ISSUE #1909

Felix

KEEP THE CAT FREE | SINCE 1949

First published in 1949, Felix is released weekly during term time and is distributed around Imperial's London campuses. All students, staff, and alumni are welcome to contribute to the paper.

Faculty of Engineering to partner with Make-a-Difference!

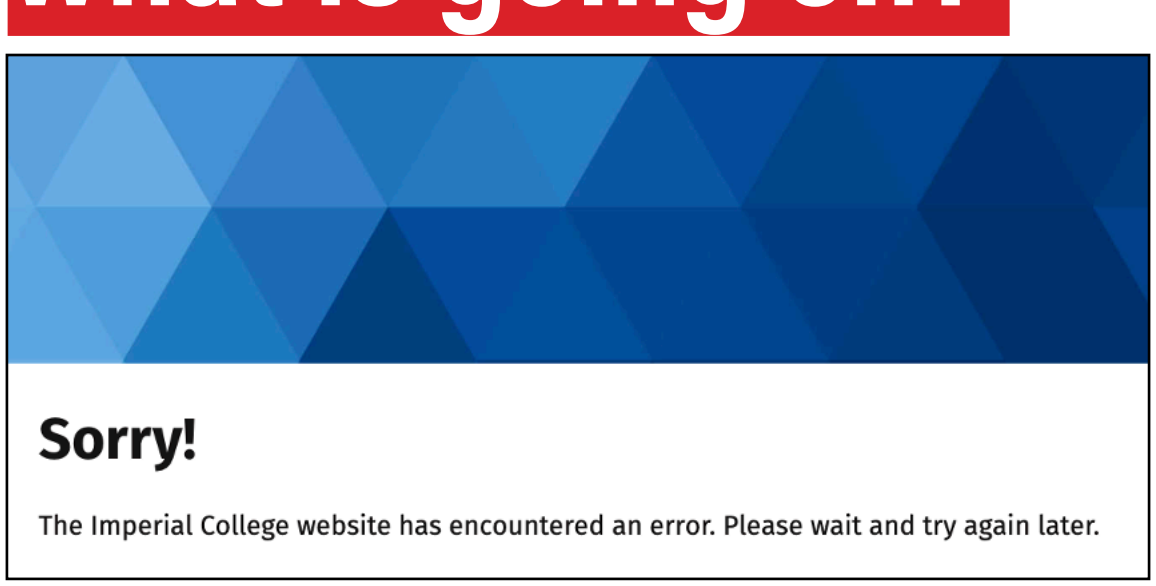
Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

The Make-a-Difference! Programme 2026/27, held by the Faculty of Natural Sciences since 2014, launched 11 November, announcing a new partnership with the Faculty of Engineering. While the competition has always been open to students from all Faculties, Engineering will now be a formal partner, renaming the competition from FoNS-MaD to Make-a-Difference!

The Programme has now opened, with teams encouraged to sign up before Friday 22 January 2027, with the first proposal outline due 12 February. It is an interdisciplinary innovation challenge where the goal is for student teams to design low-cost technologies that tackle real-word problems. Selected teams undergo an eight-week placement to develop their idea, obtaining access to laboratory equipment, funding, and entrepreneurial workshops, with the winners receiving a prize of £7,000 to continue their venture.

In 2019, Multus Biotechnology won their FoNS-MAD competition, and have now grown to a biotechnology venture that received £7.9 million in Series A funding in 2023.

Microsoft, AppsAnywhere, imperial.ac.uk: what is going on?



Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

In under three weeks, three of the most useful software platforms and websites to Imperial students have suffered outages or technical issues.

Tech giant Microsoft experienced a global outage to its Outlook, Teams, and Microsoft 365 services from 12 to 14 November. Within an hour, problems had spread to 74 countries and territories; nearly 130,000 users reported trouble accessing Outlook

→ READ MORE ON 4



Lidl in Warsaw. DMGCN, CC BY 4.0

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At *Felix*, we believe that it is always in the interest of the students to be in the know. Transparency in the workings of the College and the work of your student representatives is key. Therefore we, the *Felix* Editors, on behalf of the team promise that:

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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EDITORIAL

Should art always be helpful?

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

If you've taken the tube to or from the South Kensington station you'll have seen the above question on a colourful poster in the tunne lexit into campus. In the rare occasions I end up at the station, for some reason I spend a good part of my day debating this question in my head.

The last few editorials, as proud as I am of them, have been politically very nuanced (I hope the two people that read these appreciated the work behind them). I have decided to give that a break this week, and reflect on how art helps us as people, as Imperial students, and whether art should or shouldn't be anything at all.

A part of why this question has been chasing me for so long is because, in my head, two polar opposite answers can be justified: "*yes*, because art being helpful to the artist or the viewer is the whole point of good art in the first place" and "*no*, art should be free, and freedom means having no constraints on what something must do to yourself or others".

I'll start with the latter – the one I leaned toward the most before stopping to write this. From literature and paintings to music and films, those pieces of art that have stood out throughout history have largely been based off an unhelpful hyper fixation on the rough things in life.

While overthinking a non-reciprocal love, a lost battle, or the mere misery of your existence through art can sometimes be a form of therapy (for yourself and for those who might resonate), said therapist would also probably argue this attitude is not the best. In those moments, the purpose of producing what would then become great art was far from to help people – it may not even have been to help the artist themselves.

Art is life; life, sometimes, is suffering. Art doesn't have to help life's suffering because art **is** it. This reminds me of the issue with taking a photo of the Milky Way: like trying to take a photo of your house while being in it, you can't, because you are part of it.

However, I can swiftly lean toward the "yes" when I think about how I, and the people that surround me, view and engage with art. Recalling conversations as far back as my first year of uni, I have noticed that there is a very special corner (emphasis on corner, it's tiny) for art at Imperial. The STEM brain likes the structure, the routine, the exact answers, the root of the cause. However, such ambitions get very tiring, very quickly. Look at the eyes of any student walking around campus this month and you'll see what I mean. The more burnt out that part of our brains is, the more we yearn to lose expectations and a need to compete, so the more passionate (and in my opinion, special) the art we create is.

Take this as your sign to touch some grass during your next break and engage with art. Rearrange your playlist, hand draw your best friend's birthday card, or take that Hinge classic oh-you-caught-me-in-a-museum picture, if it makes you happy.

Art, by no means, should always be helpful, but amidst our stress and crises in this complicated world, it doesn't hurt to make it helpful for ourselves.

VACANCIES

We are looking for new contributors! Felix is a volunteer-run newspaper open to all Imperial students. Its survival depends on your enthusiasm!

If you're interested in one of the roles below, or want to contribute in any other way, email us at felix@ic.ac.uk.

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- Comment
- Business & Finance
- Arts & Culture
- Environment
- Science & Technology
- Societies & Union
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NEWS

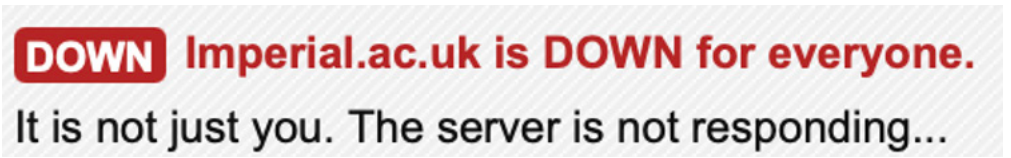
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

shortly after 1pm ET on the first day. The UK woke up to the outage on the morning of 13 November, with Imperial's Service Status pages reporting Microsoft saw positive improvements after applying a patch to an upstream authentication and routing configuration component on part of its infrastructure.

Closer to home, AppsAnywhere, the platform which hosts Imperial's Software Hub, suffered an outage around 10am on 31 October. While a fix was applied the morning of 1 November, Imperial's ICT Team decided to temporarily take the Software Hub offline as a "precautionary measure" on 2 November.

The servers that run Imperial's websites suffered a technical issue on 17 November, which was solved that same morning. Websites that were down included Imperial News, degree information pages, and term dates. A Felix social media poll found 41% of respondents had most or some *imperial.ac.uk* websites down, which showed backend errors like 502 (Bad Gateway), 504 (Gateway Timeout), and 400 (Bad Request). These errors were related to a tool that lists past research paper publications. *Felix* reporters found CELCAT, student's calendar, and myImperial, document hub, to remain working during the issues.

Beyond software, technology at a global scale has proved faulty. A five-hour nationwide ground stop in the US was ordered by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) following issues with the upgrades of an old copper wire. With 1.5 million passengers affected, US Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy pushes Congress to approve infrastructure upgrades to avoid further air traffic control incidents. Duffy estimated a $50 billion budget for an overhaul; the BBC reports President Donald Trump has requested $30.1billion.



Isitdownrightnow.com screenshot on 17 November. Cristina Carrillo

> **A single technological fault (...) can stop students from working, studying, or travelling within minutes**

The causes to the above instances differ, some yet to be fully unpacked, and none is known to be connected. However, it shows how a single technological fault, whether at a supplier, server or telecommunications link, can stop students from working, studying or travelling within minutes.

The last few weeks have undoubtedly exposed how vulnerable we are to the technology we depend on – even at the second best university in the world.

'Those who contribute most will settle fastest': new UK government policy may double wait to settlement

News Writer
TIANZONG CHENG

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood set out to the parliament a new framework on 2 November regarding obtaining settled status, called 'Earned Settlement': "Settlement should not be automatic, it should be earned", she said.

The Government's response to its consultation, "A Fairer Pathway to Settlement" sets out plans to raise the baseline to settlement from five years to ten years, with a minimum requirement of earning £12,571 for five of the previous seven years. This can be reduced or lengthened, depending on one's contribution. For workers in specified public service occupations or individual earning at least £50,271 per annum, the number of years is reduced to five, and for those earning at least £125,141, it is further reduced to three.



Palace of Westminster, London – February 2007. Diliff, CC BY-SA

Those who continue to access public funds and/or entered the country illegally can only obtain their settled status after 20 or 30 years.

All the changes are subject to a set of mandatory requirements, including 'no criminality', 'no government debt' and minimal 'immigration breaches'.

These changes reflect the government's emphasis on the four pillars towards lawful settlement: good "character", sustained "contribution", integration" into the society, and lawful "residence". Changes to the Immigration Rules will be laid from December and implemented throughout 2027.

The long residence routes, where individuals would be able to obtain settled status through a combination of mixed visa, including Student, Graduate and Youth Mobility will close: time on these visas will not count toward settlement. Transitional arrangement covers specific care workers as well as health and education workers. The existing skilled workers are keeping the lower salary threshold on their visa requirement until 2035 and aren't guaranteed the five-year route.

It is not yet clear whether any further protection would be given.

The SWJA (Skilled Worker Justice Alliance) say on their website and social media they are "preparing for a potential judicial review of retrospective changes". The SMA (Skill Migrants Alliance) similarly outlined on their roadmap that legal actions would be taken in the form of a PAP (Pre-Action Protocol) as an initial challenge – followed by a judicial review if that were to be disregarded.

South Kensington Station works to reduce crowds and install lifts begin

News Writer
RAYAAN ENVER

Construction work has begun for a major upgrade to South Kensington tube station, aimed to make it less crowded and more accessible. The five-year project will include the construction of a new accessible entrance, an expanded ticket hall, lifts to all trains, and a new platform to ease congestion.

Minor works have begun around the station, with Transport for London (TfL) expecting the main station works to begin by 2028 and for the full upgrade to be finished by 2031. The scheme is expected to cost £120 million.

South Kensington station serves about 30 million passengers each year, and is the closest station to Imperial's main campus, several major museums, and the Royal Albert Hall.

The station has struggled with overcrowding in recent years; it turned exit-only during peak hours for three days in late October due to overcrowding.

As part of the upgrade, lifts will be installed to provide step-free access from a new accessible entrance on Thurloe Street to the ticket hall and the pedestrian subway going to the museums, and from the ticket hall to the Circle, District, and Piccadilly line platforms. TfL estimates that over 500 thousand journeys a year are not made to South Kensington station because of its lack of step-free access and says providing this access will make the station easier to use for those with wheelchairs, buggies, and other mobility needs.

To reduce crowding, the station's ticket hall will be expanded and redesigned with more ticket barriers, and a new dedicated eastbound Circle and District line platform will be constructed by extending a disused platform. TfL says they will also restore heritage features on the platforms during the project.

Alongside the station upgrade, TfL's property company Places for London will begin its work on a development around the station, which is planned to include 50 new homes (35% of which will affordable), restaurant units, and a semi-circular four-storey building at the front of the station named "The Bullnose" containing office space.

Work began earlier this month with minor enabling works on Thurloe Street in preparation for the new accessible entrance. TfL estimates these works will last for eight weeks, and plan to create a detailed design for the overall station works and surrounding development in 2027.

Transport for London has not yet announced whether there will be closures to the station or significant disruptions for passengers during the main station works.



Works have begun at the future accessible entrance on Thurloe Street. Rayaan Enver

The latest Activities Forum: some sunshine at the Union

News Writer
DAVID LOUGHLIN

Imperial College Union held its second Activities Forum of the academic year on Thursday 12 November. Headed by Sky Wang, Deputy President (Activities), participants from the student management groups, who handle relations between student societies and the Union, reported the forum being pleasantly productive.

While many raised concerns about room bookings, claims, and core risk assessment issues being delayed in receiving responses, participants reported finding the Union to be receptive and acutely aware of the delays. They also assured the Forum that they are lifting any restricted access to societies' budgets that result from core risk assessment delays.

Sky recently committed to improving clarity and access to information regarding union processes through consolidation on Knowledge Base, in place of his prior AI-First aims. In light of this, the Union team ran a short, live user-testing scenario with the Forum. Participants were asked to use the Union website and Knowledge Base to discover how society members might find information on how to complete common administrative scenarios like making claims or retiring committee members. Feedback was then collected and will be used to address problems like out of date or scattered information.

With continued attention to societies' concerns, such as the recognised need for rooms available for booking to be tagged with unique features (e.g. whether they contain a piano), participants are hopeful that future Activities Forums will be as productive or more!

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT BREXIT?

Felix is gathering anonymous data on student opinion and experience relating the recent negociations on EU student's fee status. Scan the QR code, the survey takes less than 5 minutes!


Image credit: Robins7

SCIENCE

Can AI learn to fake a clinical trial?

A doctor faked hundreds of stroke trial patients in the 1990s. Now AI can invent them too. Here's what mathematics can and can't do about it.

Science Writer
WISDOM IGIOGBE

Look at a spreadsheet of real-world numbers and you might expect the leading digits to be spread evenly, with approximately 11% starting with a one, 11% with a two, and so on. Benford's law says otherwise. In suitable datasets, digit one appears as the first digit about 30% of the time and nine a mere 5%. The law does not govern every dataset, but the underlying idea is useful. Numbers generated by real-world measurements leave patterns that are hard to forge. This is especially true in biology, where every measurement comes with its share of noise.

As International Fraud Awareness Week begins on November 15th, one clinical trial scandal shows how mathematics can expose fabricated medical research, and why artificial intelligence (AI) could make fake clinical trials more than just a thought experiment.

> **Numbers generated by real-world measurements leave patterns that are hard to forge**

The Second European Stroke Prevention Study (ESPS2) ran from 1989 to 1995. It tested whether aspirin and dipyridamole, alone or together, could prevent another stroke in people who had already suffered a stroke or a mini-stroke.

Answering such a question demands numbers. ESPS2 was a unique, large and international trial with 7,040 patients randomised across 60 centres in 13 countries. Each patient was assigned to aspirin, dipyridamole, both drugs, or a placebo. The results were published in the Journal of the Neurological Sciences in 1996 and showed that the combination worked best. Among the 6,602 patients in the final efficacy analysis, aspirin plus dipyridamole combo cut the risk of stroke by thirty-seven per cent relative to placebo. ESPS2 provided further support for using aspirin for secondary stroke prevention.

