ISSUE #1906

Felix

KEEP THE CAT FREE | SINCE 1949

What does the future of healthcare look like?

A year after NHS' 10 Year Plan publication, *The New Statesman* Conference examines the system's health.

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Felix Chair, Science Editor
ISABELLA DUCHOVNY

The New Statesman hosted their annual Future of Healthcare Conference on 27 October, opening the conversation to leaders in academia, industry, and policy about the "existential brink" the NHS is at. The NHS 10 Year Plan, published in July 2025, proposes three major shifts: from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

Our Future Health

Healthy life expectancy, the average number of years a person is expected to live in good health, has fallen by two years over the past decade in the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics. The aging population, increasing incidence of multi-morbidity, aggravated by deprivation and the rise in work-limiting health conditions among young people are increasing the pressure on an already overburdened National Health System.

"By the time people come to A&E it's too late, certainly for a cure, but even for a good outcome," remarked Dr Raghib,

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Halloween felix logo: @bipedal_cat

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We will, to the best of our ability, tell you the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

We recognise the endless possibilities of AI in aiding journalism in matters such as finding sources or brainstorming, but we stand by the power of humans using their own voices. All our articles are AI-checked by the latest softwares available.

We will keep your confidence and will only publish something you say to us if you have explicitly said that we can.

We will work to expose unfairness and discrimination in all forms that it takes at the College. We will treat fairly any article sent to us, regardless of point of view, and do our best to work with you to prepare it for publication.

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Editor-in-Chief

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Photography Editor



YOHAAN MASTER
Junior Webmaster,
Catnip Editor



WILLIAM CHIA
Senior Webmaster

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London, SW7 2BB

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Science ..... science.felix@ic.ac.uk
Business ..... felix.business@ic.ac.uk

EDITORIAL

Student protests in France, and what they mean for the wider education sector

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Felix Chair
ISABELLA DUCHOVNY

Imperial Student, Year Abroad in France
ELOISE WOOD

Editor's note: When you are approached by someone who knows about and has seen more of an issue than you, there's little more to do than to sit back and listen. I have been following the protests this past month, but hearing from an Imperial student in France feels a lot more insightful. The Editorial Board is joined today by Eloise, who reached out to Felix to break down the situation and share her thoughts, with the Felix team contributing some insights and explanations as well. -Cris

It will probably not be news to *Felix* readers that France is currently gripped by large-scale protests. While the unrest, centred around the protest movement of pupils in lycées (schools for 15 to 18-year-olds), made UK headlines this week, it has been ongoing for nearly a month. As an Imperial student studying in Strasbourg this year, I'm here to give you a view from the ground.

How did it start, and why?

The movement originated in the Paris suburbs in late September, where lycéens protested outside of and blocked access to their lycées, complaining about a lack of budget and teachers, and buildings in disrepair. This spread across France, with students citing further grievances such as overloaded and long school days (ten hour days, 08:00 to 18:00, are normal), as well as an opaque and stressful university admissions system. To give some context to the latter, in France, the only criterion for admission to most undergraduate degrees is having passed the Baccalauréat, but the system used since 2018, Parcoursup, allows selection based (at least partly) on grades if the course is oversubscribed. In a system that sees higher education as more of a right than we tend to in the UK, some have called this a form of discrimination and social selection.

The call to action was extended to university students on 1 October, and student protests have largely been in support of the lycéens' movement. However, there are some university-specific demands, such as an end to higher fees for international students, and more money for the organisation in charge of student affairs, CROUS, which is currently haemorrhaging money due to the laudable and highly popular, but evidently and unsurprisingly costly, policy of offering all students a three-course meal for 1€.

What has happened?

At the time of writing, there have been seven national days of mobilisation, on the 2nd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 13th, 17th and 24th October, the latter two involving other movements as well, including the reborn Gilets jaunes (yellow vests), a movement against increased fuel prices. These mobilisations have been mostly peaceful, with bands of a few bad actors, not always actually pupils or students, on the edges and trying to cause damages or violence. Throughout October, this has led to several fires, including in the town hall in Limoges, the Lycée Nelson Mandela in Nantes, and one of the buildings of the University of Rouen.

This, of course, leads to the other growing grievance: the police response. It is generally the CRS, essentially the French riot police, who have been handling the movement. Not only are they intimidating, in their large numbers and forming lines of shields, ready to charge, but they are also brutal. Indiscriminate use of tear gas (sometimes in large enough quantities to burn your throat from several streets away) and grenades intended to disperse crowds have led to significant numbers of protestors, mostly minors, losing hands or being injured in the police response.

While street protests, occasionally violent, have made more headlines, the movement is better characterised by "blocus", referring to lycéens and students blocking access to schools or buildings. While technically illegal, this is an undoubtedly non-violent tactic which has been used before in France, and results in classes being either moved, moved online, or cancelled. Here in Strasbourg, it has become normalised to find main teaching buildings and libraries closed at eight in the morning, an unusual sight before.

Students are calling for increased spending on education and social services. Their core demands include increased teacher recruitment and staffing, smaller class sizes, infrastructure repairs, hiring of support staff, and reforms to the Parcoursup platform. The movement began in a few lycées but has grown to include labour unions, public workers, and other activists. Following the recent events, students are also calling for an end to the police crackdown on protests.

Reflections as a British Student in France

First of all, I am impressed by the level of solidarity there is: lycéens in better-off schools with those with fewer opportunities; students with lycéens; French students with international ones. That last one in particular – one of the key demands of students, and one that has been told to me several times, is that charging international students higher fees is unfair and discriminatory. That feels particularly powerful coming from the UK, where of course fees are greatly higher and international students are at times seen as "cash cows", but where their course would be unlikely to be taken up by home students. Perhaps that sort of solidarity would be no bad thing on our uni campuses.

Furthermore, while most media focuses more on the (very real) damages caused and eruptions of violence, from what I have seen, the students' focus remains their genuine demands and grievances, rather than opportunistic rioting. I've been handed countless flyers for regular "General Assemblies" of students, where students discuss what to do and where to go next. From personal experience, as well as from interviews of young people, it seems clear that most protesters really do know what they are fighting for.

It echoes a well-known French tradition of protest, but what is less known is that that is not just setting bins on fire and blocking buildings, but valuing knowing what you want and refusing to give up. Without meaning to be cliché, we could tie some of it to the French motto: Liberté to protest in favour of the Egalité of everyone around us, and in Fraternité (or solidarity) with those to whom that equality is not being afforded.

I'm not encouraging anyone to start blocking Abdus Salam with wheelie bins, but maybe we, in the UK, could take a leaf out of the French book, and have more commitment to what we believe in.

NEWS

This is a safe space: "Talking benches" installed across South Kensington campus

The benches aim to provide a no judgement zone to encourage spontaneous conversation.



The benches are mint green, in honour of the Speak Up month colour.
Imperial College London

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

The College is installing benches painted mint green around campus as an initiative to promote honest, no-judgement conversations about mental health amongst students.

This is part of an initiative from Imperial to create a more welcoming and sociable environment as they look to provide " 'sociable places' which gently encourage people to sit and have a conversation with others". The benches have been painted throughout 30 October, with installation to follow in the coming days.

Two benches will be installed outside, one in Beit Quad, and one in Queen's Lawn; three internal seating vinyls will be installed inside, in the Senior and Junior Common Rooms, and near Loudbird in SAF. Installing more benches in areas such as communal spaces is being explored.

Some signs that will be near the benches include: "Sociable Bench – if you sit here, you're welcome to chat with others" or "Fancy a chat? Take a seat and see who joins you."

The project in its entirety is financed by maintenance contractor Smart, who also provided the benches.

Deputy Campus Director Jolene Burger, at the front of this project, comments on Imperial's intention to advocate and support student mental health: "mental health is at the forefront of the younger's generation daily thinking. You deal with it a lot better than previous generations have".

The Talking Benches are "a relatively simple intervention that could potentially make a surprisingly positive difference to the campus experience."

ICU explores AI chatbot to support clubs and societes

Felix spoke with Sky Wang, Deputy President (Activities), about this proposal to facilitate club and society committee admin processes.

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Concern and confusion surrounding the usage of the eActivities platform, where all the main transactions, claims, and logistics of your favourite society run, have been matter of discussion amongst present and past committee members for years. Worries like it being unclear where to find certain information, when a risk assessment or sponsorship contract is good enough to submit, or frustrations with response times and managing eActivities and SUMS are common amongst students.

Sky conducted 15 interviews to club and society committee members to identify the main issues and pitfalls that needed solving, from which he identified that "discoverability of resources is weak, even though the answer for their problems might be out there".

At the first activities forum of the year, hosted 15 October, Deputy President (Activities) Sky Wang presented a three-layered operating model to help CSP committee members manage administrative tasks, and help cut waiting times for support.

The first layer, explains Sky, consists of making the information available on the Knowledge Base and the different eActivities pages more accessible through an AI chatbot. It would be trained on said Base, which would previously require knowledge audit to make sure the guidance is self-consistent and lacks redundancies.

With nothing confirmed, the idea is still in its exploration phase as meetings with the Department of Computing have taken place to discuss its feasibility. It has also not been determined how much budget would have to be allocated to this project or what funds would be used.

The second layer, in case students require staff help with admin, consists of providing trained student support to help with low-risk, high priority administrative groundwork.

Currently, each request takes up to 5 working days: combined with replying times for committee-admin communications relating the issue, completing processes can take up to weeks. All 15 interviewees highlighted response times as a main concern.

For more complex issues, Sky proposes a third layer where larger, more nuanced problems are managed by the existing Activities staff.

The idea of incorporating an AI chatbot has received varied feedback, with some Management Chairs expressing backlash to the use of AI, and some positive responses from the CSP interviewees. A Forum attendee expressed that, while it is "a reasonable finish line goal", they have concerns regarding the overall timely feasiblity of the idea, as it relies on an operational Knowledge Base and eActivities training pages, which currently have some out of date information, 404 errors, or inaccuracies.

Sky tells *Felix* he compromises to giving regular updates and taking constructive criticism into account in this project.

Imperial robotics AI spinout Machenta breaks seed funding record raising £40 million

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Machenta, an Imperial spinout focused on the field of Instant Robot Learning, has raised £40 million in seed funding, the most ever by a UK robotics startup. This funding round was created by early Spotify backer VC firm Creandum and Union Square Ventures, who have also backed major tech startups like Etsy or Duolingo.

Like for humans, intelligence for robots doesn't mean knowing as much as it does being able to learn quickly and independently. This means robots could ideally recognise and recover from mistakes, react, and swiftly adapt to changing conditions and challenges, known as instant robot learning. Machenta claims its AI model allows robots to learn a task after it is shown it just once, a significant change from robots that have to be trained for hours or days. The company says a single model has already learned varied tasks such as packing and tidying across different robots, including humanoids.

The training approach also differs from the norm. Instead of relying on large real-world datasets of human demonstrations, Machenta's model is trained only on simulated data, which could pose an advantage when considering privacy constraints of collecting human data at scale.

Machenta's work began six years ago at Imperial, researching an answer to how far we can mimic human learning processes for physical skills onto robots. The company was developed by Founder & CEO Professor Edward Johns and his team, who work at the Robot Learning Lab based in Imperial's Department of Computing.

This new funding is expected to be used to scale this artificial intelligence model, as well as to expand the company to a new office space in King's Cross.

> **An AI model now allows robots to learn a physical task after they are shown it once**



Telling my flatmates that robots have now unloaded more dishwashers than they have. Thomas Angus for Imperial College London

ICU to host Wardening Town Hall for student hall support concerns

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Imperial College Union (ICU) has planned a Town Hall session schedule for the afternoon of Wednesday 11 November as the College announced student hall support teams restructuring. The session will take place in Beit Hall.

Wardens, sub-wardens, hall seniors, and any student or staff member who has questions or concerns about the changes is welcome.

The initiative is part of ICU's recognition of concerns and confusion amongst first-year students and members of student hall support teams.

Members of ICU will be present, answering questions to the best of their knowledge, with the initiative's aim being to promote productive discussion and community organising amongst the student body.

Members of Imperial's Student Support Service have also been invited.

The College put forward a proposal earlier this month to the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) to reorganise the student hall support team structures, involving a new out-of-hours advising team and halving the number of wardens. This was postponed to begin next academic year, with this year defined as a structured transition period.



Summer Ball is another Union event that ICU collaborates with London venues on, aiming to deliver an affordable, enjoyable student experience. Summer Ball 2015, Imperial College London

Halloween ACC at Infernos!

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

Whether you have been at Imperial for a while or this is your first year, if you enjoy the party scene you will have heard about ACC. Known as the biggest ICU event nights throughout the year, Beit Quad adds a club scene in Metric to its classic Wednesday sports night.

Halloween ACC is particularly popular, so ticket demand is especially high. This year, the event was not hosted in Union Venues, but in popular Clapham nightclub Infernos. ICU Sports Chair Stefaniia Medvetskaia comments on record-breaking sales last year (more than a thousand tickets sold out in 3 minutes) and on ICU's goal to deliver high event quality to as many students as possible, which has resulted in choosing Infernos as this year's spooky venue. The Union strives to collaborate with as many different London venues as possible, with the challenge being balancing availability, convenience for students, and affordability. Other event venues include Electric Brixton, Heaven, and Clapham Grand.

November's ACC is expected to be back in Beit.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

Chief Executive and Chief Medical Officer of Our Future Health.

Our Future Health is a research programme that proposes a model that focuses on prediction and prevention. A widely recognised problem in disease detection is patient-to-patient symptom variations: Our Future Healthcare are working to establish an evidence base by building the largest prospective cohort study in the world, with more than 2.5 million participants enrolled and a goal to reach 5 million.

"It's well known that about 80% of what affects people's health outcomes lies outside the health system; historically, it was quite difficult to get that data," said Dr Ali. Our Future Health will combine multiple sources of health-related data to better understand predictors of disease, hoping to show how early diagnosis and treatment can prevent the most common health issues.

> **The slightly uncomfortable, unpalatable point that in order to see progress (...) you need preferential, tactical, strategic planning**

Neighbourhood Health

One of the major shifts proposed in the 10 Year Plan was that from hospital to community. More than 90% of patients' direct interfacing with the NHS occurs via primary care and GP practices, but NHS spending on primary care keeps on dropping as the share spent on acute services, such as hospitals, grows.

Baroness Clare Gerad, DBE PRCGP FRCPsych, and former Chair and President of the RCGP, called for shifting resources from hospitals and into the community, and emphasised the importance of continuity of care.

"If we're going to deliver the ambitions in the 10-Year Health Plan, then neighbourhood health would be at the heart of that," echoed Dr Anna Dixon MBE MP, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Carers and the APPG on Housing and Care for Older People.

Closing the cancer outcomes gap

"[There is a] false dichotomy between acute and community [care]," said Naser Turabi, Director of Health Policy and Evidence and Cancer Research UK. "For rare and less common cancers, the absolute priority is making sure we have a balanced strategy."

Rare or less common cancers make up a disproportionate number of cancer-related deaths, and have seen limited improvements for decades.

"Brain tumours and other rare cancers are a real test of the governments' ambitions: not just the commitments, but their implementation," said Dr Michele Afif, Chief Executive of The Brain Tumour Charity. "The system is designed around common disease and common cancer, quite rightly, but it needs to change."

One-off and recurring pressures on the NHS are predicted to result in a funding shortfall. "It's about the slightly uncomfortable, unpalatable point, that in order to see progress in some areas, you need preferential, tactical, strategic planning," said Dr Afif.

Fast, but slowing down for corners: AI

"If you have a significant, transformative invention coming in, it is not surprising that the system struggles to digest it" remarked Professor Alastair Denniston, Chair of the National Commission into the Regulation of AI in Healthcare, in his Building Trust in AI-powered healthcare keynote speech.

Reflections on how AI as a technology and a health tool differ from any other



Closing the cancer outcomes gap panel at the 2026 New Statesman Future of Healthcare conference. Cristina Carrillo

we have seen filled the room: "Unlike any other technology out there, we have a bimodal response to AI. We have a trough in the middle, and massive enthusiasts, and massive sceptics". Professor Denniston also commented on our need to correctly apply this technology: "There needs to be system readiness, and we need to apply this technology where we need it, not where it's most convenient to."

Audience questions focused on dilemmas like the question of "who do we hold responsible?" when it comes to mistakes relating AI-assisted medical devices. The Chair responded recognising this is recurrent in their work, and assures the current way of acknowledging responsibility is "not so different to what we already have for imperfect diagnostic tests".

Women's Health

"Improving women's health has been my life's mission," said Baroness Geeta Nargund, Honorary Professor of Women's Health at the University of London and former consultant gynaecologist.

"Women's health is not just obstetrics and gynaecological health. It is right from the beginning to end of life care."

"Maternity services are in crisis. Maternal mortality rates are rising," said Laura Mullarkey, legal lead at Birthrights, a charity protecting human rights during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care. Mullarkey cited systemic racism and discrimination, and failure to listen to women and their families, findings echoed by Baroness Amos in her report.

