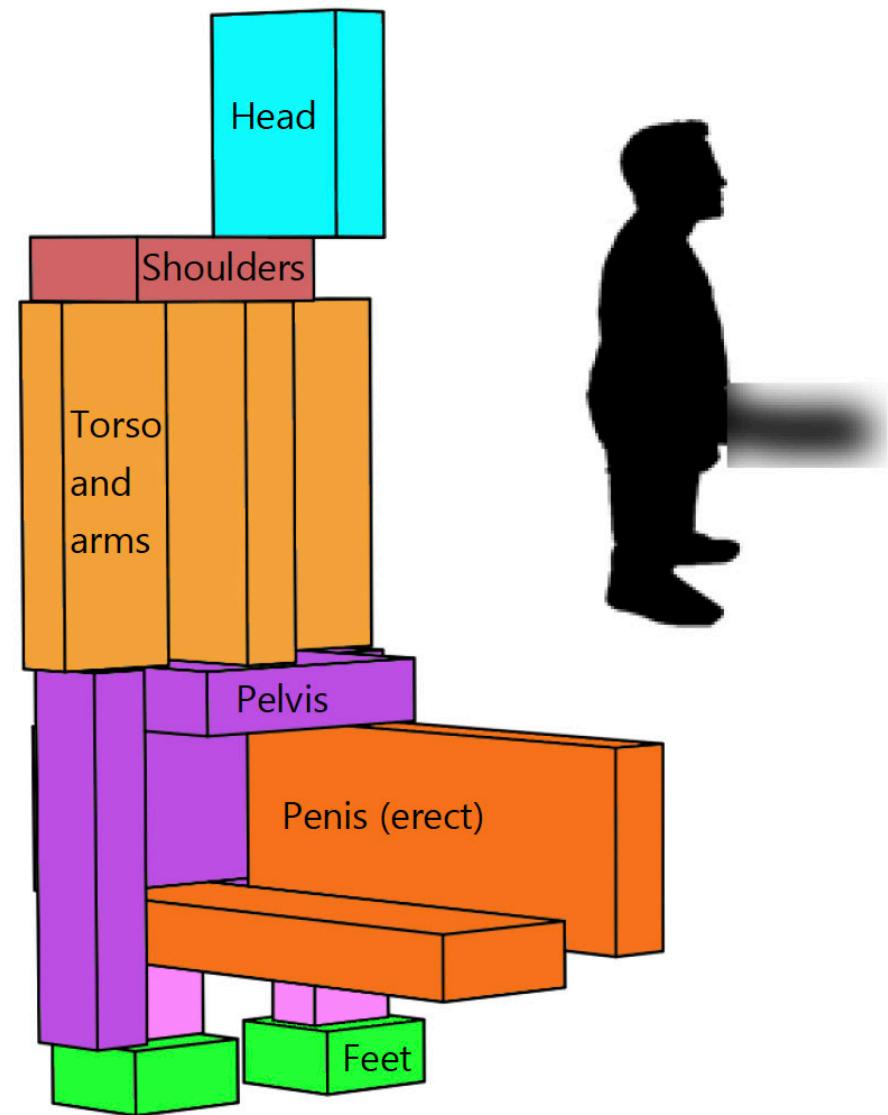
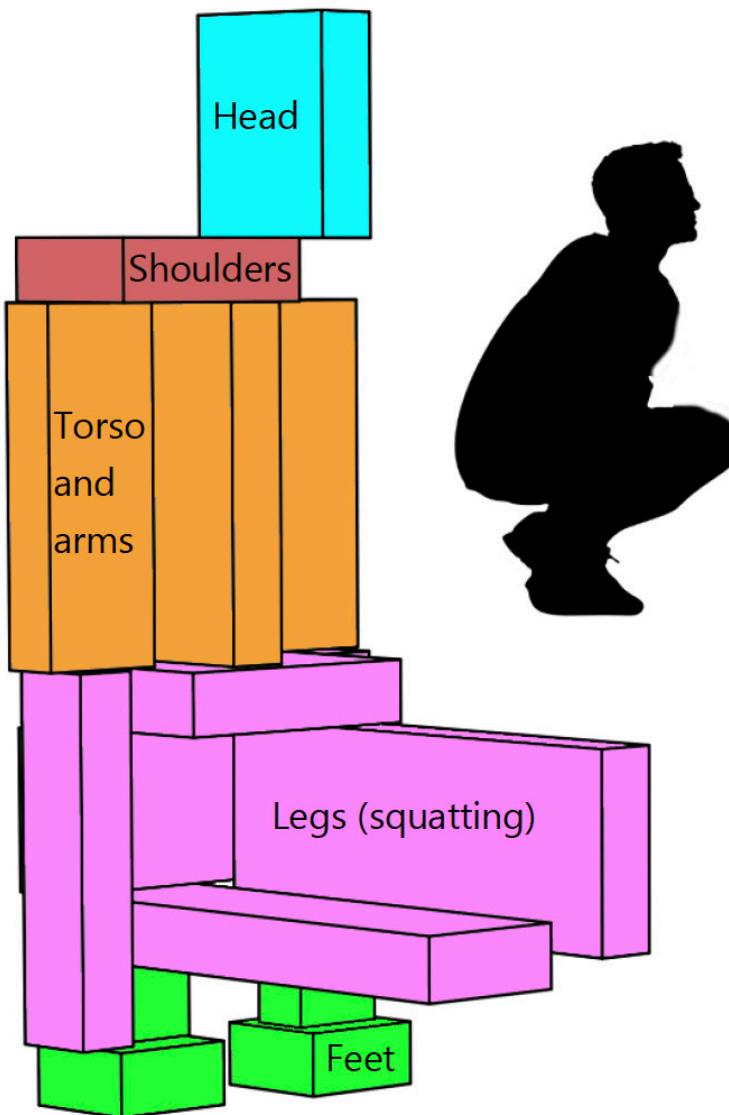




Union to lobby against ALERT statue installation



Sam Lovatt Editor-in-Chief

The Union Council has voted very strongly in favour of lobbying against the installation of the controversial 'ALERT' statue, set to be installed in the summer this year. The proposal was passed by Council with 29 votes for, 1 against and 2 abstaining.

EDI and financial issues were some of those raised in opposition to the statue's installation.

An amendment to the paper that tabled the proposition, suggesting that

the Union refer only to the Queen's Lawn area as 'Dongor Plaza' from now on was rejected. Felix is chagrinned by this.

The paper sparked controversy within the Union, due to a figure contained in the paper fully depicting two possible perceptions of the statue's form, which can be seen in the image accompanying this article. Fighting fire with fire, the figure is used to show how the statue can be perceived as phallic, by even more explicitly showing said phallus.

Following certain, unspecified meddling within the Union, a retracted

version of the paper was distributed shortly after the first, but with the diagram's modesty slightly more in tact.

The paper also expressed complaint that students had not been consulted prior to ALERT's installation being agreed.

One of the Union's resolves will be to share this paper, including the accompanying diagrams, with "College Council and other relevant members of the college". It is also stated that "If the phallic interpretation is not understood by the College, [the

diagram] should be used to explain the ambiguous anatomy of Alert".

The statue, donated by alumnus Brahma Vasudevan and his wife Shanti Kandiah, is set to be installed this summer.

It will weigh 67 tonnes and be 6.12 meters tall.

The statue has been designed by prominent sculptor Antony Gormley, who said "The work will beckon towards the passers-by on Exhibition Road, providing a point of interest and intrigue, and encouraging a closer look".

EDITORIAL

This issue was produced thanks to the work of

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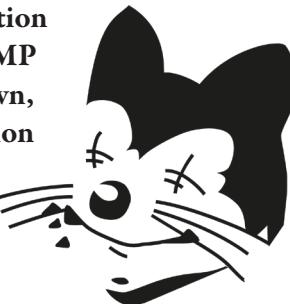
Boris on the ropes

Wednesday's PMQs were a shambles, even by PMQ standards. Boris Johnson's long-awaited defence of his actions surrounding secret parties at Number 10 came through as lacklustre as it could have been, and in response received some of the most pervasive "booing" I've heard in Parliament. With opposition MP after opposition MP standing to give their own, scathing condemnation of his actions, Boris meagrely refuted them all by simply saying that they should wait for the internal investigation's findings to be published.

Labour leader Keir Starmer has accused the Prime Minister of misleading parliament, when on December 1st last year Boris told Parliament that despite reports of a Christmas party being held in Number 10 a year earlier, "all guidance was followed completely in Number 10". Though this can be seen as Johnson specifically referring to the 2020 Christmas period and not May 2020, these does not exactly strike me as the words of a man coming clean, and rather a man trying to get away with it.

His principal private secretary, Martin Reynolds, invited around 100 people, via email, to a garden party at the height of the first wave to "make the most of the lovely weather". Boris's key defence was that he didn't know that this email had been sent. Regardless of whether that statement is believable or not, does it even matter? A blatant disregard for the rules that he himself had set, and his defence is that one of his underlings did it all without his knowledge. The reason almost all job settings have a hierarchy of management is for the purposes of accountability: if a shelf stacker puts something in the

wrong aisle of Tesco and a customer complains, it's the store manager that gets it in the neck from head office, not the shelf stacker. This admission is either a lie, or shows that the most powerful man in the country is phenomenally ignorant of the goings on in his own office. Even more of a mandate for him to leave his role, I would say.



Boris has been dismissive of the rules for some time (all his life, from the looks of letters from Eton to his father from when he was a teenager).

In 2020, Priti Patel was found to have broken the ministerial code by bullying civil servants in the Home Office. Throughout almost all of British political history, the next steps wouldn't have even been in question, and the offending individual would have stepped down before being dismissed by the PM. But no longer. Boris just ignored the advice, leading to the resignation of the Home Office Permanent Secretary who authored the report into her behaviour.

While clearly poor form, this attracted relatively little outrage from the Tory party and affiliates as it was generally seen as Boris damaging his own reputation and not the Party's. This has now changed. Major Tory donor John Caudwell recently told Boris to 'Sort it out... or step aside'. Every single Scottish Conservative MP backs Leader Douglas Ross in calling for Boris to resign. Recent polls show the Tories 10 points behind Labour, down from 11.4 points ahead in the 2019 General Election. The party's image is in jeopardy, apparently overriding the benefits of Johnson's ability to reach a wide voter audience, and the network of support for the country's first whimsical PM is coming apart at the seams.

Statement of Intent

At Felix we believe that it is always in the interest of the students to know. Transparency in the workings of the College and the work of your student representatives is key. Therefore I, the Felix Editor, 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 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.

**Signed by Sam Lovatt
Editor-in-Chief**

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£10 million Leverhulme Centre wins funding to investigate the ‘holobiont’

Sam Lovatt Editor-in-Chief

A new centre, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, has been awarded £10 million over 10 years to expand research into the relationship between large organisms and the microbiota they play host to.

The centre is directed by Imperial Life Sciences’ Professor Thomas Bell, microbial ecology expert who still has yet to give me feedback on my tutored dissertation.

One of the Centre’s primary aims will be to develop a ‘Holobiont tree of life’, mapping the associations of microbes and larger organisms to identify patterns and suggest co-evolutionary relationships.

Another aim will be to further understand the effect of holobiont relationships on agriculture. Researchers will look at how different commensal microbes alter the physiology of crops, with the hope of reducing reliance on fertiliser and pesticides.

Though led by Imperial College scientists, the Centre will rely on partners across a network of nine other institutions. These are the Wellcome Sanger Institute, the EMBL’s European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI), the Natural History Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, CABI, the Rosalind Franklin Institute, the

Mary Lyon Centre, ZSL London Zoo, and the Tara Oceans Consortium.

Some Imperial researchers involved in the project will look at the effect of certain pesticides on the microbiota of bees.

A ‘holobiont’ (from the Greek ‘holo-’ meaning ‘whole’ and ‘biont’, a derivation of the Greek ‘bios’, meaning ‘life’) is the name used to describe a large organism and its associated microbes.

Mutualistic relationships between microbes and their hosts have occurred for millenia, and are being recognised as ever more important by the scientific community.

On the work that will be carried

out through the Centre, Professor Bell said “There is growing recognition that microbes are essential for life, including providing protection against disease, and that the combination of organism and their microbes should be thought of as systems – a holobiont – rather than as individual entities in isolation.

“we can manipulate the relationship (between microbes and host) to save species from extinction, grow crops more efficiently, and a host of other applications we can’t predict”.

The Trust awarded a total of £30 million in investment to Imperial, Oxford and Cambridge-based research

centres. The Trust said the investment is “designed to encourage original research which would establish or reshape a significant field of study and transform our understanding of an important topic in contemporary societies”. The two other research centres are ‘for Nature Recovery’ (Oxford) and ‘for Life in the Universe’ (Cambridge).

The Leverhulme Trust was set up following the death of soapmaker and philanthropist Lord William Hesketh Lever. Lever’s business merged with Margarine Unie shortly after his death to form Unilever, today a large multinational corporation.



Credit: Envato Elements

€4.5 million won by Imperial researchers in Starting Grants from the European Research Council

Sam Lovatt Editor-in-Chief

Three Imperial College researchers have been awarded a total of €4.5 million in funding via the European Research Council’s Starting Grants.

The successful Imperial researchers are Dr Louise Walport, Dr Robert

Hoye and Dr Teresa Thurston, each of whom will receive €1.5 million in funding over the next five years.

Starting Grants are awarded to “talented early-career scientist(s)” who have previous examples of impressive work whilst under supervision. The application is made with a research

proposal, and the endowment allows these scientists to form their own teams and pursue ideas in their research proposal.

Applications are open to scientists working in any field of research. Imperial’s successful applicants work in the fields of Chemistry, Materials and Infectious Disease.

Proposals are assessed by a panel of international peer reviewers who look solely at the excellence of the application, combining the promise of the research proposal and the applicant’s track record.

Continued on page 4...

NEWS

Dr Louise Walport - Chemistry - Chemical Probe Development

Dr Walport's work on chemical probe development hopes to greatly expand the number of chemical tools available for testing drug targets.