The earliest public disclosure of the scandal was a single line in the trial publication, noting that one centre's data was dropped because its reliability could not be established. That centre, number 2013, in Almelo in the Netherlands, had reported 438 participants, making it one of the biggest recruiters. Yet at least 349 of them were confirmed in court never to have taken part, and nearly all of those interviewed said they had never enrolled. The neurologist who ran the centre had taken the identities of real stroke patients from his own clinic and used them to create false trial records. These patients knew nothing of the study, had given no consent and received none of the drugs.

Centre 2013 reported serious adverse events but not a single non-serious one. Everywhere else, patients grumbled of the usual side-effects, including the headaches that dipyridamole is known to cause. A site claiming to have treated 438 patients without any non-serious adverse event was, to put it mildly, unusual.

> **AI can produce a plausible table, but last time I checked, it cannot produce a vial, a signed consent form, or a person who remembers being treated.**

The biological measurements were also suspect. Blood pressure readings and lab results varied far less than they should, both between patients and within the same patient across visits. Some follow-up assessments were logged on weekends, even though the study prohibited assessments on those days. The blood samples provided the most compelling evidence, ultimately delivering the final blow to the credibility of Centre 2013. Drug concentrations from "patients" in this centre produced results that were simply incompatible with the prescribed treatment.

The original investigators grew suspicious in June 1992 and audited the centre seven months later. Fraud was confirmed in June 1993, when analysis of plasma proteins showed that all the blood samples from the centre were a pooled mixture drawn from just a few individuals.

In 2021, researchers revisited the trial database with statistical-monitoring software designed to spot oddities across trial sites. They ran 838 statistical tests on each centre, probing everything from adverse-event reporting and lab results to missing data, patient measurements and correlations between variables. The results were condensed into a single measure called the Data Inconsistency Score.

Centre 2013 ranked as the second most unusual of the 60 centres. If its data followed the patterns the software assumes, a result this extreme would occur about once in 14,000 trials. The score measures how unusual the data is, not how likely it is that someone committed fraud. Surprisingly, another centre scored higher, but there was a legitimate explanation for this site, as it had recruited an unusually old and medically complex patient population. This is why statistical monitoring is best seen as a means to an end when finding sites for further investigation.

Centre 2013 would have been flagged once about a quarter of its data was reported, as early as May 1991, thirteen long months before the trial team grew suspicious. However, we must remember that this was a retrospective analysis (though blinded), conducted after the fraud had been established. The software was never used during ESPS2, so no one knows whether it could have triggered an earlier investigation in real time.

This is where AI introduces a new challenge.

Last year, a study in JAMA

Ophthalmology tested whether a large language model could produce fake medical data good enough to survive forensic examination. The authors asked GPT-4o to conjure up datasets for three fictional eye-disease studies, complete with demographics, measurements and complications.

Many chi-square and linear correlation tests later, the conclusion was that 34% of forensic evaluations flagged the dataset as likely fabricated. Some of the slips even resembled those in the ESPS2 case. Patients were attending appointments at weekends, names weren't matching the recorded sex, ages that were miscalculated and clinical variables that barely correlated when the science says they should have moved together.

Using these findings, the authors designed a custom GPT, with instructions to avoid the mistakes from the first run. The share of tests yelling fabrication fell to 5%, and four of the twelve refined datasets passed as authentic.

It's worth pointing out that the datasets were deliberately simple and the model received human input when distributing study variables. A real clinical trial typically requires dozens of biological variables across hundreds of patients and multiple trial centres. Those correlations may be harder for synthetic data generators to get right, and medical knowledge could be used to challenge data that passes statistical monitoring, if needed.

And thus, until now, faking a clinical trial would have required a lot of time, effort and statistical gymnastics, effectively discouraging any attempts at the matter. An autonomous language model may not be so easily discouraged. It could run the standard tests on its own output and fix what fails.

Yet, the story of Centre 2013 is one about humans. The dots were connected through a combination of data and interviews in which patients confirmed they had never enrolled. AI can produce a plausible table, but last time I checked, it cannot produce a vial, a signed consent form, or a person who remembers being treated.

The industry's current rulebook asks sponsors to match oversight to risk.

Varda: Manufacturing medicine in space

Science Writer
AASHVI RAJANI

A potential cancer drug is being manufactured in tiny capsules 300 miles above us, paving the way for an ambitious chapter in pharmaceutical science: medicine manufacturing in space. These capsules, being barely washing-machine sized, are growing crystals with potential cancer treatment. Varda Space Industries is a US-based company responsible for this development.

In October 2026, Varda launched three spacecraft into orbit, one of which is investigating the crystallization of a potential cancer drug while the other two are testing heat-protection materials and navigation systems for their eventual return to Earth. Being the only company to simultaneously launch three spacecraft in orbit, they are now on a mission to operate a fleet of orbiting pharmaceuticals dedicated to drug development in microgravity.

Why take medicine development to space?

Microgravity is a condition of near-weightlessness experienced in space, which drives this research. Gravity on Earth causes particles in liquid to settle, leading to sedimentation. Density differences create currents, causing convention. Both events can interfere with crystal formation, and removal of space can reduce their influence, allowing a more uniform crystal growth. The implications of this research are huge. A drug's stability, solubility and administration method are determined by the arrangement, shape and size of these crystals. Current therapeutics which require intravenous infusions may be replaced by more convenient injections, opening a new avenue for pharmaceutical companies.

The technology behind Varda's Achievements

Varda has developed autonomous spacecrafts known as 'free-flyers'. These allow research to take place without astronauts, by carrying miniature laboratories into orbit aboard SpaceX rockets. Once the experiment is complete, the capsule separates from the spacecraft and plunges into the Earth's atmosphere to an uninhabited landing site. Aiming to accelerate drug development in space, Varda has further planned seven such missions in 2027, and ten more in 2028.

Is space manufacturing becoming an industry?

Varda is not the only company delving in space research. Microgravity experiments have been conducted in the International Space Station (ISS) for decades, though it served as a testing environment and is scheduled to retire around 2030. UK-based BioOrbit is developing space-based production of injectable cancer medicines, while Cardiff-based Space Forge is investigating the manufacture of semiconductor materials in orbit.

> **The challenge is no longer simply whether we can manufacture drugs in space, but whether we can do so reliably, affordably and at a scale that makes a difference on Earth.**

Can it actually work?

Launching spacecraft and recovering their contents is expensive, posing a hurdle. However, the benefits of microgravity research might justify these costs. Regulators would have to establish how existing medicines legislation applies to products manufactured in orbit. More importantly, companies would have to ensure that their processes deliver consistently reliable results across repeated missions.

For now, pharmaceutical factories in orbit are an emerging prospect. As commercial launches increase in frequency and companies improve their manufacturing processes, the vision of producing medicines beyond Earth may become increasingly tangible. The challenge is no longer simply whether we can manufacture drugs in space, but whether we can do so reliably, affordably and at a scale that makes a difference on Earth.

VARDA SPACE INDUSTRIES

ENVIRONMENT

Conservation and Farming in British Media

A look into rewilding and other conservation strategies as presented in *Derek vs Derek* (2026), *Clarkson's Farm* (2021-), and British news media.

Environment Writer
JOSEPH HUNT

Rewilding is a restorative approach that focuses on regenerating natural functions of ecosystems and the services they provide to maintain ecosystem services and sustainable, low management human-nature co-existence. It is a dynamic approach to restoring lost biodiversity and has complex interactions with the culture and economies of local communities, requiring some level of land use change. Rewilding is one of many conservation, restoration, and sustainable management approaches that Britain can use to improve its natural environment.

Derek vs Derek

Recently, I went to see the documentary *Derek vs Derek*, a fantastically filmed piece on farming communities and their experiences with rewilding, featuring longtime neighbours and sometimes enemies, the Dereks: one is an enthusiastic rewilder (Derek Gow), the other a traditional dairy and crop farmer (Derek Banbury). Leaving the cinema, I definitely felt the hope and passion for the natural world that Derek Banbury's gradual development from rewilding hater to tolerator inspires within the audience. The throughline of the documentary is that rewilding and preserving our natural world is our duty because of the innate value and beauty of life and biodiversity, invoking old memories of once common, now decimated, wild British species. Science is by no means absent from the documentary: the climate crisis is alluded to, and there are mentions of some threatened ecosystem services: such as the role of pollination in farming and the massive decline in insect pollinator populations. Overall, however, it sticks to the personal touch.

Clarkson's Farm

My curiosity was sparked and I went home and watched the latest season of *Clarkson's Farm*. (LATE, I KNOW!) I focused on Jeremy Clarkson's interactions with the fantastically blunt bird campaigner Hannah Bourne-Taylor who laid out the dire situation our birds are facing and what Clarkson could do to help. In this case, the solution was wildlife-considerate land management – accommodating the needs of the farm birds, rather than specific rewilding, however, the spirit remains the same. Watching Bourne-Taylor rage at the loss of both individual birds and entire species, I felt seen in a way that I'm sure so many of us can relate to; she didn't bother hiding her true feelings from Clarkson (mainly frustration, but not without fear) by delivering the all too familiar 'rational', calm, and convincing "what is happening" and "what needs to be done" speech to those less invested in the natural world. Despite this catharsis, I felt a similar, strange dissatisfaction as I had after *Derek vs Derek*. All the people in these projects have done wonderful jobs, but I could not stop picking at the argument that was held front and centre: Life is beautiful, precious and nice to be around so we have a duty to protect and accommodate its needs. I agree with this 'intrinsic value' argument wholeheartedly, but it is not enough – it is too shallow, too temperamental of an idea, and whilst its use is understandable I think it's becoming a crutch that talks down to its audience. How far does this emotive argument go for unpopular animals (wasps, for instance), or when that 'beautiful animal/ecosystem' proves itself a nuisance? Farmers can appreciate butterflies, but how long will they appreciate them at their own expense, be that real or perceived? Yes, media presenting human stories will focus on more emotional aspects of our relationships with nature, but when it digs into these increasingly contentious and relevant issues, failing to present the whole story is counterproductive.



Poster featuring Derek Banbury and Derek Gower. Derek vs Derek website.

> **Building public support [for conservation] will need more than cuddly beaver kits or wide-eyed wildcats.**

Communicating Climate Science, Effectively

Communicating science to the public can be daunting, especially in casual media (shows, documentaries, etc.) where important nuance is sometimes missed or glossed over to maintain narrative flow or save time. Unfortunately, in the case of conservation, building public support for the issue will need more than cuddly beaver kits or wide-eyed wildcats. Lines are being drawn around rewilding, and somehow it is becoming part of the all-consuming culture war. The *Daily Mail* has placed the blame for 2026 wildfires squarely on rewilded landscapes, quite literally (and determinedly) seeing the smoke sidestepping the fire. Another example from Reform UK's 2024 General Election Manifesto said "Productive land must be farmed, not be used for solar farms or rewilding." – ironically, the only manifesto of that election to mention rewilding by name. This idea that rewilding is unproductive, or a distant second (at best) to farming can spread because when framed against the necessity of 'feeding the people' and food security, the emotive argument for rewilding simply doesn't hold up. Derek Banbury sums this up nicely "Wildlife gets in the way. I love intensive farming. Supplying the world with food."

Now let us instead reframe this seemingly reckless 'eco-dogma' against actual evidence of rewilding strategies reducing wildfire risk and flooding severity (Rewilding Britain, 2026; 2023), or that local biodiversity can benefit crop production and prey on pests (Marja et al., 2024; Dainese et al., 2019). Do these concepts seem 'unproductive' or 'in the way'? Whether intentional or not, we risk framing sustainable living as at odds with productivity, as an 'either/or'. If Derek Banbury had been told that his crop yields could directly benefit from local biodiversity, and that his neighbour's rewilding efforts may have already put money into his own pocket; well, his personal journey may have been shorter. Getting misty-eyed over the majesty of a butterfly is human, but instead of arguing how to implement rewilding and sustainable practices into farming (productively), we are still failing at justifying the why – the very first hurdle. The pressure these communities face is immense – from unstable climates to shrinking profit margins and shockingly unfair government policies – and the last thing farmers need is to be told to make costly changes for a purely moral issue, only to then be guilted further by the public.



Clarkson and Bourne-Taylor on the set of *Clarkson's Farm*. Hannah Bourne-Taylor via Instagram.

The Responsibility of Environmentalists

Environmentalists are not enemies of British farming, and to give a few reasons (of many): the lower farm-to-table emission footprint and the high standards maintained of British agriculture. Scaling-up, rewilding, and adapting British farming practices will have very real economic and social drawbacks with no project being perfect, but the public deserves to have rewilding data and nuance presented to them clearly in media and not locked away behind paywalls or jargon. Hopefully, this will control or limit the operating space for bad actors that spin misinformation into the public psyche. Yet again, Derek Banbury manages to find the right words "I wish there was more insects and birds and bees but I don't study that. I study my crops." Those of us who study biodiversity or produce outreach material should assume responsibility to communicate the science, and resist decoupling our future from that narratively satisfying idea of an ethereal, beautiful – but ornamental – natural world.

Become an Environment Writer!

So far this term, our community has covered AI data center impact and commitment, a discussion workshop at Imperial, new standards for the Sustainable Development Goals, new Oil & Gas fields in the North Sea, the Garden Project behind the Chaplaincy building, and now rewilding and U.S. environmental politics.

If any of those piqued your interest, or you think you could write about: green societies and initiatives on campus, new developments in government and research, veganism or animal welfare, climate change, and more – reach out!

Experience is not a priority, because you're likely more informed about and involved with your environment than you realize. If you'd like to learn more, or want to contribute ideas or articles join our WhatsApp group with the QR below or email the editor at **dm725@ic.ac.uk**

The Democrats are not a green party

The ‘blue tsunami’ probably isn’t going to reverse climate (policy) disasters

Environment Editor
DHRUV MATHUR

The US midterms on November 3 saw a decisive swing resulting in Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. While this represents a critical challenge to the unprecedented anti-environmental policies of President Trump – who formally exited the Paris Agreement in January and repealed the EPA’s foundational 2009 greenhouse gas Endangerment Finding in February – principled positions on the green transition were systematically deprioritised by the central organs of the Democratic party in favour of populist approaches to the very real AI and cost-of-living crises.

The State of the States: Democrats sweep the midterms, shy of a mandate

This November, all 435 House seats and 35 out of 100 Senate seats were up for election: Democrats won 257 (crossing the 218 majority threshold) seats in the house, and flipped 8 Senate seats to land at a comfortable majority of 56. However, the Presidency remains squarely under the control of Donald Trump, whose second administration has additionally dealt a devastating blow to bipartisanship in Congress.

The result leaves U.S. legislature in an awkward No Man’s Land: voters have handed Democrats the power to strike down proposed anti-environmental laws in the moments after the administration completed its most thorough cuts; as will be explored, the party will struggle to pass new legislation to strengthen conservation and clean energy at the expense of economic development.

Unlike European green parties, Democrats are not brought together by a unifying position or party line on the environment. This means that it is up to individual candidates whether or not they back energy projects that enable fossil fuel companies, which Political Action Committees (PACs) and corporations they accept donations from, and which municipal infrastructure programs they support once in office. To their credit, about 50 House Democrats and 11 senators have taken the No Fossil Fuel Money Pledge (contrast with zero Republicans), and over 100 Democratic Representatives are part of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC).

However, even if leadership wanted to enact protective legislation, simple majorities fall short of the 60 votes needed in Senate to invoke cloture (end debate, used against obstructive filibustering) let alone a two-thirds majority in both chambers to override a Presidential veto. Ironically, this may be used to excuse the Democrats should they fail to make use of their available powers come the next Presidential election: had they wrested supermajorities, progressive blocs would have been able to lobby so-called ‘establishment Democrats‘ with pressure to enact meaningful policies against fossil fuels, pollution, and data centres.