Many NHS home birth services are being restricted, suspended, or interrupted. Baroness Nargund cited safety issues in home birth teams, expressing hope to improve home birth services before offering them again.

"I would really caution against using safety as a nebulous shroud to prevent us from examining what is causing the issues," said Mullarkey. "If people are choosing to birth at home, the NHS needs to be thinking really carefully about [prioritising] the right, safe support."

Mental Health

The last talk of the day saw a much emptier audience, but one that was no less passionate about the topic at hand as those before. Amongst the five panellists were Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Mental Health Dr Danny Chambers and Rebecca Gray, Director of the NHS Alliance's Mental Health Network, as the conversation focused on discussing how to deliver effective, sustainable support.

The idea (and consequences) of mental health being shaped by the environment we live in, which includes injustice and inequality, was a major topic of conversation. "[From] social media addiction [to] the climate crisis, you don't have to suffer of a mental illness to mentally struggle with where things are heading", commented Dr Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive of major UK mental health charity Mind.

"The best evidence we have is listening to young people – if we are listening to pounds and cents and things we can count, well, we've failed before we've even started", remarked Rebecca Gray as the question of using finances as an indicator for NHS mental health service quality was raised.

SCIENCE

Underfunded and overlooked

The disparity in women's health research.

Science Writer
NIKITA KATHURIA

Women's health research, which has been historically understudied and underfunded, is becoming an emerging topic of call for action. In 2020, only 5% of global research and funding was allocated to women's health research, and 4% went toward cancers affecting women, with the remaining 1% for all other women-specific health conditions. Less than 2.5% of publicly funded research has been dedicated exclusively to female reproductive health, despite a third of women experiencing severe reproductive health problems in their lifetime. Additionally, only about 5% of medicines have been adequately tested for safety and efficacy in these populations. Addressing this requires not only more investment in wet-lab research but also investments in data analysis, clinical researchers, pharmacists, governing bodies, doctors, GPs, and activists to increase the awareness of these overlooked diseases. Despite gains in clinical trial representation, significant gaps remain. These gaps increase the rates of misdiagnosis, drug withdrawal, and are especially risky for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Known risks but lack of research

Non-sex dysmorphic conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes, are associated with sex differences, but translation to sex-specific care remains inconsistent. Even when diseases are not seen to be different between men and women, risks can be. For example, women have higher bleeding rates than men, which must be accounted for in anticoagulation drug discovery, and have higher procedural complication rates for cardiovascular procedures. While women generally have more side effects from medications than men, sex differences in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics have been inadequately explored and continue to definitively impact diagnoses, treatments and its outcomes.

The gap in resources such as diagnostics, funding and treatments, increases when it diverges from general health complications to more specific conditions, such as menopause and gynaecological issues. Five times more research has been done on male erectile dysfunction, affecting 52% of men, than premenstrual syndrome, which affects 90% of women. A survey done by the Department of Health revealed that only 64% of women were conformable in discussing these conditions, and over 80% of women felt they were not being listened to due to their symptoms being dismissed during assessment leading to delayed diagnoses limiting treatment decisions. Professionals have limited access to women's health data, for example, only less than 10% for menopause and gynaecological conditions, which explains the neglect in this regard.

Clinical trial representation of women

Drugs for women are 3.5x more likely to be retracted from early research phases of drug discovery compared to men. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced among Black, Asian, and Latina women, deepening existing health disparities.

In 1993, a new federal law was introduced in the US requiring inclusion of women in clinical trials to obtain FDA approval on drugs or medical devices, influenced by the International standards (ICH), who publishes guidelines for carrying out clinical trials, which at present is followed by the countries across the globe. Consequently, the EU began to align to these standards in the 1990s. However, as the EU relied on the ethical principles of carrying medical research involving human participants, 'Declaration of Helsinki' which historically was not legally binding. There was a lack of translation of fair clinical trials, resulting in a lack of research on how developing drugs affect women physiology, leading to a lack of sex-specific guidelines.



Dame Lesley Regan, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at St Mary's, is the Women's Health Ambassador for England. James Tye for Imperial College

A call to action

Addressing this gap requires several coordinated steps. Clinical trials must set a threshold for the number of the women to ensure adequate female representation. Funders, regulators, and journals should mandate sex-balanced study designs. Major initiatives, including Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) directives are now backing this work, though sustained momentum will be critical for real progress. Equally important is education, as women's health research needs a comprehensive, standardised teaching curriculum that embeds sex as a biological variable from research design to clinical practice.

A more comprehensive investment is needed across healthcare industries and academia, with focus on conditions specific to women, diseases with sex-based differences, and conditions with higher prevalence in women.

> **It is more important than ever to make healthcare and research more equitable and accessible to women who have been enduring the effects of the disparity in women's health.**

In particular, government and major funding bodies play a significant role in supporting scientific research along with analysing and publishing data in these areas. Interestingly, a 2024 report from the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the McKinsey Health Institute determined that closing investment gaps in women's healthcare could boost the global economy by one trillion USD annually by 2040, demonstrating the vast economic potential of equitable healthcare funding. Last, but not to be overlooked, it is important to invest in female representation in workforce and leadership roles, as data shows all-female research teams are 35% more likely to develop medical treatments which serve women's needs, compared to all-male research teams.

Some success stories

There are some notable success stories in women's health that highlight the importance of gender equity in scientific research and health. A recent Lancet study found that no women aged 20 to 24 died from cervical cancer in England between 2020 and 2024, which is the first five-year period on record with zero deaths in this age group. This decline aligns closely with a demographic that was old enough to receive the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine when the program launched in 2008. Researchers estimate the vaccination programme has already prevented around 200 cervical cancer deaths in England, demonstrating the benefits of investing in women's health.

Since 1985, the Cancer Research Institute (CRI) has dedicated more than $21 million in grant funding to discover and develop effective immunotherapies to treat ovarian cancer. In 2003, CRI-funded scientists discovered that the presence of the immune system's T cells in ovarian tumours is strongly correlated with improved survival in these patients. Therefore, women's health long an underdeveloped area of research, is now attracting growing research and funding.

Although it may seem like we have a long way to go, there have already been some breakthroughs, that in the past, may have not been seen as achievable. It is essential for everyone to do their part in bringing fairness in health accessibility and scientific R&D. It is crucial to take a holistic approach into women's health research, not only from a wet-lab research point of view, but also from an economic, social, and political perspective, and it is more important than ever to make healthcare and research more equitable and accessible to women who have been enduring the effects of the disparity in women's health.

THIS WEEK IN SCIENCE

In-human *in vivo* prime-editing trial announces first patient treated

Science Editor
ISABELLA DUCHOVNY

Prime Medicine, a biotechnology company based in Cambridge, Massachussets, announced the first patient dosed PM577a, an investigational in vivo prime editor for H1069Q-mutated Wilson disease. While most current gene therapies extract the patient's cells, edit them in the laboratory, and then reinfuse them into the patient, Prime Editing's PM577a hopes to engineer cells directly in the body. They expect to announce first results from the trial next year.

Wilson's disease is an autosomal recessive geneetic disorder caused by mutations in the ATP7B gene, which encodes a copper-transporting ATPase protein. Mutations in ATP7B prevent the liver from properly excreting copper, causing toxic buildup in the liver, brain, eyes, and other organs. Current treatments rely on lifelong medical management, or liver transplantation in severe or life-threatening cases.

Prime editing is an advanced genome editing technology that allows for precise genetic modifications in a target DNA site, without introducing double-strand DNA breaks. PM577a targets the H1069Q mutation, the most prevalent mutant allele in Europe and North America, using prime-editing components packaged in lipid nanoparticles, which can be administered as an intravenous infusion. Currently, the safety, tolerability and clinical efficacy of varying doses of PM577a are being assessed in a Phase 1/2 clinical trial. An additional candidate, targeting R778L, the most prevalent mutant allele in East Asian populations, in in preclinical development.

"Dosing the first patient with PM577a is a meaningful step toward our goal of deliveering a transformative, one-time treatment for people living with Wilson disease," said Allan Reine, Chief Executive Officer of Prime Medicine.



COMMENT

Impartial censorship

"For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes." In which novel, published in 1949, does this quote appear?

Comment Editor
JUSTIN KU

University Challenge is a quiz programme run by the BBC, where universities (and Oxbridge colleges) enter teams to answer trivia questions. Two contestants from the University of Leicester wore pride pins while shooting *University Challenge*. When the episode aired, the pins had been digitally removed.

The BBC apparently removed the pins in an effort to avoid harassment and backlash. There had reportedly been online transphobia in response to prior episodes of the same programme. But one of the contestants noted that, when contacted by the BBC, she was given no words of support, and merely informed that her pin would be removed "in accordance with the BBC Editorial Guidelines requirements for impartiality."

To be clear, the BBC does request that "no badges, flags and emblems or symbols are worn or visible during filming, along with clothing with obvious branding or slogans." It is not unreasonable for a broadcaster to have rules preventing their television programmes being used as soapboxes. However, pins are generally quite understated and hardly detract from the quiz game.

Some may argue that pride pins are not political statements but indications of identity; this seems unrealistically utopian, as LGBT rights remain an issue that is very much affected by political decisions and laws passed in Westminster. Moreover, it would be impractical to carve out loopholes for symbols just because they might be a statement of belonging. How does one differentiate between a pin signalling Catalonian heritage and another supporting Catalonian independence?

That said, various other symbols, such as remembrance poppies, have made appearances on other BBC programmes subject to the same impartiality requirements. The poppy is arguably far more political than a pride pin. By choosing which symbols are controversial and which are not, the BBC is itself making a political judgment, defeating the entire point of having impartiality requirements in the first place.

Aside from the issue of selecting certain symbols to censor, and allowing others to be shown, the act of censorship is itself also fundamentally troublesome. Unless the contestants consented beforehand – which they presumably did not, given their current outrage – the BBC has effectively altered the record of these student's support. Assuming that the censorship was necessary, it would have been better to blur out the pins, making it obvious that post-production editing had occurred; or better yet, to delay airing the episode until an agreement could be reached, as this would have avoided misrepresenting them without their consent.

> **The BBC is itself making a political judgement, defeating the entire point of having impartiality requirements in the first place.**

While this instance of censorship might seem insignificant, and maybe even justifiable, to do so without the depicted subjects' agreement is to present them in a misleading manner. Applied to other situations, the logic of dismissing this as "no big deal" could be very slippery slope. For example, censoring a emblem worn by a celebrity could mislead viewers into believing that they are neutral on some issue, instead of taking a stand; removing a political pin could make it easier for someone's words to be misconstrued in a short clip taken out of context.

It is not necessarily wrong for the BBC to prevent the display of symbols at *University Challenge*, but it has failed to uniformly apply its own editorial policy. Should the BBC follow its guidelines to the letter, instead of picking and choosing which symbols are palatable, the censorship could be justified. Perhaps the more worrying issue is that the censoring occurred so silently.



Pride pins, similar to those worn by two *University Challenge* contestants. Terry Ross for Wikimedia Commons

ENVIRONMENT

A new Standard for the UN SDGs

The British Standards Institution's framework for sustainability.

Environment Writer
ANITA PUNWANI

Editor's Note: This article is a letter from Anita Punwani, an alum of Imperial College London (BEng Civil Engineering 1988, MBA 1992), active in UN environmental standard-setting. She writes here to encourage the current and future leaders of organizations in all sectors (NGOs, academia, nonprofits, the private sector or civil society) to adopt a new framework aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Everyday public discourse increasingly references the "need to be sustainable", I believe, because our way of living on this planet has undeniably become unsustainable. There is greater public awareness of the human cost of the climate crisis, especially upon systematically disadvantaged communities worldwide. Most notably, however, the impacts are now being felt not only in the Global South but also in the wealthy nations of the Global North.

The United Nations (UN) defines sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". If we are to become sustainable, we need to work in global collaboration to seriously address issues that face all sections of society across the world.

In my role as UK Head of Delegation for the British Standards Institution (BSI) – the UK's national standards body – I have been involved with an international community of sustainability experts in the development of the newly launched Standard for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), BS EN ISO/UNDP 53001:2026. The UN SDGs are based on economic, social and environmental development as well as promoting peace, justice, strong institutions and partnerships. The new requirement provides organisations operating in all sectors and geographies of the world with the first truly international standard for contributing to the UN SDGs.

As well as nation states, organisations must provide leadership if these goals are to be achieved. This new standard supports organisations in doing so by providing a framework for:

- Understanding their context, including the needs and expectations of their interested parties;
- Leaders to direct contributions to the goals in the form of a management system, setting out specific SDG policies and processes;
- Planning to address risks and opportunities in setting out organisational objectives and
- Establishing the necessary resources, operations, performance evaluation and improvement to successfully implement the plans.

Why should you as current and future leaders use this standard?

While an organisation can certainly make individual efforts to contribute to the UN SDGs, an international framework will align its outcomes and direction with collective global efforts to accelerate achievement of the UN SDGs.

A standard sets out common terminology, concepts and guidance in the form of a management system. This standard holistically approaches the well-being of human beings and the protection of the planet. Investing in this management system will help organisations to integrate sustainable development into their existing management practices. As part of a collective effort, this standard will support organisations to understand and manage social and environmental impacts by engaging relevant interested parties in this process. To note, reporting is but one aspect of this framework.

I hope you consider yourself part of a community which shares the BSI's aim of having a positive impact that accelerates progress towards a fair society and a sustainable world.

Best wishes,
Anita

More about the SDGs

ISO/UNDP 53001:2026, titled *Management systems for United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — Requirements* is meant to take an integrated approach to all 17 goals set out by the UN:

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-Being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water & Sanitation
7. Affordable & Clean Energy
8. Decent Work & Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation, & Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities & Communities
12. Responsible Consumption & Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life On Land
16. Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions
17. Partnership For The Goals



The Earth and I. Noah Buscher via Unsplash

Who has their stories straight on Jackdaw and Rosebank?

Jackdaw gas field gets green light, North Sea oil & gas tax revenues earmarked for new Energy Wealth Fund.

Environment Editor
DHRUV MATHUR

In June 2022 and September 2023, the Conservative UK Governments approved respectively the Jackdaw gas field and Rosebank oil field located in the North Sea off the coast of Scotland. In the months after each approval, Greenpeace launched legal challenges to the decisions that resulted in The Court of Session in Edinburgh ruling in 2025 that the consents were given unlawfully. Following the Supreme Court ruling on the 2024 Finch case, Oil and Gas (O&G) projects must now evaluate downstream Scope 3 emissions – the impact of burning extracted fuel – in environmental impact assessments, meaning that a new dimension of environmental responsibility was considered by the Energy Secretary before giving ministerial approval. In a decision facing backlash from climate activists but apparently widely expected from Westminster insiders and industry leaders, Andy Burnham's labour government approved extraction on the Jackdaw gas field on 21st October.

The arguments made for Jackdaw seem credible, if optimistic: owner Adura (a joint venture between Shell and Equinor based out of Aberdeen) is ready to supply about 6% of national production from the site starting as early as the end of this month. Energy Secretary Miatta Fanbulleh said approving Jackdaw would "support the country's energy security with homegrown gas this winter" and heat close to 1.5 million homes. The project is also supposed to protect hundreds of jobs, operate for up to eleven years, add billions to the economy and tax revenue, with those revenues to move into the Energy Wealth Fund.

A central tenet of pro-Jackdaw and pro-Rosebank pitches is continued demand for oil and gas in the UK in the interest of energy security and reducing dependence on liquefied natural gas (LNG). LNG incurs emissions from supercooling and transport that would amount to about 3.5 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent if Jackdaw was blockaded and its volume replaced by American LNG. In light of this obvious, pragmatic calculus and encouragement from the US government, how could there be anything to protest?

Ami McCarthy, head of politics for Greenpeace UK, bluntly states: "Andy Burnham promised pragmatism, but there is nothing pragmatic about rubber-stamping a project that won't lower energy bills, won't boost energy security and will create just 27 full-time jobs."

Each of the arguments made in favour



The Petrojarl Knarr, similar to the Rosebank, operating in the North Sea. Wikimedia Commons

of the O&G projects neglect to mention various critical caveats: the energy secretary has admitted outright that costs will not come down this winter – the first (and seemingly, only) priority is homegrown energy. "Producing more British energy doesn't necessarily mean cheaper British energy", Karl Matikonis, professor of taxation at University College Dublin, told BBC Verify. Further, while the projects will undoubtedly protect existing jobs, especially in Aberdeen, very few new roles will be created on the mostly-unmanned Jackdaw platform.

The Petrojarl Rosebank, Adura's FSPO (Floating Storage, Production, and Offloading) vessel in the Rosebank Oil & Gas field, on the other hand, would support many more full-time jobs. However, it is still pending re-approval for extraction and for good reason: the 25-year operation planned for the project will produce seven times more in carbon emissions than Jackdaw. It won't be required to sell to the UK either, and while Jackdaw was oriented towards the British market, Rosebank will likely be more export-oriented.

