

THE COLUMNS

by pupils; for pupils | HSD's Newsletter: Issue 141

Photo Credit - Ruby McNair

As you all know, this is a busy time for our school community. F5 & F6 are doing exams and half the school are picking their subjects. F4s are stepping since they're now the highest year group that isn't off school on study leave.

This must be a very stressful time. Take care of yourself, make sure you're using your time properly, take time to relax, and please know that all the teachers are rooting for you.

This week we've compiled a subject choices special, packed with thought provoking insight into study and honest opinions on the subjects that your writers have chosen themselves. Please enjoy it!

But in all honesty: good luck to all of you, and remember to take care of yourself. Happy studying everyone!

-The Columns Editors



ALASTAIR'S TEA (WHERE EDITORS DIE)

Al Forbes

(Context - this was written before I found out that I would have to up my role in editing The Columns).

As you might know, the real editors (yes, Haoqi, the real editors) are busy doing studying or something. As your lovely F2 correspondent, I am your scribe, watching my fellow (more grown up) editors in the wild as they get rage-baited by a document which will be published to our great school (not sarcasm actually). As I'm saying this Haoqi is editing my text box so I can't read what I'm typing... this is gonna be a long one team.

Talking about editors, did you know they keep rambling on about... in fact I don't even know at this point (I blacked out 10 minutes ago if I'm honest)...

Charlie, Emma, if you're seeing this, we will not be changing anything in this edition...

As I say this Haoqi is hysterically laughing, Rosie is crying, Tom is snapping his library card in half. Jeez, F4's these days.

And yes, yours truly will be helping to edit this great newspaper whilst watching the rest lose their remaining braincells on how to fix the font.

Anways, we will be (as Haoqi has put it) "RESPECT(ing) THE MARGINS". Yeah... he can do his own thing.

And as for the teachers who do notice that something is slightly changed to make the real editors lives a misery when they come back and see that the format has changed completely... nooooooo... ehem. So, I can't wait to watch and interact with them whilst "helping out" this week. It feels nerve-shattering to know that I have such "power".

We'll do our best to edit this paper so it's not just fun but a great read... see you inside!

THE LOST ART OF ESSAY WRITING

Mollie Campbell Roger

Introduction: The ruin of the essay

As school students, we become familiar with the idea of writing an essay fast, often growing a hatred for such an assignment from an early age. I believe, however, that there is something of a lost art in essay writing in the modern school system. We are taught to memorise an essay for an exam, to perfect it to match the marking scheme and to write what the markers want to read. This attempt to edit an essay or memorise it without care for the contents goes against the very nature of an essay itself and is the very reason why the act of writing an essay has been ruined for many. I believe that the world could look very different if we all knew the art of essay writing, and we used it in our everyday lives, not for a school assignment, or to get into university or for a job, but instead, for ourselves.

The roots of trying

The very meaning of what an essay is has been lost to the schooling system, so first, I will explain what an essay is, and to do that I will start at the beginning, so here is the history of the essay. The word 'essay' comes from the French word, 'essayer' which means to try. This can be explained when we think of the very first essay, although it may not have looked like the modern day essay, Seneca the younger wrote the first "essay" in the 1st century CE, although it was actually in the form of letters, or meditations, on how to live a good life. This was then repeated by Plutarch who wrote the 'moralia' which was a collection of 78 short pieces of writing on everything from 'how to tell a flatterer from a friend' to 'whether land or sea animals are smarter'. Although these may not be recognised as an essay to the modern reader, it was the beginning of the writing that would later come from French nobleman Michel de Montaigne, who wrote the first modern essay. Locking himself away from the world, Montaigne wanted to 'test his mind', and to do this, he wrote. He wrote about smells, thumbs, coaches, and death. His essays were clearly about anything and everything, and he wrote them in a messy, conversational but deeply personal way. He wanted to understand his own mind and see where it could take him using essays as a mirror to the everchanging human mind, publishing his work in a book called 'essais' in 1580, which consisted of a collection of his pieces. This was then taken across to England where Francis Bacon changed Montaigne's revolutionary form and made it sharper, shorter and full of wisdom. Bacon wanted his essays to portray a colder, hard observation about how the world works, moving away from how he feels to an explanatory description of what the human world looks like. This is where the formal essay that we write in school today comes from. Essays were never originated to get marks, or to be made for a specific reader but to explore the mind, understand your own understanding of yourself and the world, and to work through the truth.