Previously she has worked using a system known as RaPID to screen huge libraries of peptides in order to find a molecule that binds tightly and selectively to a chosen target. This library contains 10^{13} peptides, however even with this many different molecules there are many proteins it is almost impossible to identify a probe for.

Probes are used to inhibit specific protein activity, letting the rest of a system function as normal without the target in action. This process is used to search for the role of the protein in processes such as disease, with the hope of identifying targets that can be targeted by drugs in the future.

Walport's lab will aim to develop the catchily named cPTM-DISPLAY, a "platform for the identification of chemically diverse cyclic peptides". 'cPTM' stands for 'Chemical post-translational modification' and 'DISPLAY' alludes to the use of mRNA-display technology in the process.

Her lab is currently working on a family of enzymes, protein arginine deminases, the activity of which appears to be crucial in diseases such as arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

Dr Robert Hoye - Materials - Harvesting Light Energy

Dr Hoye's work hopes to improve the sustainability and efficiency of powering the ever-encroaching Internet of Things (IoT).

The IoT refers to devices such as Smart fridges and Smart doorbells, which transfer data via the Internet and require more energy than their analog counterparts. Hoye hopes to account for this power using improved photovoltaic technology which will harvest the necessary energy from indoor lighting. Currently, many such devices use small, quick-to-deplete disposable batteries which come at a cost to the environment.

Comparing the endeavour to previous technology, Hoye said "Most people will have come across this design in solar- and battery-driven calculators. But whilst a calculator only requires a microwatt of power, typical IoT devices require a milliwatt of power or more. Whilst indoor lighting can provide sufficient levels of power, current commercial-standard indoor photovoltaics, made from amorphous silicon, are not able to harvest enough of this power due to their low efficiencies"

Hoye currently leads the Energy Materials and Devices Group in the Department of Materials, and is a fellow of the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining.

His excellent track record is further bolstered by his PhD result from Cambridge in 2014, where he received the Jackman prize for best thesis.

The US Department of Energy selected his work on bismuth-based photovoltaics as one of 12 science highlights of 2016.

Imperial College describes Hoye's work as "experimentally-driven", and Hoye himself praises the ERC grant for allowing him "to pursue risky, blue-skies research, and provide me with the resources to truly tackle the challenge of developing these new materials to fulfil their potential".

**Dr Teresa Thurston - Infectious Disease - Kinase-based therapeutics**

Dr Thurston's work will look at the mechanisms behind bacterial infection leading to the "reprogramming" of host kinase enzymes.

A kinase is an enzyme that adds a phosphate molecule to an existing structure, most commonly a protein. The kinase is extremely specific to the target site for the phosphate, and under normal conditions will only attach the phosphate to this part of the target. Once attached, the phosphate alters the activity of the target protein.

It has been observed that *Salmonella* infections can lead to altered kinase activity, a phenomenon partially due to the bacteria releasing small proteins which bind to the kinase and changes its "specificity". This means that the kinase will attach the phosphate to a different part of the target protein, or another protein altogether, altering its activity. This is one of many hurdles that the host body must overcome when fighting infection.

In case anyone was wondering, this is what a Biochemistry degree is in a nutshell.

Thurston's lab have observed this phenomenon across a diverse range of infectious bacteria, and the newly funded 'Re-Kin' project will work to investigate the breadth of the mechanisms that allow this.

On the research, Thurston said "We will focus on looking at how virulence proteins from diverse bacteria reprogramme kinase specificity, investigate whether eukaryotes encode similar reprogramming proteins and ultimately we then hope to design synthetic kinase remodelling proteins that could revolutionise the development of kinase-based therapeutics to fight disease".

SCIENCE

Edited by: ISABELLE ZHANG
JAMIE JOHN
CARA BURKE
MAREK COTTINGHAM

The internal clock of plants (and all living beings)

► *Nature, not Human, was the inventor of clocks*

Wang Guo Science Writer

Living beings live and die, mountains are destroyed and created...but one constant since the formation of Earth is its orbit around the Sun, which determines day and night. This constant motion determines environmental conditions such as temperature and light that are vital for the survival of living beings. Therefore, millions of years of evolution and natural selection has resulted in refined mechanisms to determine the proper time to exert a particular activity in living beings, depending on the time of day. These mechanisms are called circadian rhythms. The general public is familiar with one particular circadian rhythm: the sleep cycle. However, the awareness of the presence of an "internal clock" in plants is not that well known despite its relevance for the survival of our green fellows.

Circadian rhythms determine the physiological and behavioural changes of living beings in a fixed period, normally around 24 hours. They are the internal clock of living organisms. Timing in nature is essential for the survival of living beings because it saves resources and maximises positive outcomes. The wrong timing can be deadly. For example, have you ever thought about what would happen to a plant that accidentally produces flowers in winter?

Flowers are designed to attract insects to pollinate them and scatter their pollen to other flowers, having a reproductive function. Because pollinators like bees are inactive in winter, this plant would be wasting its nutrients on flowers that would not be pollinized. However, the worst part is the plant needs to activate its metabolism to produce flowers. Now, higher metabolism needs more light and nutritional requirements, but unfortunately, winter is the season with the least light and food available, dooming the plant to a frost death.

Zeitgeber is the word used to define any external environmental factor such

as light or temperature that encourages the 24-hour internal clocks of living beings. The mechanism behind circadian clocks is based on the chain effect. The trigger of specific molecules, normally proteins, are called biological clocks that react to these zeitgebers. The biological clock can change another molecule, which may interact with a cell organelle, which drives a physiological change in the whole cell and then in tissue, etc. Usually, the biological clocks are regulated by the products they generate: the more product you generate, the more inhibition the biological clock suffers. This is called a negative feedback loop. It is extremely convenient because the system regulates itself to reduce the consumption of matter/energy.

The responses of plants to zeitgebers are slow, so the plants need to "predict" the environmental changes beforehand to take the necessary actions to reach that environmental change in the most optimal condition possible. For example, non-perennial plants start shedding their leaves at the beginning of autumn, so that their photosynthetic activity is completely shut down when winter arrives, allowing them to survive this harsh season in a dormant stage. These plants had to detect slight drops in the humidity, temperature and light to find the exact right moment to shed their leaves. It is amazing how plants are more active than they seem at first glance!

Photosystems are molecular complexes that absorb light in photosynthesis. Plants have to activate their photosystems during the day and deactivate them at night in order to conserve nutrients. This is regulated by the conveniently named 'morning' and 'evening' genes. The expression of morning genes de-

pends on transcription factors in nuclei, called CCA1 and LHY, whose activity increases with increased intensity of sunlight. A transcription factor controls the RNA synthesis from a template DNA sequence. The RNA is then used to synthesise proteins, which are the molecules that express the genes contained in the DNA. CCA1/LHY inhibit the

TOC1 gene, which activates the expression of CCA1/LHY genes. Therefore, the concentrations of CCA1/LHY start decreasing throughout the day. At night, CCA1/LHY will have practically disappeared from the plant system. Then, evening genes appear in the scene.

These are regulated by the Evening Complex (EC) and formed by 3 proteins: LUX, ELF3 and ELF4. The absence of CCA1/LHY permits again the expression of the TOC1 gene, activating the transcription of CCA1/LHY genes, and hence the cycle begins again. As you can see, the changes in the levels of light and temperature activate more than one biological clock.

One last key example involves plant stomata. Plants rhythmically open their stomata to allow the essential exchange of O₂ and

CO₂ with the environment. However, the opening of stomata causes plants to lose water through transpiration. In very hot and dry biomes like a desert, futile water loss is deadly. Therefore, desert plants like cacti devised a strategy in which they only open their stomata to uptake and store as much CO₂ as possible at night, when the temperatures are low enough to avoid transpiration. As they have accumulated enough CO₂ for photosynthesis, they do not need to open their stomata during the day. When stomata open and close is determined by biological clocks which respond to daylight. Circadian rhythms are the mechanisms used by living beings to guarantee that their different metabolic reactions are executed at the right moment and for the right duration, because correct timing is key for survival.

Photo credits: Wikimedia - Dominicus Johannes Bergsma



SCIENCE

This week in Science...

FROM IMPERIAL...

T cells from common colds could prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection

Researchers at Imperial have found that T cells from common cold coronaviruses can not only recognise SARS-CoV-2, but can protect people against infection from it. In September 2020, 52 people who lived with someone with PCR-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection were tested. Blood samples were taken within 1 to 6 days of their exposure to analyse pre-existing T cell levels. The 26 participants with higher T cell counts were significantly less likely to be infected. These results could allow the development of a vaccine that provides longer-lasting protection, as T cells target internal proteins, which mutate at a much lower rate than the spike proteins which current SARS-CoV-2 vaccines respond to.

The history of Antarctica's ice provides insight into how vulnerable it will be to warming

Imperial researchers working as part of the International Ocean Discovery programme examined Antarctic ice sheets from the early Miocene, around 16 to 18 million years ago, which experienced both warm and cold periods. They found that the West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS) was larger than thought during cold periods, so could have contributed more to sea-level rise, which could reach levels of 60 metres during warmer periods. They drilled into sediments in the Ross Sea to find layers corresponding to the warmer and colder periods, and found material deposited by the WAIS far out, which suggests it grew larger than previously thought. This will allow better predictions of how the WAIS will respond to warming, which is important as it is currently considered particularly vulnerable.

FROM AROUND THE WORLD...

Oxygen-rich exoplanets could be geologically active

Rocks exposed to high oxygen concentrations melt at lower temperatures, a new study has found. This suggests that oxygen-rich rocky exoplanets could have a liquid mantle and be geologically active. The researchers measured the melting temperature of synthetic, iron-free basalt rock and found that as molten rock cooled to below 1000 °C, those that had been in oxygen-rich air remained molten for temperatures 100 °C below oxygen-depleted samples. It is possible that oxygen enables chains of silicon and oxygen to be broken up into smaller, more mobile fragments. Understanding oxygen's impact could allow us to understand exoplanets' history and geology better.

Raunchy dolphins! New study suggests dolphin's clitoris is much like a human's

A new look at the bottlenose dolphin's clitoris has revealed that it shares many similarities with the human clitoris, allowing it a vital role in pleasure. There is an abundance of sensory nerves and spongy tissue, possibly allowing it to be highly sensitive to physical touch. This research provides insight into why dolphins have such active sex lives, including female-female sex by way of stimulating each other's clitoris, and masturbation by rubbing their clitoris on objects. CT scans and dissection has revealed many structural similarities with the human clitoris. Researchers even found genital corpuscles: encapsulated sensory nerve endings known as "corpuscles of pleasure" in humans. The enlarged clitoris is likely to have evolved for bonding and pleasure-seeking during sex, but alternative hypotheses suggest that it could be a reflection of its shared embryological root with the penis, or play a role in stimulating ovulation.

Green Planet: Some beautiful insight into the dynamic lives of plants

Cara Burke Science Editor

The BBC's new five-part documentary series *The Green Planet* with David Attenborough has started off strong, with an inside view into the lives of tropical plants. It has delivered on its promise to explore the "dramatic, beautiful plant life of Earth". New technology, including robot systems, thermal cameras and macro frame-stacking allowed the plant's lives to be put on display in all of their drama. The team's new time-lapse camera, Triffid, designed by ex-military engineer Chris Field during his spare time over the last decade, allowed the plants' lives to be revealed to us in their own time scale and let us move through the trees like a meandering fly. It took the audience on a journey through the creaking, groaning, and growing trees, the grappling arms of vines, and the unfurling and withering of flowers that emerge and disappear in a fraction of a plant's lifetime. It was the perfect tool to demonstrate the incredibly dynamic lives of plants, and allowed us to compare their time scale to that of the animals, other plants, and fungi they interact with. The time and effort put into this series (five years!) could not go unnoticed (and I think that effort was neatly summed up by assistant producer Louis Rimmer-Downing, who

described his life during the 8 days that it took to film the spectacular leaf-cutter ant sequence that required shots at 7,000 different angles: "Wake up. Film ants. Go to sleep. Dream of ants. Wake up....") We were invited to awe at the world's largest flower, and be showered by thousands of dipterocarp seeds. This series also comes at an opportune moment as plants are gaining increasingly more well-deserved attention.

In David Attenborough's words, "the world has suddenly become plant conscious", which allows the episode's parting message to resonate deeper. It touches on the devastating destruction that tropical forests are sustaining, with 70% of all rainforest plants growing within a mile of a road or clearing that humans have cut. Despite this appalling statistic, and the shocking images of vast swathes of monocultures and fragmented rainforest within barren land, the final tone is a refreshing one of hope. David Attenborough leaves us in new forest, with the hope that more pathways can be made between fragmented forest areas to preserve biodiversity. Tune in on BBC iPlayer or BBC One at 7pm on Sunday for further plant wonders in water worlds, seasonal worlds, desert worlds, and human worlds. It's worth a watch.

Photo credits: Wikimedia - Ylem



"Foxfire" - the bioluminescence produced by certain fungi, is featured in the programme.

ARTS

 **ON GOLDEN WINGS**
BY ALEXANDER COHEN
NABUCCO IS A POTENT MEDITATION SET
TO VERDI'S TIMELESS MUSIC

page

8

Edited by:
ALEX JACKSON

Theatre

Force Majeure: An uphill struggle

Force Majeure

★★

Where? Donmar Warehouse

When? Until 5th February 2022

How much? From £10

Reviewed by Alexander Cohen Arts Writer

After a brief Covid-induced hiatus, *Force Majeure* opened at the Donmar Warehouse this week. Based on the Ruben Östlund's 2014 tragicomedy film of the same name, one wonders why a stage adaption is necessary when the original film (1) received critically acclaim (winning the Jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival), (2) was made very recently, and (3) is readily available to watch on streaming services. If I wanted to, I could watch the original right now. So why should I sit shoulder to shoulder with strangers in the less than spacious theatre and potentially risk catching Covid to watch the same thing? Stage adaptions of films need to bring something new to the table if they want to justify their existence. Michael Longhurst's production of Tim Price's adaptation of the film did not achieve this.

