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Design by Harry Kang and Caitlyn Sue

The Charger Account's ALBUMS OF THE YEAR



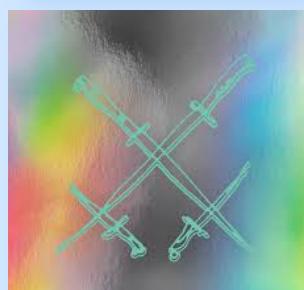
JAY LI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S PICK

Tyler, The Creator

CHROMAKOPIA

Layering Tyler, The Creator's signature aggressive and creative production with vocal harmonies and piano, "CHROMAKOPIA" seamlessly ranges from emotionally introspective to explosively antagonistic, adding yet another dynamic and replayable album to Tyler's discography.

Best Tracks: "St. Chroma," "Thought I Was Dead," "Like Him"



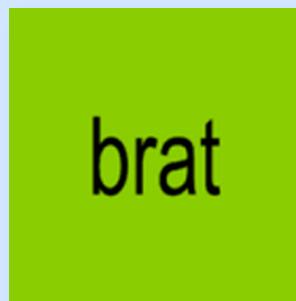
KYAN WANG EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S PICK

Xiu Xiu

**13" Frank Beltrame Italian
Stiletto with Bison Horn Grips**

Contemplative yet disassociative, abrasive yet accessible, Xiu Xiu delivers cathartic ruminations on love, sex and regret through the album's experimental synthwork, walls of noise and lead singer Jamie Stewart's fragile and disparate vocals.

Best Tracks: "Veneficium," "T.D.F.T.W," "Piña, Coconut & Cherry"



ANTARA GANGWAL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S PICK

Charli XCX

BRAT

Brazen. Brutal. Brave. Brilliant. Countless words describe this album, yet the best one is simply "brat." Experimental, unforgiving and honest, Charli XCX is unapologetically herself on arguably the most socially, politically and culturally significant record of the year.

Best Tracks: "360," "365," "Girl, so confusing featuring lorde"



LAUREN WILSON EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S PICK

beabadoobee

This Is How Tomorrow Moves

Incorporating dreamy melodies, beabadoobee's "This Is How Tomorrow Moves" magnificently captures both upbeat and melancholy ambience, debuting as yet another one of her many successful indie pop productions.

Best Tracks: "California," "Beaches," "Post"



HARRY KANG CREATIVE DIRECTOR'S PICK

Magdalena Bay

Imaginal Disk

A disembodying, existential yet blissful synth-pop experience, the duo's "Imaginary Disk" feels like being gently disassembled into Matt's kaleidoscopic synths and Mica's haunting whispers—feeling disintegrated yet?

Best Tracks: "Image," "Death & Romance," "Cry for Me"

Shelter-in-Place Incidents Raise Alarm

WINSTON CHU STAFF WRITER

Just a few minutes before the seventh period bell would have excused the remaining students on campus to return home on Nov. 6, the PA system suddenly announced the school was under shelter-in-place. Principal **Harveen Bal** instructed students in Drama, Journalism and Speech and Debate to stay in classrooms until further notice, along with student athletes and remaining faculty. Around half an hour later, the shelter-in-place was lifted.

"After we were made aware that there was a possible unidentified person with a knife on campus, we initiated the shelter-in-place and called the San Jose Police Department (SJP). Both the administration and SJP checked the campus to ensure everyone was indoors, including athletes practicing on the fields. Once it was safe, we made an announcement over the PA system and cleared the shelter-in-place," Bal said.

During this time, the school was also hosting Bret Harte Speech and Debate, a weekly program where students in Speech and Debate teach middle school students to craft public speaking skills at a young age. The program is led by high school event chairs who teach different events in different rooms. As a result, these students had to work together to safely enforce the

shelter-in-place order without any adults present.

"I was present during the seventh period shelter-in-place in one of the classrooms with middle school speech and debate students. We locked all the doors and told the kids to stay quiet, allowing them to work on other things quietly. Past shelter-in-place drills gave us a good idea on how to direct the class; I remember how my teachers responded and tried to emulate that. However, it was scary not knowing what was happening outside, and I felt cut off from the situation," an anonymous student said.

Coaches and athletes were also affected by the shelter-in-place, as they were in the middle of practice when Bal made the announcement. In fact, the Flag Football team were the ones who raised alarm when the unidentified person was first spotted.

"After the shelter-in-place was announced, the team entered Ms. Larks's classroom. We were a little scared and shocked when we saw police outside, but we knew the situation would be handled by the police and the administration," an anonymous athlete said.

This was not the first time shelter-in-place was triggered this school year. In August, Back to School Night ended early after staff noticed

a man with a knife on campus. Additionally, on Nov. 1, the school went through a shelter-in-place at the end of second period that lasted nearly an hour. This instance occurred due to a potential social media threat made by a student.

During the latter, rumors and speculation spread quickly, leading to the false classification of the school's status as a lockdown instead of a shelter-in-place. While both terms are synonymous in the minds of many, there is a difference between the two. According to Bal, a shelter-in-place is a precautionary measure in response to dangerous scenarios, such as a gas leak, police activity far away or suspicious personnel nearby. Generally, doors should be locked, yet the lights can remain on and teachers and students can resume classroom activities as usual. On the contrary, lockdowns are initiated when a credible threat is actively present on campus. When this occurs, classrooms are required to lock and barricade the doors and turn off the lights, while students must silence their cell phones and stay absolutely silent.

"During a shelter-in-place, students do not know what is happening or the level of danger that the school is in, so it starts to worry them, leading to rumors and speculation. Then, their parents

can also get worried, making the whole situation confusing and scary," Junior **Yusairah Asif** said.

The administration received similar feedback from students and teachers requesting more context during shelter-in-places. Bal states the administration will try to provide additional information and directions over the PA if there are future threats—for example, whether or not it is safe to keep the lights on.

Adjacent to the school on Oct. 28, Bret Harte Middle School also experienced school safety concerns when a stranger walked onto campus and entered the girls' locker room. When staff confronted his identity, he fled. Police were able to apprehend and arrest him two days later, according to ABC7.

The school administration emphasizes its close collaboration with the district and SJP to address these concerns. To avoid rumors and speculation, students and parents are encouraged to rely on direct communication from the district office via the PA system, ParentSquare and StudentSquare. SJP, the district and admin remain committed to protecting staff and students.

HELEN RUAN/ART



ELITE SAT/ACT WINTER BOOT CAMP

SAT® Winter Boot Camp | 2 Full Weeks + 8 Weekends (Total 10 Weeks)

2 Full Weeks During Winter Break • December 23 - January 4

Elite's SAT Winter Boot Camp is an intensive preparation course held over 8 days during winter break, followed by 8 weekend sessions leading up to the March 8 digital exam. Students take our new full-length DIGITAL SAT practice tests on a laptop, just like the real SAT, and attend live lessons with Elite's expert instructors.

Sun, Dec 22 No Class	Mon, Dec 23 Test: 9:00am-12:00pm	Tue, Dec 24 No Class	Wed, Dec 25 No Class	Thu, Dec 26 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm	Fri, Dec 27 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm	Sat, Dec 28 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm
Sun, Dec 29 No Class	Mon, Dec 30 Test: 9:00am-12:00pm	Tue, Dec 31 No Class	Wed, Jan 1 No Class	Thu, Jan 2 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm	Fri, Jan 3 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm	Sat, Jan 4 Class: 9:00am-12:30pm

8 Weekends • January 10 - March 1

Weekly Test Options Fridays @ 4:00pm-7:00pm OR Saturdays @ 10:00am-1:00pm
Weekly Class Saturdays @ 1:30pm-5:00pm

Please contact us for tuition information and program details

ACT® Winter Boot Camp | 2 Full Weeks + 4 Weekends (Total 6 Weeks)

2 Full Weeks During Winter Break • December 23 - January 4

An intensive preparation course held over 8 days during winter break, followed by 4 weekend sessions leading up to the February 8 exam. Students take full-length ACT practice tests and attend live lessons with our expert instructors.

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4 Weekends • January 10 - February 1

Weekly Testing Thursdays @ 4:00pm-7:30pm OR Fridays @ 4:00pm-7:30pm
Weekly Class Saturdays @ 9:00am-1:00pm

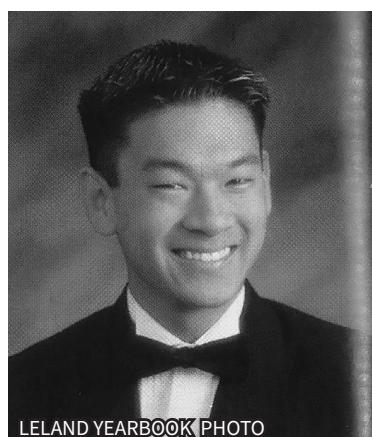
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This election cycle, California Assemblyman Evan Low ran to represent the state's 16th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives. It may be hard to imagine Low as an inexperienced high schooler, yet he was once like any other teenager: trying to find his passion while navigating academic pressures. In fact, Low is a member of the school's class of 2001, as well as an alumnus of Bret Harte Middle School and Los Alamitos Elementary School.

His family never encouraged him to become a politician, but rather stressed a more traditional career such as a doctor. Still, Low felt drawn to community service and made a point of participating in as many volunteering events as he could, even becoming vice president of Key Club. While taking AP Government and Politics with **Joe Moura**, Social



Evan Low's senior portrait, featured in the 2001 Leland yearbook

Studies Department, Low's desire to pursue a political career truly took hold. Moura instilled in him the conviction that if one is upset about something in society, they should participate in politics to advocate for change. The class also gave Low the opportunity to take a two-week trip to Washington D.C., providing him with first-hand experience of politics in real life. More than 20 years after his graduation, Low's campaign posters adorn the walls of Moura's classroom.

"After returning from his D.C. experience, Evan asked me if he could give a presentation to my new students. He arrived at my class with a big duffel bag of candy and explained his time interning in D.C., asking students government-related questions and throwing candy to those who answered correctly. That was when I knew Evan was a born leader. Although I helped foster his love for government, he already had the motivation and drive to become a politician," Moura said.

Although Low lost the congressional race for District 16 to former San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo, his journey as a politician has been one of a trailblazer. Low began his political career in 2006 when he was elected to the Campbell City Council. Four years later, in 2010, he became the city's mayor—the youngest openly gay mayor in the United States. Then, in 2014, he became the youngest

Assemblymember Evan Low

CAITLYNN SUE FRONT PAGE & OPINIONS EDITOR



Asian American in the California State Assembly, having been elected to represent District 26, which includes San Jose, Santa Clara, Cupertino and Sunnyvale.

After making progress for representation in numerous government positions, Low has leveraged his platform to advocate for the rights of underrepresented minorities. One such act was Proposition 3, which enshrines protections on marriage equality for same-sex and interracial couples in the California Constitution.

"When I ran for office, LGBTQ+ people could not get married, donate blood or serve in the army. Today, we have protections in place to prevent this kind of discrimination. That is why I talk very proudly about representation for all communities. Part of my work includes Proposition 3, which California voters passed in November," Low said.

Low's other policy directives have included lowering the high cost of living within Silicon Valley and increasing funding for public education. Since he was first elected to the California State Assembly, Low says that he has helped increase annual public education funding from \$11,145 per student to over \$20,000.

"Our educational system is the great equalizer, helping uplift everyday people out of poverty. No matter where they live, everyone should have the opportunity to receive a quality education," Low said.

Low is convinced of the power of young people to tackle issues and hold the government accountable. In accordance with this, he has worked to involve high schoolers in his campaign efforts. For instance, Senior **Golsa Sadrieh** had the opportunity to volunteer as a student intern for Low's congressional campaign.

"I knocked on doors across the county and asked voters if they had a minute to talk about this really imperative congressional race. Learning to converse with voters in a non confrontational and open-minded way definitely polished my communication skills. I am not sure about pursuing a political career, but I am definitely interested in being civically engaged in the political sphere," Sadrieh said.

Regardless of career goals, Low believes it is critical for everyone to participate in community events and voice their opinions, cultivating a lifelong journey of active citizenship.

"What will you do to hold the government accountable and tackle issues such as existential climate change, affordability or women's rights? If we do not have younger people civically engaged, we just allow injustice to repeat, and we can not let that happen," Low said.

Students Down and Out in Alum Rock

ANNA YUE ENTERTAINMENT & LIFESTYLE EDITOR

Students swiftly swinging on the monkey bars, wildly running across the grass and cheerfully chattering in the classroom—this common sight on public school campuses is soon to change in parts of East San Jose as the Alum Rock Union School District (ARUSD) finds itself in a \$20 million annual budget deficit.

The deficit results from the recent end of temporary COVID-19 relief funds from the state and a consistent decline in ARUSD enrollment. The district receives \$15,000 in state funding for each student enrolled, but its student population is declining at a rate of around 350 students per year—with some middle schools falling below 400 students and some elementary schools below 300. This fails to compensate for facilities intended for an operational capacity of 1000, reports CBS News. With only \$50 million left in the bank, immediate action is necessary, the news agency further explains.

"This crisis is not completely unforeseen and unexpected—the COVID-19 relief fund is sure to end at some point, and a decreasing student population has been a consistent trend in the district. The district should have taken action on cutting spending earlier to prevent such a massive deficit," Junior **Selina Dong** said.

As summarized in a board meeting on Nov. 14, school closures are an undesired but

necessary loss to sustain the district. During the meeting, Superintendent Germán Cerdá presented his formal recommendations to the ARUSD Board of Education, stating that considered alternatives—including cutting programs and reducing employee benefits—were either ineffective or unfeasible. Based on consultation with the School Consolidation Advisory Committee, a group formed in part by members of community groups and parents from each school, Cerdá recommended seven school closures, two consolidations and one redesign for the 2025-26 school year.

If the district fails to take action to balance the budget by Dec. 16, Santa Clara County will intervene with complete authority on the legislation to balance the budget without any community input. However, many community voices challenged the superintendent's dismissal of the committee's advice during the meeting's public hearing portion. For example, many committee members alleged that they did not recommend the closure of Renaissance Academy at Fischer (RAF), one of the highest academically performing schools in the district. Nevertheless, it appeared on the superintendent's recommended list.

Some community members were infuriated that action had not been taken earlier, particularly regarding student transportation and potentially ineffective transfer

of special programs such as Dual Language Immersion. During the meeting, Superintendent Advisor Emmanuel Barbara admitted that if action had been taken a few years prior, fewer schools would have been affected; now, the escalated fiscal crisis requires many more closures. He acknowledged that removing numerous schools from the district would be a difficult inconvenience for the community, but also that it has become an unavoidable consequence.

"I feel sorry for those who are negatively impacted due to the district's mismanagement, as they are suffering from the inaction of those who are meant to aid their community. The district should provide support and assistance in areas such as school transfers and transportation methods to minimize the difficulties they have caused," Sophomore **Chloe Xia** said.