Given that Adura is a joint venture between the UK-based Shell and the Norwegian (state-owned) Equinor, it feels appropriate to address that while Jackdaw is a massive upstream emissions improvement over US LNG and still better than the UK North Sea pipeline, it significantly trails the Norway pipeline (the largest source of Natural Gas imports). Jackdaw and Rosebank are being simultaneously sold as critical to tax revenues and jobs yet relatively too small to affect existing demand and prices; as critical to energy security, the green transition and even geopolitical strategy but also a footnote to global production that won't scale up emissions. Don't buy it.

> **If these multibillion-valued projects cannot create more than a few dozen jobs or even break a timeline for tackling the cost of living crisis, what exactly is so indispensable?**

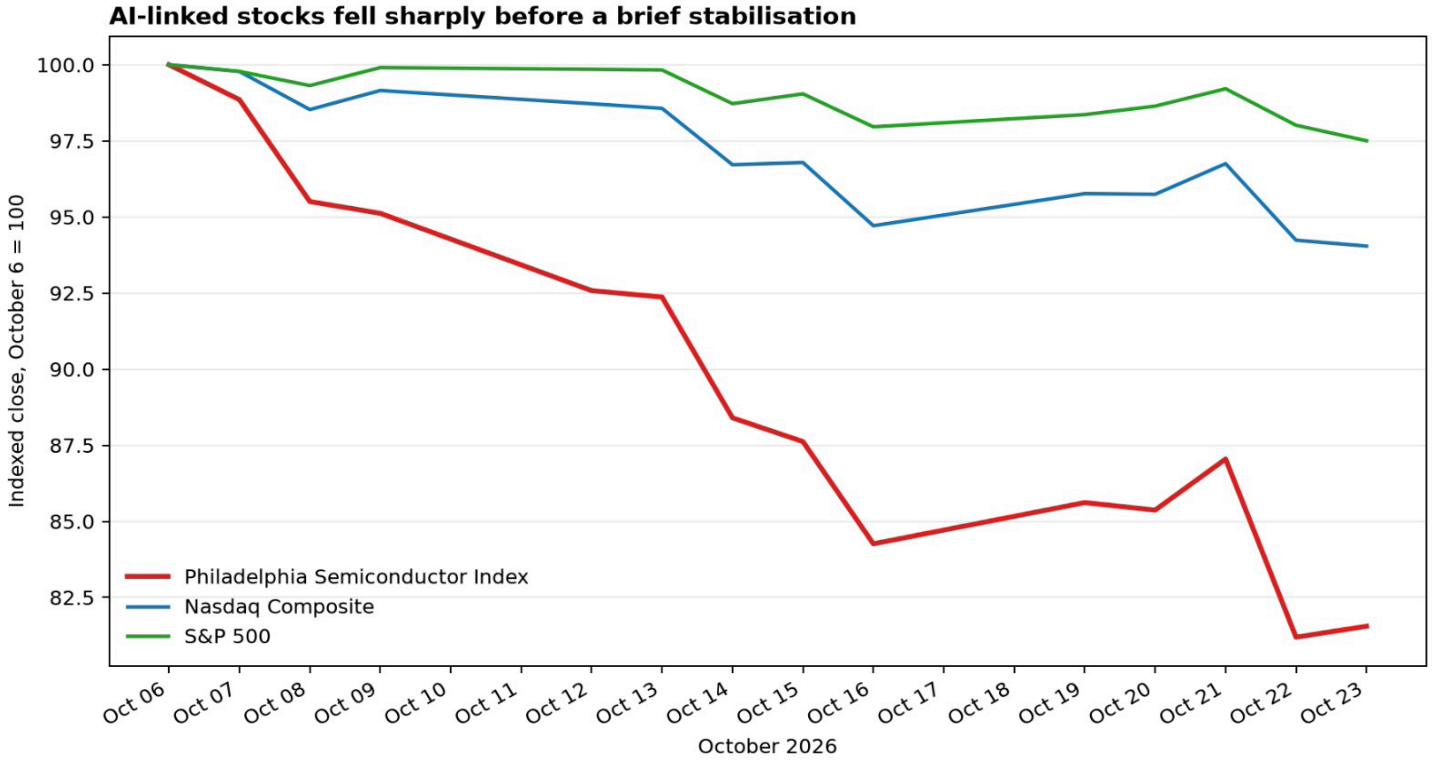
The contrast with Norwegian gas and the flimsy accountability in linking revenues to offsetting measures expose the weaknesses at the heart of Jackdaw and Rosebank development promises. If these multibillion-valued projects cannot create more than a few dozen jobs or even break a timeline for tackling the cost of living crisis, what exactly is so indispensable? The evidence, as presented, suggests that only the fossil fuel industry is to maximize their return from exploiting the North Sea fields while everyone else reaps gains from the margins.

BUSINESS

Cashing Out on Chips: The Chip Selloff

Chip stocks have suffered their worst losses since 2006. The decline began with OpenAI revealing a concerning revenue outlook and a claimed chip-design breakthrough by CXMT, while U.S. inflation made the markets' fears worse.

Business Writer
AYUSH JAIN



Comparison of the S&P 500, Nasdaq Composite, and Philadelphia Semiconductor Index Data source: Yahoo Finance via yfinance • Created with Python

The last few weeks have been brutal for global equity markets. Technology stocks have fallen across the world as increasing borrowing costs for a heavily indebted industry have started to make investors worried about their long-term outlook. Between 6 October and 22 October, the Nasdaq Composite fell by 5.96% and the S&P 500 by 2.50%. The companies that had benefited most from the AI boom were now among the biggest losers. This was clearest in the Philadelphia Semiconductor Index (SOX), which fell by 18.45% in the same period.

The pressure had been building as investors were wondering whether the earnings promised by the AI boom would arrive quickly enough to justify the prices they were paying. As the revenue potential of all the major firms started being analysed, investors became more selective about which companies could support their growth with actual earnings and cash flow.

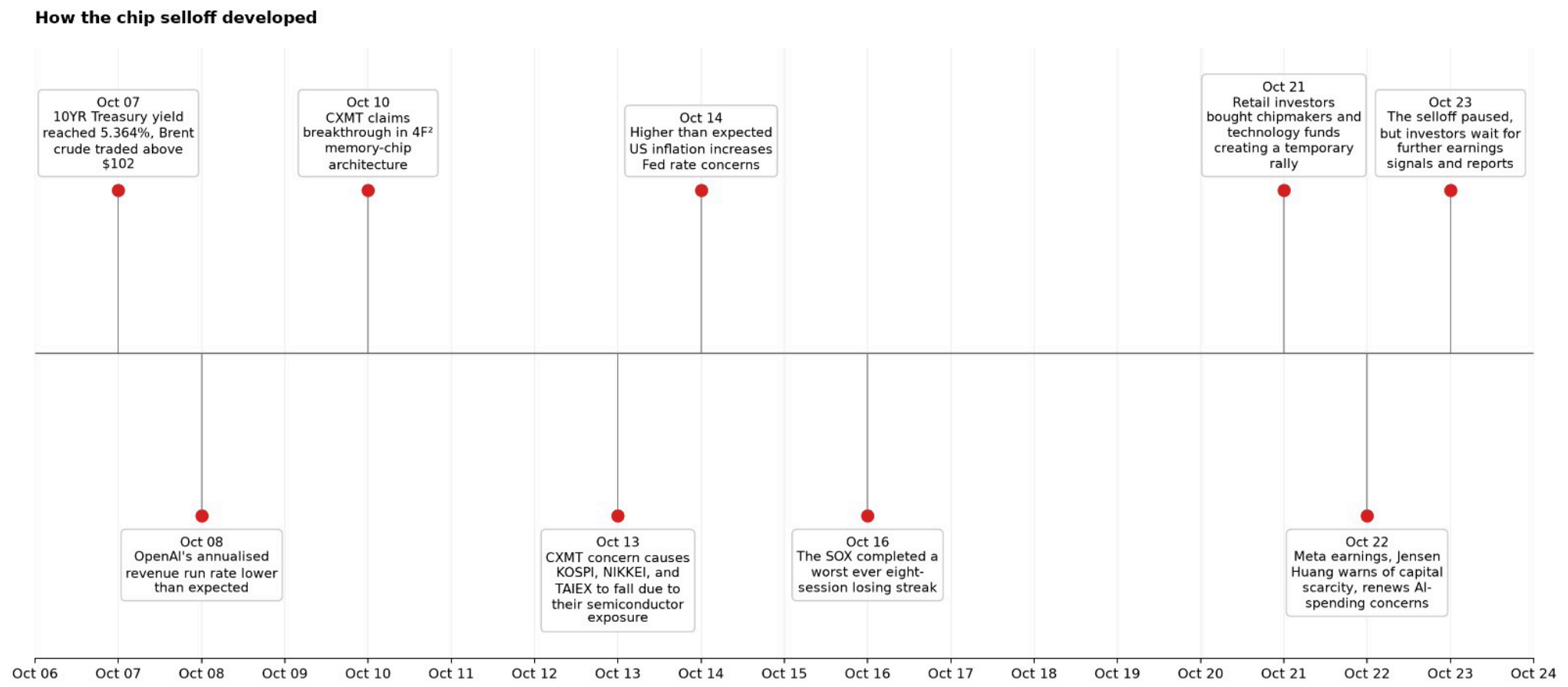
On 7 October, the yield on the ten-year U.S. Treasury reached 5.364%, its highest level since April 2002, while Brent crude traded at $102.59 a barrel, with most analysts expecting its price to rise. Higher yields meant that the future earnings expected from technology companies looked less attractive, as the risk-free rate provided by government bonds had risen. Not only this, but the higher yield also meant that the rate at which firms were borrowing for their AI infrastructure had risen, increasing the costs they faced.

As the rise in Treasury yields has been slow, markets are expecting higher rates for some time and therefore the correction in technology stocks has been limited. However, it has left the sector more exposed to negative news.

On the following day, news started to spread that OpenAI had told its investors that its annualised revenue run rate was roughly $50 billion, below the $70 billion figure it had reportedly cited the previous month. Despite the figures not being directly comparable because they treated the revenue generated by their cloud subsidiary companies differently, it was enough to raise alarm bells among investors.

Chinese chipmaker CXMT also said at an industry conference on 10 October that it planned to produce state-of-the art chips using a 4F2 design by the end of 2026. The architecture would increase the density of its memory chips and improve manufacturing efficiency while reducing its dependence on high-cost, advanced lithography machines supplied by ASML, the world's largest supplier of extreme ultraviolet lithography systems.

This sparked immediate concerns among Asian memory-chip makers like Samsung and SK Hynix, which are among the companies most exposed to CXMT's claim. Both are South Korean companies that have been trying to make similar advances in chips for years. CXMT had reportedly risen to 10% of the global dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) market in the second quarter, from 4% at the same point the year earlier, according to Counterpoint Research. The situation raised concerns that the South Korean companies could



Timeline of the chip selloff throughout October explained throughout the article
Sources: CNBC, Financial Times, Yahoo Finance UK and U.S. News & World Report

lose their leadership of the DRAM market, unsettling investors in these established producers.

This resulted in heavy selling on the KOSPI, with circuit breakers being triggered on the 13th and 15th. The selling also spread to Japan, with shares in Kioxia and Advantest falling. TSMC also declined, despite reporting strong profits driven by demand for artificial intelligence products. This suggests that despite current strong demand for AI and therefore strong demand for chips, share prices are beginning to be affected by a loss of investor confidence in how much growth will be delivered in the future.

After SOX had its eighth consecutive day of losses, the market finally started a slow recovery on 16 October. Retail investors became active and bought the same stocks that had fallen sharply in the previous week. JPMorgan data showed that technology stocks were being bought at the highest levels since the July momentum cooled off. Moreover, weekly purchases of technology ETFs reached their second-highest level on record.

> **The fact that the market has stabilised suggests that investors are no longer investing blindly across the whole sector.**

However, the recovery happened as retail investors were reducing their exposure to the Magnificent Seven. This likely means that investors were becoming less willing to pay premium prices for the largest AI companies.

The sector rebound did not last long and collapsed again on Thursday, 22 October. This time around, the main driver stemmed from Meta's earnings announcement. The earnings showed that Meta had a decrease in free cash flow and planned to issue new stock in order to help fund its expansion into data centres. To add to this, on Thursday morning Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia, stated during a conference that there was a lack of cash reserves limiting growth in AI. This caused concerns among investors that the cash needed to fund the industry's AI infrastructure was starting to affect companies' cash reserves and would therefore lead to more borrowing.

Against this backdrop, tensions have risen between the U.S. and Iran. Reports that the U.S would re-engage after its midterm elections and that Israel would reengage after its elections contributed to Brent crude to rise above $116 on Friday. This rise in fuel prices increased concerns that inflation would remain elevated and that hopes of interest-rate cuts could be delayed.

The news from Meta and Nvidia showed the market that companies will continue to pay high borrowing costs, despite the continued concerns with inflation. Taking all of this into consideration, institutional investors have massively increased short positions in certain parts of the technology sector.

However, the market did settle on Friday and now appears to be in balance in terms of valuing the AI sector. The fact that the market has stabilised suggests that investors are no longer investing blindly across the whole sector. Investors are now looking to invest in companies with stable cash flows. Companies which require large amounts of cash in order to develop their infrastructures will be under more scrutiny. This can be seen as a positive development after the chaos, as companies will now be assessed more closely when they release their earnings information.

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FELIX 2026-2027

SEX SURVEY



FILM & TV

BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

PART 2...

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

With the 70th BFI London Film Festival having drawn to a close, the crowds have dispersed, and London's Southbank has returned to something resembling normality. After twelve days of premieres, screenings and cinematic celebration, this year's festival has left audiences with plenty to reflect on, and a long list of films to look forward to.

For almost two weeks, the capital was transformed into a meeting place for filmmakers, critics and cinema enthusiasts from across the world. The excitement extended far beyond the red carpets, with audiences gathering in cinemas across London to discover unfamiliar filmmakers and catch early glimpses of some of the most anticipated releases. From packed Gala screenings to more intimate showings, the festival demonstrated the extraordinary range of experiences that cinema can offer.

One of the great pleasures of the BFI LFF is the chance to approach a film with few expectations. Away from the publicity campaigns, reviews, and awards that so often accompany major releases, audiences can encounter unfamiliar stories and form their own opinions. Of course, not every screening is destined to become a favourite. Some films provoke, others perplex, and a few inevitably disappoint. But this unpredictability is what makes the festival such a rewarding experience.

This year's programme offered no shortage of material for discussion. Across genres, languages, and filmmaking traditions, directors explored everything from personal relationships and questions of identity to political conflict and the complexities of contemporary society. Whether through intimate character studies, ambitious visual experimentation or uncompromising documentary filmmaking, the festival provided plenty of reminders of cinema's capacity to challenge as well as entertain.

For the Felix Film team, the festival has been an opportunity to not only discover new films but also engage critically with them. Our first instalment captured some of our initial reactions while the festivities were still underway. Now, with the festival behind us, we return with the second and final part of our special feature, bringing together five more reviews from this year's programme.

In this issue, we turn our attention to an eclectic collection of films, ranging from documentary to fiction, and from the provocative to the deeply personal. As these films begin to find audiences beyond the festival circuit, we hope our reviews will help you discover something new, reconsider something familiar, or simply find your next trip to the cinema.

Design Credits
LIN TURNER

In This Issue

Musk
Review by Grace Murray

The Idiot(s)
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It Gets Worse
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Musk

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

In *Musk*, the documentary branded a "hit piece" by "free-speech absolutist" Elon Musk himself, director and journalist Alex Gibney spends four hours giving viewers an unvarnished look at the tech billionaire's career. Exposing him as a fraud and an idea-thief multiple times in the first half, Gibney makes his stance on Musk's supposed inventive abilities abundantly clear. He claims Musk stole Tesla from Martin Eberhard, lucked out with Zip2 (before getting pushed out), PayPal (before also getting pushed out), and has consistently failed upwards. More recently, he has spent nearly a decade calling himself the man "sending people to Mars", despite being yet to send anyone there. Along the way, he has mutilated X (formerly Twitter) and put millions of lives at risk during his tenure in the White House.

The documentary effectively covers Musk's hypocrisy regarding AI: initially an avid advocate for AI safety, Musk co-founded OpenAI in 2015 to research responsible development practices. Since then, he has launched xAI and Grok – the latter becoming notorious for its use in generating non-consensual pornographic images of women and children. This topic was one of the more well explored, with an interview with a victim of Grok (and former partner of Elon) – it felt like he wasn't let off the hook as easily as he was for his multitude of other sins throughout. We also learn that misogyny is a common thread for Elon, and meet several of Musk's discarded former partners ("breeders"). Where this mindset comes from is revealed in the most illuminating aspect of this whole documentary regarding Elon's psyche: an interview with Errol Musk, his father. Although I went in knowing how objectionable a person Errol was, hearing him freely share his attitudes towards parenting, women, relationships, and race to name a few was incredibly revealing. It is almost miraculous that Elon isn't worse – I actually felt bad for him for minute (this sympathy was short-lived). I will say I was disappointed by how little friction Errol's opinions were met with by Gibney. I understand not saying anything during the interview in the interest of getting him to speak as openly as possible, however, because of the importance of the topics Errol was talking about, Gibney not outright condemning his views in his narration feels almost offensive.