Rory Kinnear's Tomas is a dopey middle aged oik: slightly useless at everything, a little bit of a wet towel, and just trying to enjoy his family holiday. However, the play seems to have it in for him, taking every opportunity to humiliate and degrade him after he panics in a moment of danger. As a potential avalanche draws nearer to Tomas and his nice middle-class family; he runs away instead of protecting them. Is this an Arthur Miller inspired *Tragedy of the Common Man*? No. My dad is also middle aged and also slightly useless at everything. But like Tomas he works hard at a job he probably doesn't like to provide for his children. He doesn't deserve to be torn apart on stage in the name of deconstructing masculinity for the sake of it. The



Siena Kelly as Jenny and Sule Rumi as Mats star alongside the main cast in *Force Majeure*.

production veers on the nasty side, something exacerbated by the lack of clear purpose. It is never clear what the writer or director's take on the issue is other than "some men are a bit dopey". Is Tomas sympathetic? Or does he deserve to be forsaken by the family he works so hard to support?

Rory Kinnear and Lyndsey Marshal as his constantly disgruntled wife Ebba do well to bring out the combative side of their deteriorating relationship. But that's all they can do. They are never given moments of tenderness or affection as a couple. All we see is unspoken tension. Consequently, their marriage is never believable. After all, there must be a reason why Ebba has stuck with Tomas; how she has not divorced him by now is a mystery. But perhaps their chemistry is an issue that

will be ironed out with time. The cast did have a gap in performances due to having to isolate.

But Covid was not the only uphill struggle. Tilted at a steep angle, actors had to clamber up and down the ski slope inspired stage. This off-piste creative decision that did not pay off as it made navigating the stage difficult. Confined to awkward clambering, actors could not move freely to explore their characters' physicality. One wonders if a flat stage would have changed the fabric of their performances and made the production more engaging. There was also an anxiety inducing sense of "oh god, that is going to fall over" whenever an item of set was brought on and balanced on the slope at an angle. An uphill struggle indeed.

Theatre

A beautiful journey through a raging flood

The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage

★★★

Where? Bridge Theatre

When? Until 26th February 2022

How much? From £15

Reviewed by Waleed El-Geresy Arts Writer

The lights dim and a magical world of daemons begins to play out before us. The visuals are beautiful: throughout the performance we will experience the illusion of a world that is different to ours in many ways. Several translucent, laterally-moving screens sparkle with watery visuals that evoke the cover art of Philip Pullman's original novel *La Belle Sauvage*. The set is complemented by a gradually sloping stage rear, which, in combination with the moving screens, convey a re-

markable illusion of depth to a variety of different settings. The lighting and visuals, courtesy of the director Nicholas Hytner and the brilliant technical team, are remarkably effective, with a smoky projection dancing across the stage floor. The eponymous wooden boat, *La Belle Sauvage*, drifts and bobs elegantly over what is a calm river for one moment and a raging flood the next - an impressive feat of illusion.

The choreography and motion were exquisite

throughout, with my only quibble being that sometimes it was difficult to suspend one's disbelief, since the master puppeteers were a little conspicuous in their blue dungarees.

The adaption was penned by Bryony Lavery and, whilst there were many great ideas in this adaption, the exaggerated use of humour went a little too far for me. The attempt to make almost every character humorous in some way seemed to dull the otherwise shining performances of several of the cast including the villainous Gerard Bonneville (Pip Carter) and terrifying three-legged hyaena (Julie Atherton) whose disturbing cackles sent chills down my spine. On the other hand, there were some parts where humour did seem appropriate. One comedic triumph was the nun, Sister Fenella (Dearbhla Malloy), who brought a light-hearted touch to the production with jibes in playful Irish tones, such as her comments about the fact that Lord Asriel should have "kept it in his trousers".

In this show, I believe that a part of the magic of Pullman's universe is lost in attempting to translate events to be more 'modern', since Lyra's world (even as a baby) is inherently classical, carrying with it the charm of a bygone Oxford. Although I did like the way that many of the characters were portrayed in this more contemporary context, I felt Mrs Coulter (Ayesha Dharker) to be a little too much of a headmistress. She comes across as totally unfeeling. Her conflicted love for Lyra



Samuel Creasey features as Malcolm Polstead in *Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage* at the Bridge Theatre.

was glazed over and she falls a little too comfortably into the category of staple evil villain. Samuel Creasey successfully paints a realistic picture of Malcolm Polstead, the slightly shy, intelligent boy who experiences things just beyond the horizon of his understanding. Although maybe he is portrayed as a little too much of a know-it-all in a play for laughs. Alongside him, Alice Parslow, a rough and ready London girl is given life through an outstanding performance by Ella Da-

cres. The dynamic between the two on stage is a joy to watch.

It is inevitable that not every detail of the novel can, or even should, be perfectly conveyed in a production, and indeed there were a great many good ideas in this adaptation. Overall, this was a visually stunning and entertaining translation of Pullman's original work; but the adaption might not be to everyone's taste.

a culture exiled from their homeland. This is made all the more poignant by the echoing of the real-life suffering of the Jewish people during the Second World War. With the chorus dressed to invoke 1940s immigrants, some even wearing kippahs (traditional skullcap for observant Jewish men), and Alison Chitty's eerie set consisting of grey concrete slabs mirroring the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin, Abbado grounds the heightened plot of Verdi's opera in a harsh reality. It is easy to see why Verdi was dubbed "papa dei cori" by the Milanese public.

A powerful Amartuvshin Enkhbat portrays the eponymous king as a hubristic mafia boss. His booming baritone commands the stage and dominates the chorus who cower in his presence. But Enkhbat's performance is multifaceted. He is also able to convey vulnerability and despair after the Babylonian king's downfall before valour and heroism during his eventual redemption. The high priest Zaccaria, played by Alexander Vinogradov, also captured vulnerability as the leader of the Jewish people tasked with maintaining hope in the face of destruction. Wrapped in his tallit (a Jewish prayer shawl) his characterisation again hinted at the real-life desperation of those oppressed by the Nazis.

The question of performing Jewishness on stage has come into the limelight this year. Multiple shows have tackled explicitly Jewish themes (notably Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*, Paula Vogel's *Indecent*, and Cordelia Lynn's *Other Acts of Violence*). Some have not addressed Jewish themes, but have highlighted the im-

portance of conversations about Anti-Semitism in the theatre (I'm thinking of Al Smith's *Rare Earth Mettle* at the Royal Court). If this production of *Nabucco* teaches us anything it is how creatives need a deep respect for history when addressing Jewishness on stage. Abbado does exactly this. The end result is a potent meditation on freedom and culture set to Verdi's timeless music.



Liudmyla Monastyrskaya as Abigaille in Nabucco

Opera On Golden Wings

★★★★

Nabucco

Where? The Royal Opera House

When? Until 23rd January 2022

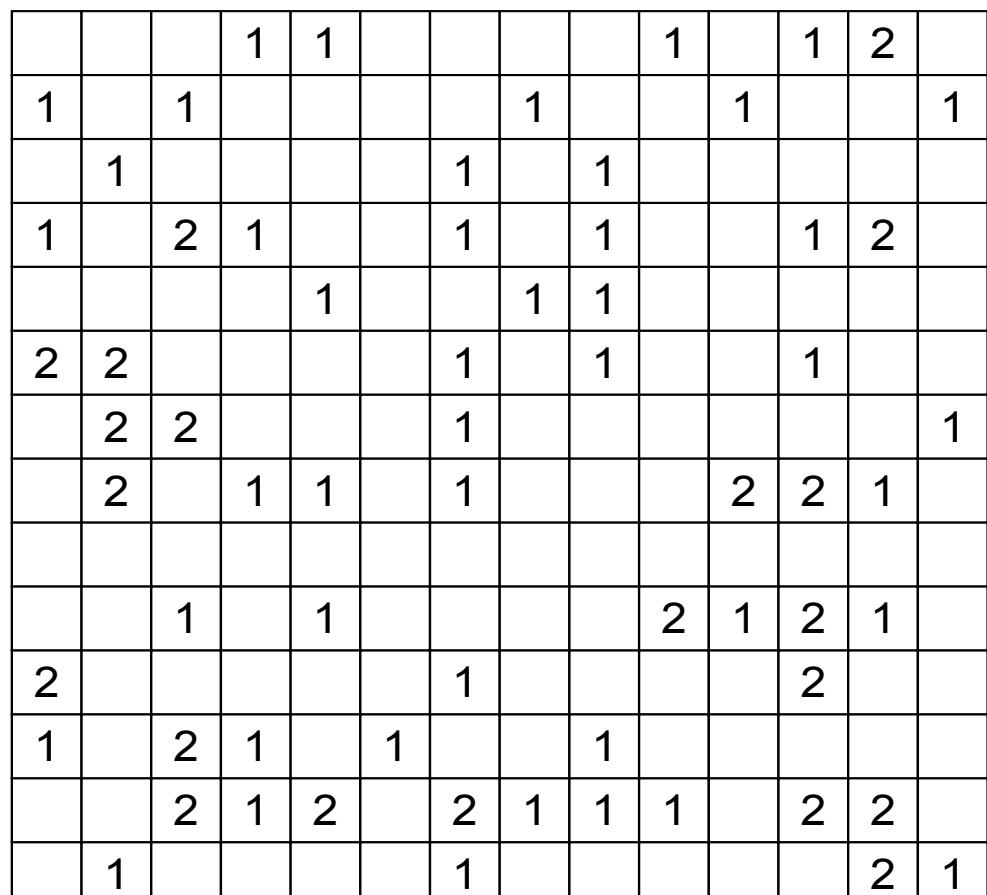
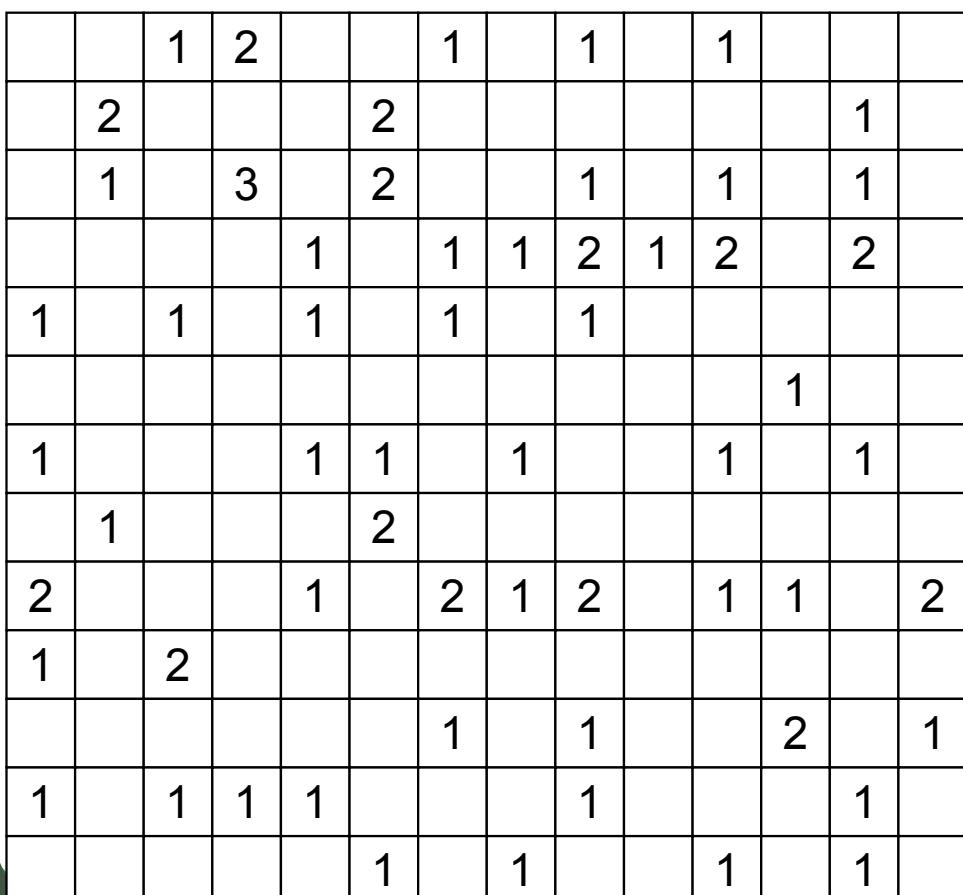
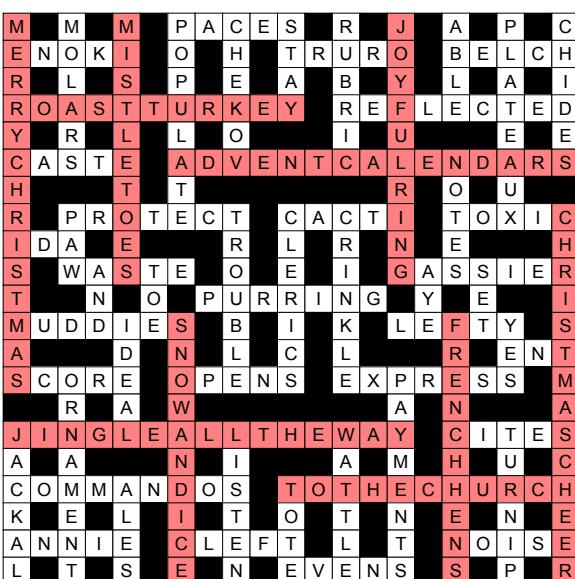
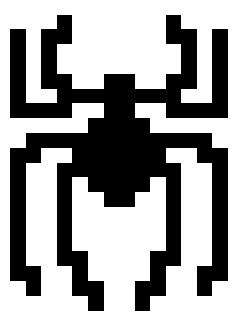
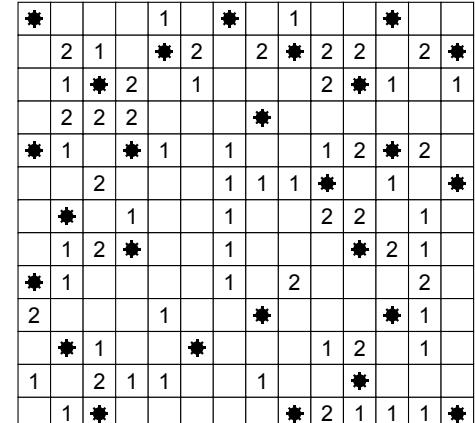
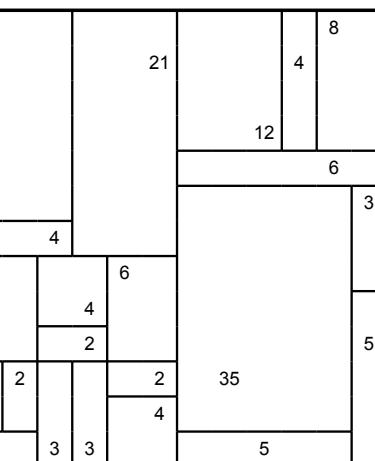
How much? From £19

Reviewed by **Alexander Cohen** Arts Writer

With a deep respect for history woven into the fabric of the production, the revival of Daniele Abbado's 2013 production of Verdi's *Nabucco* is a poignant take on the opera that addresses themes of exile, freedom, and religion.