At the Dec. 2 board meeting, the district board unanimously accepted the superintendent's revised proposal of closing six schools including RAF, redesigning three and consolidating two along with one RAF program for the

2025-26 school year. Future consolidations may occur, with two other schools also drafted in the concurred resolution. Families of displaced students will have the opportunity to select their future schools, but only if space is available. With these school closures and consolidation, along with various staff reductions, the district is projected to reduce its deficit by \$13.7 million in the 2025-26 school year and \$16.2 million in the 2026-27 school year.

ARUSD has been facing this financial struggle for years, but only now has the district

taken action to resolve their predicament due to past inaction and mismanagement. As the changes are being made, district officials hope to balance deficit recovery while aiding affected district members.



HELEN RUAN ART



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OPINIONS

The 4B Movement

ELEANOR GIL SCHOOL NEWS & FEATURE SCHOOL EDITOR

In 2016, a man in South Korea, seeking revenge against the women who humiliated him, ventured to Gangnam Station. There, he stabbed a random woman to death.

Though many sources attributed the man's actions to psychological illness, the murder shocked the nation and propelled the 4B feminist movement. The term "4B" represents four words that each begin with the root bi, meaning "no" in Korean: no marriage, no childbirth, no dating and no sex with men. The movement rejects patriarchal systems and promotes feminist separatism.

After the U.S. election, the 4B movement exploded into a topic of interest in America, with the specter of growing inequality under Donald Trump, who has a history of sexual abuse and

promoted the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Many American women took to social media, breaking up with their Trump-supporting boyfriends or even swearing off men. However, with its rapid publicization, the 4B movement risks becoming a bandwagon, not for the sake of justice but due to herd mentality, similar to the #MeToo movement. Such not only undermines the movement's true purpose but also the complex history behind 4B to uninformed, volatile public criticism. This is because 4B is a unique culmination of opposition to patriarchal norms that have been entrenched in South Korea ever since it became a democracy.

Not a century ago, South Korea was a broken nation, devastated by colonization and war, resulting in a corrupt government taking power and perpetuating patriarchal values. Trapped in this patriarchy, South Korea has one of the greatest gender wage gaps worldwide with women earning on average 31.2% lower than men, as per the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Thus, movements such as 4B are critical to bringing to light these grave gender inequalities which have been overlooked due to political propaganda.

However, the 4B movement is only the extreme end of an untold truth. The nation's highly toxic and cutthroat work culture disincentivizes taking time off, which often entails losing hard-earned career progress. Combined with the government's failure to address increasing housing costs and the economic burden of raising a child, many women now prioritize their academics



No Pain, No Gain This New Year

JAMES TONG STAFF WRITER

Every January, commercial gyms flood with eager individuals determined to transform their bodies. Yet, by February, the crowds shrink considerably. Once-bustling gyms are soon left with only a handful of dedicated gym goers while the many who have given up declare "next year is our year."

Ambitious New Year's fitness goals—from losing body fat to hitting a two-plate bench press—are frequently backed by temporary motivation rather than entrenched discipline. Effort expended at the gym without immediate results can build frustration and disappointment—but that is where the committed are filtered from the mass of New Year's resolutioners. In fact, according to Virtuagym, almost 12% of all gym sign-ups are in January, whereas the monthly average for the whole year is just 8.3%. Furthermore, 50% of new gym members quit within six months, a stark reflection of short term motivation.

Overflowing gym attendance at the start of the new year is largely fueled by media influence. Fitness influencers frequently share photos of their physical transformations, which can lead to unhealthy comparisons. Many posts display hyper-aesthetic physiques that set unrealistic expectations, often gained through the use of

strategic posing, pumps and photo editing. This creates a skewed perception of fitness, as emphasis on results often glosses over the years of dedication and consistency needed to achieve the physique.

Worse, steroids have become normalized in online spaces. Although allowing users to build muscle mass and shed fat rapidly, anabolics incur life-threatening side effects like heart disease and liver damage, according to Healthline. Yet, many influencers glorify steroids without addressing the risks, encouraging their audiences to take shortcuts to achieve their ideal body.

Hopes for quick results highlight the ego lifting trend in gym culture. Ego lifting is when someone prioritizes lifting the heaviest weights they can without the correct technique, risking serious injuries ranging from muscle strains to herniated spinal discs. The risk-to-reward ratio on ego lifting rarely justifies it; it builds little strength or muscle mass with the only benefit being short

and careers over having children, as reflected in the 4B movement.

South Korea's deeply entrenched patriarchy has not only spurred women to advocate for themselves but also evoked resentment amongst men. For many South Korean men, the deeply patriarchal world they once knew is now being upheaved. Feeling alienated by the 4B movement, they perceive it as a complete vilification of their gender. While women's expressions of frustration with patriarchy intend to promote solidarity, men often misinterpret it as a blanket dismissal of their own identity. This disconnect can be attributed to women's greater emotional intelligence compared to men, as cited by research published in 2016, which is exacerbated by South Korea's gender stereotypes that demean men for expressing vulnerability.

Despite resistance, it is beautiful to see women defying rigid social standards, both in South Korea and beyond. However, in order to achieve real institutional change, there must be change within the culture instilled by a country's education system and society.

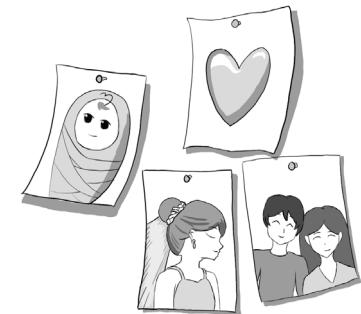
"The 4B movement is a step in the right direction, but in today's polarized media, its nuance has a low chance of surviving. To one person, the movement symbolizes justice, but to another, it is an overreaction fueled by extremists. We must collectively build empathy to understand what is being fought for and work together, rather than letting 4B become just another trend," Senior Nadia Karpenko said.

The movement is not a viable long-term solution as it risks

THE CHARGER ACCOUNT

DESIGN BY CAITLYNN SUE

exacerbating the division between men and women. Caught up in shielding women from men entirely, this movement loses sight of its ultimate goal: gender equality. A more effective approach would be to address the problems that have caused these conflicts, especially the influence of culture on



LINUS AWYONG ART

educating men. For women, the biggest problem is mistreatment and domestic violence, which requires better education, greater empathy and accountability for men. For men, the biggest problem is often a palpable sense of isolation, which signifies the need to build more empathetic communities.

The 4B movement should remain only as a point of solidarity. The most critical step to achieving real change is to foster education on these issues and build a community where both men and women are taught to support and uplift each other.

NOVEMBER CORRECTIONS

SPORTS

"Oakland A's Strike Out"
August Grinfeld incorrectly attributed as August Grinfield

FEATURE US

"Electon 2024"
Melvin Najarlan incorrectly attributed as Melvin Najaran



"I go to the gym purely for self-improvement, and I do not find fitness influencers as distracting or enviable. I work out to see my progress rather than comparing my physique to others," Junior Gabriel John said.

Regularly going to the gym requires intention and planning. Gym goers can create lasting habits beyond a spontaneous New Year's resolution motivation by setting realistic goals and reducing distractions on social media. Ultimately, fitness is a personal commitment to self-care and growth. Through embracing gradual progress over instant results, gym goers can establish physically and mentally healthy habits for a lifetime rather than merely one month after every New Year.

I Like my Cheese Moldy, Bruh

JAMES YU SPORTS EDITOR

As social media influencers become increasingly prevalent, their search for ways to turn their lives online into their livelihoods has only intensified. For YouTube giants Mr. Beast, KSI and Logan Paul, selling and marketing to their fans their own

the product for in reality being significantly less healthy, and in some cases actually dangerous, for fans to consume. Although selling legitimate products in isolation is not necessarily improper, promoting unsafe products through misleading methods to credulous followers is especially immoral given their status. But

these short-promotional videos, primarily posted on TikTok and YouTube, the three creators make side-by-side nutritional comparisons between Lunchly and competitor Lunchables, with Paul's emphatic line "I like my cheese drippy bruuh" becoming an infamous slogan promoting the nachos Lunchly combo box. These advertisement videos appeal primarily to their already younger audience of pre-adolescent viewers, most of whom do not know what to look for in nutritional foods. Indeed, news publication The New Statesman finds that a majority of Mr. Beast's audience is under the age of 30. Outside of social media, the packaging for Lunchly itself directly targets youth; bold fonts, bright colors and a stamp which states "good taste, good vibes" all work to portray Lunchly as a fun and trendy food product for kids. Instead of relying on the merit of their food to sell products, Lunchly viciously manipulates the youth, its primary consumers, for profit using bright colors for dull foods.

"I was interested in trying the meal out because of the advertisements! Funny lines like loving drippy cheese are relatable and silly," Sophomore Annika Hegde said.

In stark contrast to the marketing campaign's good vibes, critics came out on social media in droves with disapproval for the product. USA Today cites Dr. Brian Sutterer, a sports medicine doctor, who points out that while Lunchly is marketed to have more electrolytes than Lunchables—thanks to PRIME—the electrolytes in Lunchly are primarily from potassium, whereas for a healthy

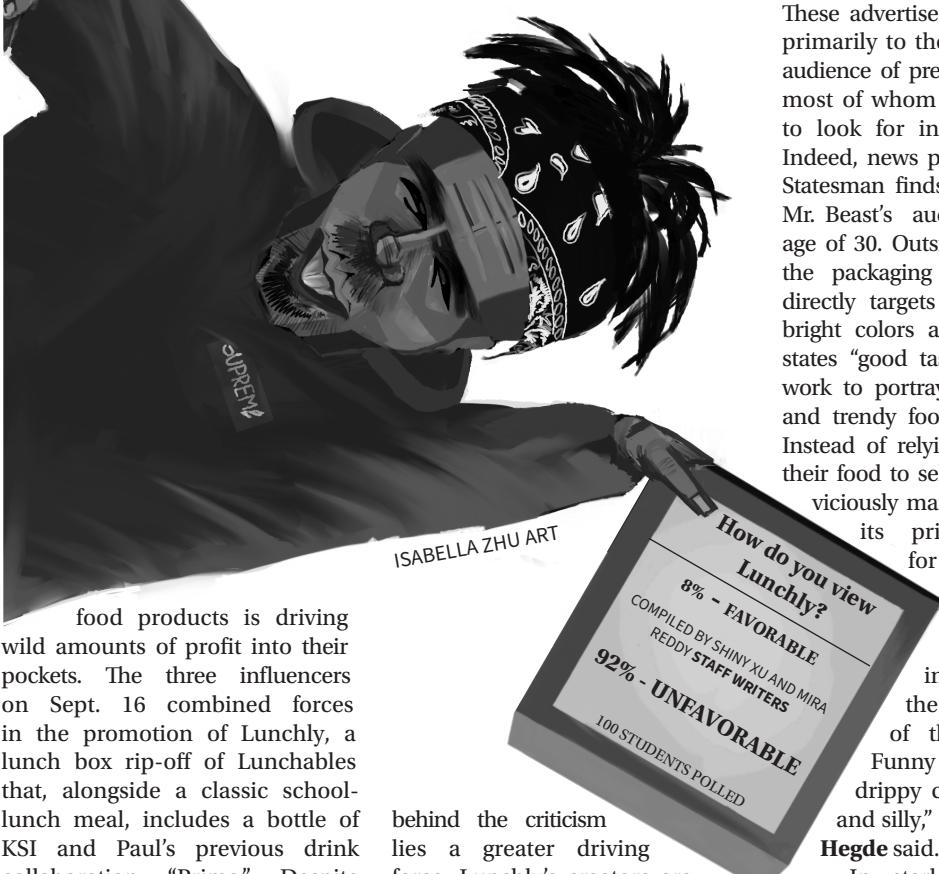
meal, all electrolytes, including sodium are required. Even worse, criticism of Lunchly's nutritional portfolio are just the start of the product's health concerns. As USA Today furthers, critics such as Rosanna Pansino came out against Lunchly after discovering mold in their Lunchly products. While Lunchly, in a statement to the news publication Daily Mail, responded to allegations of mold in their products by arguing that all Lunchly products go through thorough inspection, approval, and review processes, including those conducted by the USDA, the myriad of videos and critics corroborating Pansino's accusations of mold are too vast to ignore. However, despite these claims by Lunchly, few credible nutritionists or medical professionals have come to Lunchly's defense. Given the lack of academic and medical backing behind the nutritional health of Lunchly, it is disingenuous for Lunchly's creators to market it as a healthier option to alternatives without concrete proof. Instead of standing on the side of nutritional health and youth development, Lunchly is firmly entrenched in deceit and malnourishment.

"After trying Lunchly myself, I got violently sick the next day. Although I cannot 100% attribute my illness to Lunchly, the awful taste of the product itself was certainly enough to never make me want to eat Lunchly ever again," Junior Andy Kim said.

While taken by itself, the dangers of selling moldy food to consumers, especially young adolescents, is enough to take Lunchly off shelves. But given the even shadier marketing behind Lunchly propagated by Paul, KSI and Mr. Beast, critics are right to be adamantly calling to drop Lunchly's drippy cheese nachos.

behind the criticism lies a greater driving force: Lunchly's creators are disingenuously misrepresenting their products to their often young, impressionable fans in order to profit off their genuine trust in untrustworthy, ungrateful and unreliable influencers.

Exploiting their expansive reach as influencers, the three Lunchly creators promoted their product through now viral videos across various platforms. In



A Must for Lust in Women's Rapping

LILIANA CHAI STAFF WRITER

As a fan opens the latest music video for Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's 2020 collab, "WAP," the artists burst onto the screen, strutting through a fashion runway. As the beat drops, the lyrics hit like a truck: explicit and utterly captivating. It is hard to tell whether this is just a music video, or a contest for the most outrageous display of sexual shock value.

Female rappers often receive undeserved backlash for the explicit lyrics and content they incorporate into their rap, a product of ingrained prejudices in the rap industry. While modern female rappers often lean heavily into bold displays of sexuality, it was not always this way. Lauryn Hill, an American rapper known for her neo-soul style, featured themes of female empowerment, romance and heartbreak on her landmark 1998 album "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill."

With the maturation of the genre, women in rap truly hit the mainstream by using sexuality as a tool to reclaim power in a male-dominated industry. Rap traditionally challenges societal norms, including institutional racism, gang violence and crude topics like sex—topics women have been historically discouraged from discussing. As a result, when artists like Doja Cat embrace feminism through female sexuality, their music draws criticism for being overly explicit and female rappers often receive

more backlash than women in other music genres.



"Conscious rap may be more challenging for women to break into because showcasing sexuality often receives more attention. This image has worked in the past, leading the industry to favor it to grab attention. Unfortunately, the women's appearances are often put before their music," Sophomore Shawnessy Cabi said.