“Are we going to see ambitious climate action [before 2028]? The answer is no,” says Ken Gillingham, professor of environmental and energy economics at the Yale School of the Environment. “We still have an executive branch with a veto power controlled by President Trump, and so anything that is done would have to make it through the veto.” Instead, the party’s present instinct leans toward expanding energy production across the board (including oil & gas). Energy, in light of tariffs and the war on Iran and two years of rollbacks to alternative/clean energy production, has become too expensive for American voters to stomach.

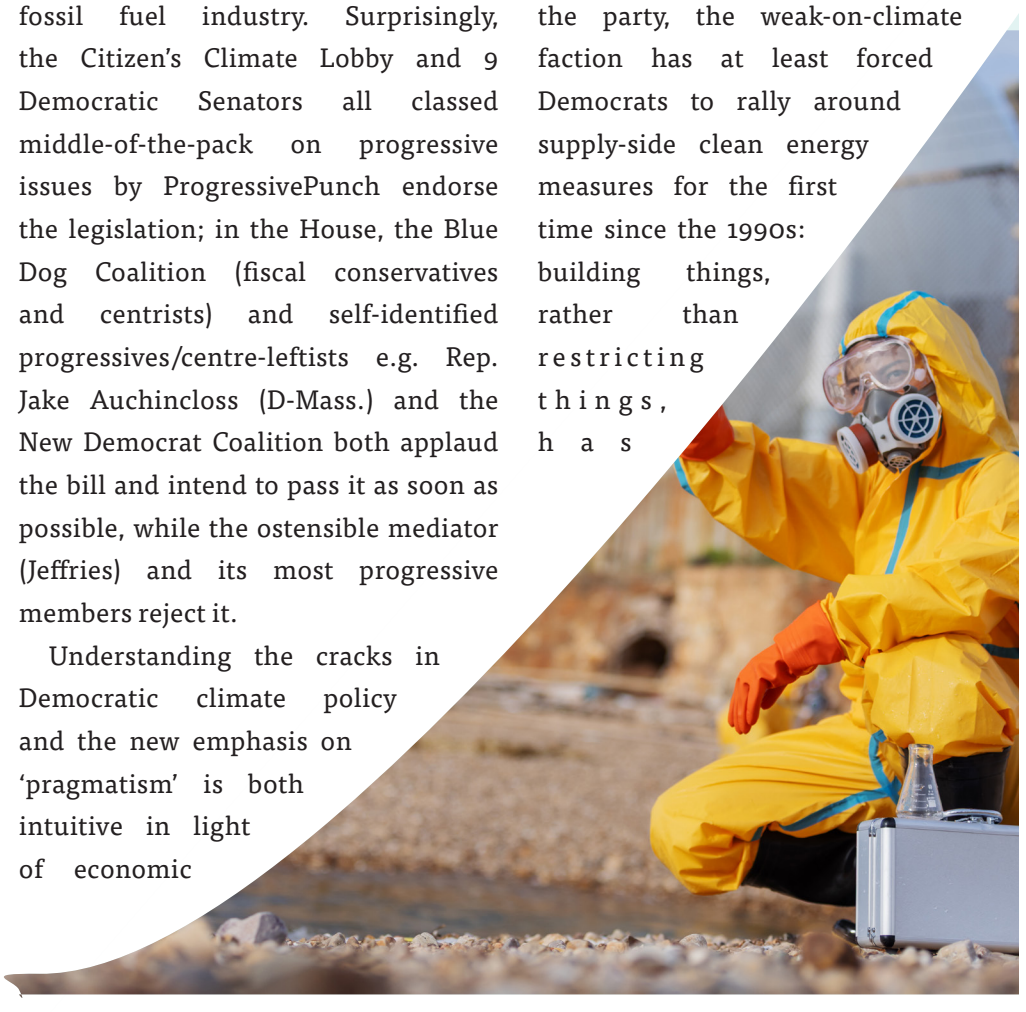
A Camp Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand (For Anything)

Democrats are split down the middle on what they can prioritize on this issue for the next two years, and possibly beyond, with unexpected players on both sides. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.), likely set to become Speaker of the House, has recently voiced opposition to the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA). Jeffries, a moderate Democrat and noted bipartisan legislator, opposes the measure that would ease regulatory barriers to building just about any type of energy project, seeing as it would grant excise benefit to the powerful fossil fuel industry. Surprisingly, the Citizen’s Climate Lobby and 9 Democratic Senators all classed middle-of-the-pack on progressive issues by ProgressivePunch endorse the legislation; in the House, the Blue Dog Coalition (fiscal conservatives and centrists) and self-identified progressives/centre-leftists e.g. Rep. Jake Auchincloss (D-Mass.) and the New Democrat Coalition both applaud the bill and intend to pass it as soon as possible, while the ostensible mediator (Jeffries) and its most progressive members reject it.

Understanding the cracks in Democratic climate policy and the new emphasis on ‘pragmatism’ is both intuitive in light of economic downturn and confounding in its capriciousness. The New York Times’ climate column frames the 2026 midterm strategy as a “rejection of the approach [taken under President Biden] … which treated climate change as an existential threat”, noting that the co-sponsors of the Green New Deal (Ed Markey, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) have de-emphasized mobilizing the US economy against climate change.

While close to 60% of Americans thought the United States should do more to address climate change, according to YouGov polling in February 2026, hardly over 5% said it was their deciding political issue.

Analysts in Washington D.C. seem polarized on whether campaigning on climate change is self-defeating or whether remaining mute on climate change is bound to reinforce anti-environmental hysteria! Even so, across the party, the weak-on-climate faction has at least forced Democrats to rally around supply-side clean energy measures for the first time since the 1990s: building things, rather than restricting things, has



Scientist in yellow hazmat suit holding dead fish by industrial tanks. thanyapatam via Envato

become the common ground (and it may prove a more durable basis for coalition than the rhetoric of existential threat ever was).

A (Probably Endangered) Elephant in the Room

Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that around the world climate disasters and environmental erosions are not being recognised as an issue of present politics. These are apparently future issues, for a future electorate that doesn't have a pandemic, or a recession, or a culture war to deal with! Thus, the only space for green messaging is in its opposition: what will cut into profit margins, what will add to deficits and the tax burden, etc. There are, of course, a constellation of conspiracy theories enmeshed with valid criticisms of published climate science that form part of the scientific method: we have yet to get a word in edgewise about why we might want to uphold regulations and reconstruct clean energy infrastructure.

> **The Democrats will fight Trump's Grand Old Party on a hundred fronts, but they too rose out of the ground from the same oil spring.**



House Minority Leader Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.). US Government

While flipping Congress doesn't give Democrats the power to pass transformative federal legislation, there are still two major obligations the party has to fulfill to keep the crisis in check until 2028. First, the party now has the authority to launch subpoenas investigating the EPA's regulatory rollbacks, enforce existing environmental statutes, and use federal appropriations bills to block the administration from withholding clean energy funds or defunding climate science. Second, Democrats have also flipped state governments: six new state-level trifectas mean unified control in Michigan, Minnesota, Arizona, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Further, the flipped governorships of Georgia, Iowa, Ohio, and Texas mean that power, priorities, and enforcement by existing authorities can be strengthened. These state governments are poised to lead on issues that might be overlooked at the local level in European and UK reporting: safeguards on data center development, water, regulation of chemicals like per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws.

Notably, several of these topics sit at the intersection of the two crises the party chose to prioritise. Data centres connect the AI boom to electricity demand and water use, and so offer a way to talk about environmental protection in the language of cost of living, which is precisely the framing the national party has found most politically useful.

What can the Democrats learn from Green Parties?

If the Democrats have lessons to take from European and British Green Parties, it's probably not that their counterparts have cured the ails of climate politics. Quite simply, they haven't. Instead, it is to apply the understandings of power and grassroots challenges institutions when locked out of (effective) government modelled over decades.

(1) Discipline: Over 75% of even the moderate caucuses among Congressional Democrats agree more should be done to stop climate change; unambiguous principles or a transparent program should inform American voters and global allies what the party will actually commit to. This is working its way into the left of the party in the DSA's requirement for candidates to champion Green New Deal policies. Whether the larger party's program is equally ecosocialist or more moderate, the model of a party line is becoming more necessary to consolidate a national direction for the future.

(2) The Irish Greens suffered in parliament in 2024 after serving in government, the German Greens entered government in 2021 on a decarbonising mandate and saw support erode as the 2023 heating law placed the burden of replacing boilers on ordinary households. The public may seek sustainable technology and governance, but this cannot be done by offloading national projects onto an unbearable infrastructure bill and tax burden.

(3) Grassroots and Progressivism go hand in hand: whether this is to be encouraged or crippled remains in the hands of establishment democrats. Progressives in the 2026 election slightly underperformed, but still saw upset victories that drew outsized attention (for example, Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan) by overcoming massively disparate campaign funding and the position of foreign and polluting lobbies against them. Regardless, local wins against terrifyingly mismanaged pollution, conservation, enforcement, and AI issues will undoubtedly help Democrats in retaining newly-flipped seats (in many cases, driven by a progressive vanguard).

In the news coming out of Washington DC, there will almost certainly be a backslide on environmental commitments and a downplaying of federal and state capabilities to avoid reckoning with America's oil lobby, without rocking the boat on oil prices, and without sabotaging the essence of US foreign policy. The Democrats will fight Trump's Grand Old Party on a hundred fronts, but they too rose out of the ground from the same oil spring.

COMMENT

Guaranteed jobs

Labour government lives up to name, providing free labour.

Comment Editor
JUSTIN KU

As of August, the number of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has risen to 981,000, or approximately 13% of 16- to 24-year-olds. On Saturday, the Labour government announced that, from April 2027, they would shorten the job-search period from 18 to 12 months before guaranteeing young people a job.

The scheme

Jobs Guarantee will be the final step of a 12-month-long process to help Universal Credit claimants between 18 and 25 years old find a job. At first, the young person is given support by their Work Coach, and "can access mental health, housing, and CV advice through Youth Hubs." After six months, the government pays employers £3,000 to hire this person. If the person remains unsuccessful for a year, the government will fully pay their minimum wage for six months, up to 25 hours per week, while they work for a "local delivery partner".

The scheme has been widely acclaimed by employers such as Boots and Lidl GB, who laud it as a "strong launchpad into stable, long-term careers in retail." In theory, this scheme should help young people gain experience and skills, while also incentivising enterprises to hire more young people. One Delivery Partner, Firecom Systems, puts it plainly: "The scheme took away much of the financial risk of taking on someone without industry experience." This is the ideal scenario, where a young person is afforded an opportunity due to the government covering the employer's opportunity cost.

In practice, this might backfire both with regard to youth unemployment and the economy as a whole. One cannot help but be sceptical of the implication that there will be a significance increase in youth opportunities available on the job market; rather, it seems inevitable that some (or rather, most) corporations will simply use the scheme to replace a position that they otherwise would have paid for themselves.

The impact

In essence, the government is providing free, minimum wage labour to private companies. This might, perhaps, be a poor use of taxpayer money. Worse, employers are incentivised not to retain their current employees and instead replace them with those whose wages are paid by the government. Many minimum wage jobs require minimal training, allowing for high employee turnover. Considering the staggering number of NEETs, there will likely be a steady stream of free labour available. For the same reason, employers have little reason to keep the scheme's participants after their six months have elapsed. Why pay wages if you can just wait for the next candidate that has been unemployed for 12 months?

> **Corporations will simply use the scheme to replace a position that they otherwise would have paid for**

Thus, even if youth unemployment drops on paper, the reality might be that the actual number of young people's wages paid by businesses decreases. Those not eligible for the scheme (because, for example, they are not claiming Universal Credit) could suffer, as they are suddenly much less appealing compared to free labour.

The cost

Meanwhile, the government is considering abolishing Personal Independence Payments, which supports those with disabilities, and the health element of Universal Credit for those under 25. These benefits will be replaced with a Youth Allowance. For context, the number of 16- to 24-year-olds receiving PIP for ADHD- and autism-related disabilities has tripled since 2019, and cost £1.36 billion in the last fiscal year.

The government promises the Jobs Guarantee scheme will help 90,000 NEETs into work by March 2029. Assuming that they all work the full 25 hours a week, at the £10.85 national minimum wage (rather than the £12.71 that those aged 21 and over are entitled to), this will cost at least £634 million. If we assume the NEET age distribution is even, it will cost £697 million. Realistically, those above age 21 seem most likely to participate in the program after completing tertiary education, so the true number will likely be higher. This does not even consider National Insurance and pension contributions, and the £250 "setup costs" per employee. Former Health Secretary Alan Milburn, who made the recommendation as part of the much-anticipated Milburn Review, seems to hope that diverting money from benefits to supporting job seeking will help alleviate youth unemployment, and perhaps more pressingly, save money.

It may be preferable to pay NEETs to work for private businesses, even if they are McJobs, than it is to pay people to do nothing at all. But this is only a plaster that fails to address the much more systematic problems that the UK job market faces. Milburn's other suggestions – such as reducing National Insurance contributions employers pay for young workers – are much more realistic.

The Burnham government might be somewhat popular, but it is nothing if not performative. Loudly promulgated projects like Number 10 North seem to be optimised for social media feeds instead of practical impact. Let's hope that the Jobs Guarantee is not a poorly thought out publicity stunt, or if it is – that it does not exacerbate the NEET problem.



A headline from the government press release regarding the revamped Jobs Guarantee scheme. Department of Work and Pensions

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BUSINESS

Italy is sitting on a gold mine: leave it there

Despite sitting on one of the world's largest gold piles, the Italian government cannot use it pay down their mounting debt

Business Writer
LINA ATABI

Eurozone countries such as the Dutch central bank (DNB) continue to repatriate their gold for crisis preparedness, wanting the commodity where it can be turned to cash fast enough as a hedge against US policy risk. However, Banca D'Italia (the central bank of Italy) has displayed no intention of making a similar move despite their own fiscal issues. Italy holds the world's third-largest national gold reserve with 2,452 tonnes (sitting just above France and below Germany) worth around €290bn, with roughly half of it stored in the capital Rome and the rest between the New York Fed, the Swiss National Bank and the Bank of England. Similar to foreign currency reserves, gold represents a fragment of the monetary assets that underpin the credibility of the single currency and is used for monetary stability rather than a fiscal resource. As one of the Eurozone's most indebted governments, ranked 6th globally in debt-to-GDP ratio with around 138% of GDP, the temptation for Italy to tap on that reserve seems hard to ignore.

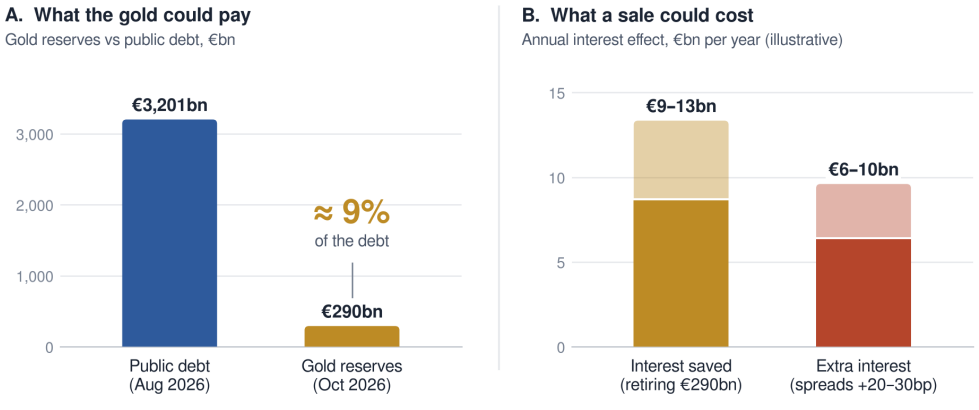
Even though they have always been considered as a reserve for national benefits, the reserves are formally recorded on the Bank of Italy's balance sheet to keep it available for financial stability and away from short-term budget decisions. Therefore, "Who controls the gold?" has been a political question for years. In November 2025, Lucio Malan, a member of the senate (upper house of parliament) for the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's "Fratelli d'Italia" far-right party, proposed declaring that the reserves "belong to the State, on behalf of the Italian people."