Set during the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC by the real-life Nebuchadnezzar II, *Nabucco* mixes a destructive family power struggle against the backdrop of the exile of the Jewish people from their homeland. This backdrop that is the most celebrated part of Verdi's opera. Premiering in 1842, the famed "Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate" (referred to as *The Chorus of The Hebrew Slaves*) was recognised by Italians as a call for self-determination at a time when Milan was under Austrian rule and is the most enduring part of the opera. Sung by a large chorus huddled centre stage, their delicate collective vocal control captured both the desperate frenzy and tragic despair of

FRIDAY 14TH JANUARY 2022

Mine...field**PUZZLES****1786 Answers****1787 Answers**

PUZZLES**Easy Sudoku**

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

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

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

Normal Sudoku

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

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

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

Difficult Sudoku

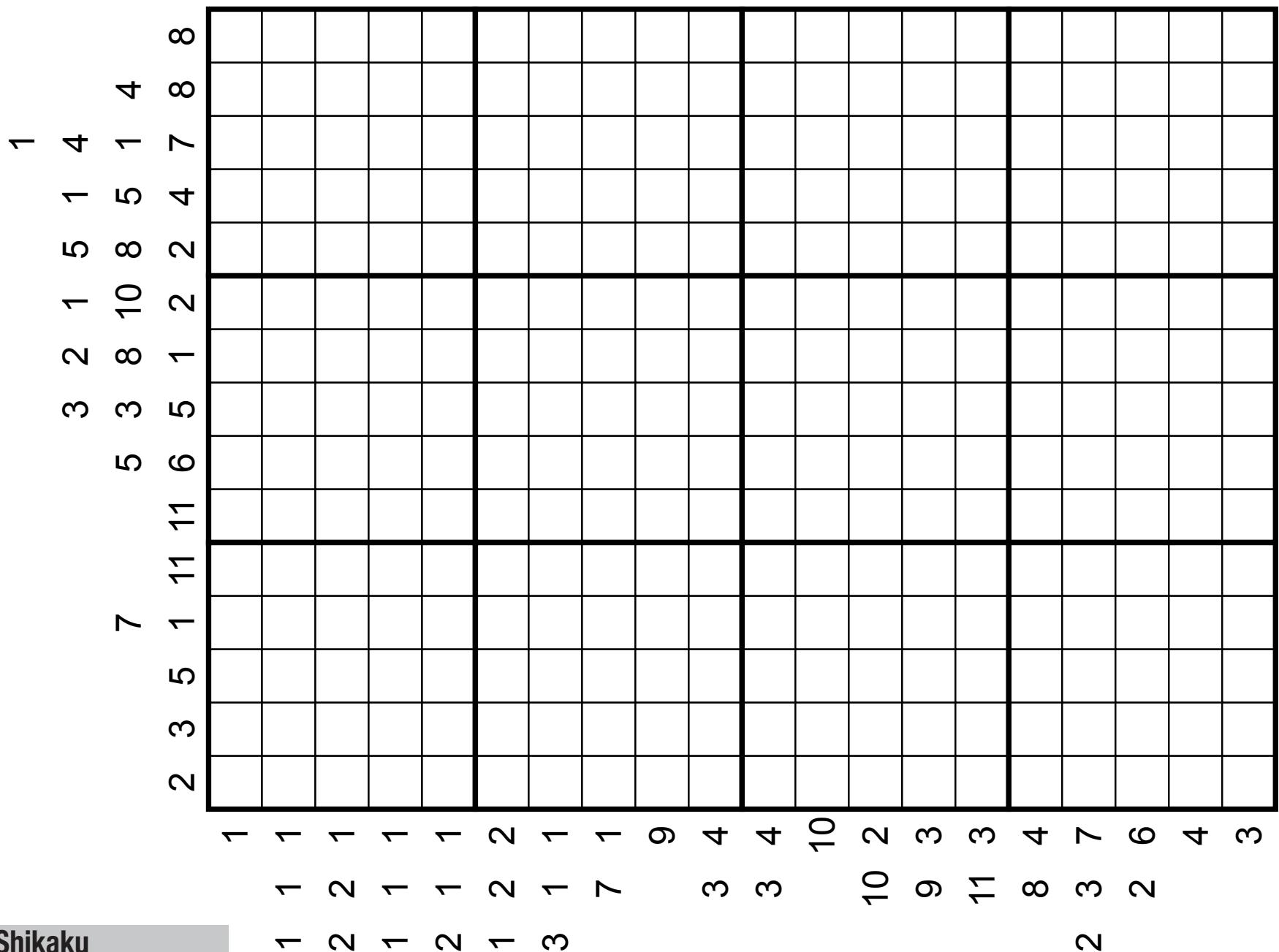
		4			3			9
8	2	1						
		7		1		6		
			7		6			
6				9				
9	5							
4	1		8					
			1	2		5		
2		3		7				

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

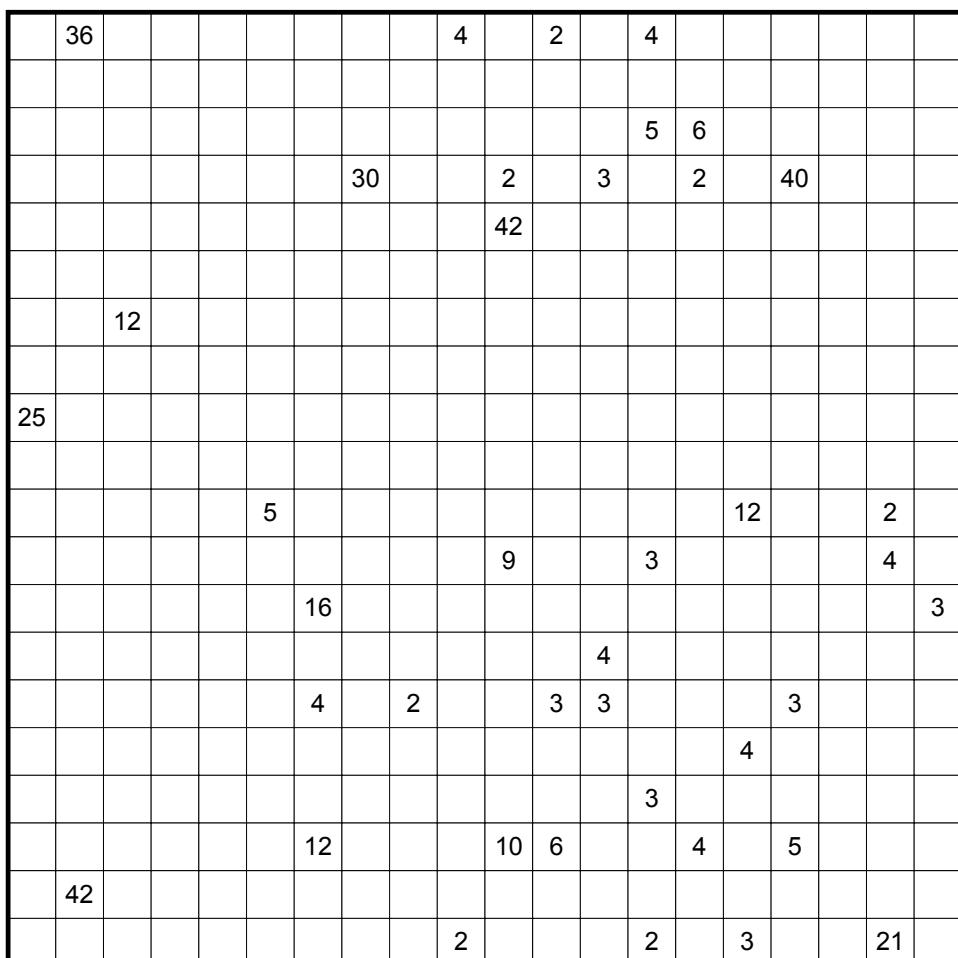
8	3	5		2	9			
			8			5		7
	4			6				
		1				7		
2	5							
			9			4		
4	6			8				
		4	5		1	9	6	

Nonogram

PUZZLES



Shikaku



PUZZLES Notices

Contributions: Nonogram by Mihaly Ormay

Points:
2 per Minesweeper
1 per Easy Sudoku
2 per Normal Sudoku
3 per Difficult Sudoku
2 for Nonogram
1 for Shikaku

FUCWIT

A new term means a new leaderboard:

Here are your new rivals!

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| 1. It's not fat, it's power | 22 |
| 2. AKGroup | 19 |
| 3. Hea-ing | 7 |

You can submit your solutions each week by emailing fsudoku@imperial.ac.uk before 12 noon on the Wednesday after publishing.

THE HEADLINES THIS WEEK...

After a week of “talks” Russia and NATO stop playing footsie and get down to business

Cabinet defends Johnson in secret party row by just saying “we’re behind you”, as there’s actually no way to defend his actions

Prince Andrew’s “I can’t sweat” claim up against its most fierce test yet

“You may end isolation early if you get a negative LFT” and “there are no LFTs left” says government, with a straight face

Michael Gove tells property developers who installed shoddy cladding “we’re coming for you”*

*REAL!



ARIES



TAURUS



GEMINI



CANCER



LEO



VIRGO

This week your bonding time with your significant other goes so well that things get covalent

This week you’re jabbed up with nowhere to go

This week you distribute your spittle in traffic

This week you blatantly cut off a car on your bike and get beeped at, but it’s still them that’s in the wrong because fuck them

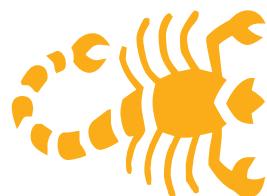
This week the chickens hatch and your counting was, in fact, spot on

This week you struggle to separate fact from addiction



LIBRA

This eek! A mouse



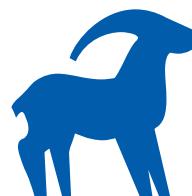
SCORPIO

This week you learn that if you throw it back it is indeed fat enough



SAGITTARIUS

This week you name your vehicle John le Car, as it's always Tinker Trailer Solder Splice when it breaks down



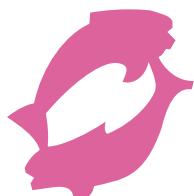
CAPRICORN

This week you take Old el Paso to court over a mouldy tin of beans, as justice delayed is justice refried



AQUARIUS

This week you learn that Roman soldiers couldn't tell the difference between Attila and his soldiers. I guess it takes Hun to know Hun



PISCES

This week you ARE that bitch

BORIS' CRACKING JOB CONTINUES

Boris Johnson's latest masterstrokes have earned him the title "best bloke of all time" by every magazine that runs such a competition. Goal after goal has led him to being the most well received Prime Minister of all time, with a 99% approval rating country wide, marred only by Rishi and Truss secretly campaigning against him.

"Things really went from strength to strength with the latest news of the lockdown party" said Sue from Doncaster. "In 2019 I voted for Boris because he's a man of the people and not like the rest of that rotten bunch. The party revelations confirmed what I already thought. He's just like one of us! I had a secret garden party that weekend too!".

"The ministerial code is cringe anyway" commented Devon from, um, Devon.

"No, I didn't want Brexit and still don't" sighed Anton from Milton Keynes, "but he's such a goofy

fella!". Anton then went on to attempt an impression of the PM so poor that we haven't even bothered trying to recreate it in text.

"He just like me fr" Tweeted Humphrey Macintosh Yaxley of Surrey.

"I'm just sick of these young, woke snowflake twats engaging in culture wars, which to be clear I never do" said Darren in Harrogate. "I want to rise above the left-right divide, but the liberal dick holes keep pulling down the statues most important to me".

"I myself am very impartial" said Arnold Jacobs, Professor of Politics at UCL. "I've spent my life studying politics for what it is and keeping away from partisanship and the left and right of the spectrum. Since Boris has basically never stuck to anything he's ever said and clearly has no political morals, he is the perfect candidate for me to get behind".



EASY SOLUTION TO THE PESKY SLEEP PROBLEM WHEN REVISING FOR EXAMS

The new brain add-on from PorpoiseLabs Inc lets you sleep each half of your brain separately, meaning you never need to stop learning the stuff you'll never use again after two weeks' time.

Not yet tested on humans

Side effects may (we have no idea) include:
Mood swings
Paralysis of half the body
Insatiable urge for tuna

HALF PRICE!!! 1/2

N95 MASK WITH A GAG BALL ATTACHED TO THE INSIDE

Now you can keep it kinky even with Plan B on the go.

FREE TATTOO - CALL 0207 594 8072

First things first, I'm not a tattoo artist, but I need to practice for the Nintendo Cosplay 18+ club I've joined.
 The tattoo WILL be Mario trying to stuff Yoshi into Koopa Trooper's shell whilst on Rainbow Road. You CANNOT ask why. This is NON-NEGOTIABLE.
 Also I accept no responsibility if it gets infected or whatever I'm not a doctor either.
 I look forward to your call.

