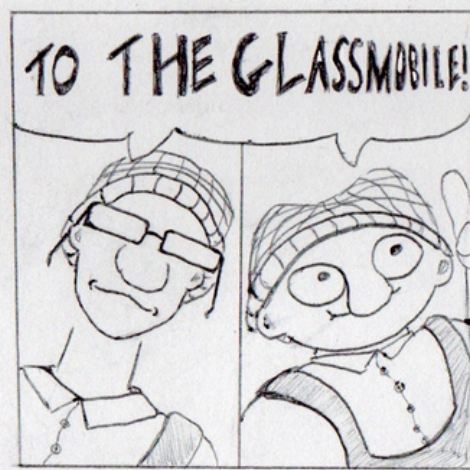
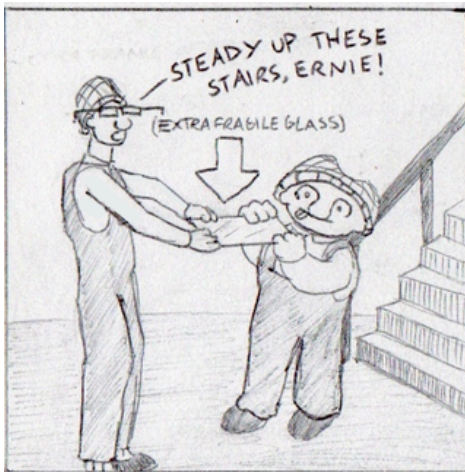
## Max's Musical Musings: The Truth about Kermit

I'm here to tell you the truth about the Muppets, since nobody else is. You may think everything is normal, but I KNOW something is wrong. Kermit the frog right, anything seem different to you? Yeah, I thought you wouldn't notice... he has, a mole. WHEN did this happen, perchance?? Unless he's eaten something and hasn't washed his face since, that's a mole!! Also he has a slight Russian accent now, people are saying it's because of his holiday. You are all sheep!! That is a different frog and you know it!!! Actually let me translate BAHHH BAAHHHHH!!!! Look at how his body language is more SINISTER!!! You may laugh now but just know, when the time comes you will come begging for forgiveness.



## Bert and Ernie: Glass Movers

Written and Drawn by Aidan Rickard



Each issue, these comics will share a common theme. Last issue the theme was 'things on wheels'. See if you can work out the connection this issue!