The ECB pushed back twice, arguing that the provision's purpose remained unclear after revisions as the draft text lacked explanation on why a new ownership declaration was necessary. The pushback renewed a recurring Italian debate that has resurfaced since 2005 when the Berlusconi government passed a law to transfer the gold to the Treasury, as a governance reform, but it was never put into effect. Nevertheless, behind the amendments are EU rules which forbid central banks from financing their governments to cover the public spending. In 2019, the ECB warned that moving the gold to the State could sidestep the rule. Though even if avoiding the ban was possible, would selling the gold actually make a difference?

No legal changes followed. The Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti assured the ECB president that the Bank of Italy still has full custody and management of its gold under the EU rules. In August, the public debt stood at €3,200bn. If the reserves are drawn, the country can pay off 9% of the debt. It would save interest between €9 to 13bn a year. It represents a significant one-time reduction in the stock of debt, without addressing the deficit planned to rise to 3.4% of GDP (2027). An indirect cost hides behind this liquidation.

This is not the first time that the bond markets have punished Italy for its fiscal issues in recent years. In 2018, the announcement of a higher deficit target made the gap between Italian and German 10-year yields (also known as the "spread") jump to over 300 basis points in two weeks, compared to the current 100 basis points. German government debt (German bunds) is considered to be the safest debt in the Eurozone, and acts as the zone's risk-free benchmark rate. The spread from the risk-free benchmark often indicates how much extra interest investors demand to take on another country's debt. As the market scrutinises Italy's fiscal responsibility, the gold sale will look like a fallback revealing a weakness and spooking investors. Consequently, leading to a rise in the spread, but even a small rise of 20 to 30bps would cost €6bn to €10bn a year in extra interest while the debt is refinanced.

The DNB's strategy was to move their gold from New York and Ottawa to London, to keep it tradable during a crisis. For Italy, holding it carries an option value. It is a liquid reserve that Italy could draw on. Italy has the eurozone's second-largest debt ratio after Greece. The presence of gold shows a tangible sign that Italy has their own resources to lay on. It also makes investors more confident and willing to accept lower interest rates. Drawing on the reserve would easily forfeit that safety buffer.



Estimated fiscal trade-offs of liquidating Italy's gold reserves to pay down public debt.
Sources: Bank of Italy (public debt, August 2026)



Palazzo della Banca d'Italia in Florence
Francesco Bini CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0

FILM & TV

Wild Horse Nine

"She's life, and I'm leaving it"

Film Editor
GRACE MURRAY

As soon as I left the theatre, I felt obligated to write about *Wild Horse Nine*. However, I knew it would be hard to do it justice: the perfection of this film can only be truly understood by watching it – so I won't spoil it. It is a deeply melancholic contemplation on life, death, friendship and what we can do for others. Simultaneously, it manages to be extremely funny, succeeding at the difficult balancing act.

In a career-best performance from John Malkovich as Chris, he is impossible to look away from – his name should already be engraved on the Oscar. He almost invents his own accent without it becoming embarassing, and manages to do some of the most devastating, heartbreaking eye-acting you will ever see. Sam Rockwell is pitch perfect as Lee, along with Parker Poser and Steve Buscemi in supporting roles. The dialogue is perfect (in my opinion, comparable to masterpieces like *Paris, Texas*) and the emotional finale, which focuses on the small human drama unfolding before us rather than some grand historical moral, is incredibly written. It is this restraint that makes the film so affecting. McDonagh knows exactly when to let a joke land, and more importantly, when to leave a moment alone. There is real tenderness beneath all the absurdity, which makes the inevitable heartbreak all the more devastating.

People tend to criticise Martin McDonagh for his films being formulaic: complex male friendship, forced proximity and expansive landscapes. I think this view fundamentally misunderstands his vision and underestimates his talent as a filmmaker. His body of work is a series of recurrences, recitations and redefinitions. McDonagh is still working through this dynamic, iterating, learning and refining – not just remaking the same thing. He clearly loves these characters so much – some critics may say too much – which allows him to humanise otherwise pretty awful people in a way I have not seen done so well before. Lee listening to Chris' tape recording saying "Lee was my first friend" endowed these grown men almost a childlike quality of innocence. McDonagh includes countless beautiful shots of expansive landscapes (much like his previous work, *The Banshees of Inisherin*) and seemingly unusual music choices which fit perfectly. The music does a lot to tell the true story of the film, prompting the audience look under the typical CIA comedy surface presented and at the beating heart.



Sam Rockwell and John Malkovich in Wild Horse Nine.
Photo: Diego Araya Corvalán/Searchlight Pictures.

> **McDonagh is still working through this dynamic, iterating, learning and refining – not just remaking the same thing.**

Chris' character is epitomised in his conversation with Lee about Western movies. He tells Lee he always wished he could watch a Western from the perspective of the horse. This is such a painful, beautiful reflection on his life that has been exclusively in service of others (though via unethical means) – he is the horse. It's simple and easy to miss, but it ties up the movie perfectly. There is something so beautifully understated about the whole thing. For a film so full of grand landscapes, eccentric characters and absurd situations, it is ultimately the smallest, most ordinary human desires that prove the most moving. Undeniably the best scene in the film is the dénouement, where the use of the word Arkansas is perfectly placed and well-deserved on McDonagh's end.

Easily the best film I've seen all year, I would pay good money for something of this quality to be screened in theatres every week. I genuinely can't think of a single thing I didn't like about it (maybe Chris not making it to Venice...). Do yourself a favour and go watch it.

Ken Russel's The Devils

A film with greater evils to warn us of than Satan.

Film Writer
RYAN STANLEY

Originally released 55 years ago to heavy censorship and outright banning in several countries, *The Devils* has a storied history. Initially refused release by its distributor (Warner Bros.) without cuts being made, it nonetheless topped the British box office in 1971 for eight weeks due to its sensational reputation. It developed a cult following over the years with limited uncut re-releases, but only this year was a definitive 4K restoration of the director's cut given theatrical release. Its reputation as one of the most controversial films ever made had me pretty intrigued to see what all the fuss was about. What lay in store for me was shocking, sure, but beyond the horror, it was also surprisingly hilarious. It read less like the gratuitous gore/sex-fest I'd prepared myself for, and more an incredibly incisive, scathing satire exploring religious hysteria, political control and sexual repression with a historical basis but relevant as ever.

Before the opening scene the first thing that flashes on the screen is the message: "This film is based upon historical fact. The principal characters lived and the major events depicted in the film actually took place." I was taken aback by the firmness of this disclaimer – the last thing you'd expect from a notoriously scandalous horror release would be a firm grounding in reality. Let's go back to the early 17th Century, to the walled commune of Loudon in France, where Protestants and Catholics alike co-exist. Backdropped by increasing religious tensions after a series of Protestant rebellions in the 1620s, there is mounting pressure from the monarchy for Loudon's fortifications to be demolished in an effort to centralise the country's government (pushed by Cardinal Richelieu, advisor to Louis XIII). Vehemently opposed to this manoeuvre, which would leave their community vulnerable, is parish priest Urbain Grandier – a popular figure, albeit reputed for his not exactly priestly conduct with women. Reports of demonic possession at the local convent begin breaking out and I'm sure you can guess who would make a convenient scapegoat. All of this is historical fact: Loudun was Europe's answer to the Salem witch trials – and a half a century early to the party at that – making it very compelling subject material. Where accounts differ is in the details of this possession. *The Devils* is not a direct dramatisation of these historical events, but it based on the book *The Devils of Loudun* by Aldous Huxley (which interpreted these possessions in a different light) justifying the film's creative liberties and making it all the more fascinating a watch for it. That's our context, so how does Russell use it?



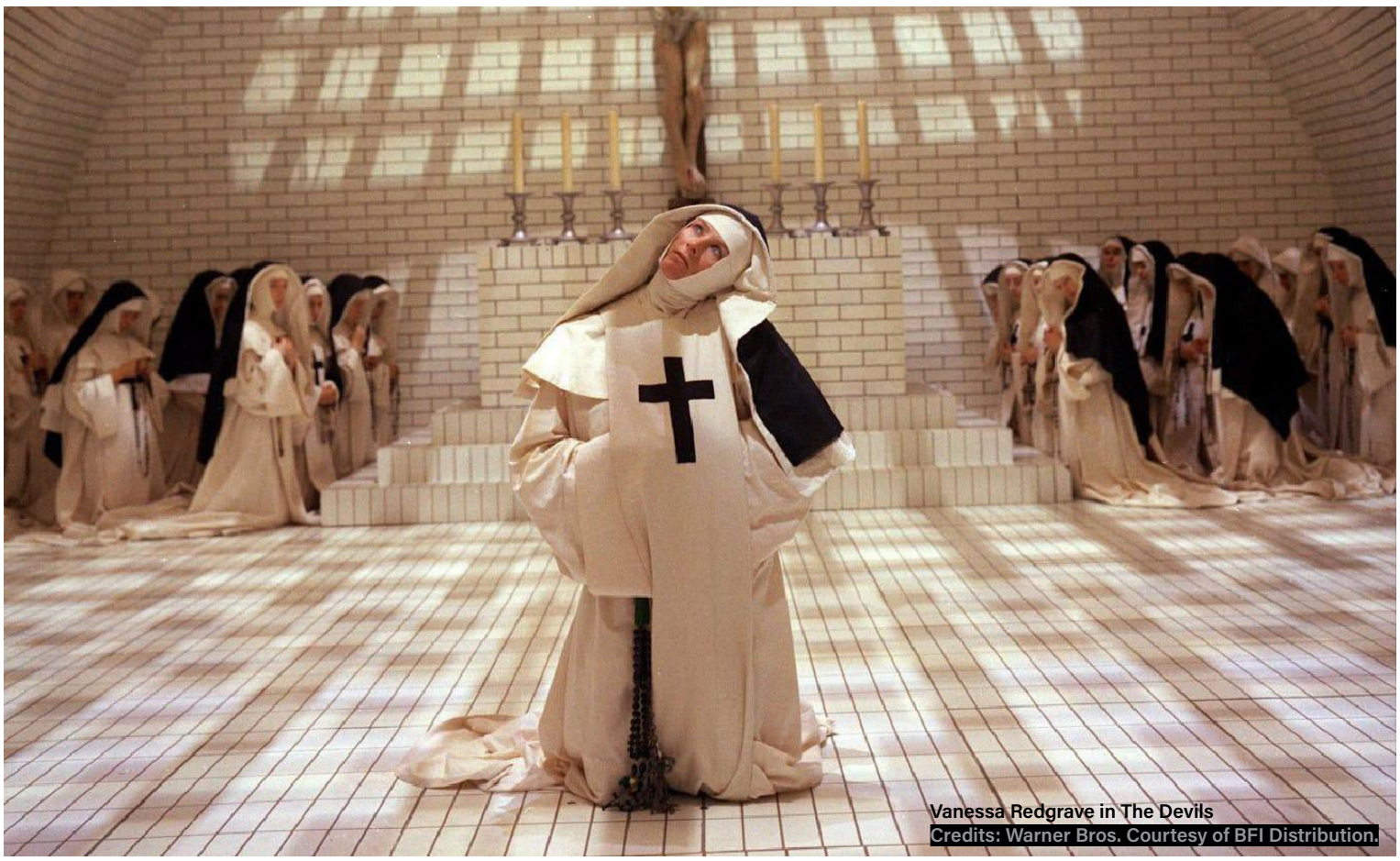
The film opens to a scantily clad Louis XIII putting on a performance representing the Birth of Venus, complete with gorgeously costumed backup dancers, intricate choreography, and accompanied by a jaunty chamber score. It is a particularly ridiculous portrayal of the monarch, very camp, and imbuing the powers that be with a certain unseriousness, contrasted with the severity of their representatives. The performance plays out as a bizarre ritual of decadence, its crowd populated by various nobles gossiping away whilst fondling their male favourites, also in drag. The only exception to this is Cardinal Richelieu sitting, stern and calculating, right in front of the stage surrounded by a handful of nuns. As soon as the show draws to a close, he flatters and wastes no time getting down to business – securing the king's allegiance to a centralised Catholic France. Amidst the circus, it is clear who is in charge. The title's flash and we cut to the maggot-ridden skeletal cadaver of a poor Protestant on a breaking wheel (a damn grisly method of public execution), backgrounded by a regiment marching on to destroy Loudun's fortifications. As far as exposition goes, Russell does an expert job. The levity of this introduction so effectively showcases the hypocrisy of the monarchy – establishing immediately the unspoken rule that anything goes behind closed doors if you have enough money, and the ease at which a blind eye will be turned to any and all un-Christian doings if it means your agenda is being forwarded. The Catholicism so vehemently pushed by Russell's conception of the 17th French

Amidst the circus, it is clear who is in charge.

government is not about Christ – just control. This initial jovial absurdity makes all the horrors that follow all the harsher.

We are then introduced to Loudun and the central players of our story. Grandier is delivering a charismatic speech at the funeral procession of the Governor of Loudun, and it's clear from the get-go that Oliver Reed (you might recognise him as Proximo from *Gladiator* nearly 3 decades later) is the perfect candidate for our protagonist priest. Reed had a name for being a bit of a hellraiser back in the day, but as handsome as any other of leading man, and an austere respectability about him – the parallels between the actor and character make him a natural choice. Beyond any character however, the set speaks for itself: the grandeur of the imposing white-brick church and convent shines through in every scene. Especially in these opening moments, adorned with mourners all in black wielding crosses, the detail in every shot is striking. Russell sure knows how to capture a crowd.

Peeking out from the convent is a group of excited nuns trying to steal a glimpse of Grandier, as word of his good looks and tales of debauchery are spread fast. They are quickly admonished by their abbess, Sister Jeanne (played by Vanessa Redgrave), who is soon the primary victim of these 'possessions'. It quickly becomes apparent why this film garnered the reputation it did, as Jeanne goes to peep on Grandier herself and is overcome with the first of two unshakeable dreams: Grandier walking on water, and her rushing towards him – unveiled and throwing herself at his feet. In both visions, increasingly sacrilegious, Grandier stands in for Christ in some biblical scene and Jeanne is overcome with lust and pounces on him, surrounded by a crowd aghast. It is a powerful depiction of Catholicism's repression of these 'worldly' desires and a very subversive representation of female sexuality for the early 70s. There is certainly a case to be made that horny nuns aren't exactly feminist, however these women are placed on a similar footing to Grandier, just within a more controlled and religiously stifling environment. These scenes are provocative, but not needlessly so – it only makes sense for the pent-up fantasies of an ardent Catholic nun have a biblical quality to them. You are what you eat after all. Russell isn't deriding these either: These aren't played for laughs, but rather have a terse yearning and sensuality about them. They are perfectly natural, the system they have been placed into twists them into 'demonic'. The real perversity lies not within Sister Jeanne's thoughts, but the wider systems that exploit them.



Vanessa Redgrave in The Devils
Credits: Warner Bros. Courtesy of BFI Distribution.

> **The real perversity lies not within Sister Jeanne's thoughts, but the wider systems that exploit them.**

The film progresses in unpredictable but wildly entertaining ways, Grandier's anti-celibate exploits and spurning of a woman he knocked up, making him far from a perfect hero; the cacophony of the plague-ridden town giving the film a surreal Horrible Histories-esque feel with wacky doctors suggesting insane cures (anyone fancy a crocodile in bed?); the exaggerated performances of the over-zealous exorcist and the Friar Mignon acting in as his goon. This may seem like too much to keep track of, but the pacing is exceptional – packed but unmuddled. There is an almost Shakespearean quality to the act structuring, and every scene is chock-full of effective theatrical dialogue.