Female rappers are under pressure from the rap community and music labels to create an image of themselves that can succeed in the industry, where rap about sex that achieves mainstream success is often labeled as "trashy." Peppered with sexual lyrics, one of Ice Spice's most popular song,

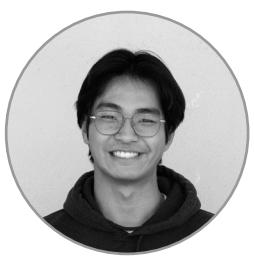
"Munch (Feelin' U)," released in 2023, catapulted her to fame. On the other hand, avoiding sexual themes

FloMix," noted in a New York Times interview that female rappers have to put much more effort into their appearances and performances to keep up with industry expectations. Female rappers should not have to compare themselves to a desired image from the industry when trying to express themselves with music. Alternative artists such as Chicago rapper Noname often bucks this trend—she explores finding her identity in her album "Room 25" through bars on identity politics. However, as the independent artist's work does not reflect audiences' expectations of what a female rapper should rap about, it was more difficult for her music to hit the mainstream. This added pressure is a burden their male counterparts seldom face to the same degree.

"Female rappers can succeed without relying on sexual themes, but the music industry often tells them otherwise to maximize at the cost of their creative freedom. The music industry should focus on the talent and sound instead of the image of female rappers," Junior Tristan Mank said.

The rap industry has the potential to move beyond the one-dimensional depiction of female rappers. As a platform that explores the complexities of human experience, rap should embrace a broader range of themes. By reexamining its standards, the music industry can work toward creating space to support female voices.

"fruitcake"



JAMES YU SPORTS EDITOR

After a blowout year for Sabrina Carpenter, the radio-frequent is looking to end the year with a new holiday-themed Netflix show, "A Nonsense Christmas." This show follows up Carpenter's Extended Play "fruitcake," filled to the brim with holiday-themed songs from last Christmas.

The first song on the EP, "A Nonsense Christmas," delivers what its title entails—warm bells. Carpenter's lovesong singing and illogically lewd lyrics make clear Carpenter's goal for the production: to break into the lucrative and esteemed Christmas tune archive amongst the likes of stars such as Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You" and Wham's "Last Christmas." "A Nonsense Christmas" achieves what Carpenter sets out to do with it, yet outside of being a catchy radio ditty, it falls short of bringing anything new to the holiday table. Indeed, the song is so generic that its melody blends in with every other song on the radio, Christmas season or not.

Following up "A Nonsense Christmas's" mediocrity is "buy me presents." Throughout the song, Carpenter angelically sings about maintaining a roster of lovers via sensual innuendos of Santa's milk and cookies. Although I appreciate Carpenter's choice to experiment with new themes, the song suffers from the same mediocrity as "A Nonsense Christmas"; while the beat and instrumental is signature Christmas, the composition lacks passion, as if the drummer is the slacking lover Carpenter sings about.

On the other hand, "santa doesn't know you like I do" takes a softer approach to the holiday love song scene. Carpenter's tender vocals make for a decent lullaby, though its corresponding softer tempo limits its radio playability. In a similar vein, "cindy lou who's" tender and melancholy vibes make for a heartfelt listen. As Carpenter laments Cindy Lou, a girl who stole her lover, holiday listeners might forget that the song is even a Christmas tune.

Returning to the fast pace of pop, "is it new years yet?" mixes together synths and Christmas chimes to craft a groovy, forward song to dance to. Carpenter's vocals fare well with the fast-paced instrumental, and the simple lyrics make for a generic but acceptable track.

Ending the EP, "white xmas" does little to differentiate itself from the Christmas songs which came before it. Most indicative of this is the end of the song, where Carpenter includes a brief homage to "jingle bells." While admittedly, the EP accomplishes its mission of creating radio-hit songs for the holidays, its lack of innovative ideas prevents Carpenter's songs from establishing themselves as true Christmas classics.

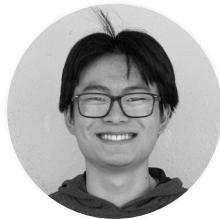
was I vibin'?

(2/5)



- + commendable experimentation
- generic themes
- soulless compositions

"Wicked"



WINSTON CHU STAFF WRITER

While I was traveling in New York this summer, green posters advertising "Wicked the Musical" on Broadway seemed to dominate the city. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to watch the Broadway show, so when the "Wicked" movie came out on Nov. 22, I knew not to miss it again.

Capitalizing on the musical's success, producers of the "Wicked" movie sought to bring the production to the big screen. Starring Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande, Michelle Yeoh and other talented cast members, the movie explores the origins of the Wicked Witch of the West from "The Wizard of Oz." Elphaba, born with green skin, attends Shiz University, where she finds herself rooming with the popular Glinda. Their initial hostility towards each other shifts into a genuine friendship, leading them to embark on a journey to meet the Wizard of Oz together.

Everyone at Shiz ridicules Elphaba because of her green skin, viewing her as bizarre. Initially, Glinda also shares these prejudices, but she is eventually able to value character over superficial differences like appearance—something we should all keep in mind when meeting those who are different from us. Once the other students see Glinda supporting Elphaba, they quickly drop their prejudices and flock to copy Glinda, illustrating the shallow nature of conformity and the importance of individuality.

"Wicked" seamlessly blends the world of cinema and musicals together. The vibrant hand-crafted set and coordinated choreography work harmoniously to bring the story to life. And of course, Erivo and Grande's powerful voices singing live during the movie production—whether it be in the midst of dancing, running or even flying stunts—made the music memorable and was sure to get the audience grooving.

However, the film was on the longer side, with a runtime of two hours and forty minutes. Instead of concluding the story, "Wicked" ends on a cliffhanger with "Wicked Part Two" releasing in November 2025. It feels unnecessary to release the story in two separate parts, especially because certain plot points were stretched out due to various irrelevant subplots.

Despite this, the second part should resolve these subplots and provide a gripping conclusion to Elphaba and Glinda's story. I, for one, am excited to see if it will be just as thrilling as "Wicked."

showstopper or snoozefest?

(4/5)

- catchy soundtrack
- + memorable characters
- lengthy watch

Diddy's Demise

ANDREW DUVAL OPINIONS & FEATURE WORLD EDITOR AND TERESA SUN STAFF WRITER

Ten years ago, being offered "48 hours with Diddy" would invoke joy and celebration. Now, such words would strike the deepest of fears in the recipient. Sean "Diddy" Combs, also known as "Puff Daddy," "P. Diddy" and simply "Diddy," is a three-time Grammy-winning label owner and rapper with prominent influence in the music world. However, his legacy is now being overshadowed by a series of grave allegations dating back to the beginning of his career.

The scandal erupted in November 2023 when Combs's former girlfriend, singer and model Cassandra Ventura, filed a 35-page complaint initiating a federal lawsuit accusing him of sex trafficking, sexual abuse, domestic violence and forced drugging. Ventura detailed years of alleged abuse during their relationship, including being forced to participate in sometimes weekly "freak off" parties: elaborate, multi-day events known for their abundance of commercial sex workers, alcohol and drugs such as ketamine, cocaine, marijuana and GHB. Victims were often drugged to remain compliant to Combs's requests, including forced sexual encounters with various sex workers and unconsented recording of the misconduct, her allegation stated. Combs settled the lawsuit the day after it was filed, yet his attorney contended that this decision was not an admission of guilt.

After Ventura's lawsuit, numerous other victims—both men and women—filed their own lawsuits. They chronicled misconduct dating from 1990 to 2022 against those between the ages of nine and 38, involving rape, drugging and sex trafficking. Some lawsuits claimed that other celebrities were also involved. For example, in a December 2023 lawsuit, a woman named Lisa Gardner accused Combs and R&B singer Aaron Hall of taking turns sexually assaulting her at age 16 in 1990. Although Combs settled his lawsuit with Ventura, he took no responsibility nor admitted his guilt.

Combs denied all accusations, claiming that they were all financially motivated. However, on May 15, CNN published 2016 camera footage depicting an intoxicated Combs physically assaulting Ventura by throwing glass vases at her and kicking her. Ventura's lawsuit claims that Combs paid the InterContinental Century City hotel \$50,000 to hide the footage. A few days later, Combs posted a rare public apology to Ventura on both Instagram and Facebook.

Yet Combs has not only been under fire from his victims. On March 25, The Department of Homeland Security conducted a series of raids in a sex trafficking investigation, disclosing over 1,000 bottles of baby oil and lubricants; narcotics; multiple illegal firearms, including handguns, homemade firearms and three AR-15 rifles with defaced serial numbers (a crime punishable by up to 5 years in prison); and multiple electronic devices believed to contain critical evidence of Combs's alleged crimes.

On Sept. 16, Diddy was arrested after a grand jury indictment for racketeering, sex trafficking and transportation to engage in prostitution. He is being held in the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn without bail, with his trial set for May 5, 2025. While in detention, Combs has made multiple requests for bail, which were denied due to concerns over witness tampering and obstruction of justice. His list of accusers continues to grow, with over 30 civil complaints filed since November 2023. If Combs is convicted, experts such as CNN legal analyst and former prosecutor Elie Honig predict he will receive a lengthy prison sentence of at least 15 years, with the possibility of a life sentence.

"Combs's sentence should be so much longer than 15 years—that time period is not even how long his abuse lasted for. A life sentence is much more fitting, because his victims deserve justice. Sexual abuse leaves a scar on a person for life, and he has destroyed multiple lives," Sophomore **Kasey Hashiguchi** said.

When asked about Combs, well-known rapper and producer Devin Malik, popular for his solo rapping and production, declined to comment.

"I ain't tryna talk 'bout Diddy," Malik said.

Other celebrities and rappers connected to Combs have also yet to speak up about the case, such as fellow rapper Jay-Z, ex-girlfriend Jennifer Lopez and close friend Naomi Campbell. Their silence has been interpreted by several celebrity public relations managers such as Erich Schiffer and Doug Eldridge as an attempt to distance themselves from a stigmatized—and potentially dangerous—case.

As the legal proceedings against Combs unfold, the discovery of electronics, illegal firearms and other evidence has added another layer of complexity to the case. As more details continue to emerge, the world watches closely, awaiting justice for the victims and a resolution to one of the most high-profile cases in recent history.

Lights, Camera, Lookalike

LAUREN LAW AND NIRU SHIVAKUMAR STAFF WRITERS

DESIGN BY ANNA YUE

In an era where toxic fan culture—from obsessive stalking to invasive behavior—populates the media, an unexpected event emerged in October, encouraging a refreshing and cheerful atmosphere. What began as a playful experiment in New York City blossomed into a global sensation, bringing people together for a light-hearted competition: fan look-alike contests.

The phenomenon began when YouTuber Anthony Po organized an online invitation on event planning platform Partiful, advertising a Timothée Chalamet look-alike contest on Oct. 27 in Washington Square Park. Po and his friends also hung up posters around New York City to promote the competition, inviting anyone to attend and offering a \$50 prize and trophy to the most convincing doppelganger.

Celebrity look-alike competitions began as an informal and local oddity orchestrated frequently by Po and his friends, as per Forbes Magazine. However, their popularity quickly skyrocketed when Chalamet himself made a surprise appearance in the park. Despite crashing his own look-alike contest, he was not awarded the \$50 prize. Instead, content creators who acted as contest judges crowned Miles Mitchell, a 21 year old fan dressed in Chalamet's Willy Wonka look, the winner. Mitchell embraced the role by handing out chocolate to the crowd, which rallied support for his victory.

Chalamet's look-alike competition offered a contrast from toxic fandoms and negative social media attacks toward celebrities. Forbes further reports that the competition went viral on social media as it allowed fans to celebrate with pure enthusiasm and kindness; the event served as a positive example of how fan communities can remain uplifting and free from negativity.

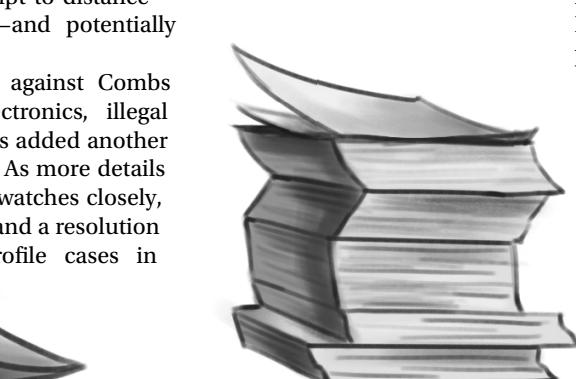
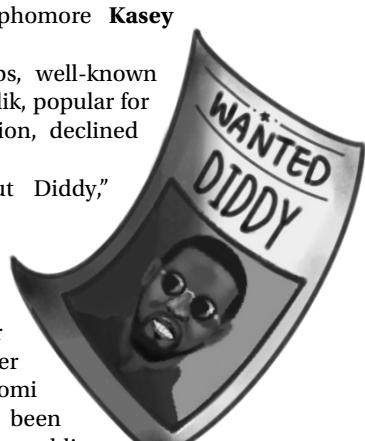
"I was surprised by the recent emergence of look-alike contests. It is fun to watch clips from the events, as it is interesting to see how people come together so easily for something so simple," Senior **Rishika Rastogi** said.

After this initial competition, look-alike contests began spreading across the world. These small local events have brought fans together to showcase their creativity and shared admiration. First was the Paul Mescal look-alike contest in Dublin, Ireland, promoted through a TikTok video that received over 300,000 views. The contest was held on Nov. 7 in Smithfield Square, drawing a crowd of both locals and tourists. While it did not achieve the same global popularity as the Chalamet competition, it still captured the same spirit of enthusiasm and creativity, The Guardian reported.

Similarly, a Dev Patel look-alike contest took place in San Francisco on Nov. 10, attracting many fans and locals donning Patel's unique looks from his roles in "Slumdog Millionaire" and "The Green Knight." Friends Sitara Bellam, Tasnim Khandakar and Sahana Rangarajan organized the contest, creating a social media flyer that led fans to an online Partiful invitation. This event marked a milestone in look-alike culture, becoming the first competition centered around a celebrity of color. Similarly, the first look-alike contest for a female celebrity—Zendaya—took place in Oakland's Wilma Chan Park on Nov. 20. Contestants participated in a series of challenges, including a dance battle, to decide the winner. Event organizers crowned Zainab Bansfield the best doppelganger as she embodied Zendaya's multi-hyphenate spirit.

"If there is an Ed Sheeran look-alike contest, I might participate as a joke because I always get compared to him due to my red hair. I appreciate how fans orchestrate these contests as a means of fostering camaraderie and facilitating social connections. They create a shared experience that brings people together," Junior **Ryan Etter** said.