Your Union



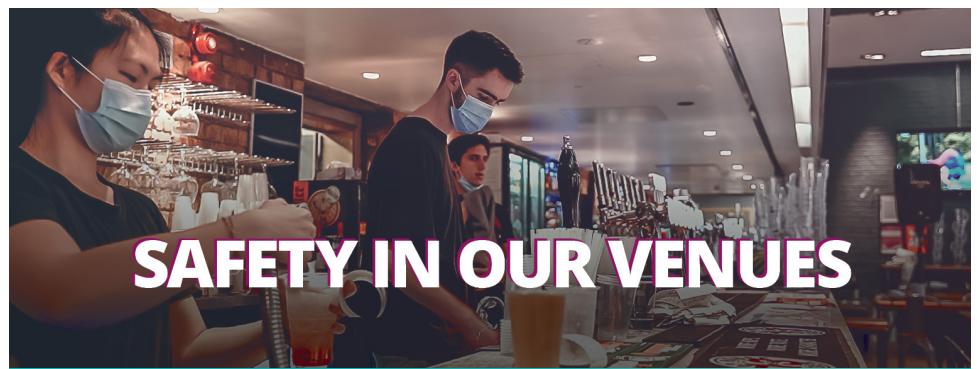
The Leadership Elections 2022 logo is in the top left corner. The main text 'Could you be a leader?' is in bold white. Below it, 'Nominations open 7 February 2022' is in smaller white text. To the right is a portrait of a young woman wearing a hijab.

Your career starts here

The Leadership Elections are almost upon us, where we will elect the next generation of student leaders. We have a variety of roles to go for, from one of the five full-time Presidents, to one of the many part-time roles. Regardless of the role you choose to go for, holding such a position can bring about many positive changes, both at the Union, at College level and for yourself. Here are some reasons why you should put yourself forward. You will:

- have the ability to drive the change you want to see
- learn a lot from the election alone
- boost your confidence and your employability
- acquire a diverse range of skills
- build up your network at Imperial and all over the country

Nominations open 7 February 2022 - keep an eye on our socials, newsletter and website for updates!



SAFETY IN OUR VENUES

Our venues have re-opened (yay!) but we've put some additional measures in place to keep everyone safe!

We want you to have fun, socialise, and relax alongside your studies, but we want to make sure our spaces are as safe as possible. Below are the changes we are putting in place this January in our venues:

- All our venues will operate as table service only. Please order via the app.
- We ask that you stay seated while you are inside – we will still have music and a fun atmosphere, but no dancing, for now!
- Events and bookings will be limited to those that work with table service .
- Activity bookings for Union Bar and Metric (or other spaces) will be limited to match the seated capacity of these spaces
- Beit Quad will have gazebos for shelter if you'd prefer to socialise outside – but do remember to wrap up warm! There will be blankets available to buy from our bars via the app, at cost price of £2.25. Due to the difficulty of washing blankets between uses we are unable to provide them on a temporary basis (but please bring them back next time to use again!).
- Our shops on Sherfield Walkway will be open, please wear a face covering when inside.
- When you are moving around indoors of any Union (and College) spaces, including to go to the toilets, please do wear your face covering and use our hand sanitising stations.

Please continue to be respectful and considerate of others in our spaces. As always if you are feeling unwell, including having symptoms that are like a common cold, please stay at home and take a test.



The image features the Imperial College London crest in the top left. The word 'shop' is in the top right. Below it, the text 'Official Imperial College London Clothing' is in bold white, followed by a 'SHOP NOW' button. In the center, there are two young adults, a man and a woman, smiling. The woman is wearing a dark blue hoodie with the Imperial crest on the chest. The man is wearing a light grey hoodie with the same crest on the chest. At the bottom, the website 'imperialshop.co.uk' is in bold white.

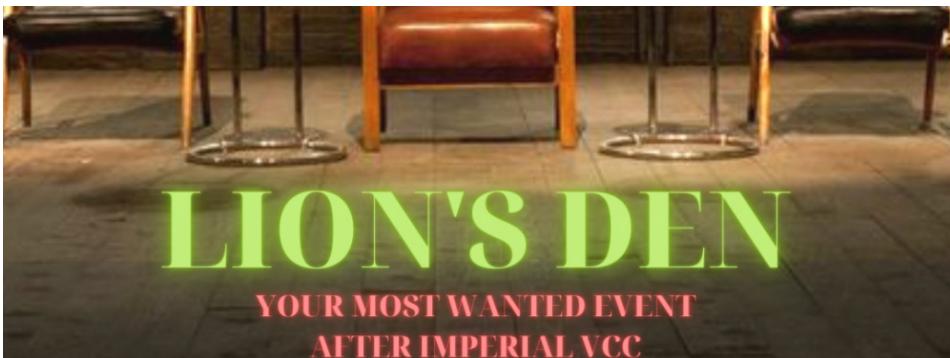


HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

Wednesday 19 JANUARY 2022 | 13:30 | Zoom

In light of Holocaust Memorial later this month (27th January), Dr Martin Stern (MBE), a Holocaust survivor will be addressing the college we are privileged to have Dr Martin Stern MBE address Imperial. Martin will share his experiences surviving the holocaust, and rebuilding afterwards. There will also be a Q&A session.

imperialcollegeunion.org/whats-on/event/10438

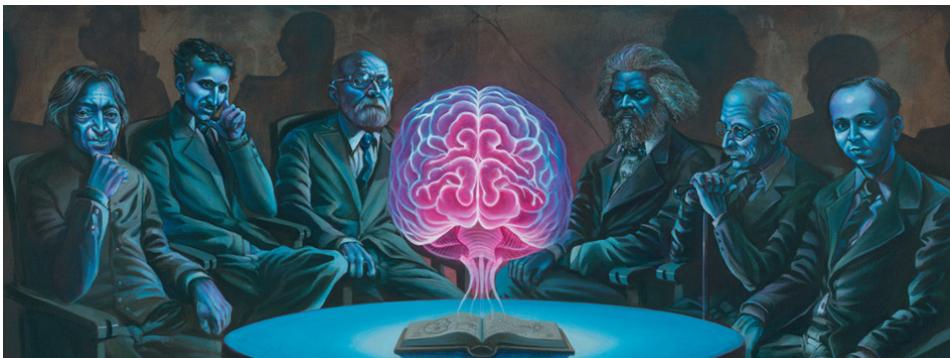


CEC X SIRB LION'S DEN PITCH SERIES

Thursday 20 JANUARY 2022 | 18:00 | Online

Do you have a business idea or are interested in starting your own business? Are you looking to brush up your pitching skills? If yes, this pitching series is for you! This multi-part series is the perfect opportunity for you to unleash your entrepreneurial spirit, test your idea, and develop skills as a global change maker.

imperialcollegeunion.org/whats-on/event/10431



MEETING OF THE MINDS

Saturday 29 JANUARY 2022 | 08:30 | SAF

More details to follow.

imperialcollegeunion.org/whats-on/event/10398



ICMSU ARTS DINNER 2022

Thursday 10 FEBRUARY 2022 | 19:00 | Brasserie Blanc Fulham

Celebrating the best in ICMSU Arts of the past year! Join your society and enjoy this 3-course black tie dinner. Plus there'll be awards given for members of Dance, Drama, Light Opera and Music!

imperialcollegeunion.org/whats-on/event/10439

More info & events: imperialcollegeunion.org/whatson

MUSIC

EP OF THE WEEK

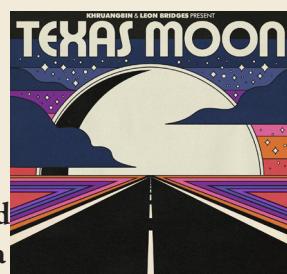
GABRIELS' DECEMBER EP "BLOODLINE" IS MORE THAN ITS R&B/ SOUL LABEL. YES, JACOB LUSK HAS A SOULFUL VOICE, BUT IT TRANSFORMS INTO SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WHEN BACKDROPPED WITH A STRING INSTRUMENTAL, DOUBLE BASS, AND THE FAR LEFT OF A PIANO. ITS DEPTH ISN'T CHARACTERISED BY HOW LOW HIS VOICE CAN GO, BUT BY HOW EFFORTLESSLY HE INTERWEAVES GOSPEL AND AMERICAN HISTORY IN HIS POWERFUL LYRICS.



Single of the Week

B-Side by Khruangbin & Leon Bridges

As part of their EP, *Texas Moon*, releasing in February, Khruangbin and Leon Bridges released a taster called "B-Side"—a follow-up to their 2020 album, *Texas Sun*. If there's anything to know about Khruangbin, it's that this psychedelic rock trio from Houston has yet to fall short in drawing heavy influences from around the world. "B-Side" features a laid back funk-inspired instrumental with a distant relative of Afro-Caribbean percussion, all brought together by Leon Bridges' muted, yet soulful voice.



TODAY IN MUSIC HISTORY

IT'S 2012 AND LOU REED OF THE VELVET UNDERGROUND REALISED THEY'VE BEEN PLAYED: ANDY WARHOL HAS BEEN LICENSING THE FAMOUS BANANA POP ART TO THIRD PARTIES. MEANWHILE, IN 1999, BRITNEY SPEARS RELEASES HER DEBUT TEEN-POP ALBUM "...BABY ONE MORE TIME", EVENTUALLY BECOMING THE BEST-SELLING DEBUT ALBUM BY A FEMALE ARTIST.



Album Reviews

Bad Sounds Are Back, Baby!

Written by Joe Riordan Music Writer



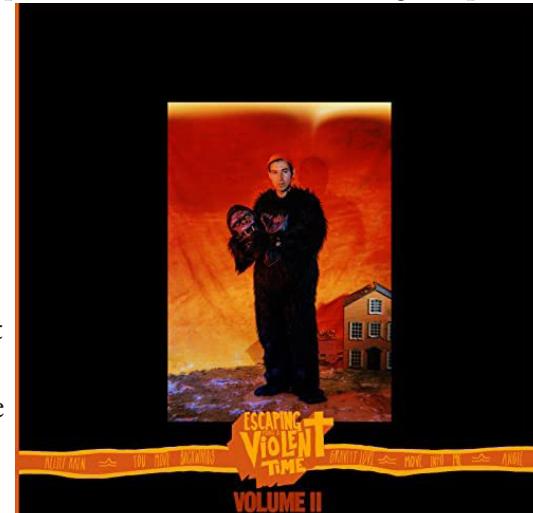
View online here!

Never living up to their name, Bad Sounds can't seem to make a bad sound.

My memories of Bad Sounds are tied with secondary school. The incredibly catchy "Zacharia" would've been the top track on my Spotify Wrapped if I hadn't still been using Apple Music at the time (other streaming services also exist, we aren't in the pocket of big tech). As you can guess, I couldn't wait to see them once I got tickets to their Halloween show in Leeds in 2018. The Bristol group did not disappoint. Two outfit changes later, from Scooby Doo to Spice Girls, we were forced to leave just before the set ended by the gods at TransPennine Express

who do not run a train back north of Leeds later than 10:30 pm. After rushing to the station because we'd stayed for as many songs as possible and saying bye to someone staying over in Leeds, my friend and I went to check the sprawling timetables to find our platform. That was when disaster struck. My eyes scanned the boards over lines of destinations and platforms to find the last train to Northallerton was cancelled. A stressful 3 hours later, we made it home in a taxi, but my memories of Bad Sounds were soured.

Soured, they are no more. Escaping from a Bad Time, Vol. 2 ends the band's 2 year long silence since Volume 1 was released in early 2020. The new 5-song EP is everything that made me initially love the band at secondary: the catchy danceability of the upbeat tracks, paired with new collaborations with other artists like New Zealand duo BROODS and Voice UK winner Ruti. These features add new angles that the Bristol group couldn't do alone. Callum Merrett, one half of the band (the other being his



brother Ewan), said "we always dreamed it would be a collaborative project", and it truly is with Arlo Parks co-writing and producing 'Bluish' with the brothers.

For me, the standout song on the EP is "Angie". Closing the EP in a wonderfully muted, conversational way, the final track embodies the somewhat lonely last two years. The stripped back song for Bad Sounds is still laden with floating synths, beautifully compressed-to-oblivion drums and ethereal vocals mixing to form a ghostly choir at the end of the track.

All these components congregate perfectly, never sounding too busy even on the larger songs, "You Move Backwards" and "Gravity Love". Ruti's vocals enhance the aforementioned "You Move Backwards", bringing the almost-disco backing track into the arena of modern pop.

This genre defiance echoes through Bad Sounds' entire discography. While they're hard to pin down – exploring hip hop, pop, indie, electronica, and soul to name a few – they are always recognisable as Bad Sounds. Their unique sound comes from the merge of the two brothers' favourite styles and is executed with ease.

Although I don't think any of the tracks from Escaping from a Violent Time, Vol. 2 live up to the catchiness of "Zacharia" or "Wages" released back in 2017, the new EP has some standout hits in "Angie" and "You Move Backwards", heralding a new era of Bad Sounds which will hopefully be accompanied by some live shows to help me forget my Halloween of 2018 fiasco.

Felix Recommends

I just think it's neat: *Hex* by Bark Psychosis

Written by Benjamin Bateman Music Writer

A post rock album before post rock was even a thing.

When I started writing articles about music I wanted my "theme" to be albums that moved me or had an effect on me, or stood out for some reason

amongst the rest. *Hex* is interesting because it could have fallen into the background for me, I listened to it once (well, more like a half, but whatever) and kind of

MUSIC

just forgot to go back to it. Luckily enough I did, and man, is *Hex* just a treat to listen to. I've talked about the history behind albums and their influence, but this time I thought I'd take a step back and just say, hey, this is a really nice album.