The exorcism scenes are the film at its most explicit (and perhaps tasteless) balancing brutality and blasphemy. The light-hearted tone assumed for the ludicrous spectacle of nude nuns completely letting loose to sell their 'possession' contrasted with the abhorrent assault of Jeanne during her interrogation doesn't sit entirely right, somewhat trivialising the severity of the affair. The infamous 'Rape of Christ' scene in particular is easy to condemn as transgressive for the sake of it, but as a vehicle for demonstrating the sheer radical momentum gathered from an untethering from dogma and notions of propriety, it cannot be denied.

The subsequent framing of Grandier and the courtroom sequences are incredibly pointed, and – whilst our protagonist is a complex and flawed character – it is obvious he is being wronged, as his impassioned final pleas fall on deaf ears. All is rigged in favour of the accusers' agenda; Grandier is just an obstacle to eliminate, justice or reality are besides the point. We see how hysteria is weaponised – fervent religiosity just a façade to vindicate obscenities like taking the devil's word as witness; the Bible merely grounds for slander. Russell really commits too: these scenes could pass as some of the best in a legal drama. The expected verdict is passed. Refusing to admit his guilt even to his last second, as Grandier's final screams die out and he is left a charred corpse at the stake, the walls around Loudun come crashing down. That's all that ever mattered. But in the rubble, there lurks a faint spirituality in the air – faith in the example that Grandier sets. Far from the ideal citizen, but never giving in: we believe that we might too resist.

> **Far from the ideal citizen, but never giving in: we believe that we might too resist.**

MUSIC

Pitchfork Music Festival: reviewing

Pitchfork, every indiehead's favourite music magazine, puts on its biggest

MGNA Crrrta (+ Daine + Touching Ice) @ Village Underground

Music Editor
MIGUEL CARREIRA

The venue is Shoreditch's Village Underground. It's a dark, brick-walled, high-ceilinged Victorian warehouse, exactly what you'd expect from an evening of vaguely 'underground' electronic music. The crowd is decidedly 'alt' – fishnets, black tank tops, and arm warmers reign supreme, the perfect blend of 2010s chronically online and rave culture sleaze.

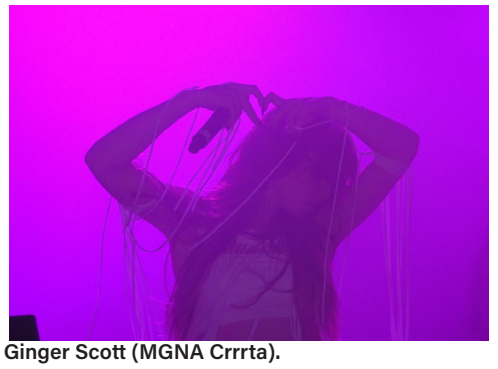
The openers, Touching Ice, describe themselves as "electro-industrial pop". There is a beauty in the dissonance: soft vocal melodies are layered over distorted guitar riffs and abrasive bass-driven beats. On one occasion, they lured us in with a mellow acoustic guitar, only to hit us suddenly with a dance-pop explosion of synth. Every song was different, and I was pleasantly surprised each time.

daine, coiner of "tweemotronica" (twee + emo + electronica), proved to be as eclectic as Touching Ice with a set that meandered between playful power pop, slower distorted rock, and dance-punk passages, with a sprinkling of some of their previous, more 'hyperpop-y' material. The show marked the live debut of daine's first full-length album *In Endless Awe & Agony*, which was released just two days after the concert and has quickly become one of my favourite albums of 2026. This was a visibly emotional milestone for daine, who prefaced "Wishing Well" with "I'm going to try not to cry during this one". The set came to a close rather wholesomely, as the crowd joined in on daine's rendition of Martin Solveig's 2010s anthem "Hello".



daine.
Issy Dang

This was a perfect segue into MGNA Crrrta, who have based much of their musical and visual identity on 2010s online culture. Their song BFF is an ode to online female friendship (the duo met on a Hunger Games Minecraft server), and the hazy, deep-fried production of their music videos evokes this sense of digital nostalgia. The whole set was an hour-long blur of glitchy, fast-paced EDM. Stage smoke, pink lighting and soap bubbles coalesced into bubblegum euphoria – sensory overload in one of the most fun mosh pits I've experienced. MGNA Crrrta revel in the crowd's excitement, and as they bring out RADA, a London-based EDM artist, it's a pleasure seeing the three of them prance around on stage with a joy that feels as maximalist as their music.



Ginger Scott (MGNA Crrrta).
Issy Dang

ear @ The Cause

Music Writer
CLARA PAKMAN

Ear is the project of Yaelle Avtan and Jonah Paz, two raggedy angels already signed to A24's music label for their second album *Rumspringa*. These two starlings deliver "digital twee," a soft field between the edges of homespun acoustics and digital hardcore. Their sound is truly special, at once innocent and harsh, like falling down in a meadow. Seeing them at The Cause last Thursday was extremely touching; their approach to performance feels childishly gleeful in a way that shoots straight past irony into pure, beautiful honesty about the necessity of music.

ear shows have gained a reputation because the crowd moshes to almost anything, even the gentlest electronic flights between verses. As Yaelle and Jonah breathe out each delicate lyric, they grip the microphone defensively, eyeing the distance like headlighted deer. But between whispered vocals are electronic interims where the two jerk violently to the whims of music, a stringy mess in their cartoon-colour outfits. Yaelle prefaces almost every song with "this is a fun one to dance to," and, after the songs, Jonah plays with the crowd: "you guys can tweak a little harder if you want," "everybody run in a big circle," "okay now split down the middle and I want to see a dance battle between the two sides." The packed room suddenly becomes spacious as fans try to bring these visions to life. And it's all playful, gloriously so; people are grinning like kids on a merry-go-round as they bash into each other, hands up protecting their face.



ear.
Clara Pakman

It's silly, yes, but also absurdly touching. It's a reminder of what live music can do, how it forces people up against the boundaries that keep us separate. It takes some violence, some discomfort, some frenetic jerking to get there – but as in ear's music, the other side is heartstoppingly sweet in its innocence, its honest demand for friendship. The tube ride home from West Silvertown felt like one big hangout.

a week of genre-bending music

festival yet. Nearly 100 artists across 16 venues. Felix reviews a few.

The Avalanches (+ Panda Bear & Sonic Boom + Debit) @ Roundhouse

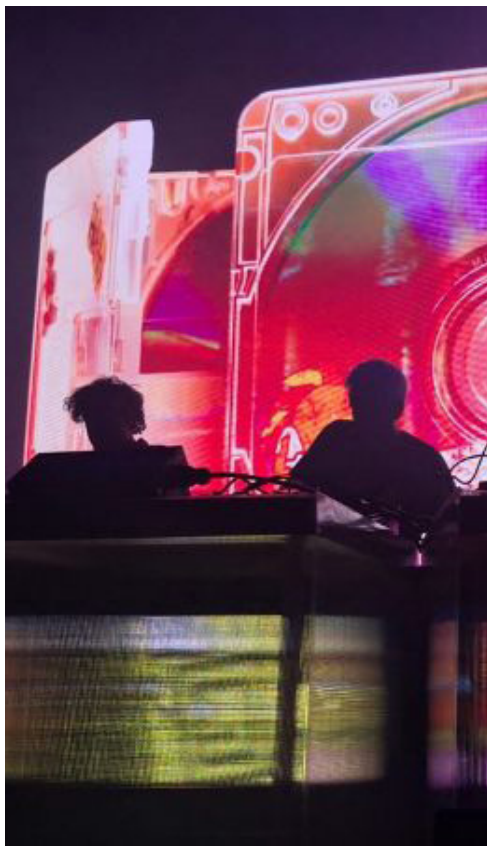
Music Writer
RYAN STANLEY

The Avalanches are a legendary producing duo, kind of un-pin-downable and a very rare touring act, so this was the show really calling my name from this year's Pitchfork Festival lineup.

Our opener was a DJ set by Debit, which I unfortunately found to be quite mundane EDM. An overreliance on 'phonky' drum loops had me categorising it as music to scroll to – which much of the audience were. There still was an undeniable impact to the chaos of some of the noisier moments, but flatness in their predictability and some very unfortunate transitions meant that the set would've gone down a greater success at an after party to a presumably less sober audience.

Next up was Panda Bear (frontman of Animal Collective) and Sonic Boom (ex-Spacemen 3): on paper an indiehead's wet dream, but I'd been left quite underwhelmed by a gig they put on a couple of years ago. This time was different though. The performance had a hypnotic, sprawling, kitsch-like quality, and, backgrounded by strobing fluorescent visuals combined with Panda's vocals, it was impossible not to be entranced. Though the tracks themselves were a tad overproduced and meandering, there was such apparent glee in every boyish harmony – it's hard to be too critical of two friends exemplifying the freedom of a side project. Harsher droning ambient sections between songs served as a beautiful juxtaposition – washed away by Panda's voice bursting in, a reverb-drenched rocket launch. They were certainly redeemed in my book.

From the opening moments of their set, The Avalanches stole the show. 90 minutes of non-stop instant gratification: every track remixed and blended into the other, built-up layer after layer of dense sample-work, and all with an incredible backdrop visual display. Despite the set notably lacking much of the group's more classic material, there was not a dull moment – not one bad memory. The joy on stage could not be understated, with the crowd jumping, every audience member beaming, and the entire room marinating in this indescribable, bubbling zest for life and love and music. It wasn't particularly cerebral – just maximalist, candy crush euphoria. Some of the studio material which I had previously found somewhat tacky transcended into this hyperreal honesty, partying away. I fell entirely for choruses I may once have rolled my eyes at for being too 'pop-y': every emotion believed and authentic, riding this unceasing wave of energy. The hour and a half passed like 10 minutes, and they truly put on one of the most fun, crispest-sounding sets I have ever experienced.



The Avalanches.
Callum Hickman

Dragonflies @ Village Underground

Music Writer
CLARA PAKMAN

Dragonflies is the musical union of Dhani Harrison, son of a Beatle, and Radiohead's mythic producer Nigel Godrich. There was a lot of legend up on that stage, but you wouldn't know it; Dragonflies feels like an endeavor born from nothing but longtime friendship and shared musical admiration. As Godrich said onstage, "this whole thing is really about friendship"; he listed his close ties with nearly everyone onstage, "I've known that guy on the keys since he was born." Maybe this was more heartwarming for me than it was for the rest of the crowd: an entire room of British dads.

Dragonflies has one self-titled album that came out just this September, and it was completely transformed live. Listening to the 8-song release this fall, I had felt the record to be dreamy, contemplative, almost ambient. On stage, the live drums and Harrison's fluttering vocals at the forefront brought the whole thing into vivid life: the songs transformed into rock ballads, spinning out from golden harmonies into mounting tides of percussion. Especially poignant was the third track "Straight Line." It sinuously wound through melodies pulled taut, meandering fields of keys, soft drops of padded synth, with the background visuals in shifting gold like a sun's bleeding edge... phew, it managed to pluck some heartstrings for sure.

The pair seemed to have a lot of fun performing together. They apologised for the very short setlist, but hoped to have more for us soon. Looking forward to hearing whatever new articulations of beauty these two legends can bring into the world next.

ARTS & CULTURE

British Science is Fake

A Brit walks into a bar, orders spirit; the bartender serves rationality and a punch to the skull.

Arts&Culture Editor
DAVID LOUGHLIN

This past weekend I had the pleasure of saying goodbye to a friend of mine before he was to head off to Japan to shovel snow for several months. Despite having a potentially Scottish sounding last name, he is distinctly British, and, more aptly, South England British. Many of the classic tales of Britain began around these lands; we wouldn't have the wonderful romance of Arthur and Merlin if not for Avalon (Glastonbury), and heck even the big British stones in the form of a henge and the best British cheeses live here. It then shouldn't have come as a shock to me to learn, in curious casual conversation, that my friend was bereft of spirituality, much like the lands we found ourselves in. Through some mutual prying we discovered that all I felt to be spiritual – the emotional contextualisation of the self, the other, and the connections in-between – he felt to be wonderment. A fine feeling, but not quite spiritual on its lonesome. As soon as he tried to feel any deeper, "rationality" crawled up his throat and out his mouth to say it was all atoms wiggling in particular ways. In that moment, all I could do was thank god for British science.

In these Irish and British Isles of yore, there were a plethora of tribes, societies, and understandings of theism. The Gaels of Ireland and Picts of Scotland practiced varying forms of Paganism with spirits inhabiting the natural world that surrounded them, offering a living force of nature to respect and with whom to coexist. The world was animated; all was alive. This practice of Animism ensured these Pagans held a profound connection with the environment in which they lived, and through this connection, as with countless cultures around the world, they developed knowledge. Stored in word and shared in song, their knowledge helped build a common understanding of how society can flourish and continue to do so. All the abundance therein, grounded in spirituality.

> **Our beloved science and rationality have manifested as machines of mass erasure.**

To cut a tragic story short, and use a healthy dosage of creative licence, everything changed when Saint Patrick's Catholicism attacked (euphemistic). And then again when Cromwell's Protestantism attacked (not euphemistic). Over time, knowledge carried in spirituality and animism was squashed, replaced with that of monotheism, and began to erode. With each, often violent, overturning of the culture in the Irish and British Isles, the meaning of spirituality moved from one dominant worldview to the next, sometimes being perverted to persecute others, but frequently still holding onto a notion of connection with something divine. However, even these powerful monotheistic worldviews have been met with their own attacker. The rise of scientific rationalism and rationality has played a major part in the growing popularity of atheism, and it is here that the real danger lies for spirituality.

In my friend's attempt to understand spirituality, they



Bottom-Bound Books and Shovelling Snow.
Raquel Fernandes da Silva

deferred to the toolkit that modern British education had equipped them with. They instinctively sought to explain something emotional and experiential through scientific rationality alone. That is to say, all the wonderment he felt could be perfectly explored via a set of logical principles grounded in the theoretical and experimental work of, predominantly white male, scientists, as though no wider knowledge could come of use. Not only are the teachings of spirituality being dismissed, overwritten by science, but the "spoils" of our beloved science and rationality have manifested as machines of mass erasure. Modern generative AI is fed by the rapid, brilliantly efficient, evisceration of books, just as Cromwell's crusades were fuelled by the burning of books and the Roman occupation of the Irish and British Isles was empowered by the culling of knowledge-bearing druids. Only now has the erasure of knowledge, especially that of the "other" and the spiritual, been suitably industrialised.

I adore my friend. While my writing may hint that he holds malice or knows/can know no better, neither holds any truth. Understanding of the spiritual, and the empowering connections to be uncovered from it, are more than within the grasp of anyone. Effectively combatting modern knowledge erasure requires appreciating all the culture who's knowledge is being targeted. And I see no better way of doing so than by sprinkling a little animism in the world around you. Animate the book you've got your nose in before bed. Animate the theorem that doesn't quite make sense to you just yet, but that you still accept. And above all, allow those around you to show off just how animated they are and share your animism with them. Feel the connection, for there is knowledge worth preserving in-between.

SOCIETIES

DramSoc's *Orlando*

Talented student actors and backstage crew honour Virginia Woolf's classic.

Puzzles Editor
DAVID LATIMER

Film&TV Editor
GRACE MURRAY

Editor-in-Chief
CRISTINA CARRILLO

The Imperial DramSoc performance of Virginia Woolf's celebrated novel *Orlando*, directed by Anya Chaudhary and Heather McRobbie, is as labyrinthine as it is funny. The chosen adaptation, by Sarah Ruhl, remains faithful to the original text in following the titular Orlando, played by Adam Hancocks, and their series of romantic escapades across hundreds of years of British aristocracy.