The rise of look-alike contests, from Timothée Chalamet to Paul Mescal and Dev Patel, reflects a shift in fan culture that prioritizes creativity, community and fun over negativity and obsession. BBC affirms that these events are more than just lighthearted competitions: they are a celebration of shared admiration, where fans come together to honor their favorite celebrities. As they continue to spread across the globe, with upcoming look-alike competitions for stars like Billie Eilish and Paul Rudd, these contests can bring fans closer together in the most wholesome and uplifting ways.



JANE HONG ART

Hoping for a shiny, limited edition figurine in trendy attire to complete their collection, a toy collector anxiously opens their last blind box. These boxes conceal their content, offering a randomized set of options where consumers are not guaranteed which one they will receive. As the crumple of the box reverberates throughout the room, the toy reveals itself—only to be a common, typical figure that has made its debut for the 20th time. The common figurine is placed beside a row of identical disappointing toys, and the buyer reopens Amazon, placing another order of the same blind box set, which is twice the price this time.

Often featuring small, colorful decorative figurines, blind boxes have become a staple of modern toy retailing, adding an element of surprise and excitement to toy purchases. Originating in Japan as lucky bags, they have gained global influence, particularly for unboxing videos that became increasingly

Hidden Hit or Miss

LAUREN LAW AND ISABELLA ZHU STAFF WRITERS

popular on social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Social media popularity can increase consumer's enthusiasm for the product, which in turn increases stocks for the blind box market. For instance, when China's diving gold medalist for this year's Olympics, Quan Hongchan, revealed her collection of blind box turtle toys over a live stream, sales surged overnight: more than 100,000 of the toys were purchased by fans, according to Sixth Tone, a Chinese online magazine.

Moreover, blind boxes are brought into physical stores, ranging from a few dollars to a few hundred. As of 2016, China introduced Pop Mart, a Chinese brand known for its more expensive, premium blind boxes targeted for serious collectors and enthusiasts. Additionally, Miniso and Funko introduced lower-cost options for simpler and smaller figures, often featuring licensed characters. Similarly, beauty store Sephora followed up on the trend by integrating blind boxes for their products, like their Set and Cream makeup bundles, granting

each one a different set of unrevealed products. Thus, the global market for blind boxes totaled \$13.5 billion this year and is projected to reach \$31 billion by 2031, per Verified Market Research.

Additionally, limited edition blind boxes feed into the sense of accomplishment and triumph that comes with winning. By perpetuating this acquisition, consumers are tempted to spend more money to obtain rare figurines, states the 7th International Conference on Economic Management and Green Development proceedings. The National Library of Medicine further revealed that blind boxes may increase risk of suicide and depression, due to their addictive nature. Referred to as miniature gambling devices, these toy boxes feed into addiction because they grant multiple possibilities, attracting consumers for the thrill of the unknown and a sense of novelty, according to the Francis Academic Press of Business and Technology.

"I love the thrill of surprise when opening blind boxes; the uncertainty of what is inside makes the experience far more enjoyable than purchasing something directly. I like collecting 'Sonny Angels' and it is even more exciting to guess which figurine is inside, instead of directly picking one," Freshman Sophie Law said.

With this, blind boxes come with several drawbacks for consumers: many of them are non-refundable, leading to frustration if the same figure is received repeatedly, ultimately resulting in a disappointing and costly experience.

Furthermore, some consider these childish or impulsive purchases, appealing more to collectors or those seeking novelty rather than offering long-term value, according to the School of Visual Arts.

"Despite their cute designs and trendy attire, blind boxes are too expensive. Generally, consumers are at a high risk of receiving a figure they do not want, which usually wastes their money. Buying something when you know what will be received is more enjoyable," Junior Angela Fong said.

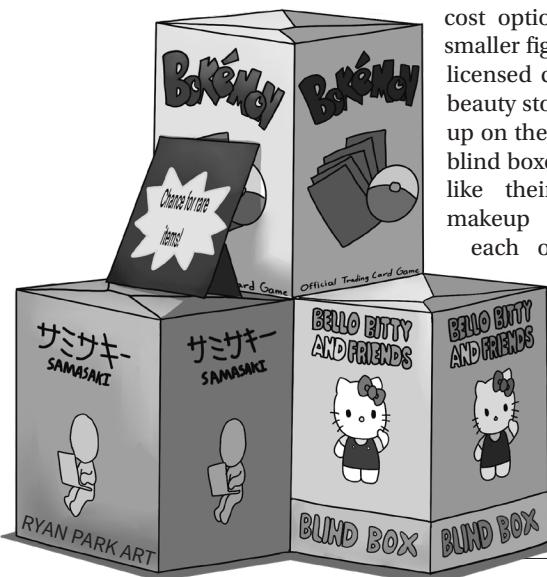
Blind boxes offer a unique blend of excitement and frustration, keeping consumers on a perpetual hunt for the next big surprise. Whether it is the thrill of unboxing a rare figurine or the letdown of receiving a common one, the process taps into the physiological rush of uncertainty. With their non-refundable nature, blind boxes add a gambling element that risks financial loss on a product, yet the market continues to evolve past simple toy phenomena into a compelling and daring consumer trend.

Poll: Does not knowing what you will get make you want to purchase blind boxes more?

Yes 28%	No 72%
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168 STUDENTS POLLED

COMPILED BY LAUREN LAW AND TERESA SUN STAFF WRITERS



Tourists Overstay Their Welcome

JAMES TONG STAFF WRITER

Under the sweltering summer sun, the cobblestone alleys of Venice suffocate with crowds, as waves of tourists flood the city. Tour groups struggle for space, while overloaded gondolas maneuver through jammed canals. Just above, frustrated locals glare from their windows, watching as their city overflows with visitors. Although tourism is intended to expand cultural exchange and economic growth, overtourism—an overwhelming quantity of visitors at a popular destination—has initiated several protests and led many

countries to implement regulations to manage its disruptive impact.

Many quarantine restrictions were lifted post-pandemic, causing a surge in travel rates and tourism. In 2023, the tourism industry contributed \$9.9 trillion to the global GDP, or 9.1% of the total, according to German international data aggregator Statista. UN Tourism estimates that 790 million tourists have traveled internationally between January and July this year, revealing an approximate 11% increase since 2023, reaching 96% of the pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

Economically, this industry provides undeniable benefits on a local and global scale. Statista estimated that there were 330 million travel and tourism jobs in 2023, which are only expected to rise. Additionally, in tourism hotspots, infrastructure relies on the influx of tourists, as hotels and local restaurants fill up with visitors.

One of the main attractions of tourism is exploring the diversity of different cultures globally. However, the authenticity of these cultural exchanges often diminishes in areas affected by overtourism, where traditions are not preserved and rather become commercialized to suit foreign expectations. Instead of protecting the local lifestyles, foods and communal identity, overtourism promotes commercialization and shifts infrastructure towards economic gain. In Barcelona, traditional markets have transformed into tourist attractions, prioritizing souvenirs and fast food over local produce.

Economic reliance poses risks in destinations like the Maldives

and Hawaii. ABC News states that tourism has the largest role in Hawaii's economy and was consequently affected by the pandemic and the Maui fire in 2023. According to NPR, the pandemic drastically reduced the number of tourists, leaving one in six workers unemployed due to the state's heavy economic dependence on tourism.

"Tourism helps people from different cultural backgrounds connect and experience more aspects of the world. When I visited New York, I was not bothered by overcrowding. Instead, I enjoyed being with other tourists from different parts of the world and visiting the various attractions in the city," Junior Warren Tan said.

Additionally, overtourism leads to pollution and the overconsumption of environmental resources. Catering to tourism, hotels, cruises and planes consume substantial resources contributing to climate change. According to Sustainable Travel, tourism contributes to 8% of worldwide carbon emissions.

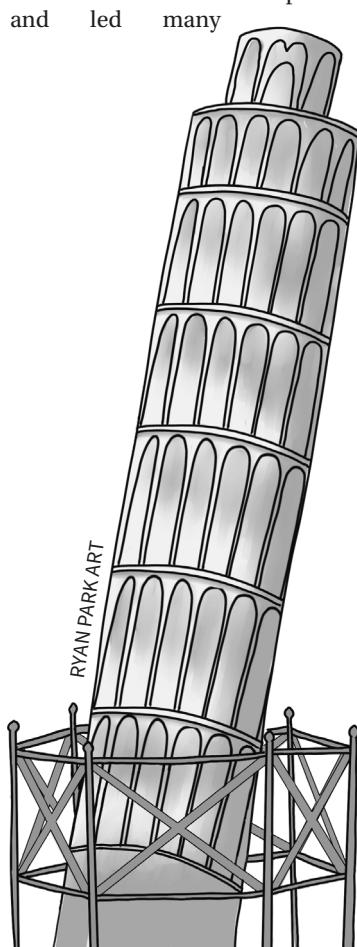
In cities like Venice, Barcelona and Amsterdam, overtourism disrupts daily life for residents. In Venice, navigating through the streets and public spaces for daily commuting becomes nearly impossible with the enormous crowds. Furthermore, the constant influx of tourists also decreases affordable housing for residents. As per PBS, many Venetians feel like strangers in their city, as tourists vastly outnumber

the local population throughout the year.

In turn, protests against overtourism have erupted across Europe. In Lisbon, Portugal, residents have rallied against short-term vacation rentals in response to increased housing costs for locals. Similarly, in countries like France and Spain, protests target overtourism's negative impacts on housing, pollution and services specific to residents. The Harvard International Review reported that the protestors emphasize the priority of their livelihoods during government decisions. Rather than eliminating tourism, locals want an end to overtourism that disrupts their communities.

"Protesting against overtourism is justified. Visitors often leave trash behind, disrupt daily life and prioritize taking photos instead of respecting the community, culture or environment," Sophomore Evan Xu said.

Fundamentally, overtourism perpetuates complexities in balancing the benefits of cultural exchange and economic growth with protecting local communities, cultural authenticity and natural environments. From Hawaii to Italy, these challenges highlight the importance of sustainable tourism. However, as new government regulations for sustainable travel are in their infancy, there is newfound potential for tourism hotspots to be preserved.



DESIGN BY ANNA YUE

The Place of Shining Light



CLAIRE CHANG INVESTIGATIVE REPORT EDITOR

Amidst a land of political turmoil and the winding roads of the Middle East, survival hinges on swift thinking and outsmarting enemies. Three men from "The Place of Shining Light" by Nazneen Sheikh race to gain possession of a Bamiyan Buddha statue for various reasons—the motive for Khalid, a Pakistani antiquities dealer, is to illegally transport the statue from Afghanistan; Ghilis, an affluent art collector, aspires to leverage his political power; and the protagonist Adeel, Khalid's reputable former military officer, feels a resonating connection to the statue. When Adeel escapes, a high-stakes cat-and-mouse chase forces him to confront his moral compass while navigating an environment driven by an unquenchable thirst for power.

After stealing Khalid's truck, Adeel disguises himself and hides, finding a poor woman named Norbu who begs him to take her along with him. Although he originally resists, Adeel's decision to help her poses a new conflict—their newfound alliance carries fatal consequences if revealed. Adeel grapples with his personal responsibility for the woman's safety, eventually sending her off to Skardu to take the bus back home to her father. Norbu's role in the story adds another layer of complexity, demonstrating how loyalty and honor are threatened by personal ambition and political affairs in Adeel's race against time. As Adeel's danger pushes his mission into jeopardy, his moral code is tested, and his personal honor to help others is inspiring.

Later, terrorists invade the place where Adeel and Norbu are hiding from government officials and Taliban associates. There, they attempt to lure Adeel into a trap. Adeel drives along the road behind their car to a checkpoint, eventually triggering an explosion. The descriptive imagery transported me into the driver's seat of Adeel's truck; my heart constricted as the pressure rose from knowing that someone was watching Adeel's every move. Amidst chaos, Adeel's decision to protect innocence demonstrates that compassion may survive, contrasting with the surrounding environment that is consumed by greed and violence.

Essentially, war may reduce humankind to survival instincts and diminish personal and cultural identity—but Adeel's story breaks norms and explores how humanity and ethical convictions are upheld during times of conflict.

book hooked?

(3/5)



+ vivid sociopolitical environment
- unclear character motivation
- inconsistent pacing

Holidays Sleigh Away From Their Origins

LILIANA CHAI AND CHELSEA LU STAFF WRITERS

The warm glow of the fireplace flickers across the walls adorned with evergreen garlands and twinkling lights. Ripples of laughter are exchanged between family members sharing stories and enjoying a plate of half-eaten sugar cookies dusted with green and red sprinkles. Children tear through brightly wrapped presents, their delighted shrieks mixing with the familiar tunes of holiday carols—a picture perfect holiday moment.

For centuries, Christmas was celebrated for the traditional origins behind the holiday, and less about the gifts under the tree. During the Iron Age, Scandinavians celebrated the winter solstice from late December to January. Fathers and sons would bring home large logs to set on fire, symbolizing the birth of new cattle in the upcoming year. Over time, these ancient rituals blended with Christian traditions, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. The nativity scene, a telltale symbol of the holiday, depicts hope and salvation for humanity: the birth of a savior, further emphasized during the holidays.

The modern image of Santa Claus originated from St. Nicholas—a monk who was born in Turkey and gave away his flying sled, making a debut in “Twas The Night Before Christmas.” Santa’s image was fully commercialized later in the 20th century when Coca-Cola featured him in their advertisements, hoping to boost their winter sales.

Yet, despite initially being a spiritual ceremony, Christmas has long since evolved and become a much more inclusive event. According to a study on religion conducted by Pew Research, 81% of non-Christians in America also celebrate Christmas, with the majority viewing the occasion as more cultural than spiritual. Similarly, countless non-religious affiliated individuals still celebrate Easter, rejoicing for chocolate eggs and a fluffy bunny figure, despite its roots in commemorating Jesus’s resurrection.

“Although we might not attend church or tie it back to religious faith, my family still has our own way of celebrating Christmas, and that is what makes it special—getting to spend time with each other. Everyone should be able to celebrate, regardless of their religious identity,” Sophomore Anna Lutz said.

Events like Christmas and Easter are also becoming steadily commercialized. U.S. holiday retail sales skyrocketed to over \$950 billion in 2023, and families spend around \$1,000 on average each Christmas, as per Statista, a German platform specialized in data gathering. Undeniably, shopping for gifts plays a crucial role in the festive season—especially with the characterizations of figures like Santa Claus. Parents feel pressured to uphold the idea of Santa Claus, as 85% of young children still believe in him as of 2020, according to a survey by The New Scientist.

By marketing towards the youth, as reported by Knowledge at Wharton. On one hand, some argue that this label on children is taken too seriously, as holidays are a once a year celebration and are intended to bring joy and teach values like generosity and gratitude. On the other, many conservatives assert that valuing consumerism over faith fosters greed.