From reflection to reason

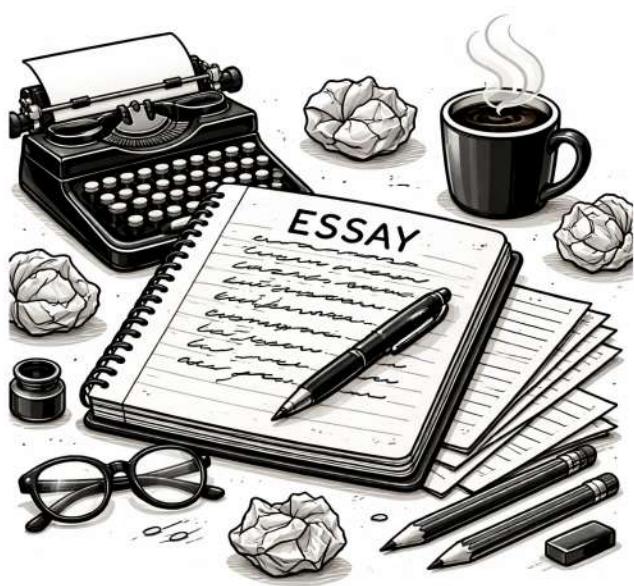
So how did this artful and crazily intelligent type of work end up in our classroom? And how come we now get marked on our ability to stay on topic, not to wander and to write what wants to be read? This new found form of writing didn't go straight from the 1850's to the classroom, first it boomed. After the industrial revolution in the 1700's, as newspapers were being printed more and more, coffee houses were opening on street corners and the working class were being educated, everyone was reading the newspaper. The essay made a massive impact as writers like Joseph Addison and Richard Steele started writing essays daily, from fashion to politics to manners. Everything anyone could dream of knowing could be found in a newspaper. The world was full of possibilities. Essays were no longer for the uber wealthy and overly educated but it was for the middle class sitting in coffee shops together, buzzing with stimulating conversation about the latest ideas, theories and the future.



Then came the 19th and 20th century where the essay became a tool, a weapon for change. George Orwell, James Baldwin and many more writers, harnessed the power of the essay to dismantle propaganda and expose racial injustices. The essay reveals the truth of the state of the world, and it forces us to recognise things for the way they are, and to see the change that is desperately needed. This power was found and utilised by the great writers of the time. As many still seek out these essays for their harsh, but necessary takes on the world, and it therefore continues to change lives, to change the world, we can see the need for this unique ability to make a difference through the truth. This didn't stay the main focus for long. Writers like Virginia Woolf brought back the Montaigne-style intimacy through personal styled essays which she used to explore the idea of a stream of consciousness in her exceptional understanding of the human psyche, and to explain the female experience of the time, which many women across the world still deeply resonate with. So, the essay branched off into two separate categories, the formal and more scientific essay used to teach and explain the world, and the personal essay which allows the exploration of the mind and new ideas to oneself. The schooling system understood that the formal essay tested reason and understanding through the use of counter arguments and full explanation of your thoughts, however slowly it forgot the point. To test the limits of the mind, to understand yourself and the world, not just to prove your logic to a marker but to your own mind.

Conclusion: A call to the digital age

The modern world is filled with screens, social media and the endless consumption of everyone else's ideas and opinions. Yet, how many of us truly know and understand our own beliefs, values, ourselves? As a society, we fill our heads with unoriginal thoughts again and again but we have forgotten how to sit with our own thoughts for long enough to get to know ourselves. I believe that writing more essays, real original essays, would allow us to take the time to sit back, and learn about ourselves, to study why we think the way we do, and if it is right. Writing down and reading your own thoughts is a brilliantly wondrous way to realise we don't agree with ourselves, or to spot flaws in our own logic. As human beings, with living minds, we have a habit of becoming the walking embodiment of hypocrisy as we contradict ourselves in a million different ways, and that may just be what makes us human, however, to understand our own contradictions and what needs to change, we MUST sit down alone with our thoughts, and think them through. I find reassurance in the fact that the best way I have ever found to do this, is seemingly the same way that some of the greats have, like George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin or the older greats like Marcus Aurelius' or the stoics. Please, get to know yourself, understand your values, learn your beliefs, write an essay. It's the only way to be yourself, to follow through your values with your actions and to change your mind on what you believe or how you should live.