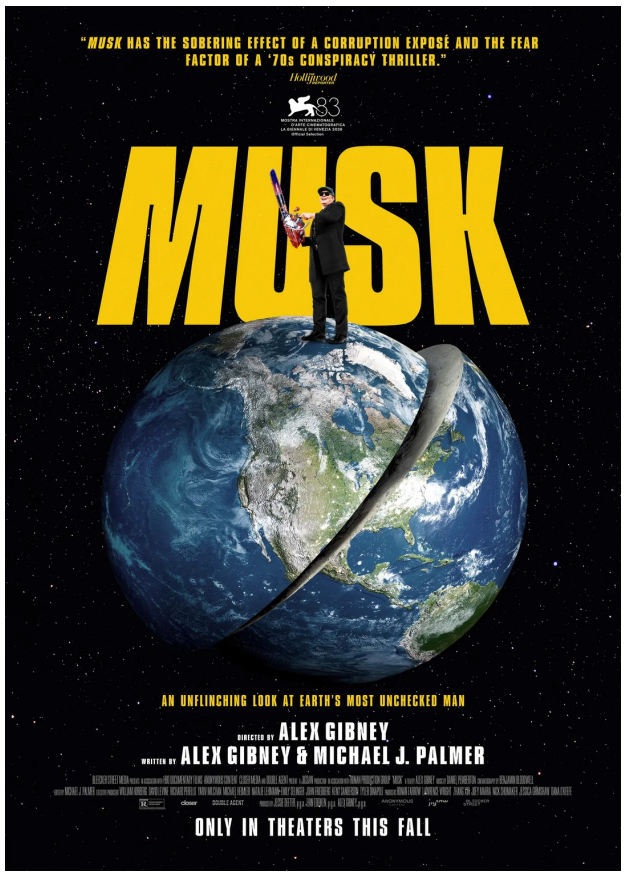
One of the more visceral parts of the documentary covered deaths associated with Tesla vehicles' self-driving capabilities. The central case involved Tesla's handling of crash data: allegedly, the company concealed the fact that it had retrieved data recording the moments leading up to a fatal collision, making it considerably harder to pursue legal action. A third-party hacker was reportedly able to expose this very quickly, after which Tesla dismissed the discrepancy as just a "clumsy" mistake. Although I am glad this was covered – it did teach me something I didn't know – I am conflicted on how tastefully I think this was done. There was actual crash footage of a man being seriously injured and a woman dying, footage which was played multiple times. I understand Gibney probably wanted to make the section as emotionally evocative and provocative as possible, but surely this could've just been done with a better script? Because these videos were used in court as evidence, they are publicly available, so the victims family didn't even have the right to sign off on the inclusion. I think this epitomises the documentary's fatal flaw: Gibney has an opinion and is desperate to spread it, but will go to any length to avoid just outright saying it himself.

The second half of the documentary focuses much more heavily on Musk's so-called political career, particularly his leadership of the White House's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), established with the 'aim' of cutting the US deficit. We hear testimony from the "DOGE boys" who express little to no remorse for the harm they caused, or the lies they told, during their time in the department.

The consequences of DOGE's cuts to USAID programmes are uniquely horrifying. The documentary suggests that the withdrawal of essential food and healthcare could contribute to nearly five million preventable deaths among children under five in Africa. We see shots of a father carry his deceased child under a blanket and families digging their own children's graves. A shot of Musk is then shown, his own healthy child perched on his shoulders, where he declares that empathy is good only to an extent – too much of it is causing "civilisational suicide". The juxtaposition is almost too disgusting to believe. I will say that, after some research, I found that the documentary presents the number of deaths/lives affected misleadingly; the statistics are projections, not actual occurrences. This was needlessly confusing: the point would've been just as effective without this attempt to potentially overstate the impact.

The glaring problem with the documentary is the interview with 'Elon'. Because Musk refused to be interviewed, Gibney and his team use an AI-generated avatar of him, trained on his past public statements and audio interviews. While spending much of the film critiquing Musk's use of, and attitude towards, artificial intelligence, Gibney employs an AI-generated Elon Musk as its narrative throughline. It is a remarkably odd creative choice, and the irony is not lost on the viewer.

Moreover, Gibney, despite vocally positioning himself as staunchly anti-Musk, never really delves into the why of anything. He presents an extraordinary amount of information, makes subtle implications, and allows his interviewees to do much of the condemning, without ever offering much in the way of his own interpretation. I suppose one could argue that this is good journalism, allowing the facts to speak for themselves. But when covering subjects as serious as those explored here, I think such restraint is irresponsible. There comes a point when refusing to actively condemn is not so much objectivity as an avoidance of moral judgement.



Genre: Documentary
Director: Alex Gibney
Screenwriter: Alex Gibney, Michael J. Palmer
Starring: Justine Musk, Ashley St. Clair, Kara Swisher, Martin Eberhard, Zoë Schiffer, Geoffrey Hinton
Run Time: 235 minutes
Release Date: 8 September 2026

The Idiot(s)

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

The Idiot(s) is a wonderfully bizarre and visually stunning portrayal of the relationship between Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky and his wife Anna. Directed by Małgorzata Szumowska and Michał Englert, it follows the couple during their self-imposed exile in Germany as Fyodor struggles with gambling, alcoholism, and a debilitating case of writer's block. It's an unconventional love story, and one that manages to be both ridiculous and surprisingly touching.

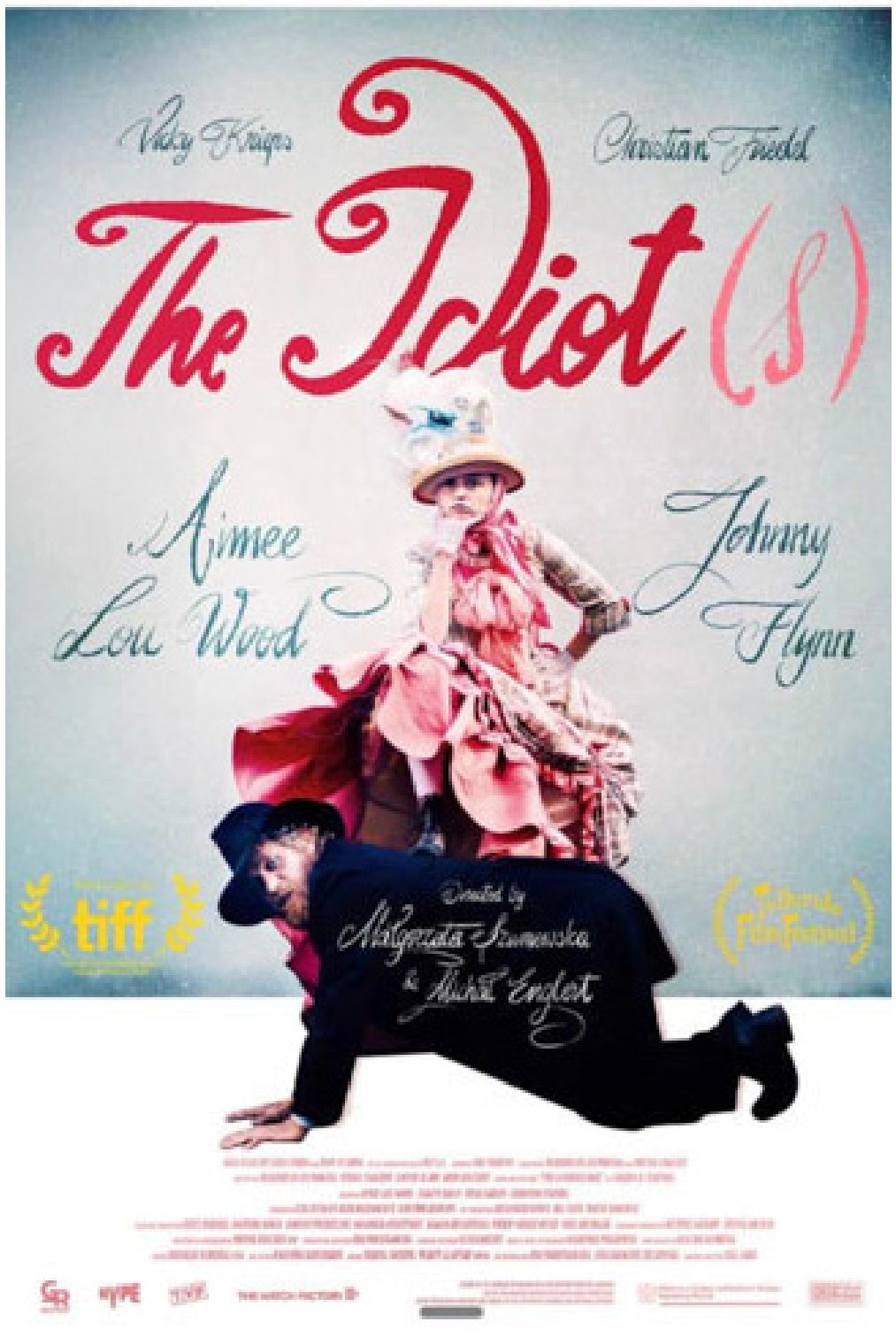
Johnny Flynn and Aimee Lou Wood are both brilliant as Fyodor and Anna, with a chemistry that makes even the most absurd moments of their relationship believable. Flynn is particularly entertaining as the self-indulgent, often insufferable literary genius, while Wood is wonderful as the increasingly exasperated woman tasked with keeping their lives together. Christian Friedel is also excellent as Fyodor's literary rival, Ivan Turgenev, bringing a wonderfully theatrical quality to an already rather eccentric film.

Visually, the film is completely stunning. The beautiful compositions, rich colours and carefully considered framing make it a pleasure to watch, even when very little is really happening. The scene where the whole cast is playing hide and seek particularly sticks out to me; we are watching them do literally nothing, but it is in such a vivid, beautiful, pruned garden that it remains engaging. There is something almost theatrical about the whole production, which works particularly well alongside the exaggerated performances and occasionally surreal humour.

Admittedly, the plot does seem to lose itself somewhere in the middle, but I really didn't care. The general consensus seems to be that the film becomes boring or is ultimately rather pointless, and while I can understand where this comes from, I felt that this was probably the point. We're watching one of the greatest literary minds in history spend most of his time gambling away his money, procrastinating, and generally making a fool of himself. I think there is something quite fitting about a film concerning the creation of a masterpiece like *The Idiot* being more preoccupied with the absurdity of its author's own existence.

It was particularly impressive that a film about Dostoevsky, of all people, managed to avoid being even remotely pretentious. It would have been so easy to turn the subject into some grand meditation on artistic genius, but *The Idiot(s)* seems far more interested in the ridiculous, often quite pathetic, reality behind it. The film allows Fyodor to behave in some truly awful, selfish ways without ever suggesting that this makes him an inherently bad person – or, worse, some tragic, tortured genius. He can be pathetic, insufferable, and certainly not someone you'd want to be married to. And yet, the love between him and Anna feels completely real. Their relationship is far from perfect, but there is something touching about the way their affection persists through all the chaos. The film doesn't try to excuse Fyodor's behaviour, nor does it suggest that love somehow makes everything alright – it allows both things to be true at once.

For all its absurdity, the film also handles its more serious moments with surprising sensitivity. The couple's experience of losing a child is particularly moving and treated with appropriate restraint. Aimee Lou Wood is especially brilliant here, conveying Anna's grief without the film feeling the need to overdramatise it. The quieter moments like this provide a welcome contrast to the ridiculousness of much of the surrounding narrative, making the relationship at its centre feel more convincing and fundamentally human.



There is something refreshing about the film's refusal to romanticise artistic genius. Dostoevsky's literary achievements are never really in question, but nor are they used to justify his behaviour. If anything, the contrast between his extraordinary intellect and his complete inability to manage his own life is one of the best aspects of the film. The characters didn't care about behaving in a way befitting their historical significance. They were petty and emotional, frequently ridiculous, and all the more believable for it. It is not a carefully constructed portrait of a great writer, but of two rather ordinary people trying, and often failing, to get through life.

It definitely isn't a perfect film and I'm not trying to argue that every narrative decision works, but I found it so thoroughly entertaining, beautifully shot, and brilliantly performed that I really didn't care. Sometimes a film doesn't need to arrive at some profound conclusion to be worth watching; *The Idiot(s)* exemplifies this idea. It might wander rather aimlessly at times, but I was more than happy to wander along with it.

Genre: Biographical Drama/Comedy
Director: Małgorzata Szumowska, Michał Englert
Screenwriter: Małgorzata Szumowska, Michał Englert, Kasper Bajon, Brid Arnstein
Starring: Aimee Lou Wood, Johnny Flynn, Vicky Krieps, and Christian Friedel
Run Time: 118 minutes
Release Date: 4 September 2026

Behemoth!

Film Writer
DHRUV MATHUR

Tony Gilroy's *Behemoth!* (stylized in all caps) gripped me from start to finish. A drama through and through, the film stars Pedro Pascal as renowned cellist and impish womaniser Alex Serian. As a fan of Gilroy's work on the superb Star Wars spinoff *Andor*, I knew he would be capable of subverting and excelling in a genre stacked with expectations. The film's score features no less than nine famous composers, including Alan Silvestri, James Newton Howard, and *Andor* collaborator Brandon Roberts. This fact has been picked up by almost every review of the film. Less reported is how powerful and varied this leaves the score feeling, particularly as the scoring work the characters diegetically play spill over into the *Behemoth!* score following Alex long after he leaves the studio. The nonlinear pacing is hard to read cause-and-effect from, events play out in what can feel like a completely arbitrary ordering of past and present and further past: on reflection it seems clear that Gilroy is using this sleight-of-hand to show Alex's irresponsibility and dysfunction through the DNA of the text.

We learn but never unpack a good deal of trauma about Serian and his family, talented but long-suffering musicians filled with contempt for one another; past relationships that come back to haunt Alex, memories of a prodigious and troubled youth. The film's focus on the inner life of a classical musician was undoubtedly to invite comparisons to another film: indeed, *The Guardian*'s unflattering review makes a passing remark alleging *Behemoth!* is "*Tár* for straight men". But Gilroy's structural storytelling presents, in all its flaws, Alex's self-perception as a person to whom things just seem to happen: it makes the third act, with its compressed and linearized plot, with its thematic restraint and excellent mise-en-scène, actually feel like it's earned the drama. We get to see Pascal against Alexa Swinton's portrayal of fifteen-year-old prodigy Viviana, seeing different currents of his life linking back to her as the embedded midlife crisis and challenge of artistic maturity meet head-on. Gilroy has created a movie where everyone and everything looks and sounds incredible, a treat for the eyes and ears that occasionally stumbles before resolving into a funny, emotional, immersive experience.



Genre: Drama/Music
Director: Tony Gilroy
Screenwriter: Tony Gilroy
Starring: Pedro Pascal, Olivia Wilde, Eva Victor, Will Arnett, Hank Azaria
Run Time: 127 minutes
Release Date: 4 December 2026

It Gets Worse

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

It Gets Worse was one of the funniest and most refreshing things I watched at this year's London Film Festival. The new sitcom, starring comedian Leo Reich, manages to do something that most television supposedly written for Gen Z fails at: actually be relatable to young people.

I loved how raw and open it felt. The dialogue was natural, the characters were believable, and the humour never seemed forced. So much of the media aimed at Gen Z seems desperate to prove that it understands young people, throwing in references and slang in an attempt to appear relevant. *It Gets Worse* doesn't bother with any of that. It isn't trying particularly hard to be clever, provocative or relatable – it just is. And that is exactly what makes it so funny.

Reich is excellent, delivering a performance that feels both wonderfully ridiculous and completely authentic. The entire cast is brilliant, each actor bringing something genuinely funny to the series. I was also particularly delighted by Lena Dunham's cameo, which felt like a fitting addition to a show so unapologetically honest about the messiness of being young.

There is something refreshing about a sitcom that doesn't feel the need to dress up its characters' flaws or turn every uncomfortable interaction into some profound social commentary. It is awkward, occasionally absurd, and wonderfully unfiltered. More importantly, it feels real. I appreciated the show's willingness to let its characters do bad things without necessarily making them bad people. Nobody is entirely innocent, but nobody is irredeemable either. It reflects the reality that people are complicated, often selfish and occasionally pretty awful, without any of those things defining who they are. Real life is rarely black and white, and we all find ways to justify our own behaviour, even when we know we're in the wrong. *It Gets Worse* doesn't feel the need to pass judgement on its characters, instead allowing them to be flawed, contradictory, and ultimately human.