“Giving gifts does not cultivate selfishness—it fosters generosity. Giving a child a gift is like rewarding them for the good deeds they have done and it motivates them to give to others as well. Besides, giving gifts gets people into the holiday spirit and it generally makes everyone happier,” Freshman Wei Liu said.

Whether through secular gatherings or religious devotion, holidays continue to hold a special place in the hearts of people around the world, offering a blend of tradition, joy and personal meaning—no matter how they are observed.

Gifts

Poll: What is your favorite part of Christmas?

Food	Receiving Gifts	Family Tree	Giving Gifts
38.66%	33.61%	21.85%	5.88%

119 STUDENTS POLLED
COMPILED BY LILIANA CHAI AND CATHERINE NGUYEN STAFF WRITERS

Unwrapping the Meaning Behind Gifts

AMIE AHN AND TERESA SUN STAFF WRITERS

Extravagant offerings of jewelry, clothing, grains, paintings and even the bright shine of gold once lined the pharaohs’ massive pyramids, destined to accompany them into the afterlife. Amidst ancient Egypt, people perceived pharaohs as divine beings on earth and showered them with lavish gifts as a means of pleasing the gods. Now, in modern times, exchanging gifts remains a universal practice shared across various cultures, each with unique rituals to emphasize gratitude and appreciation.

Gift giving dates back to prehistoric eras, where early cavemen exchanged unusual rocks and rare animal teeth to each other. The long-standing practice of gift giving highlights the timeless human desire to strengthen social bonds and express positive emotions towards others. Expanding past mere generosity, giving gifts serves many purposes; in medieval Europe, gifts were often traded among royalty and nobility as a means of securing political alliances and demonstrating loyalty. Additionally, during the Victorian era, it was expected for men to present lavish gifts to women for courtship, but societal norms dictated that women should refuse these gifts to seem modest and proper.

In modern day society, gift giving has evolved as a more casual and frequent practice, but continues to remain ubiquitous across various cultures with unique traditions and customs. For instance, in Japan, during the mid-year gift exchange custom Ochugen and its year-end counterpart Oseibo, gifts like sweets and socks are exchanged to express gratitude and strengthen social bonds. The two traditions began as religious rituals where people would offer goods to deities and ancestors, but over time have transitioned into polite acts of gratitude for one another.

Moreover, because there may be an unsaid expectation to return the favor in the future. According to the University of Arizona, both giving and receiving a gift releases dopamine. Also, giving gifts often comes from a place of compassion and can alleviate one's pain by motivating them to prepare a genuine gift for a loved one.

“Handmade gifts, even if inexpensive, are more thoughtful and genuine. To show my gratitude for loved ones, I try to make gifts, rather than purchasing something special for me, it feels much more heartfelt. When another person takes time out of their day to create something special for teenagers, for instance, may feel especially stressed during the holidays,” senior Lucas Raimondi said.

However, the financial aspect of exchanging gifts to the extent that an employed adult can. Additionally, the holidays or young individuals with limited resources, say that parents may feel pressure to afford expensive gifts. Allison Pugh, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, says that parents that gifts should be expensive can overshadow the true media, even if the prices range past their budget. Thus, the inability to purchase trendy items on social media, even if the prices are high, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and guilt, and expectations that gifts should be expensive can overshadow the true spirit of generosity and goodwill, and expectations that gifts should be expensive for the people in my life and gifts are just nice additions. Plus, when gifts are pricey, I often feel obligated to give that person something of similar value to return the favor, which is a heavy burden to carry,” junior Gavin Liu said.

Although the expectation of giving gifts comes with financial caveats, the diverse traditions continue to highlight the common underlying message of gifts—a sign that love and social connection are essential to form bonds.

Top 4 Biggest
Fracking
States:

COMPILED BY
MICHAEL IM
STAFF WRITER

Texas:
30,942,200
cubic feet of oil
daily

New Mexico:
10,235,000
cubic feet of
oil daily

North
Dakota:
6,642,000
cubic feet of
oil daily

Pennsylvania:
20,521,000,000
cubic feet of
natural gas daily

Fracturing Oil, Gas and Ecosystems

YUNSEO KIM ART

Fracking first became widely used in the 2010s, as advancing fracking technology enabled enormously increased productivity in shale formations, skyrocketing American oil production. Nowadays, up to 95 percent of new American oil and gas wells use fracking, and it is the dominant method of extracting oil and natural gas around the world. This so-called "shale boom" has made the United States a leading oil and gas producer, earned billions of dollars for oil corporations and investors, created hundreds of thousands of jobs and revitalized rural economies. However, there are downsides to this oil drilling miracle.

Hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, is the controversial oil drilling method that involves the injection of a highly pressurized chemical cocktail miles down into the earth, breaking apart the rocks and releasing the stored gas or oil for pipes to suck back up.

Although the idea of fracturing oil and gas-containing rock formations goes back to the 19th century, the first fracking experiments began in 1947. Oil corporations hoped to use the technique to make harder and deeper formations more economically viable, but technological limits prevented its expansion, as shale was impermeable to conventional oil extraction.

"The government should restrict fracking. Its many environmental harms include seismic activity and greenhouse emissions. As climate change worsens, anything that may contribute to it should be addressed," Junior Rithik Verma said.

The fluids pumped into these oil formations poison the soil and contaminate nearby groundwater. New oil wells also threaten wildlife habitats, as they convert previously untouched lands into industrial facilities. And on top of all that, increasing fossil fuel production directly contributes to the accelerating pace of climate change seen today.

MICHAEL IM STAFF WRITER

Mining the Motherlode

MICHAEL IM STAFF WRITER

Below the hot Nevada sun and beneath the drying shrubs, there lies a hidden treasure at Thacker Pass: 13 million tons of lithium ore. Although extracting this lithium would provide enough to create the batteries of a million electric vehicles or 6 billion iPhones, the proposed lithium mine has received extensive resistance from indigenous and climate groups.

Due to being the lightest elemental metal and its singular valence electron, lithium is commonly used to make the lightest and most efficient batteries currently available. This makes it invaluable for electric vehicles, smartphones and all sorts of lightweight electronics, and especially critical for the modern transition away from fossil fuels, leading to a growing demand for it in the past decade.

The massive deposit of lithium ore at Thacker Pass was first found in the 1970s by energy companies searching for uranium. The area remained quiet until the 2010s, when drilling recommenced, driven by lithium's newfound demand. Its development was approved by the Bureau of Land Management in 2021, and construction began in early 2023. Loans from organizations such as the Department of Energy and General Motors have provided funding, although it is expected to be several years until the mine is completely operational.

The majority of the construction will be of the processing plants, as the Thacker Pass mine is intended to be the first in the world to process lithium from clay deposits containing lithium carbonate. The entire process has been designed to be carbon-neutral, generating its own power without releasing significant emissions. Despite this and the jobs the mine would provide, many locals and environmentalists have protested against its completion.

"The resources gained from lithium mining in the United States should not be prioritized over its environmental hazards, as mining uses lots of water, and the Southwest is in a serious drought, which could be worsened by mining activity. The mine may lead to chemicals being released into the soil, contaminating groundwater and hindering plant growth," Senior Arush Zarabi said.

Thacker Pass is the traditional home of several local indigenous groups, and some of these groups have demanded either a stop to, or a part in, the construction of the mine. Additionally, climate groups have protested the recent surge in the number of lithium mines worldwide, due to their pollution of local ecosystems and their exploitation of local resources for the benefit of far away corporations.

"The value of lithium outweighs the potential environmental impacts that could result from mining, as long as it is done humanely and there are sufficient regulations to mitigate damage to the environment. In the long run, the efficiency of EV batteries created with mined lithium will be more economically and environmentally beneficial to the country," Junior Odin Maxwell said.

The Department of Energy has claimed that the completed mine could reduce gasoline consumption by 317 million gallons per year. The world's reliance on lithium batteries is unlikely to change, as electric vehicles, personal electronics and solar or wind power electrical grids require efficient rechargeable batteries. So as the world moves away from fossil fuels, lithium will most likely help replace them, whether it ends up coming from Thacker Pass or not.

"Fracking must be restricted to protect our environment. It will cause great damage to future ecosystems. Its ecological damage is difficult to reverse, so we need to preserve nature as much as we can," Sophomore Ethan Zhu said.

Despite the obvious downsides, many politicians refuse to discuss potential restrictions on fracking. While Republican politicians tend to be vigorously pro-fracking, funding drilling projects extensively, Democrats are split on the issue, with only the more environmentally focused politicians tending to support bans. This dichotomy could be seen playing out in Kamala Harris's campaign, who, after becoming the Democratic nominee for president, quickly walked back on her previous statements in favor of a fracking ban. With the victory of pro-fracking Donald Trump in the presidential election, fracking is likely to continue to grow, despite its environmental impacts.



YUNSEO KIM ART

China's Dumpling Dash

SHINY XU AND CHELSEA LU STAFF WRITERS

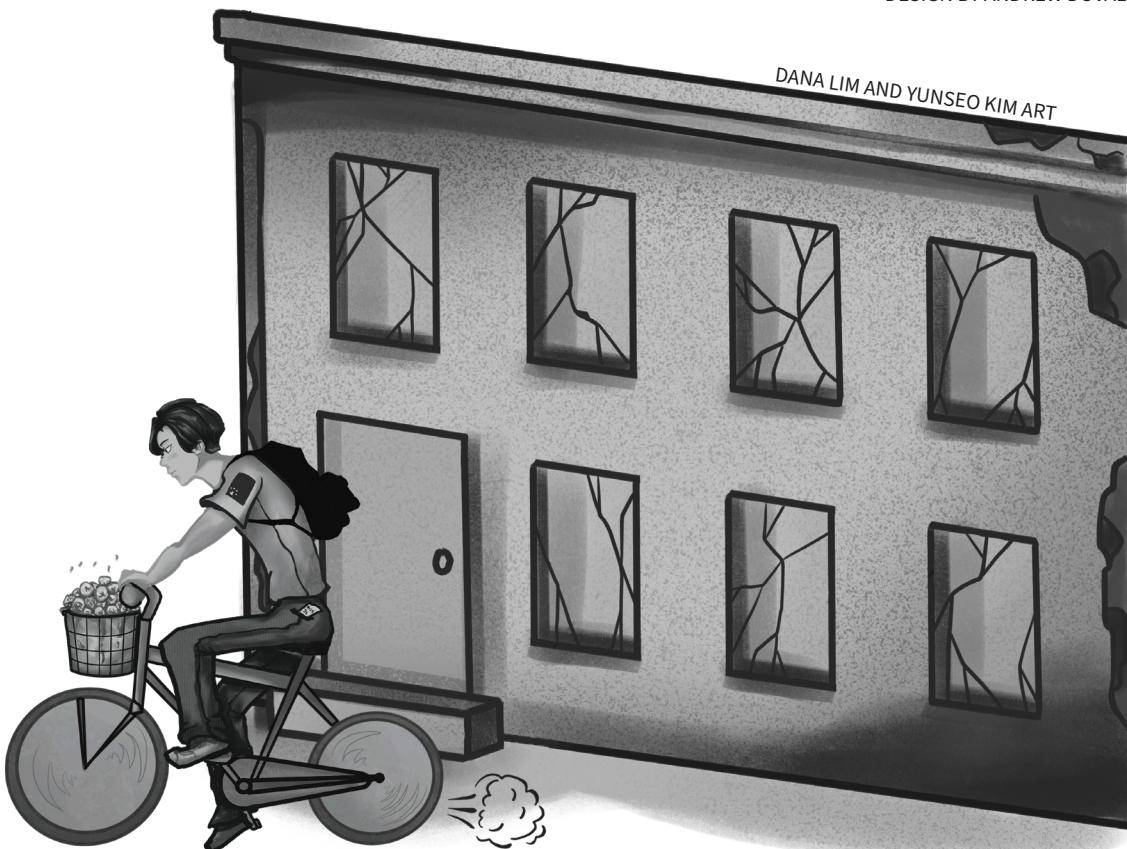
In central China, a new trend is taking over college campuses: late night bike rides for soup dumplings. 200,000 Chinese college students congest the roads, causing traffic gridlock as they ride rented bikes from Zhengzhou towards the tourist town of Kaifeng. Ambulances and police cars line the sides of the roads with police using loudspeakers to urge the bikers to leave, all while discarded bikes lay in piles on the streets. Unfortunately, what started as four college students posting on social media about a spontaneous trip to satisfy late night cravings has now caused chaos and controversy.

While the experience fosters camaraderie and is an enjoyable respite from daily stresses, the humongous train of riders easily takes up a whole street every time, disrupting traffic flow. With busy intersections crammed full of bikers, cars are left at a standstill and authorities struggle to control traffic. The local

government, who previously supported and promoted the trend to increase tourism, have now closed bike lanes and prohibited bikes from leaving the city in hopes of curbing the craze, as stated by CNN. Chinese netizens have also criticized the trend for overwhelming businesses and neighborhoods, while others have asserted that there is no fault in enjoying a late night bike ride.

"Bikers do not have the right to obstruct traffic. Riders can go any day and anytime, and they do not have to go all together either. Blocking commuters is not worth it if it is only for cravings," Freshman **Avika Choudhary** said.

Three bike renting apps declared their bikes would automatically lock if taken out of Zhengzhou, and local universities also took strict measures such as banning bicycles and requiring their students to have passes to leave campus, bringing a premature end to the chaotic trend.



DANA LIM AND YUNSEO KIM ART

COMPILED BY MELVIN NAJARIAN
STAFF WRITER

YUNSEO KIM ART

48 MILLION
homes are unfinished in china

- CAUSED BY:
1. Three red lines
 2. Overbuilding
 3. COVID-19

After nearly two decades of price appreciation and rapid growth, the Chinese housing market crashed in 2021. This was indicated through a drop of house prices by 30% since 2021, according to E-House China Real Estate Research Institute. Notably, on Jan. 29, the crisis escalated as China's largest real estate developers, the Evergrande Group, was liquidated after filing for bankruptcy. The company was \$300 billion in debt and the Hong Kong court that ordered the liquidation cited the

company's failure to implement a debt restructuring strategy.

The deteriorating housing industry has had a major effect on the Chinese middle class, crushing the long-held belief that real estate was a guaranteed way to accumulate wealth. With property accounting for 70% of family investments, the housing industry crisis has resulted in a decline in family wealth, and many families have begun to postpone important life decisions and pause mortgage payments.

Prior to the housing industry's decline, China's economy had experienced a real estate boom, with the government encouraging real estate companies to build large-scale developments. Due to the appreciation of the housing market, property developers overbuilt in many regions, and many houses were bought as investments and remained unused.