DO EXAM RESULTS DEFINE INTELLIGENCE?

Kirsty Caddick

Do exam results define intelligence – or just memory?

Every year we are told that exams matter more than anything. But do a few hours in an exam hall really show how intelligent we are?

Exams do not cater to everyone's individual capabilities like stress tolerance and memory. Some students know the content well but struggle to show it in timed conditions.

Intelligence is not just academic, yet exams often treat it as if it is. Many students show intelligence in ways that cannot be measured in a timed test, such as creativity and emotional understanding and communication skills. A student who excels in art, music, or drama, may struggle to remember facts whilst another might be a natural leader or an excellent team-worker without achieving top exam grades. These forms of intelligence are highly valued in real life yet are rarely recognised when exam results are the main indicator of availability.

When exams become the main measure of intelligence, students who do not perform well in them can start to not believe in themselves and their confidence can plummet dramatically. This pressure leads to anxiety, stress, and a fear of failure, especially in exam season. Instead of promoting learning and curiosity, often the exam system causes students to focus solely on grades, rather than personal understanding and growth.

Many argue that exams provide a fair and standardised way to assess students. Exams test knowledge, reward vigorous work, and allow schools, colleges, and universities to compare students on the same basis. They also prepare young people for working under pressure and meeting deadlines, which are important life skills. Exams are widely regarded as the most practical way to measure academic achievement across many students.

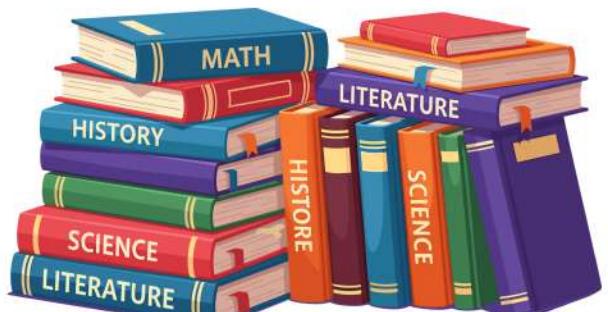
Whilst exams do have their place, they should not be treated as the main measure of intelligence. Intelligence is complex and comes in many forms, from creativity and communication to resilience and problem-solving. A system that values only exam results risks overlooking the strengths and confidence of many students. To truly recognise all types of intelligence, education should celebrate a wider range of skills, not just performance in an exam hall.

ADVICE FROM AN EDITOR

Assistant Editor Tom Johnson

As acting assistant editor, my role is definitely unimportant. But I have still enjoyed working on the article, chatting with the other editors, laughing at the silly titles and racing to the library to write this very note. I think that people should always get involved, even if they don't think they'll do much.

And to everyone who is choosing their subjects at the moment, I would like to encourage them to pick the subjects they love, not necessarily the subjects that are sensible, or lead to good careers, but because if you decide to choose a subject you love, a job you love, or a life you love, it doesn't matter whether or not you make millions take higher maths.



LUCY'S SUBJECT RUNDOWN

Lucy Smith

With subject choices rapidly approaching I thought I'd take the opportunity to impart some of my wise wisdom that I've gained over the years. During my time here I've taken 18 SQA subjects, with varying degrees of success and enjoyment, and I thought it would be nice to reflect on them (despite not having finished my AH courses yet). Bear in mind that these are just opinions, but I will argue my case violently.