I went into the screening in a strange mood, not wanting to watch anything at all, and actually left feeling considerably better. There was something weirdly comforting about *It Gets Worse*, despite (or maybe because of) how messy and unfiltered it was. It was reassuring to watch characters navigate their lives so imperfectly, without the show feeling the need to offer any neat resolutions.

I saw the first three episodes at the festival and will absolutely be watching the remaining three. It's rare to find something that feels so distinctly written for young people without being remotely patronising towards them.



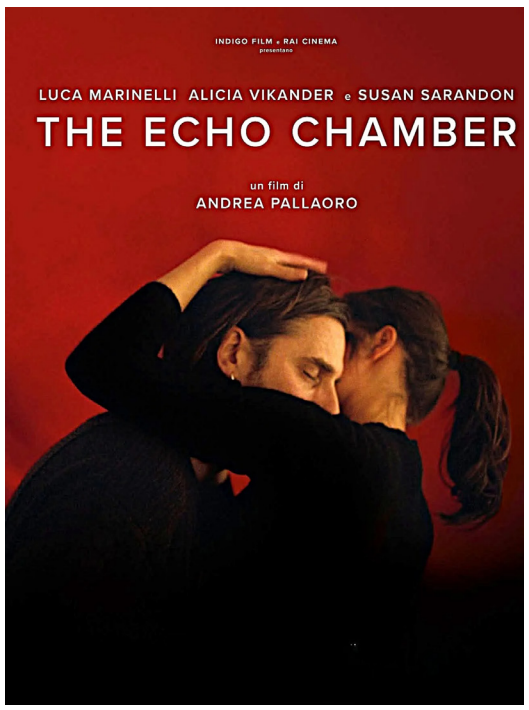
Genre: Sitcom / Comedy
Director: Mounia Akl
Screenwriter/Creator: Leo Reich
Starring: Leo Reich, Emily Fairn, Olive Gray, Andrew Scott, and Lena Dunham
Run Time: 6 episodes, 23–24 minutes each
Release Date: 22 October 2026

The Echo Chamber

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

Perhaps the most ridiculous film I've seen all year, *The Echo Chamber*'s only saving grace is the interior design inspiration it provided. The beautiful colour palette of deep reds and warm browns inside our protagonist Leo's (Luca Marinelli) luxurious apartment is genuinely the best part of this entire production. Unfortunately, the same attention to detail was clearly not extended to the script.

It seems Alicia Vikander, playing the love interest Alice, was given completely different context from the rest of the cast, with her performance – which I can only assume was intended to be warm and human – coming across as almost sinister. No matter how hard Marinelli tried, the romance was impossible to get behind; the entire time, one couldn't help but wonder whether this was about to become a horror movie. Alice, a medical professional, meets Leo, a musician, while treating his back pain. Her robotic delivery and strange side glances genuinely had me convinced there would be a plot twist revealing that she was lying about her identity or motivations – alas, the actual plot twist was even worse. There was absolutely no chemistry between the two leads, making it rather difficult to care about the relationship upon which the entire film depends. Their interactions were so uncomfortable that I found myself questioning why or if we were even supposed to be rooting for them.



The film's central conflict revolves around Leo's struggle with addiction, largely enabled by Alice, and the strain this places on their relationship. Once this is predictably resolved, Alice and Leo reunite as a couple, only for Leo to be forced to rush out of the house following a personal emergency. He gets into his car and speeds out of frame. We hear a loud commotion. Leo has just been in a car crash, and I'm not joking, *Imagine Dragons* starts playing. Seriously. We spend the remainder of the film watching Alice nurse a now-paralysed Leo. I was actually just incredulous at this point. And then the movie ends. What was presumably intended to be a devastating conclusion instead felt almost comical. The film was so desperate to manufacture some sort of emotional response that it just abandoned any pretence of subtlety. Rather than feeling moved by Leo's circumstances, I was left completely bewildered by the direction the story had taken.

To give credit where it's due, Marinelli's performance was perfectly passable, and particularly strong in the more emotionally charged scenes. Susan Sarandon was, of course, excellent as Ava, a vocalist coming out of retirement to collaborate with Leo. Vikander, whom I am typically a fan of, was so awful that her performance unfortunately contaminated the rest of the film. Admittedly, she was hardly helped by the ludicrous plot and some pretty poor dialogue (and sometimes just lack of dialouge completely). It's particularly frustrating because the film clearly had the resources and talent to produce something far more compelling. Instead, almost every attempt at sincerity was painfully contrived.

Beautiful apartment, talented cast, very little else worth remembering.

Genre: Romance/Drama
Director: Andrea Pallaoro
Screenwriter: Bernardo Bertolucci, Ilaria Bernardini, Ludovica Rampoldi
Starring: Alicia Vikander, Luca Marinelli, Susan Sarandon
Run Time: 123 minutes
Release Date: 17 October 2026

RATINGS

Musk
★★★☆☆

The Idiots(s)
★★★★☆

Behemoth!
★★★★☆

It Gets Worse
★★★★☆

TheEchoChamber
★½☆☆☆

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BOOKS

Fantasy, Inherited

A literary reflection on writing and authorship in conversation between Susanna Clarke and V.E. Schwab.

Books Writer
ANYA CHAUDHARY

Lit with green lights to match the cover of her newest book, *The Bishop of Durham Attempts to Surrender the City*, St. Mary's Church in Marylebone, welcomed Susanna Clarke for a conversation with V.E. Schwab last Thursday.

Schwab probed Clarke on the experiences, inspirations, and processes that constituted her various works and culminated in *The Bishop of Durham Attempts to Surrender the City,* prequel to the celebrated *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*.

With a gripping eloquence, Susanna Clarke reminisced about the origins of her vivid imagination in the tales of King Arthur she'd read as a young girl. She remarked on how, though she didn't realise it at the time, the characters of Jonathan Strange, Piranesi, and the Raven King had begun to develop within those early adventures. When Schwab remarked on the occasional usefulness of maladaptive daydreaming, Clarke laughed, "I would've written fanfiction if I knew such a thing existed."



V.E. Schwab on tour. Image credits: Jujukiwi1

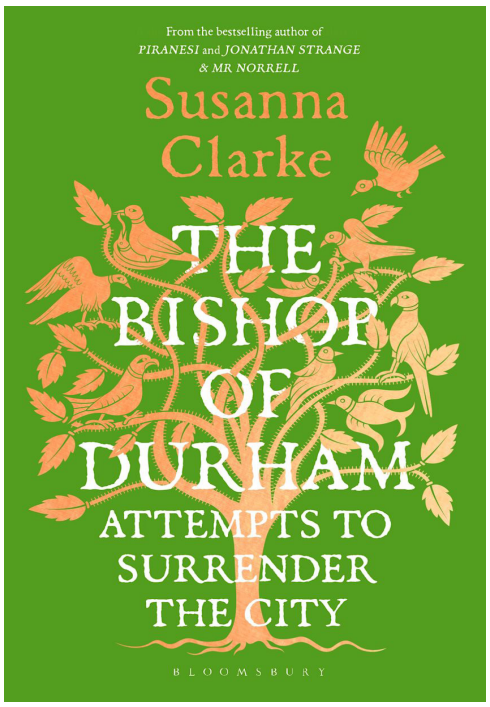
As an amateur writer myself, I brought an intent curiosity about Clarke's writing process to the event. Having ruminated over Margaret Atwood's *On Writers and Writing*, I was keen to learn what defined being a writer for her. I was struck by her answer, "I find out about things by writing about them." As she went on to explain how each of her stories starts with a simple idea or character, I could envision a magical transformation of Piranesi from a small ember into a wildfire of unpredictable storytelling.

My ears perked up when she listed the works of C.S. Lewis, Ursula K Le Guin, and the like as the greatest inspiration for her work. It's evident that writers of this genre don't just create imaginative stories in a vacuum. Arthurian mythology has been marked as the birthplace of many authors' first ideas, and their nature of being mutually inspired is exactly what enriches the field. One of the most well-known illustrations of this is the Inklings, an informal literary group at the University of Oxford. This partnership was born as a sounding board between writers C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, without which the *Lord of the Rings* series may have never been completed. Nevertheless, they diverged massively on ideas of philosophical depth and religion, which only highlights the nuance with which writers have analysed, absorbed, and resisted each other's ideas. Le Guin had once remarked how Lewis taught her what to write, and what not to write. Clarke went on to note that Le Guin's nameless magician, the Grey Mage of Plan in Earthsea had ingrained itself in her conception of the Raven King in *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*. It feels like a fantastical adventure of my own to trace how these authors pay homage to one another through their own imaginations.

V.E. Schwab, author of *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, commented on how fantasy literature is often conceived purely as a means to escape reality. And whilst there is no doubt that reading imaginative fiction can provide for thrilling hours of escapism, the fantasy genre is undeniably adept at confronting reality in unconventional ways. From Le Guin's musings on the fluidity of gender in *The Left Hand of Darkness* to Lewis' critiques on scientific power divorced from ethics in *That Hideous Strength*, fantasy and science fiction writers have challenged our world through stories written in worlds of their creation. The nature of speculative fiction manages to hold a mirror up to reality in a way that often manages to be more explicit than its nonfiction counterparts.

Giddy from an hour of rich conversation between the two admirable writers, I queued with my shiny new book for Clarke's signature, and perhaps the opportunity to ask her another question. Soon enough, I'd arrived at the last page of the book and at the front of the queue.

Later, my friend and I walked out of the church to a classic London drizzle, signed books carefully tucked into our bags alongside the ideas of Clarke, Schwab, Le Guin, Atwood, Lewis, and so on, ready to become stories that bridge reality with our wildest imaginations.



For the plot: a short description

The Bishop of Durham Attempts to Surrender the City

The Bishop of Durham Attempts to Surrender the City is an enigmatic read, evidently engaging to the extent of helping one survive hours-long waiting times. The story begins with the Bishop, Ranulf Flambard, waiting to surrender himself to the Raven King in a newly annexed Durham, surrounded by an impenetrable forest that seems to defend itself like an army that cannot be reasoned with or defeated. In the essay that follows, Clarke brings us back to the stories of C.S. Lewis, citing him as her inspiration for wanting to bring nature to life through storytelling. As Alex Brown from *Reactor Mag* calls it, the book was truly "a Small Delight", especially for fans of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*.

MUSIC

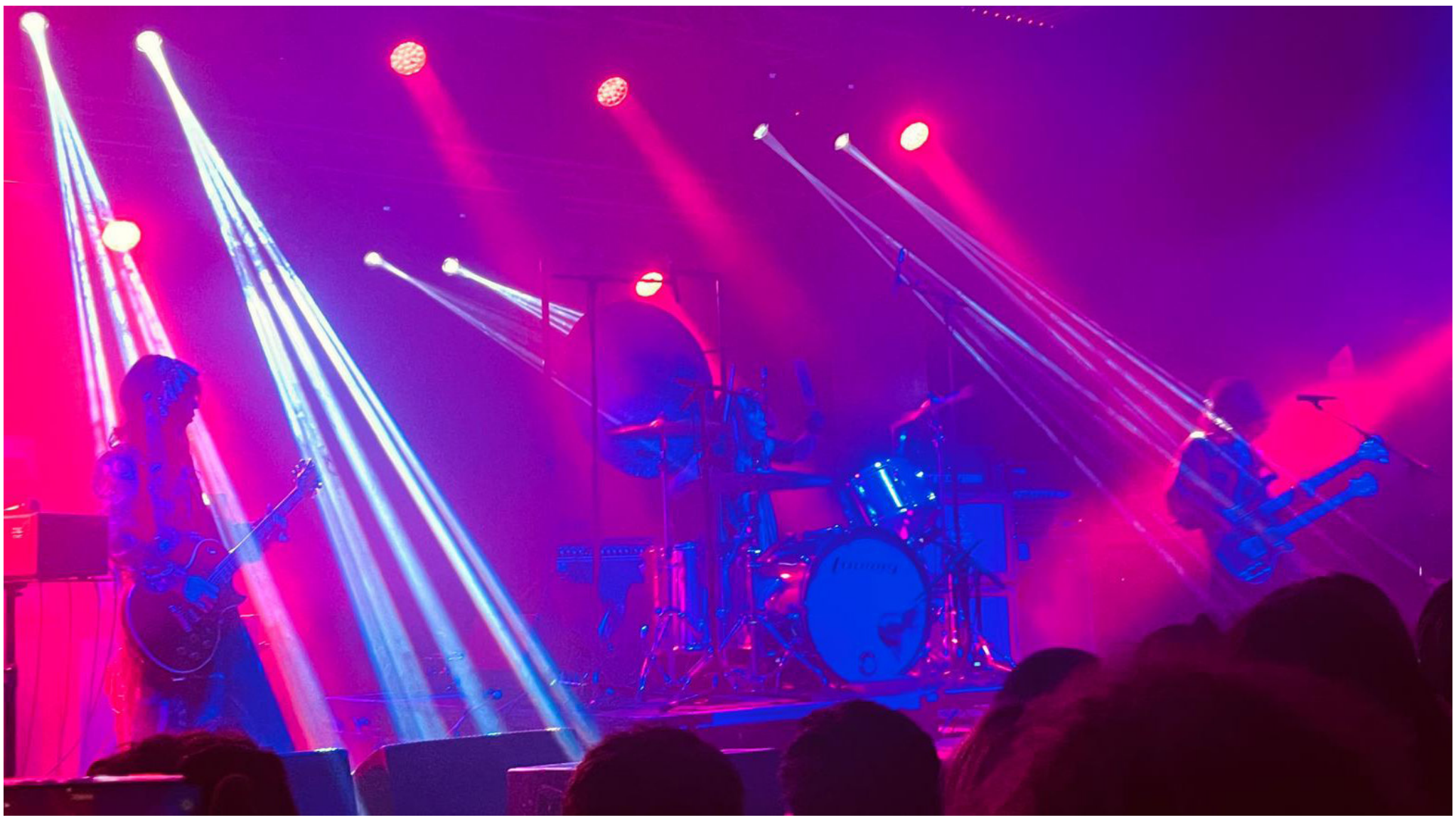
Boris tears the roof off Electric Brixton

Or how to curate an anniversary set.

Music Writer
RYAN STANLEY

Boris is a heavy band. Comprising three members – Wata (guitar), Takeshi (double-necked guitar/bass and vocals), and Atsuo (drums) – they conjure up earthshattering, crushing metal that can simultaneously pummel you with some of the densest concoctions of distortion and feedback you can fathom, and bring you to tears with this sense of ineffable beauty. It's impossible to pigeonhole them into one specific modus operandi as they experiment with so many different styles, but their earlier material broadly explores two categories. You have the dronier sludge/doom metal or post-rock, moving at glacial paces with endless builds followed by immense explosions of pent-up energy. Their debut 'single' exemplifies this perfectly: *Absolutego* (1996) is an hour-long track with the first drop only hitting around 25 minutes in. Then we have their more traditional, thrashier hard rock: faster, more energetic and riff-driven, closer akin to Guns N' Roses than Electric Wizard. *Pink*, the album which this tour celebrates the 20th anniversary of, falls more into the latter category (but far from absolutely, as with all their releases it contains a plethora, complicating a simple genre attribution).

I first saw Boris three years ago when they played Camden's Desertfest, which describes itself as "the UK's premier stoner rock, doom and heavy psych festival". That might be true, but probably due to a lack of competition as it was overall a pretty middling experience. As an over-enthusiastic 16-year-old who'd impulsively bought a ticket after seeing Boris's name, not recognising a single other act on the lineup or particularly enjoying many of their sets, I was somewhat out of my element. At the end of the day though, Boris kicked ass – shrouded in fog, they had a belly dancer on stage at one point; Atsuo crowd surfed; it was glorious. My only qualms were that the volume was simply not high enough (I'd lost my hearing protection earlier in the day but was more than comfortable) and that their set comprised entirely of their hard rockier post-2020 material. This was a bit of a gut-punch when I found out that they had closed with "Farewell", the opener for *Pink* and universally agreed to be one of their greatest tracks, on all the adjacent dates. So surely being guaranteed to hear the hits in the context



Boris performing at the Electric Brixton. Ryan Stanley

> **Praying for one of your favourites, or an under-appreciated deep cut, the delight of them hitting you with that one track you never expected to hear.**

of an 'album anniversary' tour would be all excitement? Well, the answer to that can be a bit more complex.

I'd say a large part of what makes for an enjoyable experience at a show of an artist you're a big fan of is the mystery of what they might play. Praying for one of your favourites, or an under-appreciated deep cut, the delight of them hitting you with that one track you never expected to hear. Even if your hopes go unfulfilled, this process of anticipating, being surprised in some parts, let down in others, is what keeps gigs fresh and dynamic. Even if you are seeing a band you know will just shut up and play the hits, the order in which they do it is pivotal, creating a subtext of suspense, making you question whether they will play their biggest track. Surely, they will? Right? Right? Being kept on edge makes the opening notes hit even harder and creates these euphoric releases from the tension that stick with you long after curtains close. Classic album tours lose this magic with a preordained promised setlist running through the tracks from that album from front to back. As dear as the record may be for me (and these do end up being the most exciting kind of tour announcements), these are the shows I find myself the least excited for in their run-up – there's staleness in predictability.