"The issue of overbuilding property has caused a rise in ghost towns, as real estate developers took advantage of low interest loans to build residential complexes in hopes of drawing investment, but not necessarily actual tenants. Most buyers of the newly constructed property ended up being wealthy investors betting on price appreciation when future tenants moved in. However, a decrease in the rate of urbanization, slowing birth rates and increasing concerns of affordability have discouraged many Chinese citizens from purchasing new property," Senior **Vincent Chung** said.

Local governments have also faced economic trouble due to the decline of the housing industry. The housing crisis has led to a decreased property development rate, and according to the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum, the decline in

land and property sales has caused the local government spending to decrease by 18%.

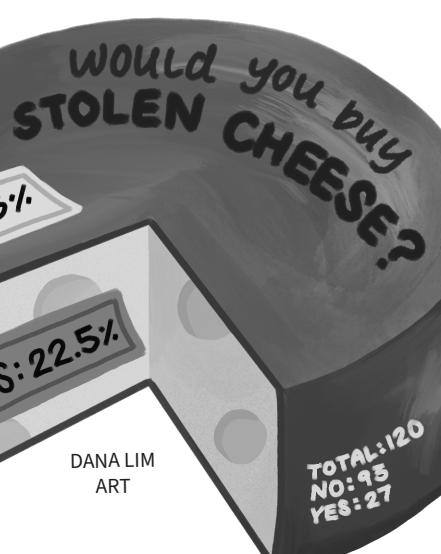
In an earlier 2020 attempt to control property development, The People's Bank of China introduced the Three Red Lines policy, which aimed to ensure that housing developers borrowed less money and had enough capital to pay their debts to continue their projects. The three red lines in question were that liabilities could not exceed 70% of assets, that net debt could not exceed 100% equity and that money reserves must be at least 100% of short term debts. Evergrande had been in violation of all of the financial guidelines of the policy, contributing to the decision to liquidate the company.

Evergrande had also offered "wealth management products," a risky financial product, to investors, raising \$14 billion in the process. These promised investors rates of interest as high as 12%, and came with gifts of complimentary Gucci bags, but ultimately became worthless as the company missed payments to contractors and creditors, per Reuters, resulting in protests outside Evergrande's offices in late 2021 to early 2022.

"China's housing crisis could have severe global implications, as undermining China's role in the global economy could disrupt supply chains and limit trade with other countries who depend on China as a viable market. As the

world's second-largest economy, a housing crisis would hurt the country's GDP and countries who depend on China for exports and manufacturing. Additionally, China's housing collapse would reduce foreign investor confidence, making it so that less investors would stimulate the Chinese market," Junior **Simone Vinay** said.

Ultimately, to combat the housing crisis, China's vice premier, along with top economic officials of the Communist Party, has proposed that local governments should purchase homes that have not been sold and turn them into social housing. To support the vice premier's decisions, People's Bank of China also declared that it will create nationwide programs that will provide \$41 billion to local governments to aid them in buying unsold houses. In coordination with the proposed plans, the central bank's deputy governor announced in a press conference that it would advocate for commercial banks to help local institutions purchase unsold houses and turn them into affordable social housing. The country has previously tried over 300 measures to resolve the crisis, per Caixin, a Chinese economic news agency, to little avail, as prices have unrelentingly continued to fall.

COMPILED BY MELVIN NAJARIAN
STAFF WRITERDANA LIM
ART

Say Cheese! You're on Camera

JOSHUA YAN AND NIRU SHIVAKUMAR STAFF WRITERS

In early October, criminals in the United Kingdom stole 22 tons of cheddar cheese, worth \$389,000. The Metropolitan Police arrested an unidentified 63-year-old man thought to be involved on Oct. 30 in London on the charges of fraud by false representation and handling stolen goods.

In what the media is calling the "grate cheese robbery," perpetrators assumed the identity of a French supermarket chain to make an order in July for 22 tons of Hafod, a rare artisanal form of cheddar. The thieves made the order through Neal's Yard Dairy, a London cheese retailer.

The cheese reached a Neal's Yard warehouse in two shipments

in September. After Oct. 14, a week after payment was due, the company attempted to contact the supposed buyer but received no response. By that time, all 950 wheels of cheese had already disappeared.

This cartoonish incident is not the first of its kind. According to CBS, Italy's Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium lost \$7 million worth of cheese over a two-year period at the time of its most recent theft in 2016. In 2013, New Jersey police arrested a man for stealing \$200,000 worth of Muenster cheese from K&K Cheese.

"Stealing is only okay when it is necessary for survival. I would understand if the thieves stole lower end food products, but

stealing luxury cheese is just a means to profit," Senior **William Nguyen** said.

Russia is a hotspot for illegal luxury cheese, as sanctions imposed by the country on imported fresh produce in response to Western sanctions on Russia have affected supply. As a result, black markets for food continue to grow in Russia, with cheese and wine being the most popular.

The key to ending the thefts may lie within the root of the problem fueling them. Unless the illegal trading and corruption that stemmed from the tariffs on imported produce are stopped and punished, there are bound to be more of such cheesy crimes.

Running in the 60's



GWEN CARROLL COMMUNITY NEWS & LAST WORD EDITOR

Crisp, cold morning air and the silence of an empty street combine to make the perfect running conditions for **Jeffrey Lutze**, Math Department. His runs span from a casual five-mile jog to a full 26.2-mile marathon, the latter of which he has run several.

For Lutze, running started off as a casual hobby that doubled as an exercise plan. It was perfect as a short escapade from the bustle of work life: a slice of time just for him. He enjoyed—and continues to enjoy—the way running both keeps his body in good shape and clears his mind.

"I never run with music. Although many runners do, I prefer to be focused fully on the run, which listening to music distracts me from. For me, a good run is one where my mind goes blank and I can clear my thoughts," Lutze said.

However, an issue soon sprung up: the ease with which he could skip out. Cold or rain or simple exhaustion made it plenty easy to neglect this bit of self care. Rather than run without a goal in mind, Lutze gave himself a solid objective in the form of a marathon.

He had run races in the past, but never anything longer than a half marathon. To tackle such extreme distances, Lutze went to great lengths to prepare himself. Rather than relying on a trainer, he referenced various practice regimes to adapt one that worked around his packed schedule.

Lutze's weekdays include five-mile runs that stretch into ten on the weekends. As he becomes accustomed to the shorter distance, he works up to 20-mile runs. His previous races of five to ten kilometers (3.1 to 6.2 miles) became part of his training plan, eventually including half marathons to prepare for the full 26.2 miles.

True to his word, Lutze ran his first marathon in 2014 in Santa Rosa, ending with a time of four hours and one minute. With that, his next target was presented directly to him: to finish in under four hours. He has since surpassed that goal as well, with his best time of three hours and 46 minutes in 2019. Although aging makes chasing new records difficult, Lutze continues to run marathons, his most recent being in 2023 to celebrate his 60th birthday. Marathons are very taxing, but Lutze's persistence makes him an experienced hand.

"After each marathon, I am tired and sore all over and start to ask myself why I would do this to myself. But after a few weeks, the feeling fades, and I begin to think I can do it again," Lutze said.

He took 2024 off from running marathons, but is still considering doing more in the future.

DESIGN BY ELEANOR GIL

Student Council Rings in Debate for Phone Policies

ARIEL LEE STAFF WRITER

Technology has become deeply integrated into students' lives, reshaping how they learn and communicate and sparking significant debates about their place in the school. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom's administration has brought renewed attention to this issue, with schools and districts exploring potential policies. A recent debate involving San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) officials and representatives from the school highlighted

with Bal and district official Jodie Lax. Additionally, they provided the student perspective, which consisted of data gathered from the Leland Student Council—run by the Associate Student Body Officers (ASBOs)—and the Intradistrict Leadership Council (ILC)—directed by Harb. The ILC is a program where representatives from each SJUSD school come together to discuss policies and specific issues within schools. During ILC Student Council meetings,

of 22 studies that showed no correlation between a cellphone ban and improvements in academics. This specific evidence was one of many that helped the debate team advocate for a soft ban during the debate.

The previously discussed topics during Student Council and ILC were touched upon during the Q&A session, and everything that Tseng and Harb prepared and planned to discuss—such as key issues related to a ban including campus safety and bathroom sanitation—were also mentioned during the meeting without many complications. The debate team especially hopes that people will be able to truly understand the student perspective and take the time to reevaluate any total bans.

"These debates are amazing opportunities for students to voice their opinions directly to the administrators who make policies that govern them. By representing the student voice on pressing issues, both administrators and students can share their side and listen to each others' perspectives. They can summarize the major contentions on each side of a controversial issue in an orderly and systematic manner that helps everyone involved understand the issue better," Kiwalkar said.

dedicated time was set aside to discuss Newsom's phone policy and gather direct input from the students the new policy would impact.

On Nov. 14, the team traveled to Gunderson High School and presented in front of administrative officials. First was the debate—two speakers on each side: Kiwalkar and Chang defending a cellphone ban, and Kumar and Liu opposing a cellphone ban, along with one moderator, Das. Following the debate was a Q&A session by the other two students, Harb and Tseng.

During the event, debaters organized into pairs to simulate a debate. However, unlike a real debate, the simulation's goal was not to win but to compromise on a balance between student needs and the responsibilities of the administrators. Their overall advocacy promoted a soft ban: brainstorming and discussing how to manage cellphone usage in classrooms rather than a blanket ban. As specified by Liu, one core statistic the opposing side cited was a meta-analysis consisting

from different groups on campus such as sports teams, student organizations and academic departments. Each ASBO was assigned a group to contact, gathering people for the meetings and gauging interest. Department representatives are nominated by teachers and sports representatives by coaches. Student Council meetings are led by the ASB officers and **Meg Walsh**, Activities Director. Before the meetings, they send out Google Forms to students on their opinions regarding certain topics—such as bathroom sanitation and school infrastructure—as requested by admins. Currently, ASB's main focus through the district debate and Student Council is to formulate a soft ban on phones that excludes whole-day confiscations; they believe it is important to them that students still have the chance to grow with technology and learn how to use it responsibly.

"Right now, it is hard to enact a phone policy since phones and technology are so ingrained in high school culture. It is not entirely the presence of devices at school that degrades the learning experience, because many of the issues are perpetuated by social media specifically," Tseng said.

The efforts of the debaters and student representatives, along with SJUSD's initiatives,



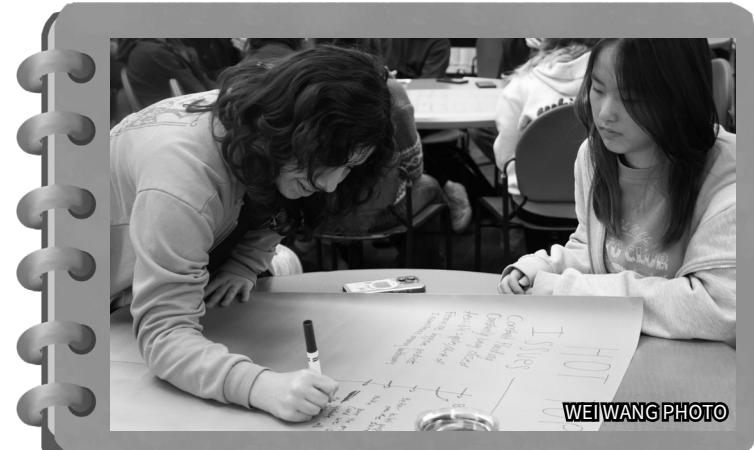
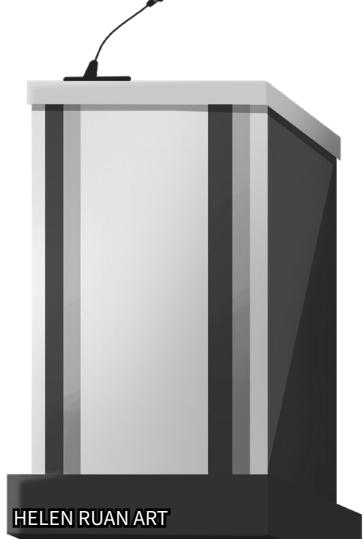
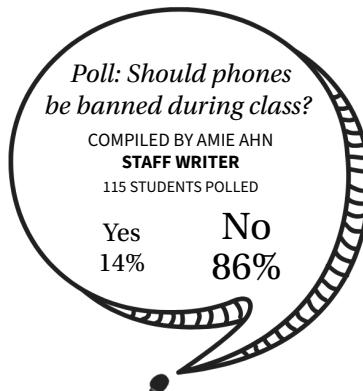
Junior Caitlynn Sue, Senior Shannon Ruan and Junior Max Nguyen brainstorm solutions to the phone problem in a Student Council Meeting.

the complexity of balancing the benefits and drawbacks of cellphone use in classrooms.

Principal **Harveen Bal** and **Priya Garcia**, English Department and head coach of the school's Speech and Debate team, selected five debaters—Junior **Heather Chang**, Junior **Aria Das**, Senior **Amyea Kiwalkar**, Junior **Bhavya Kumar** and Senior **Allen Liu**—for the phone ban conference with district officials. For the next 2 months, they practiced and researched, preparing for the conference alongside ASB president Senior **Jeffrey Tseng** and SJUSD student representative, Senior **Lara Harb**.

"Planning for this event took a long time as we had to meet several times a week to prepare for speeches and answers to questions from parents and teachers. But overall, it was a great experience, and I am super honored to have been able to speak on behalf of the students in the district," Harb said.

This process also included online research and interviews



Junior Mary Mirza and Sophomore Nicole Kuo write on a poster.

According to Tseng, ASB and the school admins aim to communicate with students to design a policy that works best for both parties—a difficult process that began with the Student Council. When planning for the first meeting, members of the Student Council were drawn

highlight the importance of diverse perspectives in policy-making. Their approach—a focus on dialogue, data collection and gradual implementation—emphasizes the necessity of creating policies that address safety and educational benefits without alienating students.

The Cost of Trophy Hunting

From survival to sport: Killing for fun

THE CHARGER ACCOUNT EDITORIAL BOARD

Though mankind has been hunting since the dawn of time, the practice has endured far past its original purpose. What started as a key aspect of survival has evolved as an unprecedented means of killing for the thrill of it, destroying animals' lives and inflicting unnecessary suffering.

For our ancestors, animal products were their main sources of food, clothes and weapons: necessities now fulfilled by corporations and industries. Yet hunting remains commonplace, raising questions of why the brutal activity prevails.

A study conducted by WBI Studies Repository reported that, when questioned why they kill, hunters claimed it either evoked a sense of achievement or came from a place of appreciation for the animals. Whether intentional

or not, hunters often leave animals severely injured to suffer a prolonged death rather than a swift painless one, as per wildlife charity In Defense of Animals. Many hunters also boast their self-proclaimed glory by posting pictures smiling over lifeless, wounded animal bodies on social media. Thus, their claims of appreciation are ironic because the acts of bloodshed show no honor; they only perpetuate fear, suffering and pain for the animals, which are then mocked in pictures.