Incredible would do again in a heartbeat

- **Higher Maths** – everything just connected and made so much sense compared to Nat 5
- **Nat 5 Latin** – mainly because I did no work whatsoever, and Mr Faulkes let us watch TV the entire time
- **Higher Chemistry** – it was difficult at the start, but by far the most rewarding by the end
- **Higher French** – I feel I finally began to gain a sense of fluency in the language at this point
- **Advanced Higher French** – good vibes all around, very little workload

Was fun while it lasted

- **Nat 5 Chemistry** – I honestly remember very little from this, but I liked the experiments
- **Nat 5 Art** – I mean it was fun...but got really stressful when I realised I didn't have enough artistic talent for it
- **Advanced Higher Chemistry** – so far, so good – talk to me in a couple months then I may say differently

So mid I can't remember it

- **Nat 5 Maths** – it was ok, just a bit all over the place and not entirely coherent
- **Nat 5 French** – too many people in the class, and I learnt very little
- **Nat 5 History** – too much writing and stress for such a seemingly chill subject
- **Advanced Higher Maths** – It's really not that bad, just awfully repetitive

Thoroughly unenjoyable

- **Nat 5 Classics** – I was forced into taking this alongside Latin, I just found it a little pointless
- **Nat 5 English** – as a rule I hate essay writing subjects, I think it originated here
- **Higher History** – I thought it would be easy, the sqa mark scheme proved me wrong (RUN WHILE YOU CAN)

PTSD do not speak to me about it

- **Higher English** – by far my least favourite subject, all the worst bits of Nat 5 combined into one, I think I am mentally scarred from Carol Ann Duffy
- **Nat 5 Physics** – I'm not a physics person. That's all I'll say.
- **Advanced Higher Latin** – so much workload for so little reward



ROSIE'S SUBJECT RUNDOWN

Rosie O'Ready

Seeing as this is a subject special, I figured I'd write a little about the subjects I'm planning to take for F5. I definitely don't have as much experience choosing subjects as some people in the school, and I have also technically not picked my F5 subjects yet, but pshaw. If this is useful at all, that's great!

In F5, you can take a variety of subjects, usually up to 5. I intend to be taking: English, Maths, Drama, History, and Classics at Higher level. Now, if you've read my other article in this edition, you'll know why I'm taking English, so I won't expand on that. But here's some words on the other four subjects.

Maths

Maths at Higher and Nat 5 is a very useful subject. It can be used in STEM careers or everyday life, and the skills it gives (for me, patience, as I do my best to remember what's the difference between the sine rule and the cosine rule) can last a lifetime. Maths is required for nearly all STEM subjects or related careers, business, and psychology, amongst others.

National 5 Drama

Nat 5 Drama is a great option, you can choose whether you'd like to do acting, makeup and hair, props, lighting, sound, or costume for your final exam, and at Higher you can add directing to that list. It's a brilliant opportunity to build confidence and express your creativity.

National 5 History (& Modern Studies)

Nat 5 History is a truly fascinating subject to take, especially if you choose it alongside Modern Studies. You can learn about WW1, the trade in enslaved African people, and the civil rights movement in the USA. Each topic is so valuable to explore and learn about.

Classical Studies

Classical Studies is a subject which is often forgotten about, but is unbelievably interesting. Do you like epic stories about monsters and gods? You'll love the topic of The Odyssey! What if you're more interested in how Ancient civilisations existed? In Classics, you study both Ancient Athens and Pompeii.

HAOQI'S SUBJECT RUNDOWN

Haoqi Liu

I have chosen six N5 subjects and been forced to do another two, so here are my honest thoughts about each subject, ranked best to less best shall we say. Please bear in mind that I had existing knowledge for a lot of STEM subjects, and I wanted to look for a challenge, so you may not be in the same situation as me.

Hidden gem – Economics

For the F2's who might not know what this is, this is the study of how money flows around the economy. I originally chose this as a side dish to my N5 diet, but it's ended up top of the list here. I found it extremely interesting. While it can be confusing at first, there is this moment when everything 'clicks', and from there is when I started loving the subject.

Wonderful as promised – Chemistry

Controversial take: I think chemistry is actually better than they make it seem in F1/F2 (although many people think they've been short-changed). The theory is I guess... fine, and the practicals are fabulously fun and fascinating.

Pretty cool – Physics

Figuring out how things work is cool, and the physics course has been taught even cooler. Practicals are again fun and engaging and it is overall a chill class.