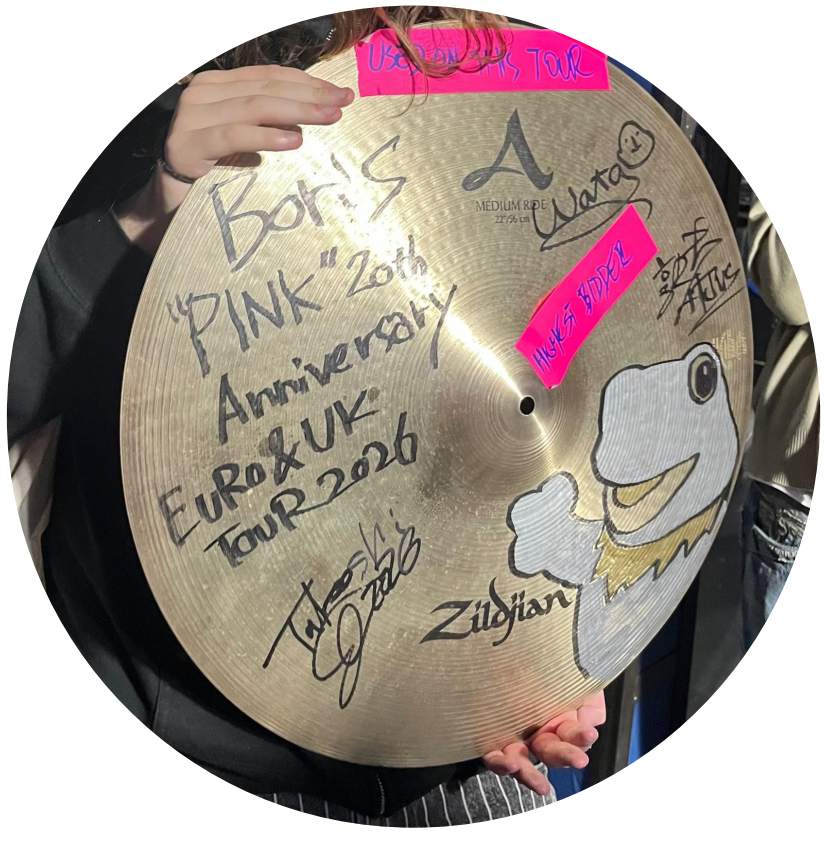
So on 15 October, I'm just leaving Brixton tube station to join my friends in the queue and spy someone with Boris merch, "Boris Plays Pink in its Entirety" and a list of tour dates printed on the back – banishing any hope for setlist variety in their performance from my mind. I begin bracing myself to hear the pure gorgeousness of "Farewell" right off the bat followed by *Pink*'s 10 other tracks (all brilliant, but never really topping the heights of the opener)... a bit of a bummer but any Boris is worth savouring. We have Planning For Burial supporting and he does an excellent job at quite literally setting the tone: with the blast of the first strum I am reassured that volume will not be an issue this time around. Wasluck has never been my brand of doomgaze exactly, but the density of the layered instrumentation live sells his work a lot better, with very powerful moments in the dronier sections especially. His clean vocals float hazily in the background of the distortion, imbuing the songs with an almost lullaby-esque quality in it's very gradual rhythmic thudding along. Being a one-man project, the drum machine accompanying does get a bit boring, but his ramp up in intensity to screams makes up for it and leaves the opening set on a good note, whetting my appetite massively knowing that Boris executes what he sets out to do much more fully and interestingly. I await eagerly for them to take the stage.

Ten past nine, everything quiets down, and the band comes out. Smoke machines have obscured the entire stage, but the vibrant ceremonial garb they are wearing glimmers through. Wata takes her seat on the left as she broke her foot a couple of shows prior, but her guitar mastery remains unimpeded. I prepare myself to be thrust into the immediate sonic bliss of *Pink*'s opener but... that's not "Farewell"? A thick sluggish droning riff has enveloped the venue and "Blackout" blares out, a track from midway through *Pink* and probably the sludgiest of the bunch, subverting my expectations and leaving me giddy with my inability to predict what would await. The band sounded brilliant, supremely loud, and unmatched in tone: I was ready for them to surprise me.

The energy was swiftly turned all the way up as the scorching thrashing of the title track took hold and the room immediately erupted into frenetic moshing. Being slightly overcrowded, this wasn't the most enjoyable pit I've been a part of, but nothing could take away from Boris' blazing performance – Atsuo pounding away, Takeshi holding down these lightning-fast riffs, and Wata gliding over them with these beautiful screeching solos. Things continued in this vein for the next five tracks (four from *Pink*, and "Ibitsu" from *Akuma no Uta* (2003)!), maintaining this momentum, embracing the neon-pink hard rock they'd perfected two decades ago. These were all undeniable and the band was killing it up there, but I was getting a bit exhausted in the crushes and writhing of the pit. Which is why I was all the more enthused when they decided to switch things up yet again!

The next half hour of the set took a massive pivot into tracks from other early 2000s releases, focusing on Boris' other forte – my personal preference, the dronier stuff. With the 20-minute "The Evilone Which Sobs" at its centre, this portion of the show was completely mind-melting. The moshing was replaced by this reverent, patient communal headbanging, with the unbelievably crushing tone cultivating an almost sacred atmosphere: mammoth, deafening, and beautiful. This was then followed up with a return to *Pink*'s burning with the 10-minute rager (and the albums closer) "Just Abandoned Myself", a sprawling, cathartic epic resummoning the mosh and stunning you with their combination of technical ability and emotional impact. And finally, of course, "Farewell" – and it is just every bit as perfect as I had hoped; words cannot do it justice; this may well be the greatest single song I have heard live, and ever will.

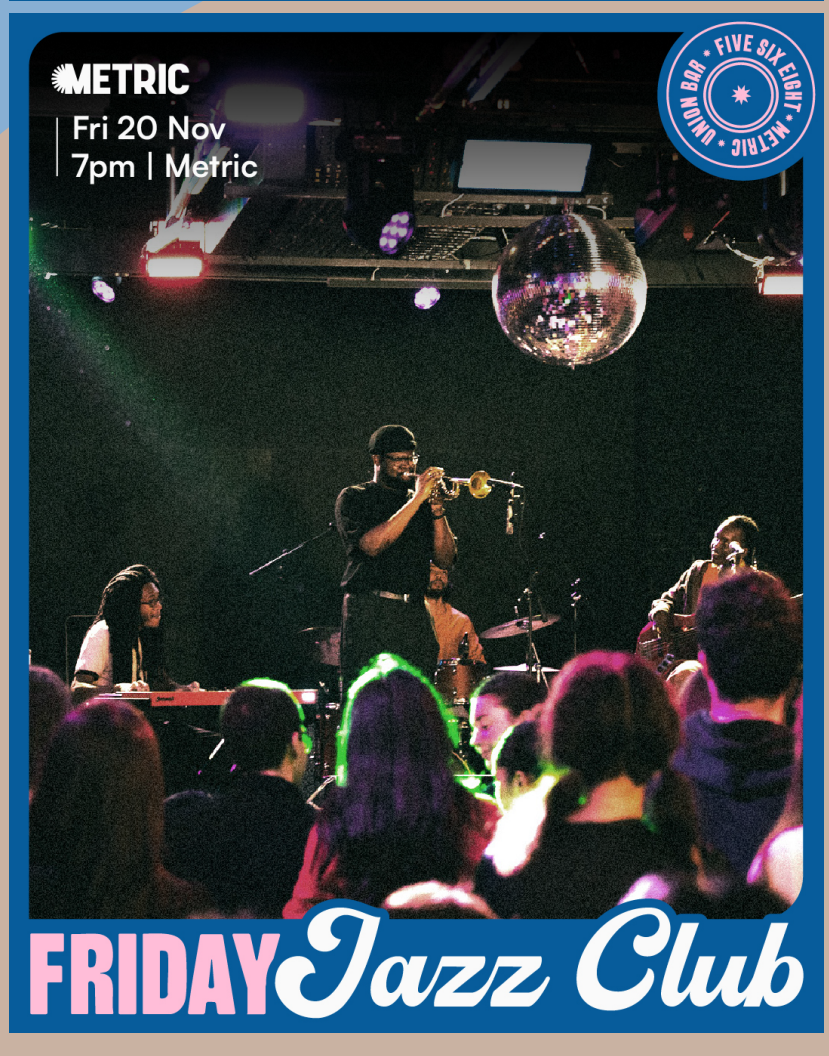
As definitive as a conclusion as "Farewell" is, who's going to turn down an encore? Boris return to appease the usual chanting of "one more song!", and they deliver exactly that – the 12-minute "Naki Kyoku", the heart of *Akuma no Uta*, and Wata reaffirms her status as a guitar goddess. Pretty minimal instrumentation otherwise, just a succession of jaw-dropping solos over a great groove Atsuo and Takeshi hold down, it is the sweetest cherry on top of an already astonishing show. I have had this track on repeat since, and my friends who were there have the same story. They didn't even play the whole record – only seven of *Pink*'s eleven tracks! But never have I been so glad to have been misadvertised to: that is how you put on an anniversary set.

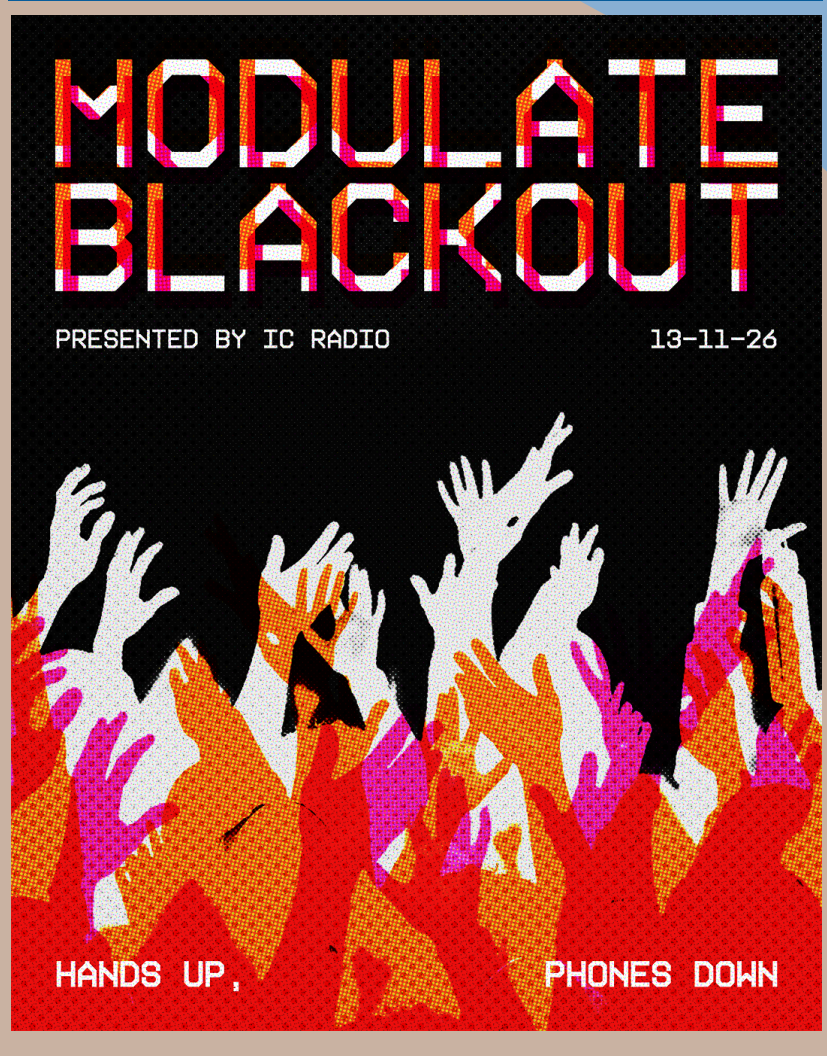


Commemorative signed cymbal purchased by a fan. Ryan Stanley









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ARTS&CULTURE

The Return of Y2K Technology

Tired of doomscrolling? Afraid to rawdog reality without your airpods? Where has all the comfort we found in our Y2K tech gone?

Arts&Culture Writer
RAQUEL SILVA

The technology of the 2000s has been making a comeback. Wired earphones are in fashion, digital cameras are now in every party, and even portable gaming consoles can sometimes be spotted out in the wild. It seems Gen Z has decided to adopt offline technology as part of their day-to-day carry-ons. With such an increase in the use of technology that, for the most part, has not seen the light of day for a decade, I couldn't avoid asking myself: is this a performative fashion trend that will die within the year, or is there a deeper reason why Y2K tech has had a revival?

To answer this question, we must first acknowledge that current fashion trends have also returned to the beginning of the millennium. Think low rise jeans, baby tees, and platform shoes. It is no secret that fashion trends cycle every couple of decades, but it is interesting that now it is also accompanied by a surge in the casual use of seemingly outdated technology. At first glance, this can come across as trying too hard to be cool and quirky to the point of being performative and attention-seeking. I am definitely guilty of jumping the gun and pre-emptively judging anyone I saw innocuously using gadgets I believed would forever be buried in the back of my drawers. But as I saw more people using and connecting with this type of technology, I began confronting my preconceptions.



Author through a fishbowl.
Photo by David Loughlin

My first realisation was that I often struggled to spend any time of the day without some form of entertainment going on in the background. Face buried in my phone on the commute to university, earbuds in my ears when doing housework, and even YouTube videos as I fall asleep. I noticed that I hadn't felt bored in years, as I always had plenty of readily available ways to distract myself. It was through the process of attempting to "raw-dog" reality that I understood how useful retro technology can be both as a coping mechanism and as a way to protest against modern addictive technologies. After this realisation, I couldn't help myself from finding out more about the various quirky gadgets released over a decade ago.

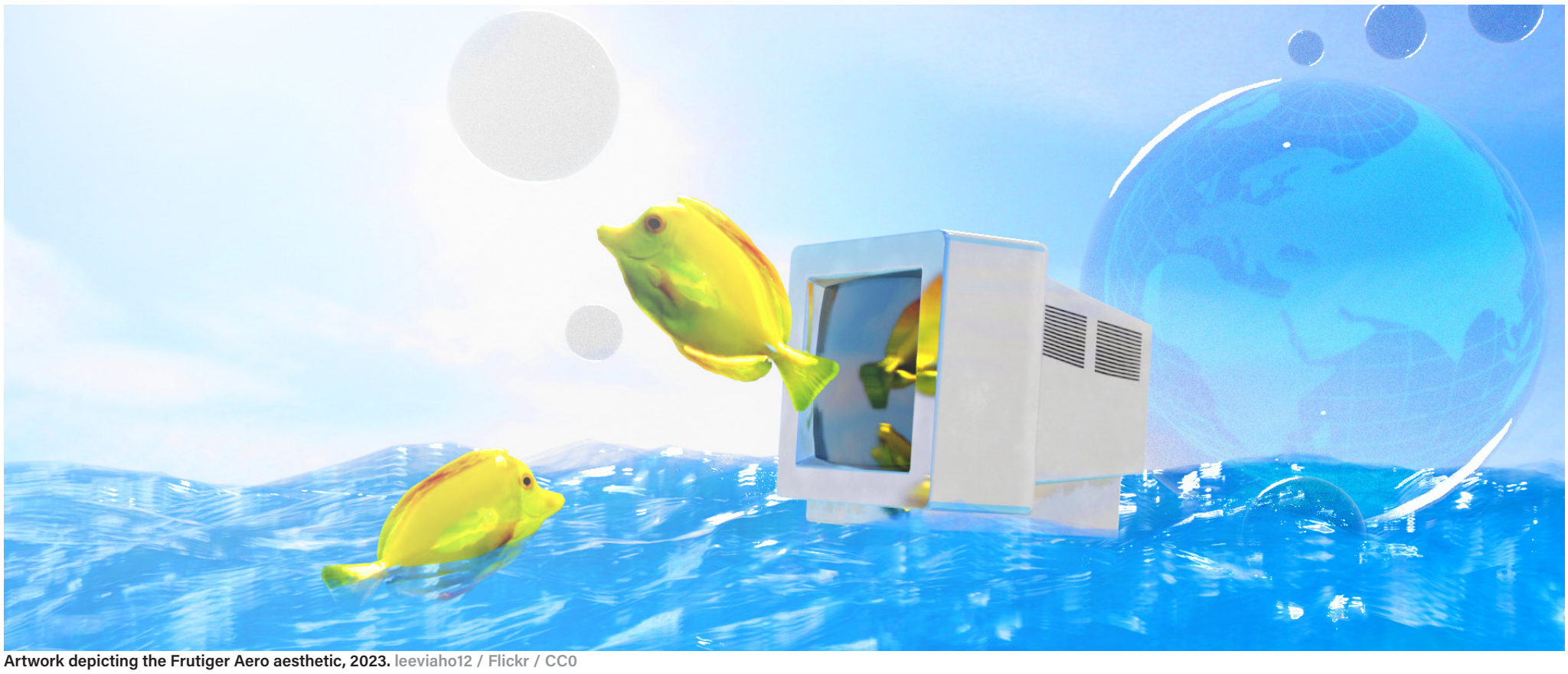
My first deep dive into the world of retro technology started during one of those bed-rot days where I spent a terrifying number of hours scrolling on my phone. When I finally managed to get a hold of my own consciousness, I realised I could not recall anything from what I had been watching, and I felt mentally and physically worse than before. This seems to unfortunately be a very relatable experience for most people. Phones and social media can often provide a much needed relief from the stresses of everyday life, but they are designed to keep you coming back for more, providing you with an endless fountain of content and entertainment so that you give them more data and consume more ads. Long gone are the days where you could scroll Instagram until you reach an end captioned with the words "You're all caught up" with no further content served to you. Instead of the technology being limited by design, we are left with no choice but to resort to restricting the addictive technology that surrounds us.