The bass feels like it takes a lead in the songs on this album a lot of the time. It's like a second melody that accompanies the soft airy singing from vocalist Graham Sutton, or the tinkling on the piano above it, weaving in and out of one another in some kind of dance. In "*A Street Scene*" the soft reverberating guitar provides a

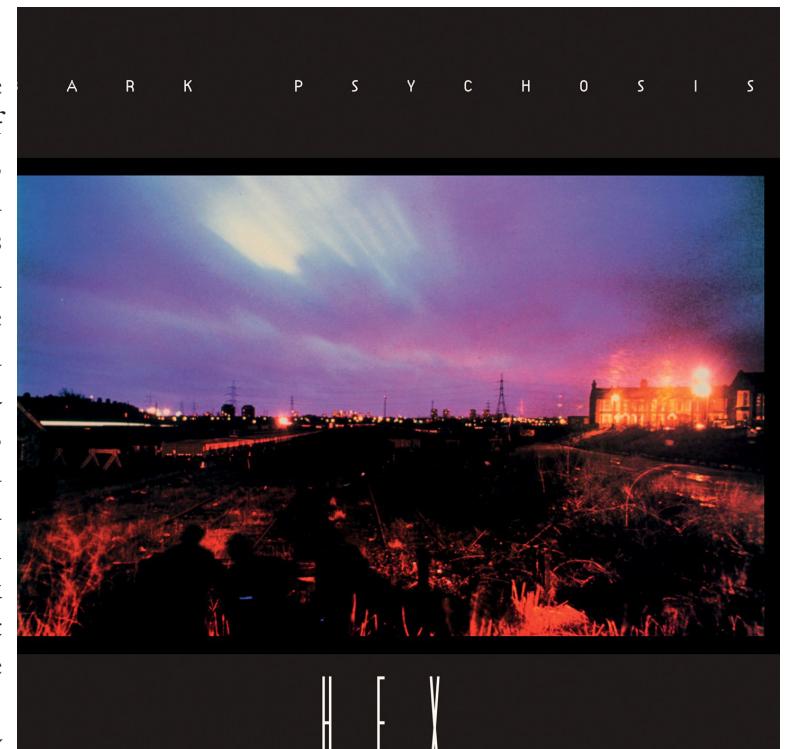
“
I THOUGHT
I'D TAKE A
STEP BACK
AND JUST
SAY, HEY,
THIS IS A
REALLY NICE
ALBUM.

drone for the rest of the track to build around. The chorus is vibrantly different from the down-low and subtle verses, drums loud and synths buzzing either side of your head. Sutton's lyrics remind me somewhat of the more abstract and poetic musings of Mark Hollis on the later Talk Talk records.

The next track,
"Absent Friend" builds

around the bass and lead guitar riff, the whole thing feeling sort of jazzy within the context of a rock song. Where it starts off quite traditional, as the track progresses it feels more airy and ethereal as the bass disappears, leaving synths and piano to play over and around the lead guitar. "*Big Shot*" meanwhile does away with the more traditional sound that has stuck around so far, feeling distinctly alien in the context of a rock song. The drone here is played on the bass, and it's almost hypnotic with the drums around it. The rest of the cacophony of synths and percussion weaves around it, detached from the order of the bass and rhythm. The break midway through is a shock after this, in the best kind of way, and leads eventually back to where the song started.

Where this album really shines is the final track, though. “*Pendulum Man*” feels like the natural precursor to post-rock that this album is nowadays heralded as. There aren’t any lyrics and the soundscapes take lead position here. Starting off with a simple two-note guitar riff that’s soon joined with an e-piano and a synth, it evolves and changes through the song. It’s the definition of a slow burn track, that shifts around and plays experimentally with the usual structure of modern



music. The soundscapes halfway through remind me of some from *Laughing Stock*, my favourite Talk Talk album, with shimmering synths and an organ taking centre stage. Sutton's guitar and Daniel Gish's keys lead the song out quietly and almost tentatively.

Hex is definitely one of those albums I can wholeheartedly say is a hidden gem, an unlikely masterpiece that I go back to all too often to just lose myself in. It's just really, really good.

A New Way to Discover Music: Every Noise at Once

Written by **Tara Pal Chaudhuri** Music Editor

Imagine a website which allows you to sample every genre imaginable. Exactly.

cally arranges all the music on Spotify into this enormous map. You can sample the sound of each genre you see by clicking on the name.

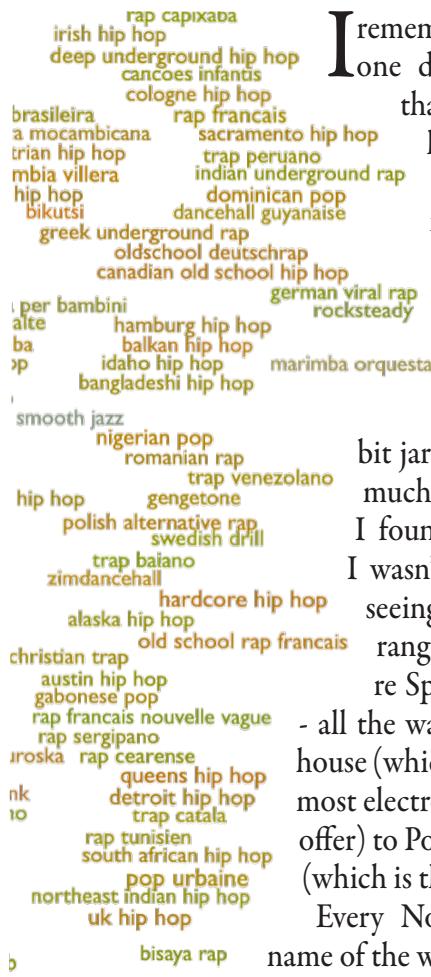
It doesn't stop here. Clicking on the genre directs you to a separate page dedicated to that genre. This genre map lists the artists on Spotify who contribute to this genre – again arranged according to the sound of their music. The higher up a name/genre is, the more electronic or mechanical the sound is. Down corresponds to organic-sounding music, left is atmospheric and right is bouncier.

Clicking on the artists' names allows you to sample their music and even gain access to playlist of their music.

What about when you don't know the genre of your favourite artist? How do you find similar sounding music or artists? A small search bar on the top right of the home page allows you to type in the name of your artist, returning the genres their music is categorised under. For instance, if you type in "The Strokes", the website will return 'garage rock', 'modern rock', and 'permanent wave'. Clicking on 'permanent wave' would reveal the other names (big and small – the size of the artist's name on the website correlates with their popularity) who play this genre of music. Looks like there's

band called "Dinosaur Jr." who I want to check out.

Why should you give this a go? Aside from the obvious, that is discovering new music, the website reminds you just how large the world of music is. Take a look at the screenshots of the website flanking this article and ask yourself exactly how many you'd ever given a thought to, forget heard about. There. That's exactly why.



Books

Book Review

The Humour Code

Wangxing Guo Staff Writer

Section Editor's Note: We could all use a bit of humour to relieve us of the January back-to-uni blues. One of our writers reviews 'The Humour Code' - have a read of the book for a healthy dose of fun, and you might just learn something new about laughter along the way!

A curious book in which the authors, Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, unravel the mechanisms behind humour. Through travelling to different places around the world, each more unusual than the previous one, including Los Angeles, Japan, and the Amazon, they look at humour across the globe. Their objective: to investigate different cultures' approach to humour while gaining a greater understanding of humour itself. The format is interesting because it combines a research journal with a narrative tone.

A key concept of this book is the theory of benign violation. This defends the notion that humour comes from making something wrong seem inoffensive or acceptable. The thing that is wrong is usually uncommon or far-fetched, so people cannot sense any sort of immediate danger. Timing is essential, as a joke about controversial or serious issues, regardless of how inane or witty it is, can harm people's sensitivities and become massive social conflicts. This can be illustrated with jokes about the 2001 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers.

The correct approach to make fun of it would be to allow time for the psychological wounds to heal among the population, and then elaborating jokes that remark on the unfairness of the tragedy or mocking the terrorists, without ever mentioning the victims.

Humour does not necessarily mean being funny. An intelligent association of two abstract or apparently unconnected elements can produce the same effect in a viewer as random eccentric videos of people stumbling or falling over. We find something amusing

mainly due to confrontations between reality and fantasy, correctness and perversion. Humans love oxymorons, and the more unexpected the connections, the funnier they turn out.

Another common misconception is that laughter is synonymous with humour. It is undeniable that humour often involves the trivialisation of reality. Therefore, although it can easily capture people's attention, humour should not be used in "serious" matters, such as medicines for cancer treatment or gender-equality campaigns because it distorts the meaning into something to poke fun at. However, laughter is more involuntary because it is physiologically controlled. The most immediate example that springs to mind is one's reaction to being tickled, but in the book, the authors describe a more extreme case of laughter, in which entire populations start chuckling uncontrollably for no apparent reason. In the past, this was associated with witches and

the Devil, but we currently know this phenomenon as 'collective hysteria'. The example in The Humour Code focuses particularly on the Tanganyika laughing disease of 1962. The "patient zero" was a female student in a religious school who mysteriously began laughing in the middle of a class. The teacher took her out of the class until she could pull herself together, but the "ailment" constantly reappeared, and eventually spread to other students. Therefore, the school decided to close its doors, but this only resulted in infecting the families of the students, affecting thousands of people. This so-called "epidemic" sent many people to

Edited by: ZANNA BUCKLAND

The Humor Code



A GLOBAL SEARCH FOR WHAT
MAKES THINGS FUNNY

Peter McGraw and Joel Warner

hospital and caused many schools and businesses to shut down. What was the root cause of all this? Well, the female student was under constant pressure and stress due to living and studying in a place with barely any contact with the outside world. In such an oppressive environment, the body needs to find a way to relieve itself, and laughing is effective because it promotes our brains to secrete dopamine, the hormone of happiness. Therefore, laughing can be a sign that a situation is not okay; a despairing call for help.

There are many other interesting concepts that the authors cover, such as the study of humour to learn about a particular culture, or the connection between humour and natural selection. Overall, I would consider this a pleasant read, with a lot of absurd anecdotes, like having a clown company in the middle of the Amazon, and, of course, lots of humour!

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ANOTHER COMMON MISCONCEPTION IS THAT LAUGHTER IS SYNONYMOUS WITH HUMOUR

FOOD

Opinion

Plant-Based Propaganda



Written by **Pete Knapp** Staff Writer

I have been struck by the short queues at plant-based food stalls compared with the long, snaking lines for the fish, meat and dairy options. Plant-based food consumes much less of the planet's resources and seems to have countless other benefits. So, what's the beef with plant-based food?

Over the past two years I have learnt about the vast and intricate network of factors that contribute to our collapsing world. It still amazes me that the milk from a latte makes it ten times worse for the climate than a cup of black coffee. Joining the dots between diets and pandemics is one of the reasons why I chose to change what I eat. I knew the carbon emissions from meat were high, but learning about the following issues with meat and dairy really affected me.

Pandemics

There are two ways for pandemics to come from livestock farming: (i) antibiotic resistance; and (ii) mutated viral transmission between species.

Globally, 73% of medically important antibiotics are fed to animals and this gives more opportunity for bacteria to adapt, dodge antibiotic protection, and create another pandemic. By 2050, drug-resistant microbes will lead to ten million deaths every year if the problem is not solved. For context, the 2020 death toll from Covid-19 was over around 3 million. Limiting meat intake worldwide to 40 g/day could reduce global consumption of antimicrobials by livestock by 66% - a huge reduction - and consuming a plant-based diet reduces this to zero.

The cramped conditions and cross-over with wildlife from industrial farming and wildlife farming is also giving disease more opportunity to adapt to jump across species. When wildlife interacts with farmed animals, such as migrating birds flying into chicken sheds, there are many opportunities for a virus to mutate and jump between species. There are lots of chickens - they make up 71% of all bird biomass on Earth - so bird flu viruses are waiting in the wings.

Land use

While meat and dairy provide just 18% of calories globally, they use the vast majority – 83% – of farmland. A typical UK meat and dairy consumer requires 10,000 m² of land (1.5 football pitches) per year, and a plant-based diet can reduce this to 2000 m² (3 penalty boxes). A plant-based diet would take pressure off tearing down the world's tropical forests and bring our planet's ecology back towards a healthy equilibrium.

Pesticides

80% of the world's soya crop is fed to livestock, and 51% of soya crops are sprayed with 'highly hazardous pesticides' such as glyphosate. Cocktails of pesticides have been shown to kill 96% of exposed pollinators, which is a huge problem. Losing pollinators would be devastating to food production, and already we see people having to pollinate some crops by hand because of the decimation of insects. We would consume around thirty times more crops through a cow than if we ate the crops directly, and this vast amount of crops needed to feed animals requires high yields and therefore high pesticide use. Plant-based diets reduce the need for such a high yield, and therefore can be grown more organically. By eating organic, locally grown plant-based foods, this environmental and ecological damage is reduced.

Eutrophication

A green ooze of algae is produced when nitrogen and phosphorus from cattle farm run-off and chicken manure flow into rivers and coastlines, which starve the water of oxygen and kill other life. A plant-based diet can reduce this by 49%. To achieve the high yields needed to feed livestock, fertilisers are used excessively. These also contribute to eutrophication.

Water and Methane

A pint of milk requires around 350 litres of water (over a bathtub). Water is a resource that will run out if we extract it from the ground faster than it can be replaced and this is a significant issue in water-stressed regions. As the globe heats up, glaciers shrink and rainfall patterns change, meaning fresh water becomes scarce. Reducing water consumption is important. A diet with a 50% reduction in animal products would reduce total water use by 37%. Atmospheric methane reached a record high in Sept 2021 at 1900 ppb, compared to 1638 ppb (1983) and 722 ppb (1750), where 30% of current anthropogenic methane is from livestock. Water is a significant issue in growing certain nuts, too (almonds require around 3 gallons of water per nut), and they are typically grown in areas where water is scarce. Rice requires a lot of water from typically water-stressed regions, and it produces a lot more methane than, say, UK-grown potatoes. But let's keep this in perspective: cattle produces 100kg of CO₂e per kg, whereas rice produces 4.5kg. Californian cattle requires 1.5 times more water than Californian almonds. For this reason, I wouldn't replace my cow's milk with almond milk, but as oats can grow in the UK and use 13 times less water than cow's milk.

Stone-cold statistics like these might convince some...

Continued on next page...