Pleasant surprise – Geography

Pleasant is a very fitting word to describe geography. It's fun, not in the action packed chaos, but in how interesting and important it is to explore the world. I have seen perspectives that I have never seen before, gained deep understanding and insight, and that is what made this subject special to me, in a different way.

Average – Maths

Well, it's kind of just maths. And harder than F1/F2. That's all I can say because it's about the same.

Satisfactory – English

Notably, it's a really chill class. Chill-ness aside, I did learn some skills, and overall I do think it is pretty good, but sometimes it gets tedious, especially with RUAE or writing essays about texts.

Brain switched off – Computing

This was easy. Very. We finished the theory in May, giving a generous (and in my opinion excessive) amount of time for revision. As I already was able to code python, this made this course easy breezy and to much so for my liking. (Note some people struggle with the logic involved in the subject.)

Under-engineered for me – Engineering

This was possibly a mistake. Engineering is unlike physics in the way that it is very applied to the real world, lots of explaining, no shortage of technical designing, and less of the theoretical science. It also overlaps very significantly with physics. The actual stuff is not technically challenging, which made it feel too relaxed for me. Overall, maybe the go-to for some, but it doesn't suit me.

USES OF ENGLISH

Rosie O'Ready

Recently, the topic of subject choices has been rife amongst F2's, F4's, and F5's. "I'm taking X, Y, and Z!" "My parents are making me take X, but I hate it!" "What subjects are you going to do?" One thing that I have heard alarmingly often, however, is "English is useless." English is, of course, mandatory up until the end of Nat 5's, but from there it's your choice. You definitely don't need to take it, but it is also most certainly not useless. And here's why.

Reason One is English gives you valuable critical thinking skills which are required throughout life. You might not realise it, but those long hours analysing 'An Inspector Calls' have given you the analytical skills needed to collect evidence, form an objective judgement, and - most importantly - to form independent thoughts.

Another reason is that English actually comes in handy for a lot of job, even if you wouldn't think so! Some jobs you might need English for include becoming a teacher, a lawyer, certain positions in business or accountancy, translating, politics, and a lot more that would take too long to list. Of course, it depends on the job and your other qualifications, but English certainly shouldn't be disregarded.

Yet another reason why English is important is that English provides an opportunity to continue reading. A 2024 study shows that only around 34% of children aged eight to eighteen say they enjoy reading for fun, which is the lowest level in nineteen years. Additionally, in the UK, Scotland has the largest percentage of adults who struggle with literacy. Doing English at Higher requires reading of poetry, plays, and prose, which means you can continue reading. Reading maintains your creativity, imagination, and gives you an excellent vocabulary.

There are, of course, other reasons, however I will keep this short and only list three. Hopefully, you now have a new appreciation for English as a subject.

SEIZE THE DAY, STRIVE FOR THE FUTURE

Tom Johnson

I never regret doing something, I only ever regret not doing something, or doing it wrong, but that is besides the point. It is always better to throw yourself in to everything, to take every opportunity you can, because it's almost always better to have done something than to have not done it.

My sister has a categorisation for different types of fun (that I think she found online).

First there's type 1, that is fun in the moment. This is your classic fun, like a roller coaster, or a party, or any fun experience. The present only happens once, make sure you don't miss it.

Theres also type 2 "fun", that isn't actually fun and is in fact just miserable, such as meeting a relative who remembers you from when you were little but whose name you have totally forgotten.

Finally, theres type 3 fun. This is the type of fun that is in my opinion the most rewarding, but also the most avoided. It is something that is hard at the time, but you are glad you did and are proud of accomplishing. This can be things like climbing a mountain, overcoming a fear, or doing your Nat 5's. Hard work done well pays off.

