January

We finished the brilliant They Cloned Tyrone and Mum & I made Gumbo.

I then headed back to Germany, at 7pm but due to some rowdy room mates in Köln, I barely slept . Somehow I made it to the office at 10am before completing the entire workday (carried on the shoulders of a brief nap).

And after that I had a pretty quiet month 😂I spent the first week pushing on with a 4 week regime Tom recommended to prepare for the Royal Marines. It got me up early and I felt much better at work, especially as I often did my exercise before going to the office. I pretty much finished it but had to tone back some of the exercises in the last week, as I limped over the finish line with a few minor muscle twinges.

I also got back to my German cue cards and textbook, which had lapsed a little over Christmas. I watched some great films too, including Lola Rennt (Sprint Lola), an experimental German thriller, as well as The Nice Guys, about a pretty useless detective, his daughter and a thug for hire, who end up in the middle of a sinister series of murders.

In addition, I had the pleasure of meeting my new roommate Miguel, because Lenard (like Lisa), is a Dual Student, who alternates between study and work, and began his study down by the Boden See (Lake Constance). Miguel and I played a lot of cards (mainly Spit and Beggar My Neighbour) and shared a lot of nachos.

I made sure to call some mates such as Felipe, Anush, Millie and Will, as well as family such as Grandma, who I sadly hadn’t seen over Christmas. I also organised with Alec an almost weekly call to play some games like Geo Guesser (where you have to deduce your location from Street View) and Codenames (a fun word association game). I also had a long overdue catch up with Euan, on his birthday.

The first week and a bit were pretty quiet but things changed at the end of week 2:

Firstly, on the 12th I was invited to play some board games. Felix, from Day 0/1, who told me all about Bachata, also added me to a volleyball group chat. However, due to an injury, one of the members decided to start a board games side-chat. I joined this chat and was invited along, where I met Luis, Alberto and his partner Romy. Luis is a strategy/board game guru, who teaches in a school in Leimen, primarily sports education, and coaches Handball too. Plus he’s a menace if you hand him a table tennis bat (or any racquet, for that matter). Romy works at a hospital nearby and did Erasmus in France, which is how she met Alberto, and comes from Düsseldorf. She primarily works on the Tuberculosis ward during the week but sometimes does night shifts, where she has to work everywhere. Alberto works for Düsseldorf university, currently on an AI project, but will soon be starting a new job, involving Web Architecture.

I felt super welcome and enjoyed our game of Istanbul, which Romy won. Everybody was really encouraging and massively helped me with my German (and would continue to do so).

On the same weekend, I went with Mark, Melissa and Julia to Ludwigshafen, near Mannheim, to get Julia an e-bike, before heading on to meet Alba, in Worms, who made a lovely Lasagne and then we watched a weird movie and played some cards. On the way back we actually stopped at a bar to say goodbye to Paula, who I have weekly coffee chats with, who was moving for a semester to Paris! We continued to keep up our calls though and she seems to be settling in brilliantly.

I also attended the political discussion group, on Martin Luther King Jr. day, where we read some of his massively impactful and important speeches [Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.] (upenn.edu)](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html).

This month, I found more time to cook as well as enjoy a variety of culinary delights, including an amazing roast chicken with Miguel, pizzas with Miguel, some Sushi with Julia + Mark and a scrumptious banana bread (at the moving celebration for a part of our team, who relocated to the office next door to us).

January had some embarrassing moments, such as when I got up to leave the tram but checked my phone and completely zoned out, missing my stop…. I had to sprint back on icy terrain, for half a kilometre, to catch my bus home ☹Not a proud moment.

However, I was certainly a tiny bit proud on the 21st when Mark, Julia and I climbed the small mountain next to Heidelberg. It had snowed the week before and due to the altitude, we had the dreamy opportunity to hike through almost untouched powder. And then we had the quintessential winter snack: watermelon.