Author's phone open.
Photo by David Loughlin

My solution rested in getting a phone that I actually enjoyed using. I often found that my iPhone worked faster than my brain, so I would end up doomscrolling without ever making a conscious decision to do so. Ironically, it was through an Instagram ad that I first fell in love with my current device: a smart flip phone. For all intents and purposes, it works as a normal smartphone. It has a small touch screen and an up-to-date Google Play Store, through which I can install all the important apps: banking, WhatsApp, maps, Spotify, and even damned Instagram (yes, I can, and still often do, scroll on reels on my flip phone). Its main drawbacks are its 2GB of RAM making the phone rather slow at times, and its lack of NFC preventing me from tapping to pay. However, I have found these quirks actually work in my favour. Because my phone is much slower, it gives me time to consider whether I actually want or need to use my phone, and the inability to use my phone to pay has relieved some of the stress of worrying about not having enough battery when leaving my home. While using an unconventional phone may not be for everyone, its purpose is not dissimilar to the strategies my friends have found to take control of their screen time, which can range from the simple app time limits to the more limiting external devices that can "brick" your phone. At the end of the day, the goal is the same: taking control over how we use our devices rather than letting the devices control us.

While digitally disconnecting is helpful for restoring your relationship



Artwork depicting the Frutiger Aero aesthetic, 2023. leeviaho12 / Flickr / CC0

with technology, it can also be useful to embrace the parts of the internet that provide you with genuine joy. I have found solace in technologically escaping into the world of Frutiger Aero, the successor of the Y2K Futurism aesthetic. Think back to the mid-2000s and early 2010s, when every wallpaper was full of nature, bubbles, sparkles, and over-saturated colours. Despite being a rather old aesthetic, Frutiger Aero has seen a recent surge in popularity on the internet. The most famous example of this is the dolphin meme set to *Symphony* by Zara Larsson. The dichotomy of the dolphin jumping out of a gorgeous biodiverse sea with a lovely sunny blue sky and the honest and rather dark words captioned on top (usually something along the lines of "I'm depressed"), I think best illustrates why Frutiger Aero has had such a big comeback; in a reality absent of hope, the ability to digitally escape to a nostalgic, jolly environment can provide the necessary comfort one can struggle to find in real life. In practice, this is what Frutiger Aero is all about: optimistic technology in harmony with nature, the visual manifestation of a better future. One can choose to see this resurgence as the reclaiming of the joyful techno-filled future that was promised to us growing up and has failed to be provided.

Hope is not the only thing that current tech designs lack. Nowadays, everything seems to be centred around clean lines, muted tones, and cookie-cutter designs. We've lost to minimalism not only the devices that looked more like transformers than phones, but somewhere along the way we also lost all the joy and excitement of quirky gadgets that clearly express one's individuality. This lack of personality goes beyond the visual appearance of the design. It is now hard to go a day without reading an email written by ChatGPT, seeing an ad image on the tube generated by Gemini, or scrolling through a reel that barely anyone can detect as AI-generated. Through some of my friends that have started graduate jobs, I have seen the despair that comes with having to use AI for most, if not all, of their tasks at work.



Author's phone closed.
Photo by David Loughlin

> **Somewhere along the way we lost the joy and excitement of quirky gadgets**

The goal seems to be workmaxxing even at the cost of stripping all the enjoyment out of it. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the usefulness and convenience of AI in streamlining laborious tasks and helping with large information processing. But, at the end of the day, it is important to consider that by outsourcing all the work to the machine, we remove all the enjoyment of the learning journey and doing the work ourselves, while also ending up with an output stripped of character and personality.

It may seem like we are doomed to, willingly or not, be overwhelmed by the modern technological ecosystem. Using technology in a conscious way is simultaneously arduous and necessary for anyone that actively engages with society. My recommendation is to first gather the courage to analyse and reshape your relationship with technology. I also encourage you to "whimsify" your devices. Put your favourite stickers on your laptop, use an icon theme on your phone, install customisation software for your Spotify, even paint your headphones! If you wish to embrace the retro tech even more, you can also look into making your own custom devices, anything from a simple MP3 player to a full cyberdeck.

No matter how you choose to reimagine the technology in your life, it should be around your interests and needs.

At the end of the day, your gadgets are no different than any piece of clothing you choose to wear: if you don't like it or it doesn't fit you, you should change it or get something else that does.

CATNIP

Nothing's scarier than ghosts

Catnip Guest Writer
KITTY OF CAT FAME

There's something so specific about a non-reply. I've highlighted the word specific on my laptop to remind me to change it when I edit this text, but I don't think I'll be able to come up with a better term. There truly is nothing like the emotional nuance triggered when the fizzling out of a human-to-human connection ends... yeah that's it, it just does. An unanswered question, a flown-by joke, a liked message, a missed call. The one thing I like about ghosting is that the term is perfectly chosen; ghosts share that Schrödinger-like, transparent nature of being there, and not, at the same time. Interestingly, I don't think many of us care about who has ghosted us in the long term: however much you can yearn, deep down you're aware you've gotta let that one go. The scariest part is the questions it begs: why, what did I do this time, did they finally realise they deserve better than me, and an etcetera that my therapist wouldn't be happy with me explaining as she says I shouldn't feed the thoughts that finger me or whatever the saying is.

The best part of ghosting, though, is that you never know when it's actually happening (I didn't think I could get away with bringing up Schrödinger once, nevermind twice, but here we are). Leaving on seen used to mean something man. Why have they now started coming BACK? They can sense when you're almost fully healed, I swear. It's even funnier when they come back with the classic "wyd" and the cognitive dissonance with the text above it is hard to ignore (one of my latest hits, "yeah I think Rome would be fun, when do we book the flights"). This one was weeks ago, wyd was today, hence why I'm writing with what may or may not be a danger pint next to me (actually it wasn't "wyd" it was "how've you been" so I think he loves me thank you very much).

Will you kill me if I say I've ghosted people before. Surely that just makes me all the more qualified to speak about this. I think about the (more than a couple) times I've done this, and weirdly I don't feel as bad for those people as I wish the people that have ghosted me felt about me. Before you call me a hypocrite let me just share that I think two days of talking is less than six months. Take what you will from that and call me what you want if you still wish to.

I'm afraid I don't know how to end this, so I might have to ghost you, and just leave it here. Ohhhh maybe *that's* why people do it.

Either way, I don't think this deserves any more ink. But it was the Halloween issue, and this is about ghosts, get it haha, so I thought why not.

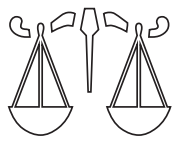
I look for a sign as if I've ever seen the stars align, and the waitress lights the candle next to me at the pub. I'll make a wish before I leave, but I won't tell you.

I see a stranger through the window and I think it's you; my heart drops to my stomach. Then I remember: I don't actually know what you look like.

Horrorscopes

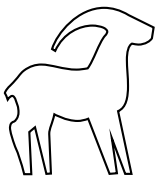
ARIES

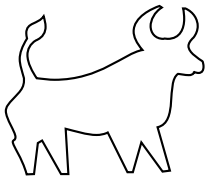
This week you don't know who to call after your Halloween hookup busts and ghosts you

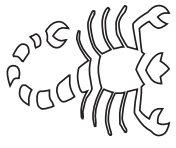
LIBRA

This week you decide to be sexy for Halloween and everyone tells you how terrifying your costume was

CANCER

This week the scariest part of Halloween is being forced to talk after sitting on a green bench

CAPRICORN

This week for gay Halloween your couples costume is the "Do you wear wigs?' interview

TAURUS

This week you watch the VHS tape from The Ring but end up wasting your 7 days doing the same shit you always do

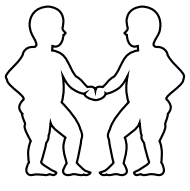
SCORPIO

This week your villainous alter ego "Evil-lyn" swaps bodies with you Freaky Friday style on your birthday

LEO

This week you roleplay with your boyfriend as vampires but instead of giving you a crazy hot hickey he just dies after opening the curtains

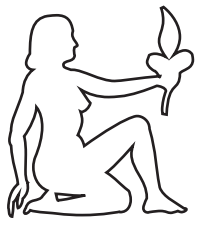
AQUARIUS

This week everyone starts treating you EXACTLY like how you've been treating them

GEMINI

This week you get too high at the Halloween party and think the real zombies attacking you are just people in costumes

SAGITTARIUS

This week you wish your crush was obsessed with you but instead of them becoming a horror icon they're just lame

VIRGO

This week you think you've found a real life banshee but it's just a student practicing at Blyth

PISCES

This week you go as a werewolf for Halloween and everyone compliments your accuracy before you wear the costume

Spooktober Week 4: Synecdoche

(or As Above, So Below)

Writers love to say that they pour their whole heart out onto the page

But do they? Really?

I just find it a bit hard to believe, that somehow you've managed to squeeze all there is that makes you tick into something as fickle as a page or two of text. I've tried, you know. Not here in this newspaper, but once before, when I poured every single piece and drop and thought of my being into a single paragraph, the ouvre of what makes me me. The egg that hatched and released her. She lives right here:

On the tip of my fingertips, writing

All of my thoughts 
All of my wishes 
All of my hopes 
All of my dreams 

What makes me me 
What makes us work 
What makes her choose 
To be my muse, my word 

The things that break 
The things that fly 
A secret smile 
A cathartic cry 

And as I have my muse she too has her own, and I'm sure you could guess

That I am hers, just the same

I am no less and no more than an extension of her desire, she may be the flame but I am the pyre and only together can we truly be ablaze in our fire. It is as above so below and as below so above and you may not believe me when I say that the two of us are in love. It was always impossible to love myself but I can love her, oh oracle oh eye, for she represents what could have been but what isn't I. And she loves me too!

I know she does, for she makes me

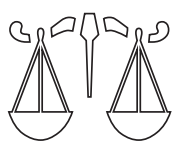
Take of all my clothes 
And sit in the frost 
The rosy flush 
A shiver of what's lost 

And I walk into the silver sea 
With a smile on my golden face 
When I die she'll be with me 
In that oh so sacred place 

I let go so lightning fast 
She holds on so vice tight 
Isn't this day so divine? 
We follow each other into the light 

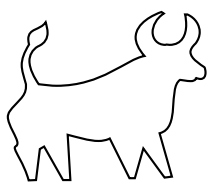
Whoreoscopes - Sex Survey!

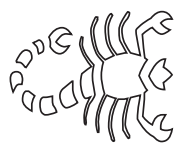
ARIES 
This week she asks you to get flavoured condoms so you piss on yours beforehand to make them salty

LIBRA 
This week you fill out the sex survey as aftercare and get so turned on you have sex again

CANCER 
This week you host a wank & cheese night because the sex survey hypothetical scared you too much

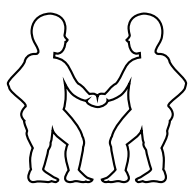
CAPRICORN 
This week you hit the 4.5 month mark of your dry spell and gain the ability to move objects with your mind

TAURUS 
This week she sticks a finger in your ass during sex and instead of getting an amazing prostate orgasm you just start bleeding

SCORPIO 
This week you can't get him to come so you say that you're intentionally edging him for kinky orgasm denial

LEO 
This week you realise you're a masochist after you scrape your arm on the bitchass sharp Huxley desks and it gets you wet

AQUARIUS 
This week you hit the 4.5 month mark of your dry spell and start getting annoyed with people way quicker than usual

GEMINI 
This week you fill out the sex survey as foreplay and instead of getting hot and heavy you just get into an argument with your partner

SAGITTARIUS 
This week you use the base of your electric razor as a vibrator and circumcise yourself by accident when you orgasm

VIRGO 
This week you realise you have a foot fetish after you get kicked out of a society and it gets you hard

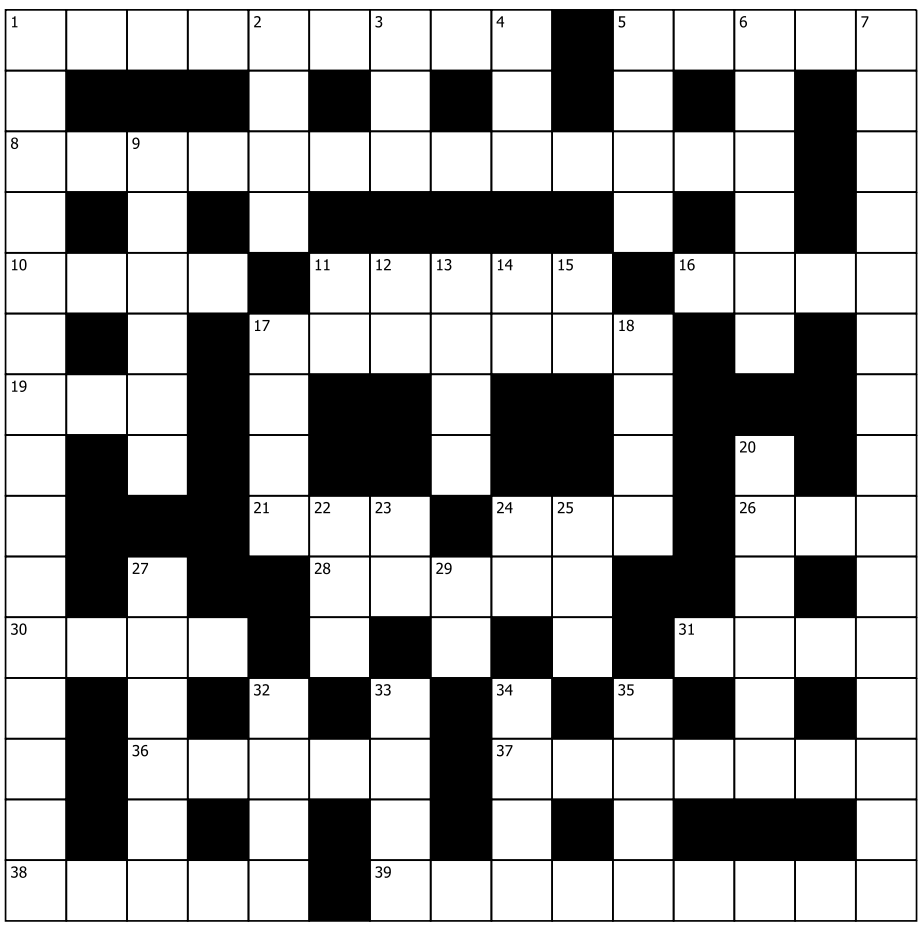
PISCES 
This week you try to get into watersports but get immediately turned off when your partner moans that you're a pissces

PUZZLES

Puzzles Editor
DAVID LATIMER

QUICK CROSSWORD

Written by David Latimer (10 pts.)