Image credits: Generated by Matej Genci (4th Year DoComputing)

Inspired by graphic "Earth's Land Animals by Weight" on xkcd.com

EARTH'S LAND MAMMALS

BY WEIGHT

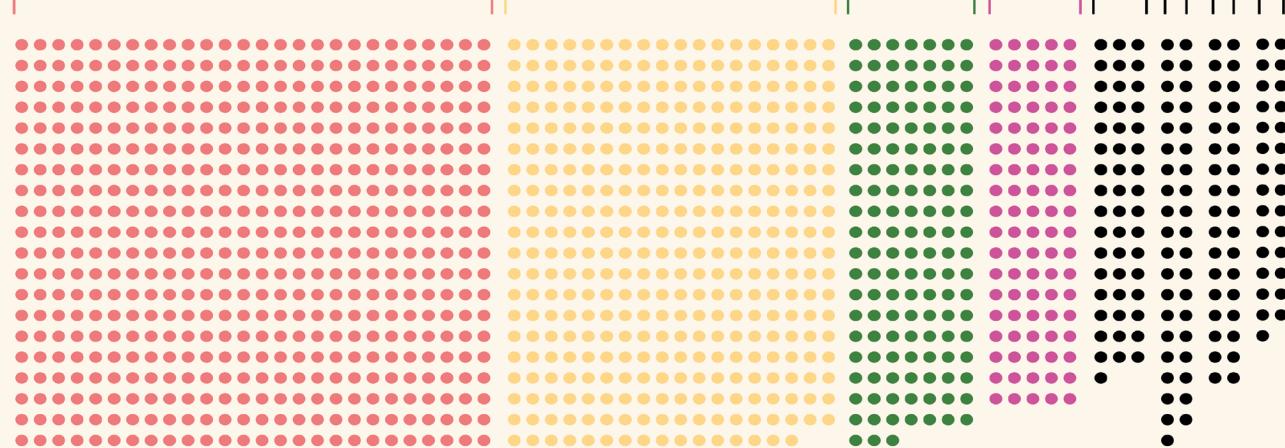
• each equals one million tons



520 CATTLE



358 HUMANS



Livestock more than outnumber humans 2 to 1. Could you win in a fight against two sheep?

FOOD

Continued from previous page...

people, but not everyone. Let's look at some common concerns about adopting a plant-based diet.

Health

We were taught food pyramids or wheels at school, where meat and dairy are 'required' to be healthy. But now numerous studies have shown that plant-based diets provide all the nutrients required for a healthy diet. It does require some more thought at first, as simply cutting out meat and dairy will leave you lacking certain things. Vitamins, such as B12, are a common supplement in a plant-based diet; I get my B12 from fortified oat milk and Marmite. All the proteins you can get from beans, pulses, lentils, nuts, or legumes, can have a carbon footprint 50 times lower than from a beef burger. These foods contain plenty of iron too, as does spinach and broccoli, which contain non-heme iron. (90%

of our body's iron stores consists of non-heme iron.) The WHO have classified processed meats as Class 1 carcinogens, the same group as smoking, contributing to bowel and stomach cancers. Overconsumption of antibiotics has led to resistance bacteria such as MRSA.

More expensive

It can be true that organically grown plant-based foods are more expensive than cheap meats. But this is partly due to the UK government allowing meat and dairy to be sold at 0% VAT. Plant-based foods are sold with VAT, making them 20% more expensive. Meat and dairy are therefore artificially cheap. Billions of pounds of public money is spent to subsidise meat and dairy, when it could be spent to make organic plant-based foods cheaper instead. Let's campaign for this.

Farmers would lose their jobs

There are more than 11,000 dairy farmers and 23,600 beef and lamb producers in the UK. Reducing demand for meat and dairy would put these farmers out of business, surely? Not if they are offered grants from the government to change their farms into more sustainable and environmentally friendly ecosystems. A UK scheme is currently in place, but it currently pays the largest landowners disproportionately highly, meaning smaller farmers don't benefit enough to rewild their land. A fairer scheme would be expensive, but a lot cheaper than continually and unsustainably repairing the country from the horrors of climate change and ecological collapse. Farmers need to be paid fairly to allow nature to flourish and to reduce their emissions.

Freedom of choice

Everyone wants to make their own choices. This is what makes us human and what makes us happy. The last thing people want is to be told what they can eat. I made the choice to stop eating meat and dairy after I learnt about the disastrous effects it has on our crumbling environment and the inhumane conditions that animals suffer. It was not an easy decision to watch footage of the inside of abattoirs or dairy farms, but it was all a part of my education. I was still free to make my choice, but my choice changed when I learnt more about the topic.

Meat and daily taste nice

I love the taste of bacon, burgers, milkshakes, omelettes, and steaks. But knowing the true cost of these foods was important to me in making my decision on whether I ate them or not. I also found that I could cook 'tastier' food with spices and techniques that I had never learnt before. Online videos have helped me to learn a new skill. I love cooking now. My parents bought me a plant-based cookery course for Christmas!

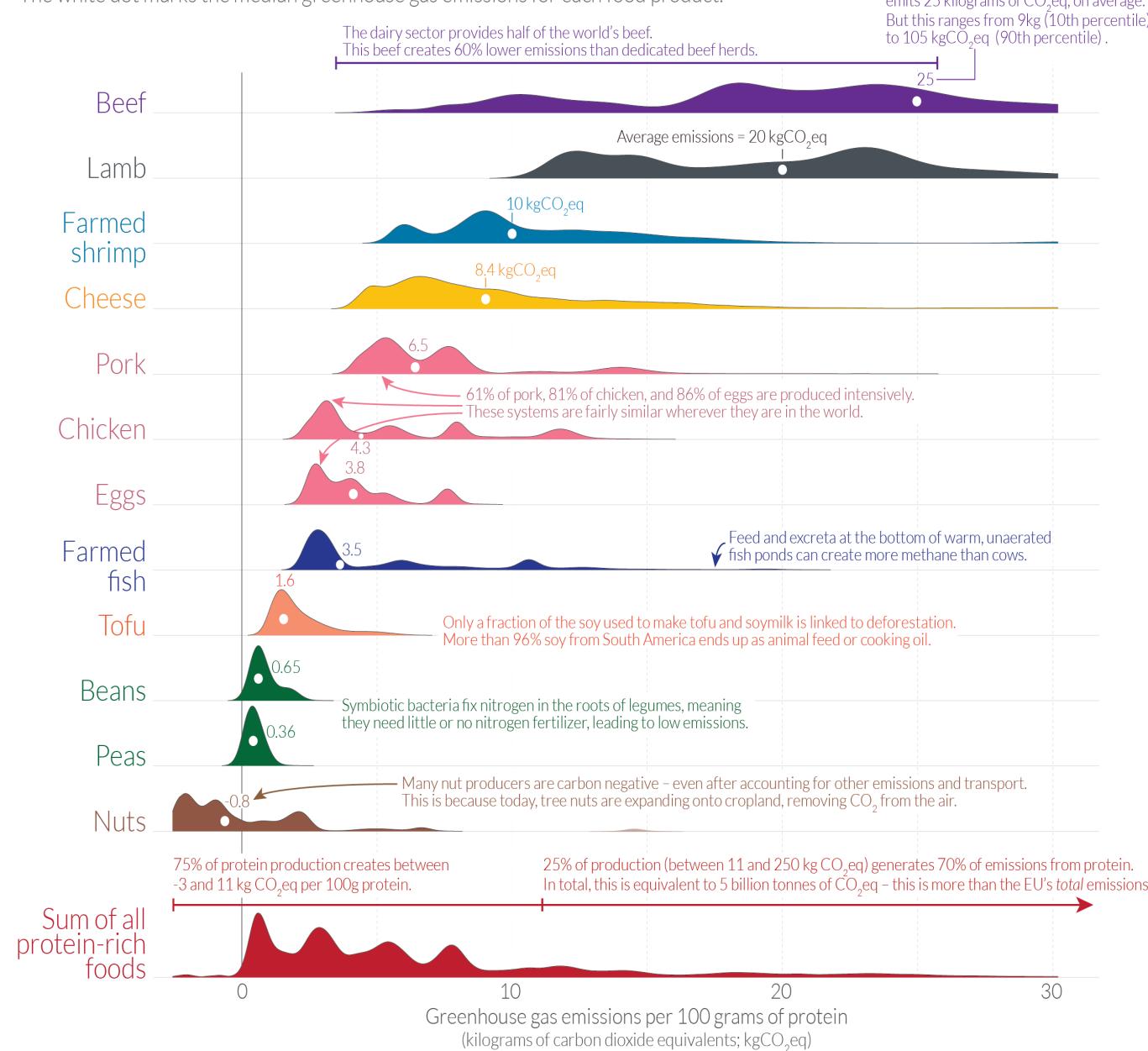
Switching to a fully plant-based diet could reduce food's global impacts by:

- 76% for land use
- 49% for greenhouse gas emissions
- 50% for acidification
- 49% for eutrophication
- 19% for scarcity-weighted freshwater withdrawals

How does the carbon footprint of protein-rich foods compare?

Greenhouse gas emissions from protein-rich foods are shown per 100 grams of protein across a global sample of 38,700 commercially viable farms in 119 countries.

The height of the curve represents the amount of production globally with that specific footprint. The white dot marks the median greenhouse gas emissions for each food product.



Overall, I wanted to contribute this article to share the issues around meat and dairy that made an enormous impact on me. Adopting a plant-based diet has made me happier and healthier, and it's one of the most impactful actions I have been able to take in tackling the climate and ecological emergency. Today, the average UK citizen eats 20% less meat than in 2008, and this is an encouraging trajectory. My parents said after their first plant-based Christmas 'this food tastes so good that I don't see the point of eating meat anymore'. It has been a positive journey for all of us.

COMMENT

Huxley's apology

► *A Temple of Science*

Farid Kaveh

Comment Contributor



“In the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour there used to be four agate columns. When the Cathedral was blown up in Stalin’s time, these were saved: first they were brought to the Donskoy monastery and then to the Moscow State University. While restoring the Cathedral the columns were searched for, but in vain. In the end a journalist decided to take photos of all columns in the University. One evening, while doing this, an office-cleaner told him that these four are in Rector’s office. And indeed they had been left - the University is the Temple of Science.”

Perhaps a better title for Thomas Huxley's 'Emancipation: Black & White' would have been 'Emancipation: Man & Woman'. Barring the opening few paragraphs, the essay concerns the inequality between men and women in education and their asymmetric roles in society. Huxley believed that, allowing even for the most common reasons male chauvinists gave for excluding the opposite sex from this or that arena, reasons which he himself held in low regard, women's oppression was only injustice and their emancipation would bring only good to humanity.

Huxley wrote his essay shortly after the conclusion of the American Civil War had brought the institution of Southern slavery to an end across the Atlantic. He used the Black slaves' emancipation as an anchor for his message of women's liberation. As an abolitionist, he was heartened by the freedom the former slaves had attained. Yet, it is true that he espoused in this essay a racial hierarchy of intelligence, as alleged by the Imperial College's Historical Group. He did not believe that "The average neg** is the equal, still less the superior, of the average white man ... it is simply incredible that ... he will be able to compete with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival." These sentiments were heavily motivated by the discipline of craniology. The pre-

dictions of craniology have since been discredited and it is no longer seriously practiced. Modern genetics sheds light on the question of race and intelligence which craniology tried and failed to tackle: there is no correlation between the genes that determine a person's racial identifiers, such as skin colour, eye lid shape, etc., and the individual's intelligence. That is to say, that racial equality in the sense of intelligence has been established as a matter of fact.

There has also been another related, but very different, development since Huxley wrote his essay. In his time, an integrated multi-racial society was completely outside the popular imagination, even among most classical progressives (among whom we count Huxley). Today, on the other hand,

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...THERE ARE CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS WHOSE ROLE IS NOT SIMPLY TO MANIFEST THE VALUES OF THAT SOCIETY AT ANY GIVEN TIME, BUT TO PRESERVE AND SEEK UNIVERSAL TRUTHS...

multi-ethnic multi-culturalism is a core tenet of liberal progressivism. As part of this transition, the truth of racial equality has been enshrined in our culture. In this context, racial equality is understood to be self-evident, or in other words, it is understood as a matter of *faith*.

The role of values and faith in human society and culture is not well understood, and what has been said of it we could not hope to summarise here. Suffice it is to say that for one reason or another, faith often plays a role in our societies that fact

could not. In view of this, to embrace equality as a core belief may even be necessary for the cohesion of a multi-ethnic society. But in a liberal democracy, such as ours, there are certain institutions

Photo credits: Wikipedia

whose role is not simply to manifest the values of that society at any given time, but to preserve and seek universal truths that supersede the values of any people anywhere and at any time. These are the liberal institutions, traditionally the universities and colleges.

Indeed, our culture and values are the manifestations of fleeting popular consciousness and our fickle collective memory, and faith and prejudice are two sides of the same coin. The self-evidence of racial equality is simply an expression of our egalitarian prejudice. Granted, when it comes to prejudice one could do worse than egalitarianism, but it is a prejudice nonetheless. There are parts of the world today, among the democratic, lawful places, where racial equality is not any more assumed than any other claim about the natural world. This is not because the people of these places are unenlightened, but because they do not share our egalitarian faith. Yet scientific racial equality is as true in one place as it is in another, and it is as true at one time as it is at another. But inevitably, challenging theories will arise at different places and at different times. In fact, they are budding all around us today.

We must be able to defend the truth against such challengers not merely with righteous proclamations, but with the evidence from which they can be impartially established, else we risk losing ground against false theories whose agents can, at a particular place and time, seem more righteous than ourselves. This, to protect natural, universal truths against unworthy challengers, is the primary task and duty of any body that dares to call itself a liberal institution. This Olympian responsibility cannot be fulfilled if the institution is to allow itself to be swayed by the prejudices that immediately surround it, or even those that occupy its halls. Although any particular prejudice may champion some conclusions that agree with our best theories of the world, it will be useless in defending those conclusions. That is to say, that to be prejudiced is to reason from



Death of Socrates - Jacques-Louis David, 1787

COMMENT

conclusions, while the task of a liberal institution is to reason *to* conclusions.