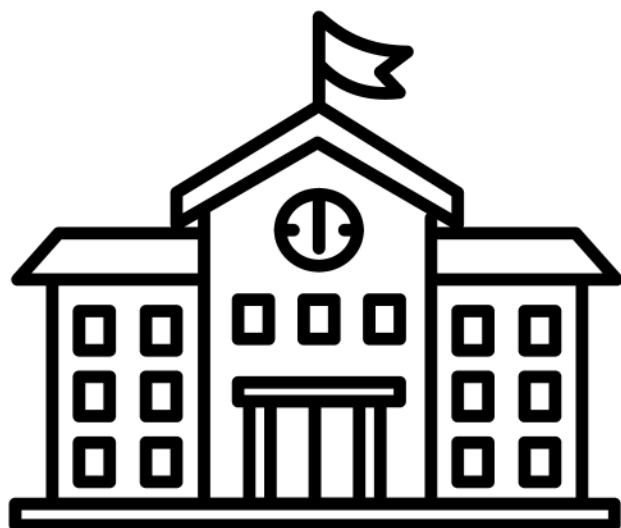
I think this is particularly relevant for those who are currently choosing their subjects at the moment.

First of all, a mistake I think some people make is being too sensible. People often drop a subject they love to peruse a subject they think is sensible, but I would argue that making that decision actually contradicts that, makes the "sensible" choice the less sensible option! For example, some people might drop a subject or idea they love (lets say drama) for another one that could lead to a "better" career (lets say Engineering [not that engineering's a bad subject at all, I've decided to take it myself, but only because I love it]).

I believe that this choice is wrong because if you love a subject, the job that relates to it will always be the "better" job because it's a job you will love. If you chose to follow a path you do not enjoy, it most likely wont lead you to the life you truly want to lead. The only way you can succeed is if you do the things you want to do, not what you should do or what would be "sensible" to do.

Ultimately, every decision for how your life is led is up to you. You can take any path, lead any route, live any life. But if you choose to take the sensible route instead of the one you think will make you happy, just because its easier or more stable, you may well still end up happy. But theres every chance you always, eternally wonder what your life could have been.

Follow your dreams, seize the day, and strive for the future you want for yourself.



GOLDEN GLOBES 2026

Jack Mitchell

On Sunday, the 83rd Golden Globe Awards ceremony was held in Beverly Hills, California, at the Beverly Hilton hotel. Hosted by American actress and comic Nikki Glaser, the awards introduced a new category to recognise the Best Podcast of the Year, won by Amy Poehler for Good Hang with Amy Poehler. Often seen as a precursor to the Academy Awards – or Oscars – the Golden Globes give us a taste of what is to come in March for what many would see as the more prestigious ceremony.

In the Golden Globes, films and television shows are divided into the categories of drama and musical or comedy, meaning there is not just one best picture or best actor, but rather one from each type. The winner of best picture in the drama category was Hamnet, the story of William Shakespeare's eponymous son and his tragic death starring Paul Mescal and Jessie Buckley, who took home the Best Actress award in drama. Another successful film at the Globes was One Battle After Another, which won Best Director and Best Screenplay for Paul Thomas Anderson, and Best Supporting Actress for Teyana Taylor. In addition, Timothée Chalamet won his first ever Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy for his performance in Marty Supreme.

HBO's new medical drama The Pitt won Best Drama Series while The Studio from Apple TV+ won Best Musical or Comedy Series, however both of these achievements were undoubtedly overshadowed by the real winner of the section: Adolescence. The Netflix series was the biggest TV winner of the night, bagging four Golden Globes, including Best Limited Series and more importantly Best Supporting Male and Female Actors on Television. Owen Cooper became the youngest person to win in his category, and the second-oldest globe winner in history at just 16 years old.

Overall, the ceremony drew 8.7 million viewers, a little less than previous years, but due to increased social media activity surrounding the event it's clear its popularity isn't waning. Whether or not the Oscars will mimic the results seen on Sunday remains to be seen, but we're guaranteed to see the same films battling it out for the top spots.

THE 1% IMPROVEMENTS

Al Forbes

This week, Mr Durward gave an assembly on "The 1% Improvements". But what does this mean? Lets find out...

When new years comes, tradition soon follows, and we usually make a New Years Resolution (or resolutions for those who feel snazzy). But who actually sticks to these? The answer, quite truthfully, is not many.

This is where Mr Durward's message becomes apparent. Start off small. Want to be able to lift 100 kilograms? (No idea how heavy that is in real life but pretend its heavy enough).

Well, start off small. Start with 5, then when you've mastered that, go for 10, then 15. going too fast? Slow down. Going too slow? speed up. As long as you are comfortable and safe, you should be fine.