Across

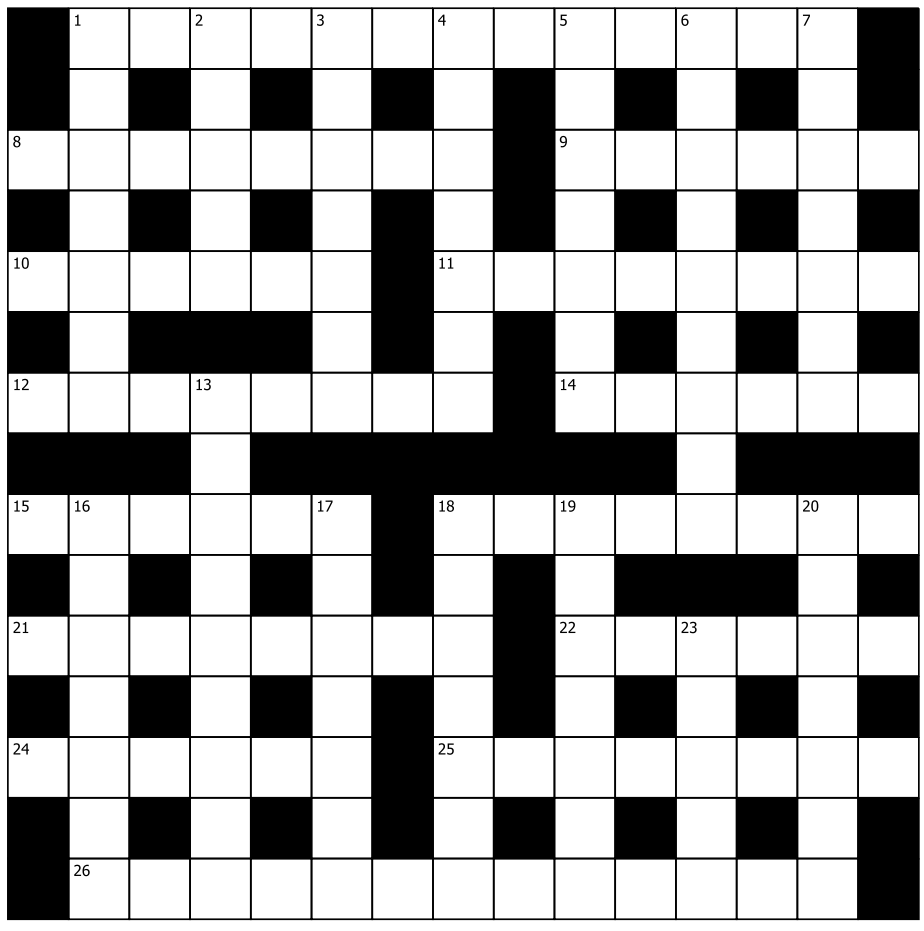
1. Not yet fully formed. [9]
5. Your only friends, in the end? [5]
8. Hooded chaperone for the recently departed. [3 4 6]
10. Stalk and sidle stealthily. [4]
11. Make an edit. [5]
16. Metal protrusion. [4]
17. Breathtaking. [7]
19. It caused Cleo to croak. [3]
21. Name of a language app's green mascot. [3]
24. Stopper. [3]
26. Catholic militant group. [3]
28. What this clue is inside of? [5]
30. Double-reeded wooden instrument. [4]
31. It comes between delta and foxtrot. [4]
36. Brother of 13 Down. [5]
37. Pertaining to rain. [7]
38. Bother. [5]
39. Prisoners, casually. [9]

Down

1. Bad choice for an overnight stay! [5 10]
2. Put to rest. [4]
3. North Korean dynastic family. [3]
4. Word describing the females of many mammals. [3]
5. Sobbed. [4]
6. Level of uncommonness. [6]
7. It's hanging on by a thread? [5 2 8]
9. Second smallest continent. [6]
11. How cute! [2]
12. Not you. [2]
13. Brother of 36 Across. [4]
14. [Shakes head.] [2]
15. Head of the table? [2]
17. Corrosive liquid. [4]
18. Just made it (out). [4]
20. Pickled provisions. [6]
22. Exploit. [3]
23. Not bad. [2]
24. __ Cool J, rapper. [2]
25. Type. [3]
27. Strip. [6]
29. 2009 animated feature. [2]
32. Predict via a peer. [4]
33. Heed. [4]
34. Egg (on). [4]
35. Without feeling. [4]

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

Written by David Latimer (20 pts.)



Across

1. Sonnet's lie endlessly lucid inside scholar's home country? [13]
8. I have gone after a small brass and it's rough. [8]
9. One who leads on is calm. [2 4]
10. Nestled in zenith, a camper's home? [6]
11. Decree on religion is a disaster. [3 2 3]
12. The lesson derailed lacking love for hometown? [2 6]
14. Resistance over old money in argument for tax return. [6]
15. Reminder: send the thing. [4 2]
18. Ridiculous vile beer enthusiast... [8]
21. ...leads with stout and has a fiery Monkey Tail as finisher? [8]
22. Sticky clay covers glazing's edges. [6]
24. Curtis' digitised self is not fully evolved? [6]
25. No French cow in brief city retreat is safe. [8]
26. Surrender to spirit revealing force you can't surpass? [5 8]

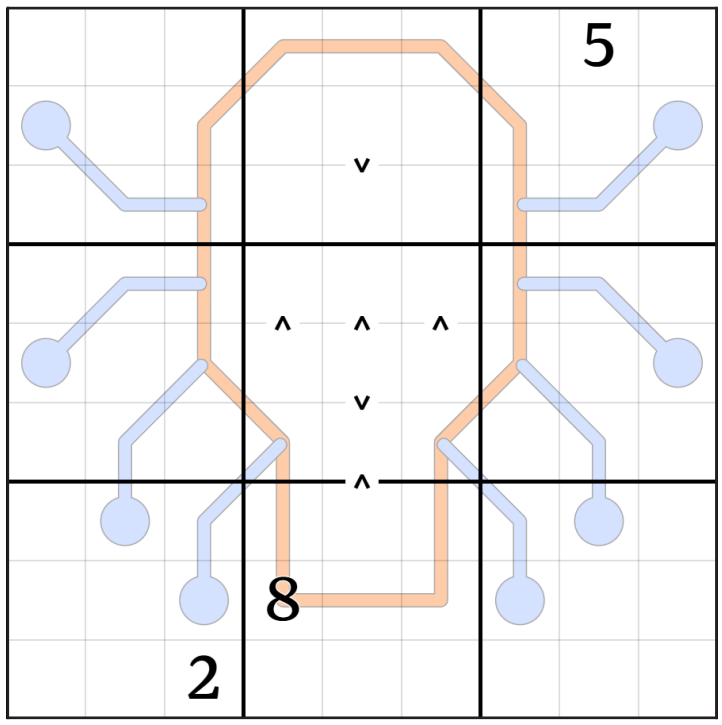
Down

1. Practice at finding place to live. [7]
2. Pack animal takes all back with mother. [5]
3. Are unit's waste? [7]
4. Individual seals cover even beach cold spots? [3 4]
5. Connective is appropriate in poorly-read... [7]
6. ...story after confusing "fine" and "amazing".[9]
7. Find Gogol's protagonist exhausted. [4 3]
13. Arrangement made by old flame - traitor hiding in date. [5 4]
16. Murkiness of London, maybe, has odd orphan leading. [7]
17. Lost hair over house after fine. [7]
18. Point in lagoon with nothing total. [7]
19. Allow bugs every other one, see. [7]
20. Subject: everyone ruins sling before hospital!!!! [7]
23. With Matt losing his head, Greg loses everything but! [5]

SPOOKY SUDOKU

Designed by Mara Sergienko

Mara has cooked up a devious puzzle this week with lots and lots of rule! Check the editor's note for more information on the grid.



(15 pts.)

MISSING VOWELS

Theme: Songs that may sneak their way onto Halloween playlists and their artists

HDSW LLR LLBYT HYH YH Y HS

S PRFR KB YRC KJ MS

Z MB BYT HCRN BRR S

DRC LBY T M MPL

PS YC HK LL RBY THTL KN GH DS

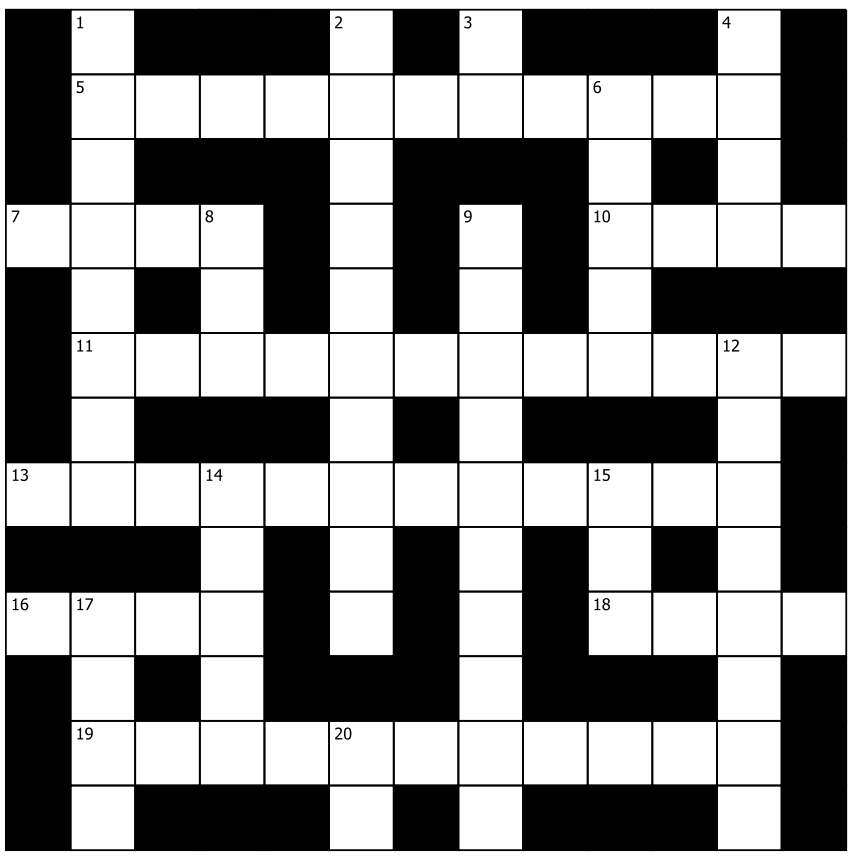
M NTR B YHL LND TS

(6 pts.)

50/50 CROSSWORD

Written by The Tealest Crab

Enjoy a "spooky" mini 50/50 on behalf of... someone who wishes to remain anonymous! As standard, the across clues are cryptic and the down clues are traditional crossword clues.



Across (Cryptic)

5. Drained me to see my ex happy at the end of grad. [11]
7. May see many in Devonshire dairy? [4]
10. Say no to dentures while eating? [4]
11. Tournament is mismanaged, happens every month. [12]
13. "Reanimated" PB is nuts. [2 1 3 6]
16. Here's the guy with 18 across, I think he's gay. [4]
18. Here's the guy with 16 across, he's a bit eccentric. [4]
19. Found aging by the river? [11]

Down (Quick)

1. Citrus-sounding British slug. [3 5]
2. In an energetic manner. [10]
3. Symbol for micro, per SI. [2]
4. Java IDE from Jetbrains. [4]
6. Superheroes ___wing, ___hawk, and ___crawler. [5]
8. Component of bronze. [3]
9. Less than right, geometrically. [5 5]
12. Officially documented. [2 6]
14. Common theme of 5 across, 7 across, and 11 across. [5]
15. Don McLean's 70s hit song "American ___". [3]
17. Slogan from Shepard Fairey's street art. [4]
20. "Up the __, Nigel?" [2]

(10 pts.)

CRYPTOGRAM

Clue: Peel Narwhal Toy (anagram, 2 words)

Each letter in the below message has been replaced with another corresponding letter. Use your knowledge of the alphabet and code-breaking skills to decipher what the secret message says. Bonus points are available for giving where the quote comes from!

T'R QSXE NO NBLINFL RNO YTEC NO NBLINFL

ATGL. T YDIW GIDR OTOL ED GTBL, CLM,

CLAA, T ZNM ECL ZITUL. NAA T YNOE TX ED

HL ALGE NADOL TO RM NBLINFL CDRL HSE YCM

VD T NAYNMX GLLA ATWL T'R TO ECL

EYTATFCE JDOL?

(7 pts.)

Anagram: ________________________________ (2 pts.)

Quote from: ________________________________ (1 pt.)

SUDOKU

Designed by Mara Sergienko

					6			9
		5	2	4		8	3	
	8							
	1	7	5					
			9			2		7
4		8	1					
	5				1			
			3	7			5	
3							2	6

Easy (5 pts.)

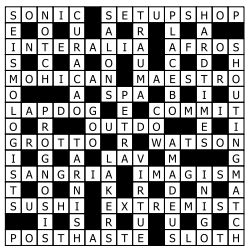
	6							7
	8		2				3	
			9	8				
			7	5				9
9			8		2	6		
				6		7	4	
3	9						5	
7			3	2				4
5								

Medium (8 pts.)

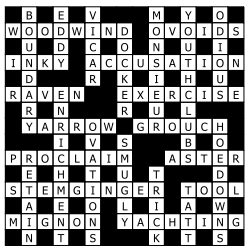
	6				7	5		
	2							
3		4	6				9	
8		3						
	5							
7				1		2		8
				6				3
2				7	5		1	
		8	3			7		5

Hard (11 pts.)

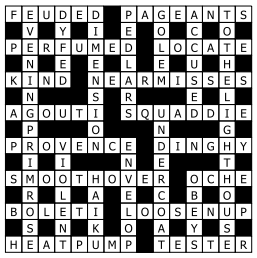
LAST WEEK



Quick #1905



Cryptic #1905



50/50 #1905

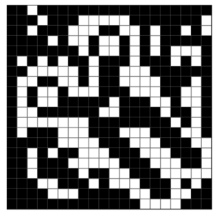
4	9	1	8	7	3	5	6	2
5	6	7	1	4	2	3	9	8
8	2	3	9	6	5	1	4	7
6	4	2	7	5	1	8	3	9
7	1	9	3	2	8	6	5	4
3	5	8	6	9	4	2	7	1
2	3	4	5	1	7	9	8	6
9	7	5	2	8	6	4	1	3
1	8	6	4	3	9	7	2	5

7	6	1	4	5	3	2	9	8
4	8	2	1	7	9	3	5	6
5	9	3	6	2	8	4	7	1
9	1	5	3	4	7	8	6	2
6	3	8	5	1	2	9	4	7
2	4	7	9	8	6	1	3	5
8	2	9	7	6	4	5	1	3
1	7	4	8	3	5	6	2	9
3	5	6	2	9	1	7	8	4

Sudoku #1905

8	9	5	4	1	7	2	3	6
3	4	2	9	8	6	5	1	7
1	7	6	5	3	2	9	8	4
2	6	1	7	4	5	3	9	8
7	3	4	2	9	8	6	5	1
9	5	8	1	6	3	4	7	2
6	2	3	8	7	9	1	4	5
4	8	9	6	5	1	7	2	3
5	1	7	3	2	4	8	6	9

Nonogram #1905



Around	Down	Within	Amidst	Prepositions
Essence	Spirit	Crux	Soul	Central point
Wish	Up	Bolt	Brave	Animated films
Boombox	Bambi	Power	Bangle	Begin with onomatopoeia

Curtain	Eclipse	Cloak	Cover	Conceal
Sapling	Water	Earth	Sunshine	Growing a plant
Sunrise	Ballad	Fire	Reaping	*Hunger Games* title words
Blind	Sun	Hiding	Parking	____ spot

Grouping Grids #1905

LEADERBOARD

Pos.	*Team Name*	*Pts.*	*Gain*
1	Joey H. Sultanas	398	-
2	Nicocross Wourbaki	275	81
3	ariff with 2 fs	100	57
4	Roshni	91	40
5	Grasmin	70	43
6	Baboku	59	59
7	Skrelp	40	-
8	The Northern Line	36	-

Want to see yourself on the leaderboard? Send in a picture of your puzzles to **puzzles.felix@imperial.ac.uk** before next issue to secure a place on the leaderboard for you or your team. Partially completed puzzles will still get you points!

WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?

Have new ideas for the section? We'd love to have you on the team! Reach out to us via e-mail or scan the QR code to join our WhatsApp chat.

Email: **puzzles.felix@imperial.ac.uk**

COMIC

Submitted by Tengyu Zhao



Puzzle Editor's Note

Dearest Puzzlers,

Happy Halloween everyone! And welcome to another week of puzzles. Halloween is one of my favourite holidays, and part of that is just so I can have an excuse to dress up. Like last year, anyone who sends me a picture of their or their team's costume will be entitled to 10 bonus points!

Those points will surely help in what seems to be some very fierce competition on the leaderboard! With the top few places seeming set in stone, the teams in the rest of the leaderboard are battling for blood! With new entrants creeping up from the bottom, it looks like we'll have a fight on our hands. Should be good practice for when points reset in January!

The section this week features some wonderfully spoOoOky puzzles on behalf of a new anonymous submitter and recurrent friend of the section Mara. Now, Mara's variant has a few rules, so here's a debrief:

Orange - Each set of three consecutive cells on the line must contain one low (1, 2, 3), one medium (4, 5, 6) and one high (7, 8, 9) digit.

Blue - Numbers must monotonically increase starting from the bulb of the "thermometer" travelling up to the tip.

Inequalities - Cells connected via < or > signs must have their values adhere to the inequality.

Phew! I think I'm exhausted (and I'm glad I'm not the one having to solve it!) But with that out the way, I wish you all well for all and any spooky season social spontaneities you might get yourselves into. Ta-ra!

-David


happy
HALLOWEEN
OCT
Roshni