Moreover, a people's faith and prejudice are not constant but are in fact easily and quickly changed and even manipulated. Our faith is just as likely to change for the worse as it is to change for the better. In recent times we have found false comfort in the now-conventional wisdom that the arc of history bends towards justice. This false hope is another artefact of our biases today. In fact it may be said to be an example of historical survivorship bias. As even the most cursory survey of the arc of history will reveal, it bends whichever way it is forced. Hence, an institution that couples itself with the culture and faith of any people will inevitably find that it is unable to defend this faith against ideological aggressors (regardless of the voracity of the faith), and also that this faith on which it has rested its foundation is not constant, but ever-changing, with little regard for universal truths or facts. Such an institution would be more akin to a local gallery that curates its collection to cater to its audience's idiosyncratic tastes than to a world leading university that seeks to preserve and advance knowledge of scientific truths. Such a body could be

a successful cultural institution, but it could never be a liberal institution.

In the context of the removal of references to Thomas Huxley on the South Kensington campus of Imperial College, London, this has the following consequences: the college must decide whether it considers racial equality to be foremost a matter of fact, or a matter of faith and prejudice. Crucially, one cannot at the same instance consider racial equality both a matter of fact and a matter of faith, since these two starting points so often lead to irreconcilable ends. Considering the case of Huxley and taking view of his abolitionism and his activism in favour of the marginalised in his time, we can say with some conviction that his erroneous ideas about a racial hierarchy of intelligence were not motivated by malice or hatred, but were the genuine result of errors in his understanding of the world. So, if racial equality is a matter of fact, then Huxley deserves no blame for his misconceptions, since they arose not from malice but through false theories of the world, in particular, demonstrably false claims about race. Indeed, to blame Huxley for his views on race would be to condemn Newton for his formulation of absolute space and time. Since

Newton's theory also arose from faults in understanding, leading to demonstrably false predictions. Such renunciation of past scholars would have grave consequences for all academics at the college today. We all investigate the nature of this world, but all our theories of it, in spite of incremental improvements, are ultimately incomplete and mistaken. If this immutable nature of our work, that is, the incompleteness of our theories, is grounds for us to be ostracised, then we cannot safely inquire into the nature of this universe. Therefore, if the college understands racial equality to be a matter of *fact*, but still chooses to disown Huxley's legacy by removing references to him on College grounds, then it must abandon any and all claims to being a liberal institution. In fact, by following this course of action, the college would not only be abandoning its own claims to liberalism, it would be rejecting liberalism altogether.

On the other hand, if the college understands racial equality to be first of all a matter of our egalitarian faith (on campus, in London, in the UK and broadly across the West), then indeed, it may distance itself from the Huxley name while avoiding an outright rejection of

liberalism. Indeed, if racial equality is a matter of faith, then Huxley, as a heretic, deserves no less blame and condemnation than a heretic who might appear on campus today. However, in the process, by tying itself to the popular interpretation of racial equality as a matter of faith, the college will have understood and formulated itself as a cultural institution, so that in future it will no longer have the legitimacy to strive to seek and defend universal truths, and shall instead be confined to the curation of its collection to the tastes of prospective students.

Whether universities around the world formulate the principle of racial equality as a matter of fact or a matter of faith will prove to be a deciding factor for the future of our world. But as far as the future of Imperial College is concerned, the disavowing of Huxley's legacy shall be the unequivocal end of the college as a liberal institution, regardless of this rather technical distinction. Since it will henceforth resemble a Sunday school far more than any liberal body, it may be best if the college no longer characterised itself as a 'college' or a 'university'. Afterall, honesty is a cornerstone of any faith.

FAILURE is much better than SUCCESS

► *Success is a mirage, behind it there is only ego and conformity.*

Wang Guo
Comment Writer



In the 20th century, when the ideas of purity and perfection were at their peak, failure was extremely frowned upon because people associated it with imperfection, and defective products should be discarded. Instead, our grandparents admired the successful man, flawless in whatever they do in life, with money, health, and sex appeal. This was the model to follow but this was mostly out of reach for most people, which derived into a futile frustration among the population as they appeared to be not good enough - worthless individu-

als in a society that demands greatness. However, the ideal was unrealistic and even the people who seemed to achieve it were not at 100% compliance with this model of greatness. Instead, what they did superbly was save their appearances. They could 'buy' evidence of skills and achievements. Need to show you are smarter than other people? Do not worry, if you donate a building to X university (like Harvard, ehem), you can get in without satisfying the entry requirements. There are many news articles about nepotism and biased admissions at Harvard online. Need to show your kindness? Fund a charity with the spare millions of pounds in your pockets. Instagram, or any other type of social me-

Photo credits: Brett Jordan on Unsplash



dia, was not the catalyst for the growing number of people boasting about the pretty side of their life to others while hiding all the manure under the carpet, this behaviour existed way before its invention. Everyone has their defects because certain external factors influence our life such as genetics or tragic accidents. When people realised that by sharing a misleadingly 'perfect' lifestyle they were advocating a practically unachievable model, they decided to change the status quo to a friendlier one which is the one we have currently. Now, failing is fine, the world is cruel and just trying your best is good enough. Everyone should applaud you for your efforts and the ones that criticise the causes of your failure are savages that do not know how to behave in this society.

Success at an early stage is not always a good sign. It could mean that the activity engaged in is easy, not requiring high expertise or a lot of effort, so it is not valuable because anyone else could do it. A clear example of this is video games, one of their main appealing traits is the ease to gain recognition and instant gratification of doing something well. Thus emitting a torrent of endorphins that hijack our brain. The fact that it is so easy to feel successful while playing video games can increase the risk of neglecting reality in favour of the virtual world because true success requires time and work. Additionally, there is no guarantee of success in the real world, video games are designed to instill the feeling of uniqueness and geniality, whereas in the real world they are mostly average because they are basically wasting their time in something unreal. This mechanism of video games to create people addicted to non-real but gratifying success is unfortunately widespread in our society. It can be seen in football spectatorship or social media. These effortless activities give us a dose of dopamine that is enough to feel good, but not enough to satisfy us totally, so we always go back to the source of the problem believing it is the solution. Therefore, early success might be a synonym of the instant gratification trap.

However, what if the activity is actually something difficult and valuable? Then, the more plausible explanation for the initial success would be a natural talent, which is, in my opinion, a double-edged sword. Of course, natural talent increases the learning progression and the success rate, but it could para-

doxically do the contrary. When talented people find out they are continually succeeding, two tendencies are usually developed. First, the assumption of being the most skilled person in that activity as this is constantly supported by the results. This can derive into a false sensation of immobilism, that this winning stage will elongate over time and there is no need for the person to work hard in order to keep up with the learning, making people lazier and cause they feel there are better than them. Second, the tendency is closely related to the first sentence. Regardless of the talent, when people are successful, they would rarely compete with best people already instead they compete against others. Therefore, the relationship is beneficial for the talented person as the absolute competition between the talented person is

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THE REACTION AGAINST FAILURE CAN BE PROACTIVE, BY IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES OF THE FAILURE AND TAKING ACTION SUBSEQUENTLY, OR NOT PROACTIVE BY SIMPLE NEGLIGENCE THROUGH EXCUSES AND PROCRASTINATION

attitude in terms of results obtained, and they want to keep succeeding, this will cause a risk-averse mentality that will prevent the talented person from competing with people better than them – as they may potentially lose, thus falling into stagnation just as the trap of instant gratification; pursuing the pleasure of winning and not of improving.

There are two main reasons to justify why we tend to fail. The fear of failure is well-entrenched in our genes. We believe that failing will lead us to contempt them as failures, and that they will lose their self-esteem. It follows, even though we do not wish to show it, that it seems that we are failing. Engaging in low-risk or safe activities has become the norm in populations nowadays. We believe that failing requires a significant amount of effort to exit the comfort zone and engage in something

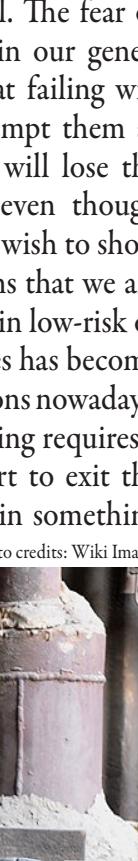
new and challenging. In a world that advocates for the state of maximum comfort, there is a lot of friction to do something out of our comfort zone.

The reaction against failure can be proactive, by identifying the causes of the failure and taking action subsequently, or not proactive by simple negligence through excuses and procrastination. The problem with the first option is that it requires acceptance of the crude reality of hard work and patience; whereas the second one is fast, cheap, and comfortable. People are lazy by nature, so guess which one they tend to choose.

How does one combat the fear of failure? One word: acceptance. You need to accept two facts: you will die, and there is always a bigger fish. On the one hand, life is very short and you should not live according to the expectations of others, because we do not live in the Stone Age,

There are two main reasons to justify why we fail. The fear of failure is instilled in our genes, we believe that failing will lead us to contempt them as we think they will lose the approval of others, even though we do not wish to show it. It seems that we are more inclined to engage in low-risk or low-stakes activities has become the norm in many populations nowadays. We often forget that failing requires a significant amount of effort to exit the comfort zone and engage in something challenging.

Photo credits: Wiki Images



so the rejection of the group is not deadly anymore. Additionally, note that after death, you will not care anymore about mortgages, careers, etc. On the other hand, regardless of how hard-working and talented you are, you will not be the best in all the situations, even if you just specialise in a specific field. However, this should not be alarming as we live in a world with more opportunities than ever in human history thanks to the rise of living standards and globalisation. As well as the competition becoming international, the opportunities are too. Besides, the success of others can be used as a source of inspiration; and note that successful people might be potential high-quality partners. In a paradoxical world where mediocrity and competition are coexisting in harmony, be like the Blacksmith; most of the hammer blows will not be perfect but the difference is that each blow is modified according to the outcome of the previous one, polishing impurities. Finally, due to perseverance and using feedback correctly, a fine sword is forged to slash the armour of ego and conformity we are all trapped in, myself included.



SPORT (JUST ABOUT)

A Skeptic's Take on Meditation and Yoga



Zanna Buckland Books Editor

I have always been very against the concept of mindfulness and meditation; why does one need to think about thinking? How does one elevate their mind through simply being still and breathing? Mindfulness sessions held at my secondary school elicited much amusement: a room full of teenagers sitting or lying on the floor with their eyes closed, doing nothing but breathing in and out, what a laugh! And I carried this mindset around until reaching university and, along with it, the pandemic.

I won't pretend that COVID-19 didn't play a part in my change of heart (or mind rather) – it definitely did – but I don't believe it was that alone. Starting university means a big leap in independence, workload, and pressure to socialise with peers, among other things. With that often comes some (or all) of the three biggest names in mental illness: stress, anxiety, and depression.

The aim of meditation is to think about our thoughts, but to stop doing for a moment and let our thoughts pass without reaction. It teaches us to have thoughts without constantly acting upon them, allowing them to flow more clearly without piling up.

'Overthinking' is a common side effect of mental illnesses, and meditation trains us to free ourselves from this onslaught of thoughts (many of them negative) and stop worrying for a while.

My mum had previously invested in a 'Headspace' family plan. 'Headspace' is a mindfulness app, created by monk-turned-entrepreneur Andy Puddicombe, full of guided meditations and other related tools for getting in the right headspace. I was

skeptical of it at first, but as stresses and worries piled up, I found myself looking for relief, and eventually investigated what the app offered.

The guided meditations are led by a few different teachers, which can be chosen by the listener, and Puddicombe does many of them himself. They range from as little as three minutes up to an hour, and span a variety of topics, including anxiety, sleep, dealing with change, and many more. The app also provides sleep aids such as ambient sounds and sleep podcasts for those who have trouble hitting the hay, and guided mindful runs, workouts, and yoga to encourage staying present while being active. It even has tidbits of recordings from celebrities on a host of topics; Kevin Hart on energy boosts and mindful cardio, and Hans Zimmer and Erykah Badu with focus music.

Even if meditation isn't your thing, the soothing voices of the recordings are enough to relax you for a while. It can be done sitting or lying still, or even while performing basic tasks during the day, and there's no right or wrong way, although they recommend trying to stay as undistracted as possible. It forces you to take a break from the world and be present with yourself.

Now, you may be wondering why this article has been placed in the sports section. It has nothing to do with sport! Well, this is where science comes in: it has been shown that mental wellbeing greatly influences physical health, and vice versa. Long-time depression or anxiety can be the source of gastrointestinal issues or heart disease, while sedentary lifestyles or chronic pain can lead to depressive symptoms.

I also had a go at using other features in the app, yoga being one of them. I had always – arrogantly – thought that yoga wasn't so hard, that surely anyone can perform some stretching and bending on a

mat? I was horribly wrong: yoga is not for the weak. A few rounds of Sun Salutations and I'm already (embarrassingly) breaking a sweat. For those of us that may not get out for exercise as much as we'd like, or who don't particularly enjoy crunches and weightlifting, yoga can serve as a decent strength workout without even having to leave the house (as was necessary during lockdown). Where possible, it should be complemented with other forms of exercise – particularly cardio such as walking and running – but it's great if you're short on time, or just want a quick break from sitting down. Of course, it can also serve as a complement to existing workouts; yoga has long been considered a way to stretch out and release tired muscles, and is useful as an active recovery technique.

At the time I had also started using the 'Nike Training Club' (NTC) app – a free workout app that contains a range of strength, endurance, and mobility workouts, as well as yoga classes – and 'Nike Running Club' (NRC), which provides audio for guided runs, and can record their statistics. NRC even has collaborations with Headspace. I find running is also a good escape for the mind, and pairs well with a yoga-based warm-up or cool-down, but walking is also an underrated form of exercise. The NTC app offers both restorative (yin) and energetic, active (yang) yoga practices. In both types, practising rhythm and stability can have a calming, grounding effect, which is particularly beneficial in Covid times.

I am still, personally, not a regular practitioner of meditation – I find it hard to sit still for more than a few minutes without itching to get on with something else – but even a few minutes of meditation per day or week can be beneficial to one's mental state. Yoga has become a regular part of my routine – a mixture of short and long sessions scattered throughout the week – and while I haven't yet conquered the 'Kakasana' (Crow Pose) and other inversions, I have no doubt that my flexibility and strength have increased over time. As they say, practice makes perfect – or at the very least makes one better.