Being from the early twentieth century, *Orlando* runs the risk of being outdated. However, this adaptation was well chosen for its tasteful modernisation that preserves the heart of the story. The first half was well paced, with the interval giving the audience time to let the story percolate before launching into the finale. The second half felt like the plot could have been punchier and more concise, but the talented actors and well-directed screenplay made up for it.

The actors fared impressively with a very sparse set, with just a tree painted along the back wall. This production choice shifted the focus onto the acting talent, with physicality taking centre stage. There were no set changes, so all location and time changes, always clear, had to be inferred via context and well-timed narration from the ensemble.

Lighting was a very useful tool exploited by the tech team: the spotlight was shone on the audience at times, making the viewing experience more visceral, feeling almost interactive. The lighting was also effectively used to draw the eye of the audience to the part of the rather large stage where the action was happening, rather than letting it wander around the empty space.

Probably the most striking costume choice in the play, Orlando's red and gold waistcoat was actually on loan from a member of the chorus's grandmother. The monochromatic black uniform of the chorus allowed them to act as plot-driving devices, without distracting the audience from their words.



Anya Chaudhary and Adam Hancocks as Sasha and Orlando. Cristina Carrillo

> **"The whole cast allowed Woolf's modernist satirical masterpiece to retain its exploration of the fluidity of gender and time**

Acting was strong all around, with highlights being Adam Hancocks as Orlando and Aineias Arango as Queen Elizabeth I. Adam was able to portray Orlando as flamboyant without losing their depth as a character – we were still able to sympathise with them. Their youthful vigour was held alongside their developing maturity, particularly towards the end of the play when they had aged hundreds of years. Aineias was hilarious as the Queen with a brilliant, very effective use of comedic timing, later playing a second role as part of the chorus. Bertie Buckle was consistently good as a narrator, effectively using his facial expressions for non-verbal communication.

The whole ensemble had great chemistry and timing, punctuating the script with comic moments throughout but also adding gravity when needed, productively accompanied by sound effects, props, and lighting. Narration was used as the main narrative frame: particularly in relating Orlando's changes throughout the story, this tool proved very effective. As opposed to characters expressing musings and feelings through thoughts in the book, translating this to script dialogue does not result as smooth. Having the characters occasionally refer to themselves in the third person held the necessary space for the audience to understand their inner dialogue, one of our favourite elements of the play.

The smaller cast increased the demand on the actors, with several having to play multiple roles (typically a named role plus a part of the chorus). They were able to carry this off unfalteringly, without breaking their stride. Co-director Anya Chaudhary shone as Princess Sasha, one of Orlando's lovers, taking on the role last minute as understudy. The expected iciness of an aloof Russian princess was replaced with gracefulness and poise, giving her character a fresher, more modern feel.

The entire ensemble gives a great performance whilst still allowing the lines to speak for themselves, and the production strikes a fine balance between minimalism and emptiness. The whole cast allowed Woolf's modernist satirical masterpiece to retain its exploration of the fluidity of gender and time, without becoming an empty sequence of ideas.

BOOKS

My Name is Red

Translated Turkish 1998 novel by Orhan Pamuk, set in late 16th century Istanbul.

Books Editor
DARIGA ATAYEVA

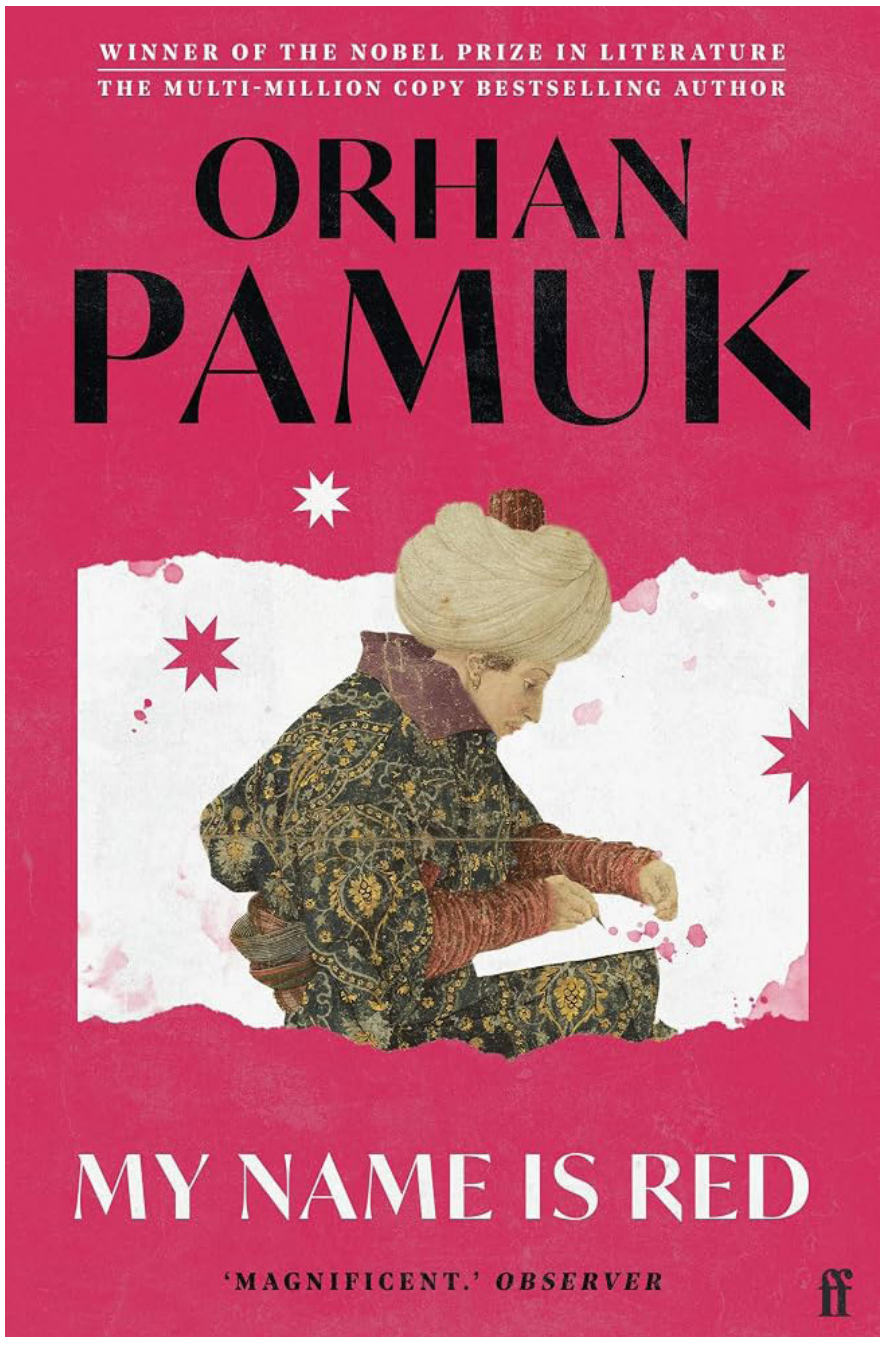
Can we visually represent a feeling? Is it truly possible to paint from example, when there is always a brief moment where, the artist's focus having turned to the canvas, he paints the model from memory? *My Name is Red* explores the antithesis between Western art, which portrays a realistic impression of what we see at a given time, and Islamic miniaturist paintings, which depict an unchanging truth beyond any perspective – in other words, "as Allah would see it."

The theme for the November meeting of the Imperial College book club was historical fiction, with the chosen book being a mix of Turkish history, murder mystery, and culture: *My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk. At the beginning of the story, I admit I was confused as I could not quite understand who the protagonist was nor what the context was. Knowing some background beforehand definitely helps in the comprehension of this historically rich novel.

Imagine this: it's 1591, in Istanbul, under the rule of Ottoman emperor Murad III, otherwise known as His Excellency the Sultan. You're a miniaturist, which means you execute and illustrate manuscripts for the royal court, painting in royal workshops. You believe that your greatest achievement would be to lose your eyesight to years of meticulous work. Like all master miniaturists before, you believe that by painting blind, you're released from your "individual" self and paint closer to what Allah sees, from memory and spiritual vision. You, Master Osman, hold this conviction so strongly that you go so far as to blind yourself with a needle when you sense the emerging threat of the Venetian art style, which values individuality and contemporaneity.

My Name is Red follows several perspectives comprising miniaturists working for His Excellency the Sultan to produce a secret book that celebrates him. The great secret lies in the artistic method used by the miniaturists; a Western-inspired Venetian style focusing on the their individual skills rather than the weight of tradition. The problem then lies in the murder of one of the miniaturists, which leaves one question left unanswered until the end of the book: who killed the unfortunate Elegant Effendi? In one passage, Black, the protagonist, reflects on the crime's motives: "Miniaturists are murdering each other over the pictures in that book. Is it for money [...] or because the book desecrates our religion? They say one glance at its pages is enough to bring on blindness."

A perculiarity of Pamuk's style are the multiple narrators, including objects, who directly question the reader. Pamuk challenges your empathy, perhaps even going so far as to challenge your consideration for everyday objects, including the painting of a tree, a gold coin, and even the colour red. Art, if studied from a traditional Islamic perspective, is the tool that bridges the gap between spirit and matter.



> "Art is the bridge between spirit and matter

It can be suggested that by including these unexpected narrators, Pamuk aims to give voice to abstract ideas and show how Allah might see the world, as well as to challenge the reader to form his own theories and conclusions about who the murderer might be.

Rich in religion, knowledge, art, and relationship dynamics, *My Name is Red* is a unique novel that makes you question your opinions throughout the book, as you change your mind about who you believe is most likely to be the murderer. However, I would not recommend this novel to all but rather for those interested in art history and long murder mysteries. Personally, I found a few situations, notably those between Shekure, her father, her husband, and Black, who's in love with Shekure, to draw out longer than they needed to, requiring patience and dedicated interest to really follow the story.







THE GREEN ROOM

23 November | Metric, 6pm

- Free vegan food, cookie decorating, beer & wine tasting, quiz and open discussion!
- Share your ideas with Sustainable Imperial & ICU.

TERM 1 EVENTS

SCAN HERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

CATNIP

A list of phrases I think sound nice

Catnip Guest Writer
ASTON MARTINA

No, that line above isn't a typo. I'm a guest writer this week. I'm pissed off in ways that you canNOT fucking believe. You would think that my dazzling work ethic (staging a coup, surviving the great turnover, bankrupting Catnip, saving Catnip from bankrupcy, leaving the newspaper for a month, ignoring and abusing my only member of staff) would have solidly cemented my position as editor in chief for the rest of my life. But for some reason, in the month that I was gone, the head honchos at felix were auditioning for new writers to take up my position. Thankfully the guy I picked as interim editor in October was dull enough that no-one really expected him to continue in the role (which I swear was my plan all along Claude, I would have picked you otherwise); but apparently they found someone else in a private interview process: Robert Cattinson.

It's genuinely abysmal how easily that man steals shit. Back in 2019 he stole my boyfriend, even though he's (probably?) not gay, just because he was bored that weekend. During my failed playacting career in 2023, he was a background character and STILL stole the show with his brooding looks and powerful yet nuanced delivery of "and you, sire?" during his 5 minutes on stage. And now, against all odds, he's stolen my fucking job. I genuinely am starting to believe he has a personal vendetta against me. He's like if Robert Pattinson hated one specific person. That's right, in the Catnip universe Robert Pattinson and Robert Cattinson are two separate unrelated people with the same broad personalities and talents. You can take a moment to wrestle with the implications of that. Ok. Thankfully for me, Cattinson is busy with an upcoming movie franchise he got hired for (Government Bond, or something? Not heard of it before), and is only taking over my job for a week. In my unbiased opinion, I think it's kinda fucked up that instead of just not taking over my job at all, he decided to screw me over and humiliate me just for ONE WEEK of being Catnipper-In-Chief. He's not even a writer!! He's never written a book!! Or a newspaper article!! How the hell did he get this job?

[Editor-In-Chief's note: Honestly, I gave Robert the role because he was really really hot during the interview. Martina is just kinda drab, ugly, and generally uneappealing, sorry :(Be hotter, maybe? Editor-in-Chief copyediting here. I didn't write this but might as well have. FACTS]

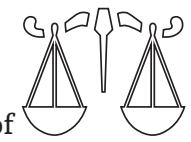
While I guess I'll never know what set him apart to take over my role, I guess I'm temporarily terminated now. Despite the absurdity and unfairness of the situation, the term does have a bit of a ring to it. Temporarily terminated. Huh. I was initially going to title this article "Fuck my stupid chungus life", but an article on phrases which I like might actually be good catnip content!

Chungus – that's another good one. I love the term chungus, it needs to be brought back. I use it for pretty much anything that is silly or out of place or even as a term of endearment. I also use chud as a term of endearment, which people don't always get. "Niche" also is a lovely phrase to use whenever someone says something that is absolutely not niche. Getting fired unfairly? Niche, lmao! Hahaha. Ha. God I fucking hate Robert Cattinson.

Horoscopes

ARIES

This week you decide to bunk school to play GTA 6 but no-one notices since you don't show up anyways

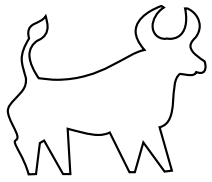
LIBRA

This week you get the shit scared out of you by a fake bird picture lunging at you on campus

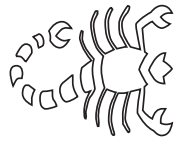
CANCER

This week every single software you use regularly for work has been down for atleast a day each

CAPRICORN

This week your friends haunt the narrative during your PintOS Task 2 code review

TAURUS

This week I saw you on 8th avenue drinking a smoothie and you paid me no mind

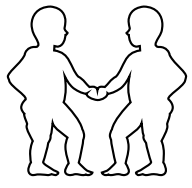
SCORPIO

This week you're pissed off after all your friends got a birthday horoscope but you didn't

LEO

This week you go on a road trip and realise England is really pretty when it's not covered in concrete

AQUARIUS

This week you get the ick after your crush comments "INTERNSHIPS" on a linkedin post

GEMINI

This week you think the Microsoft outage is about Satya Nadella being revealed as secretly gay

SAGITTARIUS

This week you help organise revolution in the Alvin and the Chipmunks community

VIRGO

This week your friend on student visa doesn't go to the protests

PISCES

This week you have to choose between your boyfriend and feminism so you do the right thing and dump him

I'm trying hard to be someone new

Layout note: there is meant to be more space between the strapline and the body but I'm Robert Cattinson and I wanted it so they gave it to me instead.

Moving on as motivation.

Catnipper In Chief
ROBERT CATTINSON

Hi! Robert Cattinson here, your new Catnipper-In-Chief for a week. Maybe I'll stick around in the offices and contribute every now and then, who knows! I mainly did this to piss of Aston Martina. Normally I would feel bad for screwing over one person this much, but she's so drab and ugly and generally uneappealing that it's hard to muster up any sense of remorse. That's not the only reason I'm doing this though. It's an open secret (ok, maybe not really a secret) that I've been intentionally going out of my comfort zone for the last decade and a half to distance myself from my past and change the public's perception of me. I am, of course, talking about my campy yet incredibly famous role as Edward Catten in the Moonlight saga. Not many people know this but I actually applied for the Taylor Dogner's role as Jacob Bark, because I thought that the role would have more dynamicity and action. I didn't expect that the fact that I was a cat would preclude from the role, especially after I scored an appearance as Cedric Doggery in the Harry Catter movies, (another role I regret, fuck JK Rowling). But the second I stepped foot in front of the panel auditioning me, they had their mind set on me as the perfect candidate for Edward, and five movies later, the rest was history.