Also remember that you have the whole year, not just a month. Take your time, and again, be safe, no matter what your resolution is.

The moral of Mr Durward's assembly: go at 1% at a time.

Take it slow, and build up overtime. As long as you put effort into it, you'll do great.



13:20 | 07.02.2100 | UST+1 | MONT CALIMA ENCLAVE, NEUTRAL

The world leaders arrived one by one in Mont Calima Enclave, one of the few remaining places considered truly neutral, protected under the 2038 World Preservation Treaty.

Supreme President Katerina Putina was first, arriving by high-speed train with two personal guards, her pale uniform cutting sharply against the stone walls. President Barron Trump followed minutes later, descending from his private jet with the assured step of someone born to command. Xi Mingzhe appeared next, his arrival quiet and sudden through a humming Teleportation Capsule Device.

High Chieftain T'Kane Obasanjo II and Grand Vizier Samir al-Hashim came last, riding in a grand procession, still arguing about the escalating unrest across their territories.

The great doors of Mont Calima opened to reveal the conference chamber. There was no luxury here—only bare walls, a rough-hewn wooden table, simple steel chairs with thin cushions, and plates of bread, cabbage, and tomato beside small glasses of water. Three hosts awaited them: Chancellor Mathias Blanc of Switzerland, Dr Aiko Tanaka of Japan, and Kaulana Makao of Maui.

Dr Tanaka spoke first.

“We are gathered to discuss the chaos that began at 20:00 UST yesterday. According to our reports, multiple systems were hijacked simultaneously. A message was broadcast across every network, and not long after, the New Soviet Powers attacked the Middle East Jewels. That is all we know so far.”

Supreme President Putina straightened, her voice cold but controlled.

“Dr Tanaka, the New Soviet Powers have honoured the Preservation Treaty for over three decades. Those jets did not fly under our command. Our control systems went down minutes before the attack. We tried to override them, but every signal was blocked.”

The Grand Vizier slammed his fist onto the table.

“All lies! You used this as cover to strike us. Our cities burned! Our people screamed! You call that an accident?”

“Vizier, calm yourself,” Chancellor Blanc interjected firmly. “This enclave is for dialogue, not accusation. We understand your outrage, but there may be another hand behind this. Our sensors have detected unusual signals emanating from the Icelands—signs of life, perhaps even organised activity.”

The room fell silent.

Then Barron Trump’s phone rang. He answered, his expression shifting from irritation to shock. His hand trembled slightly as he lowered the device.

“What is it?” Putina asked.

He didn’t respond—only stared at the table as the sound of distant sirens began to rise outside the chamber.

Something had happened in Recife. The Icelands were stirring. After twenty-eight years of uneasy peace, the world was about to change again.

Tau had managed to get lucky — a kindly old farmer had offered him and Amahle a lift up the road on his creaking cart. But after that, it was a harsh walk. The plains stretched endlessly, the air dry and sharp against his throat. By six, the sun hung low over the Karoo hills, and the dusty outline of Prince Albert came into view.

He knew who lived here. Mama Zandile. His grandmother.

Keeping Amahle's small hand in his, Tau walked up the narrow streets lined with old stone houses and weathered porches. When he finally reached the little house with the faded blue shutters, he knocked. The door opened, and a gasp was followed by a warm, trembling embrace.

"Tau, my sweetie! And Amahle! You're here." Her voice cracked. "It must have been such a difficult journey from Cape Town."

"Only a little bit," Tau said with a tired smile. "We're heading to Lagos. Just wanted to rest here a while." Mama Zandile's eyes widened. "Lagos? That's a long way, my boy. The roads north aren't kind. But Mama can help you, at least for a hundred kilometres or so. There are still a few guides I know from the old days." She turned to Amahle and softened. "And how are you, my darling?"

"Good," Amahle mumbled, rubbing her eyes. "Brother good. Want food."

Zandile laughed, her face glowing with affection. "Food you shall have," she said, lifting Amahle into her arms.