Additionally, hunting safety course guide Hunter-ed correlates the sensation from hunting to that of swimming and riding bikes—both enjoyed in good fun, even if irrelevant to survival. However, this comparison proves ignorant, failing to acknowledge that biking

and swimming are not enjoyed at the expense of another's life. At its core, the appeal of killing the vulnerable, less intelligent and innocent to elevate oneself is detrimental to modern society—while such actions began from desperation and survival, they are now deeply rooted in malicious intent, hindering our empathy.

Overhunting also disrupts biodiversity by disrupting the food chain and creating an imbalance in the ecosystem, as per Green Journal, a British publication. Additionally, hunting resulted in the extinction of the Tasmanian Tiger, along with other species.

Despite its sadistic nature, the pleasure that comes from killing is not worth the severe impacts—a brief gunshot lasts mere seconds, but a life cannot ever be restored.

Skirting Around the Dress Code

SRIHITA MADIRAJU AND MIRA REDDY STAFF WRITERS

After staring at the endless arrays of outfit combinations to wear to school the following day, many students are still unable to decide what will provoke confidence and comfort for almost eight hours. However, simultaneously having to adhere to the school's dress code instantly eliminates options. Without uniforms, choosing an outfit for school can be an overwhelming, time-consuming process for many, especially for students who tend to be conscious of their style. Still, the school's dress code aims to foster self expression and the freedom of choice.

The SJUSD parent-student handbook lists all of the standard rules and procedures for apparel that students must account for. It emphasizes that nobody can portray hateful messages in their clothing, intending to preserve appropriate etiquette and safety.

Any image or language that refers to alcohol, nudity, drugs, profanity, violence and criminal behavior is highly prohibited. Clothing that depicts racism, homophobia or other forms of hate speech to degrade students is considered bullying and will result in larger consequences. Sports jerseys are banned on campus because the district found that they may be perceived as entitled opinions and foster violence or bickering between students. Additionally, the San

Jose Police Department deemed that wearing predominantly red and blue clothes correlates to gang association and potential violence, especially when the colors are worn from head to toe.

In regards to the overall fit of clothing, the code enforces that pieces must cover the body appropriately by concealing undergarments. Attire can vary depending on the classroom—in lab sciences, students must wear closed-toed shoes to participate, but this can be bypassed in other classes. For example, students taking P.E. are required to change into a school-issued uniform, sparking conflict as many find them inconvenient. However, attending class without wearing a P.E. uniform prohibits participation in class as a consequence.

"The uniforms in P.E. were always a waste of time. I found myself rushing to get to my next class right after, but if I did not comply with the conduct, I would have to sit out in P.E. and lose points for participation grades," Sophomore **Lasya Madineni** said.

Despite generally lenient policies for the school's dress code, it comes with potential bias. Female students seem to face stricter enforcement of the dress code in comparison to their male counterparts. For example, dress code policies regarding low cut shirts target girls, specifically focusing on covering their chests.

On the contrary, almost all private schools in California, along with some SJUSD public schools, maintain a strict uniform policy to prevent distraction from education. Uniforms may be helpful in this case—reducing the stress of choosing an outfit and alleviating pressure to conform to the standards of their peers, despite financial differences.

"The school benefits from not having uniforms, as they prevent students from being able to express themselves properly. I previously attended a school that enforced uniforms,

Moreover, the school's dress code encourages acceptance for cultural expression. For instance, religious customs can be reflected in how a student dresses, such as wearing a hijab to represent the Muslim faith, Cross necklaces reflecting Christianity and more. The dress code encourages students to express themselves the way they desire, which in turn boosts self-esteem and participation in school life.

Overall, the school has been able to maintain a consistent dress code for years on end, and compliance from



CATHERINE NGUYEN ART

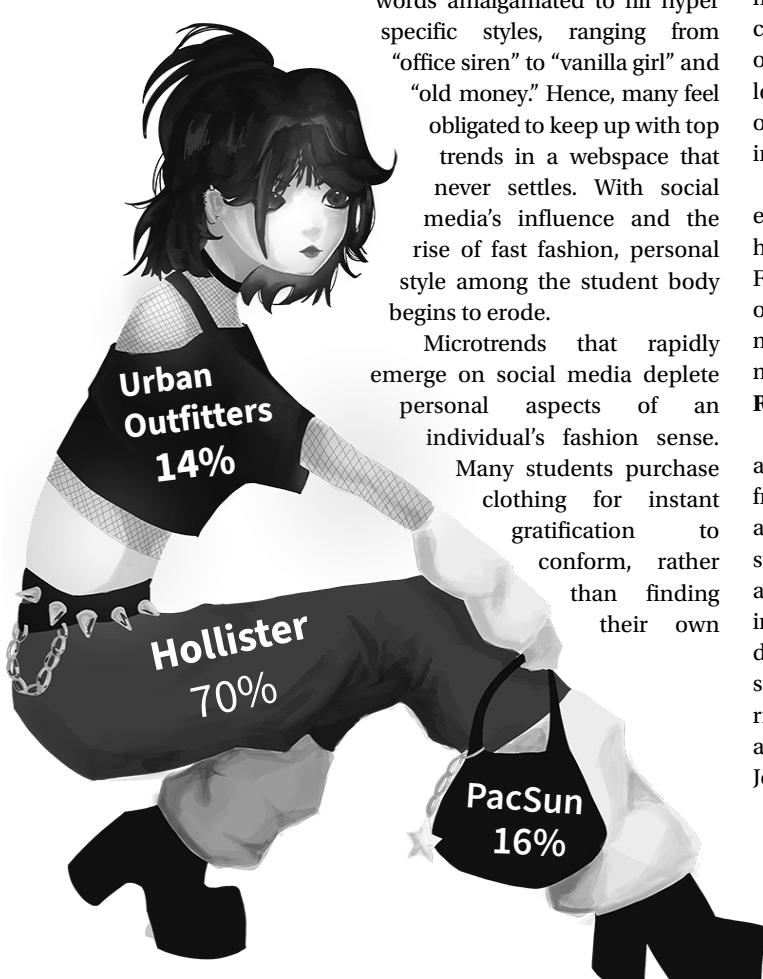
which I started to dislike when I began to care more about my style. I felt significantly more confident when I wore clothes that were comfortable and reflected what I liked," Junior **Gabriel John** said.

students prevents new concerns from arising. Still, the dress code intends to foster politeness and discipline in a student's routine to help prepare them to enter various environments in the future.

Poll: Would you rather shop at Hollister, PacSun or Urban Outfitters?

COMPILED BY SRIHITA MADIRAJU AND CATHERINE NGUYEN STAFF WRITERS

208 students polled



CATHERINE NGUYEN ART

Dress to Impress or Dress to Distress?

CATHERINE NGUYEN STAFF WRITER

Drawing attention to the latest fashion trends, influencers boast a newfound aesthetic—random words amalgamated to fill hyper specific styles, ranging from "office siren" to "vanilla girl" and "old money." Hence, many feel obligated to keep up with top trends in a webspace that never settles. With social media's influence and the rise of fast fashion, personal style among the student body begins to erode.

Microtrends that rapidly emerge on social media deplete personal aspects of an individual's fashion sense.

Many students purchase clothing for instant gratification to conform, rather than finding their own

tastes. As a result of the high demand for trendy, often low-quality clothing, overconsumption emerges, and those who are unable to afford it may feel excluded. Vogue Magazine claims that celebrity endorsements only heighten these microtrends, leaving businesses at the whims of popular aesthetics rather than introducing their own ideas.

"After seeing celebrity endorsements for certain clothes, I have considered purchasing them. For instance, the shirts and jewelry of singer-songwriter beabadoobee make her a significant fashion role model for me," Junior **Marlene Rotzow** said.

Contrary to current trends, alternative culture originally arose from the desire to not conform to authority. Well-known alternative styles such as goth, grunge and punk are entirely different. However, people in these subcultures are oftentimes disparagingly labeled as "emo." These styles are viewed as being at a higher risk of depression and self harm, as found in a study from the British Journal of Clinical Psychology.

The ridiculing of alternative people is present at the school as well, with students noting that they are usually treated as outcasts. Senior **Via Drewwry**, Fashion Club President, claims that every alternative person that she met at the school was

ostracized in one way or another, and that people often take pictures of them to ridicule their appearance. She believes that such counter-cultural styles are not accepted by more conformist students who repress their authentic selves and project their insecurity on those that are comfortable with themselves.

"Students at the school must be less judgemental—people get caught up in unhealthy labeling and fashion hierarchy, and feel inclined to separate themselves from those who dress differently. While it is normal for students to gravitate to others with similar tastes, it is good to accept diversity," Drewwry said.

Additionally, Sophomore **Creighton Voon** argues that students at the school primarily spend time around others with similar styles and prematurely judge others' characters based on differing styles. For example, many stereotype the "lululemon girl" aesthetic with subpar grades, while individuals who place less importance on fashion are associated with studiousness.

Ultimately, aesthetics open a window to self expression and individuality by creating visual narratives and improving confidence. With increased acceptance, there is room for more diversity and personal style at school aside from widespread trends all around.

How to Deep Sleep



ELEANOR GIL SCHOOL NEWS & FEATURE SCHOOL EDITOR

Often when people refer to "good sleep," the common notion is that you must sleep for at least eight hours. However, quality is an equally crucial paradigm for satisfactory rest.

During the deepest sleep phases, brain waves slow to a steady, delta rhythm that induces cell regeneration and energy restoration. Deep sleep occurs when cerebrospinal fluid rushes through the brain, clearing away beta-amyloid protein waste linked to cell damage, as cited by a health newsletter by Harvard University.

In order to set the stage for deep sleep, start your efforts in the morning with a simple but vital process known as "morning anchoring." As early as possible, expose yourself to bright, natural sunlight outdoors. With this, your brain will indicate that the day has begun, resetting your circadian rhythm and making it easier to fall asleep at night. According to the Journal of Biological Rhythms, morning sunlight exposure stimulates the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that boosts attention and mood during the day, later converting to melatonin, the sleep hormone.

Next, strictly dedicate your bed as a place for sleep—avoid scrolling through social media once you lay down. With contextual conditioning, your brain connects places with their purposes. When you use your bed for non-sleep activities, it disrupts this association, making it harder to fall asleep.

Finally, contrary to common misconceptions, blue light from phones does not inherently block melatonin, but more so the content that you consume. If the content involves emotionally charged news, social media or intense videos, it can activate the sympathetic nervous system, disrupting the transition to sleep.

Instead of convincing yourself you need a break and turning to your phone before bed, try gratitude journaling. Whether it is subconscious or conscious, stress accumulates throughout the day, and journaling helps reduce anxiety and negative thoughts that might keep you awake. By increasing mindfulness about the positives in your life through journaling, you can better organize your thoughts and feelings, calming the mind and facilitating deep sleep.

Key steps to improvement:

- get sunlight after waking up
- purpose your bed only for sleep
- write down words of gratitude nightly

Fading Like The Dead: Ghost Forests

ARIEL LEE AND SHINY XU STAFF WRITERS

A haunting graveyard of leafless trees and bare trunks protrude from the earth of a shore shoreline, their roots exposed. These are ghost forests, large groups of dead trees on coastlines overrun by rising oceans. While likely not filled with ghosts, their name derives from the way the standing trees look uncanny as they rot away, damaging ecosystems.

Ghost forests, consisting of decomposing trees, are most prevalent in South Carolina's barrier islands, as they sit just above sea level, making them especially vulnerable to flooding. The saltwater accumulates excess sodium and chlorine in cells, interfering with photosynthesis, killing these trees and turning wide expanses of forest ecosystems into marshland. Eventually, the intruding saltwater turns these salt marshlands into open water. These forests have been forming rapidly, stretching from Canada down the East Coast, around Florida and further on to Texas.

"Despite being a more obscure environmental issue, ghost forests still affect many lives, human or not. They could risk extinction or the endangerment of a native species, which in turn could imbalance ecosystems, damaging the native area," Junior Adalyn Lin said.

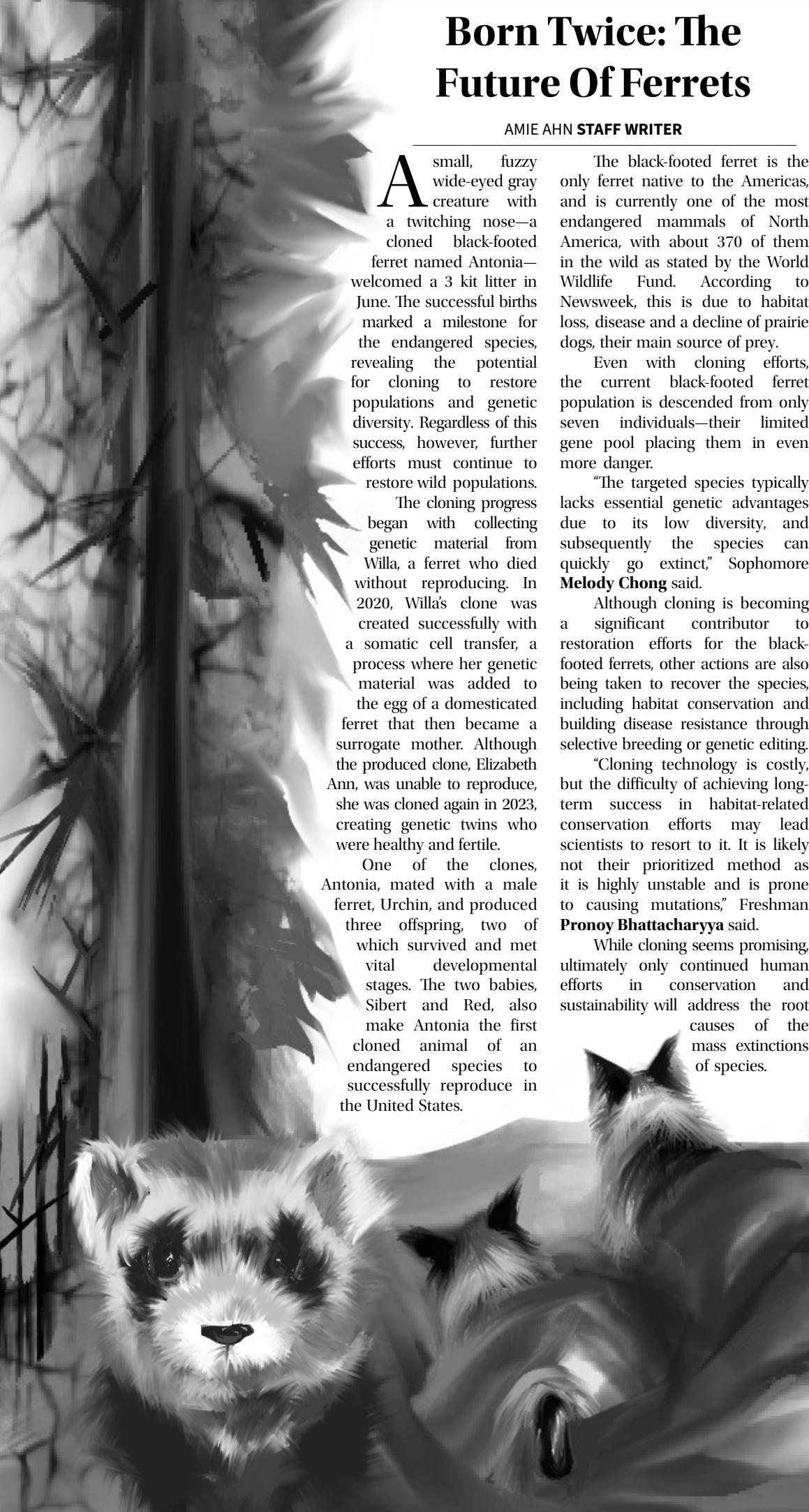
Over the course of decades, exposure to salty water can cause damage to hundreds of acres of trees on the shorelines. This impacts the surrounding environment, as the trees release all the carbon they have been storing as they decompose. This affects the wildlife: many migratory birds that rely on coastal forests have had their habitats shrink. Coastal forests are also

important carbon sinks, and when trees decompose, the carbon stored within them is released and returns to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, contributing to global warming in a damaging cycle.