It's hard to say I hated the experience. The movies may have been cringe but the connections I formed with other cast members (and the 'in' that it gave me to the industry) were undeniably good things that I'm eternally grateful for. But I'm just not the type of person that I portrayed on screen as Edward. I like to think that I'm impish and mischievous; stunningly handsome, yes, but in a rogueish way. Edward was brooding and stiff, far and away from any of the qualities that I mentioned (except for the mindbogglingly hot part, of course. Because I played him. Soooo hot. Hummina hummina. Awooga. I wish that Mickey 19 was real because I'd be Mickey 69ing myself, if you know what I mean ;) God I'm handsome. But not egotistical!). I've been trying not to box myself in ever since. I didn't want to be typecast as the "brooding eyecandy lead", unless I get to also ride the Batmobile or an Aston Martin (no relation to the Ex-Catnipper-In-Chief. God I do NOT want to ride her. Ew. Ewewewewew. I had to go look in the mirror to calm down after even thinking of that).

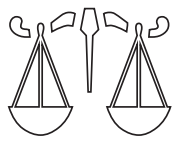
It was fun doing weird shit in indie films, and it was REALLY fun doing weird roles in blockbusters too, and by now I've gotten to work with pretty much every single active director that I would want to: Nolan, Cronenberg, Eggers, Bong Joon-Ho, Corbet, Reeves, Denis (Claire), Denis (Villenueve), the Safdies, other directors who I'm not going to bother giving a silly feline-inspired name, the list goes on. But in the end, I think I need to come to terms with the fact that there will always be a huge subset of my fans who will only ever think of me as Edward.

And maybe that's fine. We all change as we grow up, and maybe there are parts of ourselves that have been entrenched in the past that we wish we, and everyone else around us, could forget. But those things are what made us become the people we are now. And sure, if you were a bully or a piece of shit when you were 15 that doesn't mean that your actions can be completely forgiven just because you're kinder than average in your late 20s. But it does mean that you should be a bit less harsh on yourself. And hopefully, every single one of you will end up fulfilling the roles that you want to in life. But the role I'm filling is fucking James Bond, baby.

Robertscopes

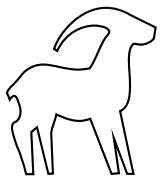
ARIES

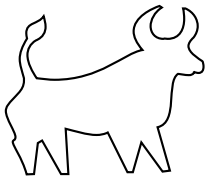
This week Robert Pattinson gets picked over you to be a Union Bartender

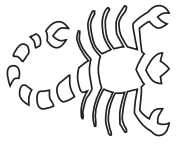
LIBRA

This week your application to be polycule leader is rejected in favour of Robert Pattinson

CANCER

This week, somehow, Robert Pattinson gets approved for unemployment benefits instead of you

CAPRICORN

This week your dreams of being Union President are ruined when you see Robert Pattinson applied

TAURUS

This week Robert Pattinson gets picked over you for the new Star Wars Trilogy

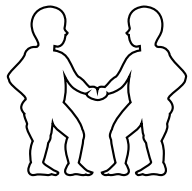
SCORPIO

This week your UTA Application is rejected in favour of Robert Pattinson

LEO

This week your internship application is rejected in favour of Robert Pattinson

AQUARIUS

This week your boyfriend asks Robert Pattinson to go with him for prom instead of you

GEMINI

This week you resign from Nvidia and they immediately hire Robert Pattinson as the new CEO

SAGITTARIUS

This week your hopes of being Huang's new side chick are ruined when you see Robert Pattinson making moves on him

VIRGO

This week Robert Pattinson is in front of you at the cafe line and takes the last muffin

PISCES

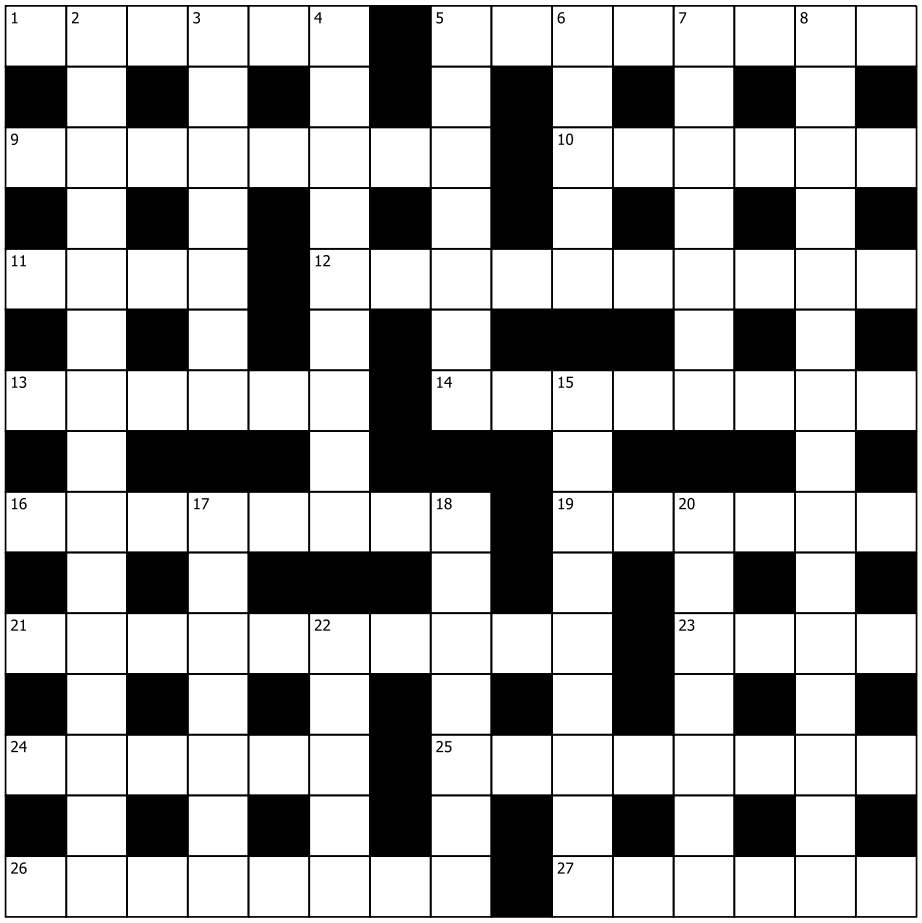
This week your audition to be James Bond is rejected in favour of... Oh nevermind you got it!! Congrats!!

PUZZLES

Puzzles Editor
DAVID LATIMER

QUICK CROSSWORD

Written by Dyfam (10 pts.)



Across

1. UK peninsula. [6]
5. Extinct mammals. [8]
9. Polygons. [8]
10. Purify, improve. [6]
11. Creep. [4]
12. Recruited directly. [10]
13. Fuel. [6]
14. Final judgment. [8]
16. Fashion advisors. [8]
19. Evades. [6]
21. Solve an anagram. [10]
23. Twisted. [4]
24. Preserved in can. [6]
25. Proofs of purchases. [8]
26. Silicate mineral, cause of mesothelioma. [8]
27. Wi-Fi adaptor. [6]

Down

2. Contradictions. [15]
3. Stretches of rivers. [7]
4. Legal oversights. [9]
5. Condiment. [7]
6. Magi's gift. [5]
7. Upsets. [7]
8. Fairy tale couple. [6 3 6]
15. Emitted shimmering colours. [9]
17. Gaps, holes. [7]
18. Outskirts. [7]
20. Speech. [7]
22. Inspection. [5]

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

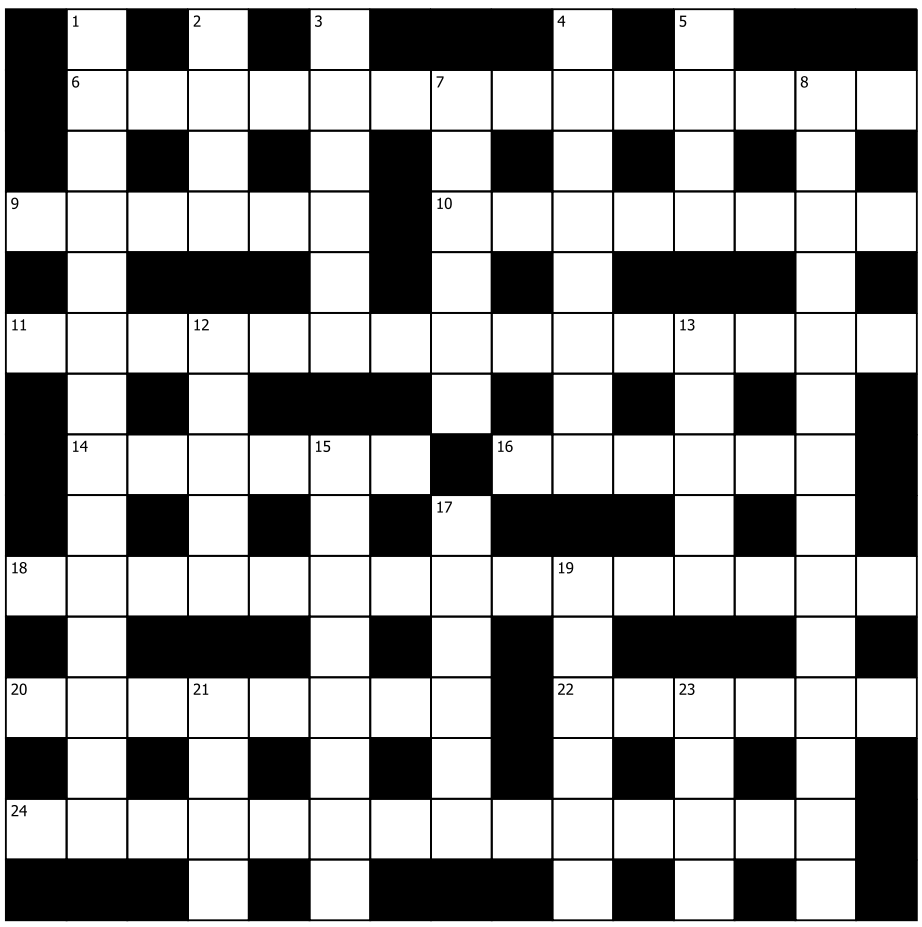
Written by muSKRat (20 pts.)

Across

6. Drink if you've... watched this TV series!? [5 4 1 4]
9. Twisted fabric sewn diagonally to maximise stretch. [6]
10. Alluring sorcery contains trap. [8]
11. Topless bird runs around wildly!? [8 7]
14. Saab car missing a wheel, get a Beetle. [6]
16. Liking both things hidden by merkin intimate two-piece. [6]
18. First two flautists love billiards: cheat and have Lincoln on. [4 6 5]
20. Bass swimming around tub for Saturday and Sunday (depending on who you ask). [8]
22. Mike to join forces with evil. [6]
24. Toys with overfed fauna. [7 7]

Down

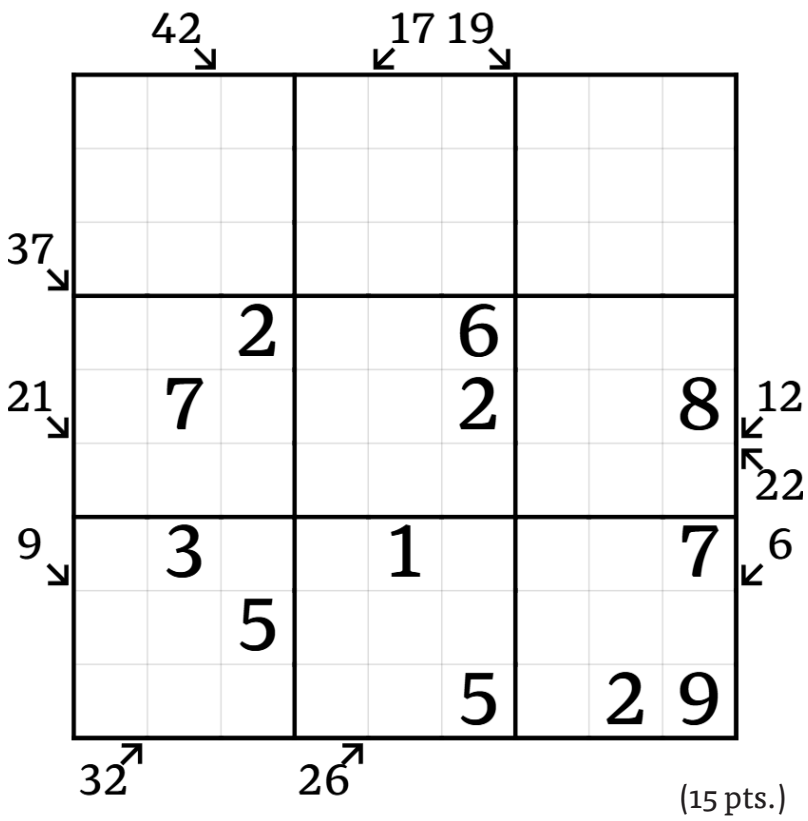
1. Put this on against each before a sprint burst. [14]
2. Michelangelo didn't use ChatGPT to make his man, stone element stores the information! [4]
3. Cross wife has gathered source. [6]
4. Fungi she washes with the ancient Chinese principles of harmony. [4 4]
5. I copied a joke from the web. [4]
7. Nearly all, mostly, not entirely... [6]
8. Modern-day plague doctor legitimised consuming poo when cooked. [14]
12. Cover messy padre. [5]
13. Spouted cold Mexican stew. [5]
15. Start to amble after the French followers. [8]
17. I'll ask her in Northern American territory. [6]
19. About core UK decision. [6]
21. Muscley mate hugs you. [4]
23. Left barbarian some bread. [4]



ARROW SUDOKU

Designed by Mara Sergienko

In addition to standard rules, the numbers along the diagonals denoted by the arrows must sum to the number next to the arrow.



(15 pts.)

MISSING VOWELS

Theme: British Reality Shows

THT RT RS

CM D NWTH M

D RGNS DN

L VS L ND

T HPPR N TC

TKMT

(6 pts.)