To finish the month, I went to Karaoke with Nico, Sebastian, Coco, Manu and Hendrik and also saw Alba, Mark, Julia and her flatmates. I sang my first ever karaoke and had a blast. The next day I went with the second list of names for the leaving event of Laura, from the student community, which was a charming evening, despite the leaving of someone from the organisation team.

I did end up joining the student community myself a week or so later; I was placed in charge of student lunches but also orchestrated an Ice Skating event, which had a low turnout and was cold (believe it or not). However, everyone was really friendly and I hope to meet them all again.

It was a steady, relaxing start which picked up sharply and continuously as the month pulled to a close. It felt good to get back into the rhythm of things and I even had my best dance class yet!

Jula – works as a civil servant. Her course covered loads of awesome things.

Petra – HR?

February

February began with my first jog all the way to Heidelberg, which I was pretty happy with 😊I had some interesting calls too, with potential future partners. The first weekend of February was fabulous, but started out with me solving a few problems I hadn’t quite finished on Friday. I then went for a walk with Sruthi in Heidelberg, mainly focusing on the Schloss which she hadn’t visited before. Upon my return, Karl-Heinz kindly invited me to join him for birthday drinks, with Petra, Connrad, Rike (Karl-Heinz’s sister) and her partner. We ate and drank a fair bit together and had a lovely time chatting.

The next day, Mark and I climbed Königstuhl the back way, where we saw an awesome helicopter. In the afternoon/evening, Luis and I met for some Kinder Schokolade, a game of Istanbul, and a round of a charming new game, called Cascadia, where you have specialised animal cards that give you various benefits if you enlarge their habitats. The game revolves around weighing up these choices. I then caught up on the news.

I met Basi for coffee on Monday and spent some time planning for the Uni Alliance event, which involved making a sort of Jeopardy-style game, to showcase the various student pathways, alongside stalls from other student teams, be it projects to recruit and train students, or the output of specialised student teams. The event, which actually happened a few weeks later was fairly successful, and was pretty relaxing, especially once I’d discovered the buffet 😉

Mannuel and I went to an all-you-can eat Flammkuchen joint, which was delicious. Flammkuchen is a traditional dish from the region Baden (where I am), Alsace and Palatinate, which consists of very thin dough, spread with crème fraiche and any topping of choice. We tried a few varieties such as salmon, horseradish (the German word is Meerrettich - what a word) + rocket, as well as a great mushroom, cream and mustard special. Then we indulged in a purr-inducing Winter special, consisting of Spekulatius biscuits scattered around chunks of apple, all floating in the sea of berry coulis. Marvellous!

The culinary excellence (and slight indulgence) continued the next day, when I had my first custard Berliner (a little like a Doughnut) 👌In the evening, I played a bit of Geoguesser and a word game with some course mates from Southampton.

Things get gnarly for Karneval

Karneval sits on the same day as Mardi Gras or Pancake day, but lasts in Germany, at least, for about a week.

After a frustrating day in the office, the week ended with a Axel and I starting Triumph of the Nerds, a short miniseries on the history of the PC. Afterwards, I headed straight to the Faschingskeller (Karneval basement party), with Nico. He was a rockstar (both generally speaking and as his costume) and I had some funky glasses and a wacky shirt. It was a really fun night, but I struggled a bit as my German, is not quite there yet.

On the Saturday, I donned my full tracksuit outfit, which Petra kindly lent me, and joined Jula with her friends to travel to the Hockenheim Karneval parade. We set off at 10am from Walldorf, with a massive Wagen, which played tunes along the way. We saw Nico on the way, as well as Leo from the Feuerwehr, who originally introduced me to Nico. Along the way, the local mayor and carrot farmers greeted us and fed us well. We arrived just in time for the parade and were just a little bit inebriated. The parade was entertaining and we followed the last float to a massive square where we continued to party until the sun had set. We all devoured a Döner, and then headed home.