Dinner was simple — maize bread, lentils, and thin stew — but to Tau, it felt like a feast. For the first time in months, there was warmth in the room: the smell of cooking, the sound of gentle laughter, the flicker of the lantern casting gold light on the walls. For a while, the world outside — the rumours, the fear, the message — all seemed far away.

As the night deepened, Tau looked up from his plate. "Mama... you heard the radio two nights ago? The message? About the virus?"

Zandile's smile faded. The fire crackled in the silence that followed. "I did," she said quietly. "And I've heard words like that before. Long, long ago — when I was just a little girl. Your great-grandfather had an old radio, and I remember voices saying something about sickness, lockdowns, and... ice."

"Ice?" Tau frowned. "You mean the Icelands?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, not the place. Something they made. Something they buried. I was too young to understand it, but I remember the fear in the grown-ups' eyes. People said the sickness was gone, cured forever. But I remember my mother whispering that it wasn't cured... only frozen."

Tau felt a chill that had nothing to do with the night air. "Frozen?"

"Yes," she said, gazing into the fire. "And now they've woken it."

For a moment, no one spoke. The lantern light trembled on the walls, and the wind outside moaned through the narrow alleys of the old town.

Zandile reached for his hand. "Whatever it is, Tau, don't chase it. Just keep Amahle safe. Promise me that." Tau hesitated. Then nodded.

Later that night, after Amahle had fallen asleep, Mama Zandile unrolled a hand-drawn map across the table. Her wrinkled finger traced the route north.

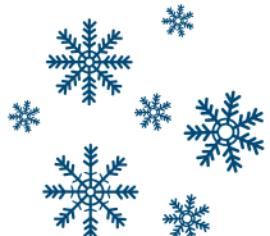
"From here," she said, "you'll follow the old N1 toward Beaufort West, then through the dry lands near Three Sisters. There's a settlement by Kimberley — you might still find water there. Past that, the desert grows thinner near Gaborone. Cross there, keep west of the Kalahari, and you'll reach Luanda. Lagos won't be far after that, if the roads still hold."

Tau memorised every name. The firelight flickered across his determined face.

It was warm, safe — almost like the world before everything had gone wrong.

But outside, somewhere beyond the mountains, the wind carried a low, distant sound.

Sirens.



SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR STAFF

Lucy Smith

Welcome back! Today I bring you the best dressed teacher in the entire school...

DR MORRIS!

1. Cats or dogs, and why? – **Dogs – they show unconditional affection**
2. What did you want to be when you were younger? – **A lawyer**
3. Comfort TV show/movie? – **'Still Game'**
4. What department do you wish you were in? – **Music**
5. Favourite musical artist? – **Verdi (Italian operatic composer for those wondering)**
6. What was your first job? – **I worked in the post office, counting money**
7. Go to karaoke song? –
I don't have one... (After being forced to choose) 'Sweet Caroline' by Neil Diamond



I really need to find some cat people in this school, if you've any suggestions please get in touch. I'm getting desperate.

EDITORS' NOTES

The editors... who else would it be?! Why you still reading this?!

Editing The Columns has been a great excuse for me to stop studying. Maybe it was too effective for such a purpose. Anyway, I've taken great pleasure in coating these twelve bits of reformed wood with excellent writing and colourful designs. Let's hope Charlie doesn't get a fright. Good luck to the half the school that are choosing subjects and I hope you enjoyed this as much as I did. See you next week!

-Acting Editor Haoqi Liu (F4)

Hopefully this edition of The Columns has been helpful, and if it hasn't, at least it's been entertaining. If it's neither of those... let's not think about that. Good luck to everyone who is choosing their subjects in the coming days, weeks, and months!

-Acting Editor Rosie O'Ready (F4)

Wow... I can't believe the process this has been. so much discussions, running about trying to find people, and the constant question of "is this okay"? It's been a tiring week nevertheless, and I'm so glad to have the wonderful team to help put it together. Thanks for reading The Columns this week and we hope to see you returning!

-Acting Editor Al (Alastair) Forbes (F2)

I think my article covers it up, but thank you for reading The Columns this week!

-Acting Assisting Editor Tom Johnson (F4)

And a note from all of us... IT'S 12 PAGES HAHA WE'RE SO DOPE DUDE