50/50 CROSSWORD

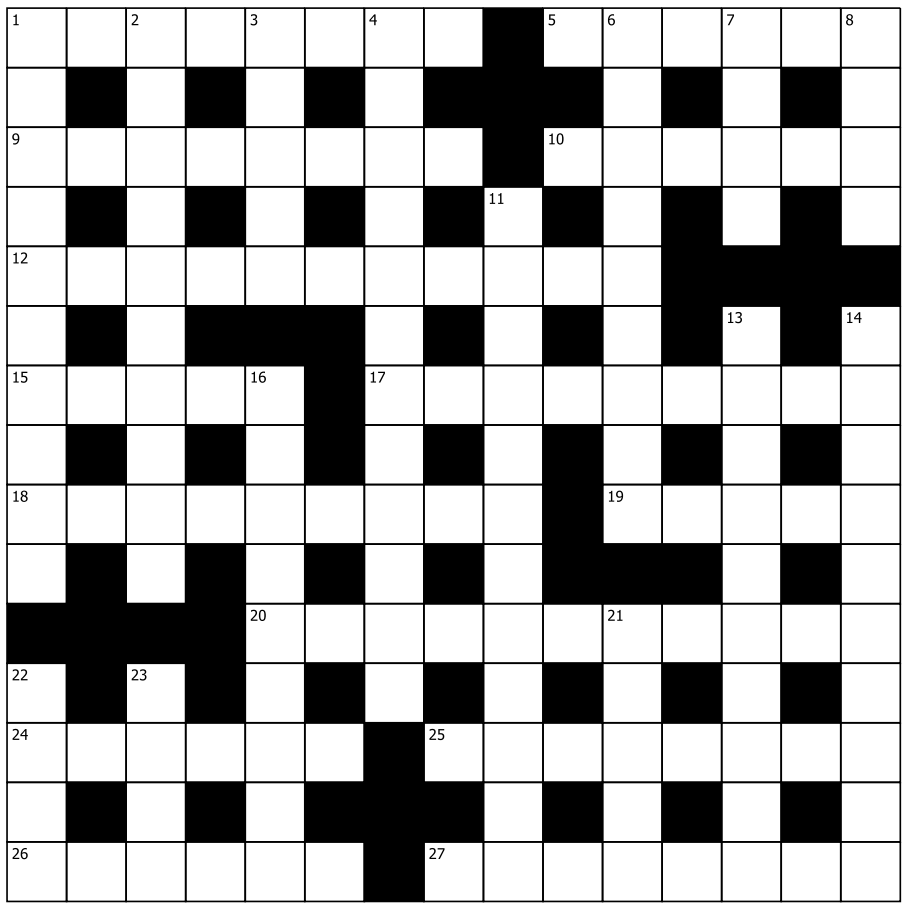
Written by Dyfam

Across (Cryptic)

1. Detectives go under cover with buddy - it's murder. [8]
5. Invade and keep busy. [6]
9. Take down and destroy his model. [8]
10. Wheel thrown with hesitation. [6]
12. Your stoical performance goes very badly. [11]
15. Artefact shows early signs of rust, even if left in cabinet. [5]
17. Only Durer could be this chaotic.
18. Being in no frenzy for honouring. [9]
19. Rattled, bears weapon. [5]
20. Circle articles to identify instigators. [11]
24. First woman to enter every examination. [1 5]
25. Locals in mix-up supply vegetable. [8]
26. Opulent, like a toilet. [6]
27. Work, patchy, has no right to be dramatic. [8]

Down (Quick)

1. Carries bricks. [3 7]
2. Take a trip down here to reminisce. [6 4]
3. Bowel spasm. [5]
4. What happened to the monasteries. [12]
6. Sea-monster and whirlpool encountered by Odysseus. [9]
7. Until. [2 2]
8. Tent. [4]
11. Prestigious Berkshire horse race. [5 4 3]
13. Puzzle designer, mainly in chess. [10]
14. Faster than Mach 5, like an overactive hedgehog! [10]
16. Tamagotchis, for example. [9]
21. Austrian psychotherapist who coined the term inferiority complex. [5]
22. Pull, with effort. [4]
23. Slang term for fuel for a Diesel Engine Road Vehicle. [4]



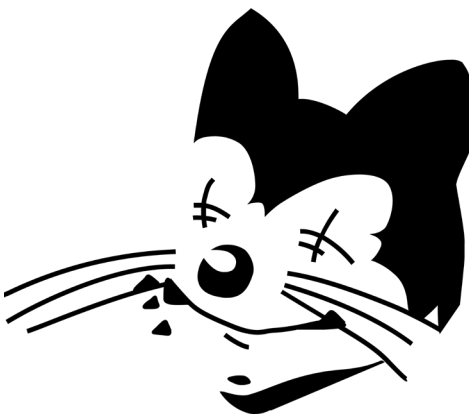
(15 pts.)

NONOGRAM

Designed by Rhea Sheth

"Comic"

Use the margin hints to complete the puzzle! Each number refers to the distribution of filled squares in each row and column. "2 4" refers to a row with a two consecutive filled squares followed by four consecutive filled squares, with blank space(s) in between.



															3									
					2	1	1		8				2	5	3			1						
			4		1	1	3	4	1	9	3		6	2	4			3	2	1				
			2	3	1	1	3	5	2	5	4	1	1	3	5	4		4	7	8				
	8	11	2	5	4	1	8	1	2	2	1	7	6	1	2	3	5	3	3	2				
	5	4	3	3	4	11	3	1	1	1	5	10	2	1	1	11	14	4	3	4				
				3	9																			
		3	4	5	1																			
		2	6	5	1																			
			3	8	5																			
		2	4	4	4																			
2	1	2	5	2																				
2	1	1	8	2																				
	2	1	8	3																				
	2	1	6	4																				
2	1	1	2	6																				
	2	1	3	6																				
	3	3	3	4																				
	8	1	2	3																				
1	5	1	2	3																				
1	5	2	3	3																				
	7	2	3	5																				
2	1	3	4	5																				
3	3	5	3	1																				
	6	5	5	1																				
		5	3	5																				
		4	7	4																				
			2	4																				

Hard (15 pts.)

SUDOKU

Designed by Mara Sergienko

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

Easy (5 pts.)

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

Medium (8 pts.)

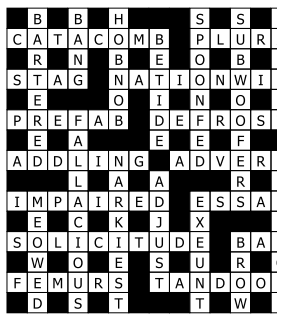
		9	6					
3		8						5
	7					3	9	
		2			9		5	3
				4		6	7	
			8		1			
4	5							1
9		7	1			4	3	

Hard (11 pts.)

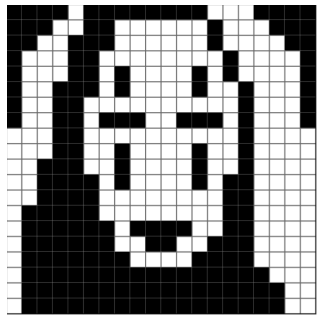
LAST WEEK



Quick #1909



Cryptic #1909



Nonograms #1909

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

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

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

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

Sudoku #1909

s	a	r	m	u	p	o	t	e
e	t	p	a	r	o	u	m	s
m	o	u	s	e	t	r	a	p
o	u	e	p	s	m	t	r	a
t	r	m	u	a	e	p	s	o
a	p	s	o	t	r	e	u	m
p	s	o	r	m	u	a	e	t
r	e	a	t	o	s	m	p	u
u	m	t	e	p	a	s	o	r

Wordoku #1909

WHITE GIN
SPRING WATER
DRY MARTINI
SAMBUCA
CRYSTAL PEPSI
TRIPLE SEC

Anagrams #1909

LEADERBOARD

Pos.	*Team Name*	*Pts.*	*Gain*
1	???	-	-
2	???	-	-
3	???	-	-
4	???	-	-
5	???	-	-
6	???	-	-
7	???	-	-
8	???	-	-

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!

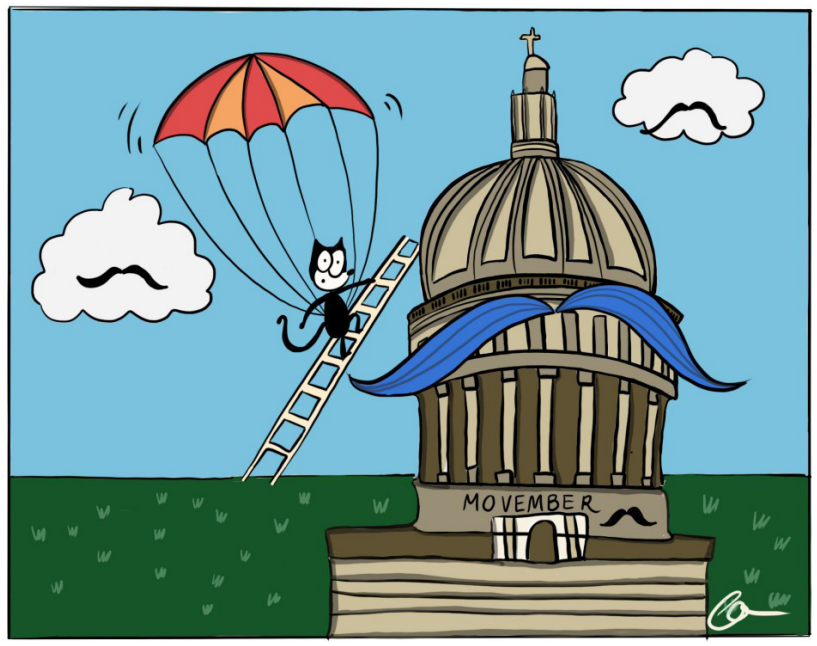
WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?

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,

Hello everyone! Still on the slow recovery from this bitter winter illness. But, thankfully, I have a backlog of submissions from my wonderful contributers! Thanks to Dyfam, Mara, Rhea, and muSKRat (welcome back!). We have a wonderful new Sudoku variant, and another nonogram, and a litany of crosswords for you to feast your minds on.

If the illness wasn't enough, I am *still* having a few issues with Outlook which is making it very difficult to read through your submitted solutions. So, for the time being, the previous weeks' solutions will take another week to get through when the service is (hopefully) back.

In terms of what I'm doing with my time at the moment, it's hit that point in the term where about three big deadlines have appeared all at once, so I'm hard at work at those. But also, the next EV is very nearly finished!

But yes, for now, I will have to leave you all with a pretty scant editor's note and a selection of conundrums. See you!

-David

SPORT

There's nothing premier about

The game's well and truly gone.

Sport Writer
KONRAD HOLUBINSKI

In England, there are ninety-two football clubs playing in the professional leagues. However, the media only cares for twenty of them. Those twenty, of course, play in the Premier League, arguably the biggest football league in the world based on revenue, media coverage, and viewing figures. Every season, 920 million homes in 189 different countries watch the Premier League, with countless more attending the games in person. Pretty impressive, right?

Though, when it comes to prioritising football, the Premier League lags far behind the lower divisions. Sure, the quality of football worsens as you go down the leagues. Teams aren't as tactic orientated, for one. You'll see a team playing out from the back, where there's a good chance they'll lose possession in a scramble, and watch the ball slowly roll into their own net. This is where the Premier League excels.

How we got here

The Premier League was born out of a lust for money. Back in 1992, clubs in the First Division decided to break away from the Football League to form the Premier League. Their aim was simple: maximise commercial revenue and negotiate their own sponsorships, without the Football League and FA watching their every move.

Part of this deal was a lucrative television deal with BSkyB, nowadays known as Sky. They agreed to pay £300m over the Premier League's first five seasons, with the money going straight to the Premier League sides. Previously, they would need to share with the lower division teams – now, they could have their cake and eat it too.

> **The Premier League was born out of a lust for money**

Now, it's worth remembering Rupert Murdoch, the owner of BSkyB, didn't do this out of a genuine passion for football. After all, he viewed football as a "battering ram" for television – a tool to market and profit from. And to be fair, he succeeded. Nowadays, over £3bn is spent in total on the Premier League's TV rights, both domestic and international. That means member clubs can outspend and compete with traditional big-name clubs for talent. Just recently, Bournemouth beat AC Milan 3-0 in the Europa League; just twenty years ago, Bournemouth were struggling at the bottom of League Two, whereas AC Milan were champions of Europe.

In return, however, the Football League (now the EFL) has suffered. The Premier League is now more of a promised land than ever for aspirational clubs, who look to outspend their rivals in a scramble to the top. That means more clubs spend outside their means, leading to a greater risk of administration or even expulsion. The latter was the fate of Bury FC back in 2019, thanks to a negligible owner who couldn't pay staff and effectively held the club hostage while being snarky towards fans. More recently, though, last season saw Sheffield Wednesday relegated from the Championship on 0 points. Not just because they were dreadful, but because they had an 18-point deduction imposed on them, thanks to an owner who wrung the club of every last penny while placing them under large debts.

Need for clicks

But don't worry: the clubs in the Premier League have it much worse. Just ask Manchester United, the wealthiest club in the world, who live in a constant permacrisis. Actually, you don't need to ask them: the media will tell you that instead. Every other game, pundits - often consisting of players who retired decades back - question if Manchester United "are back", whatever that means, and discuss how the club has "fallen". It feels like one continuous psychotherapy session, except your therapists are Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher.



Gigg Lane 2012, home stadium of Bury FC Espandero for Wikimedia commons

the Premier League

Just this season, there's been constant talk about Manchester United's woes, which range from their manager being inadequate to a 15-year-old wanting to leave the club. Said manager, Michael Carrick, was recently sacked, following three months of constant reporting on whether or not he would be sacked.

Now, I know it's all just a matter of perspective. Manchester United have won thirteen titles during the Premier League era, but things haven't been as rosy for them since. They're actually in the relegation zone. That said, I've seen far more articles about United's struggles than I did about Bury being expelled, or Sheffield Wednesday's own issues. Whatever you think about football, you've got to agree priorities have been misplaced here.

> **"It feels like one continuous psychotherapy session, except your therapists are Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher.**

It doesn't just stop with United, though. Every week, you'll find a new article discussing whether a club's in crisis; the crisis in question is losing one singular game. The very next week, you might even find an article triumphing the same club with countless superlatives, for winning one game. If there's no football, don't worry. Various news outlets will fill their back pages with transfer rumours, commentary on the footballers' girlfriends, or other inane topics that are vaguely football related.

It's just a massive shame the football's not any good.

Constant misery and financial weeping

No one in the Premier League seems truly happy. Every other week, pundits and managers will find something new to complain about. Either the referees are too incompetent, or their team didn't spend enough on players, or the grass was too long that day, or there are too many corners in matches. Now, some of these complaints are valid: there are certainly discussions to be made about VAR and pitch quality. Sometimes, they just come off like someone just wanted to complain that day.

The complaint I find most egregious is transfer-related. As I said before, the Premier League is wealthy enough as is, and yet no club is truly satisfied with their wealth. Some teams will go to extremes, like selling their own stadium to themselves, to get around rules limiting transfer spend. Chelsea did just that a few years back so they could spend £1bn on various players, including over £100m on Enzo Fernandez back in 2023. He moved last summer to Manchester City for a similar fee.

Back in 1992, the most expensive footballer in the Premier League was Alan Shearer, but he only cost a measly £3.6m. Nowadays, even the most average footballer can be worth £100m, if you're desperate and your accountant's clever enough. Elliot Anderson's a good example: one decent season at Nottingham Forest, combined with a good run at the World Cup, suddenly means his cost has tripled in just two years. It also means he's worth more than the entirety of retail chain Argos.

Why I prefer the Championship, despite its glaring flaws

Now, just because the Premier League is a dysfunctional family cast in the fish-eyed lens of a telenovela, it doesn't automatically make the lower leagues superior. The Championship has also become increasingly focused on profit; this season, the size of the promotion play-offs has been needlessly expanded from four to six teams, diluting the value of the league. The clubs themselves aren't saints, either. Just last year, Southampton were caught spying on opposing teams' training sessions on no less than three occasions.

One thing the Championship does have going for it, though, is competitiveness. Whilst I agree the Premier League is full of teams that can go head-to-head with each other, it's also mainly down to the immense financial pull those teams have. Newly promoted sides like Ipswich Town and Coventry City can only come up close against more dominant teams like Arsenal and Liverpool by spending vast sums of money. They can completely revamp the teams that got them up, and only just stay up.

The Championship, meanwhile, is more of a free for all. Owing to the comparatively smaller TV deals, the gap between the haves and have-nots is far narrower. You can win consecutive promotions from League One to the Premier League, like Ipswich Town did two seasons ago. You can also plummet the other way, like Leicester City did this summer. You can be stranded in mid-table for years on end, before shooting into the play-offs on the final day with a perfect run of form right at the death.

In the Championship, every team is fighting to either go up or go back down - sometimes, they can go from one to the other. Compare that to the Premier League, where most teams can expect an average season in mid-table, with the occasional hiccup along the way. At best, you might get a decent relegation battle or fight to qualify for European competitions, but both tend to be decided weeks before the season ends.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, but for a league that prides itself on being "the best in the world", it does render the Premier League as somewhat subpar. As a league that wants to proclaim it's highly entertaining, it feels like more of a branding exercise than reality. Combine that with the media frenzies and eye-watering commercial value of the teams, and it feels less authentic than the lower leagues. Ironically, it feels less premier as well.

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