"Raising awareness about climate issues like ghost forests can lead to solutions, prompting policymakers to start doing something about it," Sophomore Ishani Manral said.

Farmers have been trying to save their land from undergoing the natural phenomena with storm surge barriers, yet the spread of these forests is often too rapid to prevent. Some researchers have suggested lining shores with trees to slow ghost forest spread, as their root systems keep erosion in check. Another proposed solution is adding sediment to raise the bottoms of coastal marshes, allowing wetlands to spread to higher elevations, avoiding rising seas.

As ghost forests rapidly emerge around the world, finding solutions becomes difficult because the lack of awareness undermines the urgency to address the growing issue. Protecting wetlands and forests, mitigating climate change and adapting to its effects are essential steps not only for preserving these vital ecosystems, but also for drawing attention to their impact on our planet.



ISABELLA ZHU ART

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Born Twice: The Future Of Ferrets

AMIE AHN STAFF WRITER

A small, fuzzy wide-eyed gray creature with a twitching nose—a cloned black-footed ferret named Antonia—welcomed a 3 kit litter in June. The successful births marked a milestone for the endangered species, revealing the potential for cloning to restore populations and genetic diversity. Regardless of this success, however, further efforts must continue to restore wild populations.

The cloning progress began with collecting genetic material from Willa, a ferret who died without reproducing. In 2020, Willa's clone was created successfully with a somatic cell transfer, a process where her genetic material was added to the egg of a domesticated ferret that then became a surrogate mother. Although the produced clone, Elizabeth Ann, was unable to reproduce, she was cloned again in 2023, creating genetic twins who were healthy and fertile.

One of the clones, Antonia, mated with a male ferret, Urchin, and produced three offspring, two of which survived and met vital developmental stages. The two babies, Sibert and Red, also make Antonia the first cloned animal of an endangered species to successfully reproduce in the United States.

The black-footed ferret is the only ferret native to the Americas, and is currently one of the most endangered mammals of North America, with about 370 of them in the wild as stated by the World Wildlife Fund. According to Newsweek, this is due to habitat loss, disease and a decline of prairie dogs, their main source of prey.

Even with cloning efforts, the current black-footed ferret population is descended from only seven individuals—their limited gene pool placing them in even more danger.

"The targeted species typically lacks essential genetic advantages due to its low diversity, and subsequently the species can quickly go extinct," Sophomore Melody Chong said.

Although cloning is becoming a significant contributor to restoration efforts for the black-footed ferrets, other actions are also being taken to recover the species, including habitat conservation and building disease resistance through selective breeding or genetic editing.

"Cloning technology is costly, but the difficulty of achieving long-term success in habitat-related conservation efforts may lead scientists to resort to it. It is likely not their prioritized method as it is highly unstable and is prone to causing mutations," Freshman Pronoy Bhattacharyya said.

While cloning seems promising, ultimately only continued human efforts in conservation and sustainability will address the root causes of the mass extinctions of species.

Beyond the End Zone

ANDREW XIE STAFF WRITER

The stadium roars with anticipation as the quarterback surveys the field, the game clock ticking down in the final moments of a high-stakes showdown. A deep pass cuts through the air, the receiver leaping above defenders to secure the game-winning touchdown. Cheers erupt—victory! But this game is not happening on a field. It is unfolding in the games of millions, meticulously crafted through statistics, strategy and a little luck. Welcome to the world of fantasy football: where fans become coaches, players and analysts, transforming the NFL season into weekly battles between friends and opponents.

At its heart, fantasy football involves joining an invite-only or public league typically consisting of ten teams. Each league starts with a draft, where participants strategically build 16-player rosters. These rosters earn points based on how the selected players perform in real-life NFL games. The game's appeal lies in its blend of strategy and unpredictability, as even the most carefully crafted plans can be derailed by player injuries, shocking upsets or unexpected breakout performances.

Fantasy football has evolved from a niche pastime into a global phenomenon, captivating millions of fans worldwide. Its origins trace back to 1963, when Bill Winkenbach, part owner of the Oakland Raiders, established the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League (GOPPPL). In its beginnings, participants manually tracked player statistics and calculated scores, a tedious, time-intensive process. The game's public debut came in 1969 when Andy Mousalimas, a GOPPPL founding member, introduced it to patrons at his Oakland sports bar. Fantasy football began gaining broader recognition in 1985 with the launch of Grandstand Sports Services, the first nationally available fantasy league, paving the way for its future explosion with the internet.

"Fantasy's most appealing factor is competitive edge that comes with putting money into it, as it creates a rivalry between friends and family. Additionally, it provides a great opportunity to spend more time with family and strengthen community bonds," Elijah Yoon '28 said.

According to ESPN, 40 million NFL fans participated in fantasy football leagues in 2021. Over the past decade, both fantasy football and NFL viewership have experienced significant growth. Fantasy football serves as a gateway for casual fans, offering an engaging way to learn about players and the basics of the game. For many, these leagues become a tradition; annual drafts and season-long rivalries are opportunities to bridge gaps and build meaningful connections between fans from all walks of life through their love of football.

In recent years, the NFL has adapted its rules to encourage higher-scoring games, a shift directly benefiting fantasy football participants. Changes such as emphasizing player safety and reducing defensive penalties—like limiting helmet-to-helmet hits and increasing pass interference enforcement—have made offenses easier to thrive. Tweaks to kickoffs and overtime rules have increased scoring opportunities, keeping games more competitive and exciting. This trend toward offense-focused play directly translates to higher fantasy point totals, as players post record-breaking numbers. For fantasy players, this evolution in the NFL provides more thrilling weekly matchups and a greater chance to capitalize on star player performances.

From humble beginnings to becoming a global phenomenon, fantasy football offers an immersive experience that extends far beyond the field. As the NFL continues to evolve, fantasy football grows alongside it, drawing in both die-hard enthusiasts and casual fans.

SCOREBOARD

BOYS VARSITY FOOTBALL - 11/15
CCS QUARTERFINALS

	30-20	
Leland (10-0-3)		Stevenson (7-0-3)

BOYS VARSITY FOOTBALL - 11/22
CCS SEMIFINALS

	35-14	
Leland (10-0-3)		Alisal (6-0-6)

BOYS VARSITY FOOTBALL - 11/30
CCS FINALS

	27-21	
Leland (10-0-3)		Sequoia (7-0-6)

GIRLS VARSITY WATER POLO - 11/21
NORCAL SEMIFINALS

	11-13	
Leland (19-0-11)		Stevenson (21-0-10)

BOYS VARSITY WATER POLO - 11/13
CCS SEMIFINALS

	14-7	
Leland (17-0-10)		Pioneer (21-0-7)

BOYS VARSITY WATER POLO - 11/16
CCS FINALS

	11-13	
Leland (17-0-10)		Valley Christian (12-0-17)

GIRLS VARSITY SOCCER - 12/3
SEASON OPENER

	3-3	
Leland (2-1-0)		Los Gatos (1-1-1)

Saudi Sportswashing

ANDREW XIE STAFF WRITER

Emerging from obscurity to becoming a global sports powerhouse is no small feat. For Saudi Arabia, the key is a bold, multi-faceted strategy backed by billions of dollars from the kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF), which has transformed the country into a formidable player in the global sports industry.

Saudi Arabia's expansion into international sports is central to Vision 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)'s sweeping reform plan launched in 2016 to diversify his country's oil-dependent economy while scaling its global influence. Soccer has taken center stage, with the kingdom's PIF acquiring Premier League club Newcastle United in 2021 after a lengthy legal dispute. Since the takeover, the club is estimated to have spent a staggering \$504 million on player transfers, which would be even higher were it not for the Premier League's strict financial regulations.

Domestically, Saudi Arabia has worked to revitalize the Saudi Pro League, which struggled to attract a significant international audience despite the national team's consistent World Cup qualification. This changed dramatically in January 2023 when Pro League club Al Nassr signed global superstar Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United. The deal—worth \$220 million annually—has increased the league's revenue by 650%.

"One of my favorite soccer players, Neymar Jr., recently moved to the Saudi Pro League. His decision was likely heavily influenced by his contract, as other more established European clubs were also trying to sign him," Shota Yu '25 said.

Yet Saudi Arabia's sports investments extend far beyond soccer. The creation of LIV Golf has disrupted the professional golf world, challenging the dominance of long-established tours like the European Tour by offering lucrative contracts and massive prize pools.

"Although LIV golf may have made the professional golf atmosphere much more exciting, I still dislike LIV, as they simply steal top players from the PGA Tour by buying out players with massive contracts to draw attention away from Saudi Arabia's human rights record," Ethan Yin '28 said.

However, Saudi Arabia's ambitious sports investments have sparked accusations of "sportswashing"—a strategy in which nations use sports to polish their reputation and divert attention from human rights issues. Danyel Reiche, a professor at Georgetown University in Qatar, contends that the term sports washing is misleading, as it oversimplifies the kingdom's multifaceted approach to global politics.

Saudi Arabia was recently awarded the right to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. In response, 11 human rights organizations raised concerns about the Kingdom's treatment of its citizens and workers. Like Saudi Arabia, Qatar found itself at the center of the sportswashing debate when it hosted the 2022 World Cup, spending an estimated \$220 billion on the event despite having little soccer history.

The country faced criticism for its harsh treatment of migrant workers, with reports of exploitative labor practices, poor living conditions and thousands of worker deaths during World Cup preparations.

MBS has insisted that Saudi Arabia's increased involvement in sports is driven by economic diversification, job creation and nurturing talent—not improving its international image. In a recent interview with Fox News, he also emphasized that he is unconcerned with criticism over sports washing, as long as the kingdom's GDP reaps the benefits. As the kingdom continues integrating sports into its broader international strategy and grows its global influence, it will undoubtedly continue to face harsh scrutiny.

DESIGN BY JAMES YU



GAMBLING

-GAMES-

cash-raking casinos

JOSHUA YAN STAFF WRITER

7

YES
54%

777

PARTICIPANTS WERE GIVEN A LOLLIPOP, THEN GIVEN THE CHOICE TO KEEP IT OR FLIP A COIN FOR A 50-50 CHANCE TO DOUBLE OR NOTHING.
DID THEY TAKE THE CHANCE?

7

NO
46%

COMPILED BY JOSHUA YAN STAFF WRITER

100 STUDENTS POLLED

The room is overloaded with colors: the jumbled stripes of the patterned floor, the soulless flashing lights of slot machines, the unforgiving green of the blackjack table and the quickly retreating piles of pink and yellow chips representing lifetimes of savings disappearing in an instant. Though bleak, hundreds of billions of dollars hang in the balance each year through gambling.

Though gambling serves as a vehicle for self-destruction for many, the American Gaming Association finds that 90% of gamblers play responsibly, deriving excitement and a stimulating challenge from the games. But 2.5 million Americans are compulsive gamblers who believe that they can win real money, disregarding the fact that the house always has an advantage. When they lose, they continue playing under the impression that they will be able to make their money back. Casino marketing methods make winning seem plausible, display leaderboards to encourage competition and offer generous concessions to distract gamblers from their losses.

The symptoms of gambling addictions are not solely financial—addicts often struggle with anxiety, depression and grow distant from loved ones. This perpetuates a sense of isolation, which the rush of gambling can distract from. Many also lose their jobs and homes in the process, with 57% even admitting to stealing to finance their addiction, according to Gamblers Anonymous.

"Casinos put vulnerable individuals in worse positions to hurt themselves and their relationships. These businesses should implement restrictions such as time limits or a maximum loss amount to lessen how much people can lose," Senior **Jason Bui** said.

Most forms of gambling are outlawed in California. Although state-sponsored lotteries, card rooms and horse race betting are allowed, the state prohibits any "banking or percentage games," where a house profits either through player losses or by taking a percentage of each win. However, casinos still operate in tribal lands where federal and state laws have no jurisdiction. California also forbids online gambling, but online games involving virtual currency do not fall under this category, making sweepstakes casinos legal.

Inside casinos, players participate in a variety of different games that are based on different combinations of luck and skill. Some popular luck-based games include slots, roulette and craps, where players bet on the outcome of a random event. In these games, a player's odds of winning are unaffected by their choices, and the casino always has an advantage in the long run. Skill-based games differ in that players can reliably win money given their proficiency. However, casinos still rake in a portion of each prize pool in games like Poker.

Even outside of casinos, businesses exploit gambling through different mediums like gacha games, which utilize loot boxes in which players spend in-game currency to roll for random items. Gacha games generally have free methods of earning in-game currency, but only as rewards for significant effort and time investment. The quickest way to earn the currency is to buy it with real money, making it an appealing option to players running out of time to obtain it for free. Most gacha games contain a pity system, wherein players are guaranteed to receive high level rewards if they roll enough times. In some games, when players reach this required amount of rolls, there is still a 50% chance to receive an undesired reward, forcing them to reach pity again to guarantee getting their desired prize.

"Despite being free-to-play, I am addicted to Genshin Impact. In order to guarantee getting the characters I want, I always play for enough rolls to reach pity twice. I mostly play the game to finance my rolls, and I feel depressed when I lose a 50/50," Junior **Matthew Lau** said.

In one form or another, gambling can be taxing—whether on an individual's time, mental health or life savings. By encouraging addiction, casinos can turn players into financial assets without paying mind to the lives they destroy.

MINGYUE XIAO ART

DESIGN BY GWEN CARROLL