

THE COLUMNS

by pupils; for pupils | HSD's Newsletter: Issue 142

Photo Credit - Ruby McNair

This Friday marks the end of the prelim season for so many of our wonderful F5/F6 pupils. Excellent work, and I wish you the best on your results!

It also marks the end of us temporarily editing The Columns (don't hold back - we know you want to cry).

We have been busy bees in the last two weeks. Long shifts, discussions about everything down to font sizes, trying to speak to three people at once, but nevertheless we are thankful for the opportunity.

And to all those wonderful readers, whether you're a parent, pupil, teacher, or somebody else, thank you for reading. To the writers, thank you for writing. Because of you, The Columns has been made extra special!

For the last time, we bring to you another twelve bits of reformed wood. Please enjoy!

Also good luck re-formatting the document, Charlie & Emma! :)

-The Columns Editors

ALASTAIR'S TEA (AND COFFEE)

Al Forbes

Wow... Haoqi was correct... editing The Columns is a good excuse to not study.

Last week was definitely something - late nights, constant notes, discussion, and messages.

But, this week we are back again.

Anyway - to those few people who read The Columns, I hope you take something away. Whether it's something from a life hack, to favourite teachers, us as editors only hope we give you something good to finish off the week.

Thanks again to all the brilliant contributions we have this week - and remember, you can join our team. Submit your articles to be a part of this community of writers!

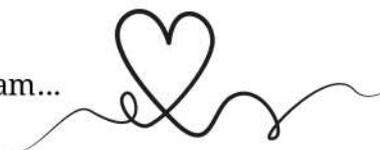
But I want to get serious in this - a moment where I can try make a difference in someone's life.

School can be hard, so can life in general. Some people may worry about shoe sizes, whilst others tests, friends, or even just living without the risk of constant physical and emotional burn out.

Being stressed isn't fun. Trying to feel when you're too exhausted is tiring. Trying to love without knowing how to can be harder.

I know that there are people out there who find life a bit more challenging than the next person who comes along, and for that I'm sorry. But just know that there are people out there who are more alike than you might think.

We see you, we hear you, we feel you. Hang in there. One day this will just be a dream...



TRUMP'S GREENLAND FROLIC

Recently, Trump has declared his intention to purchase Greenland from Denmark before offering military support, because apparently Venezuela was not taxing enough for him. All this and we are only in January! U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos this week drew global attention, combining bold trade rhetoric with diplomatic friction and sharp reactions from financial markets. Trump's remarks on tariffs and international relations dominated discussions at the gathering of world leaders as Europe held their breath while Trump let breath flow.

In the days leading up to his speech, Trump publicly threatened to impose steep tariffs on several European and NATO countries that resisted his push for increased U.S. influence over Greenland, part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Those tariff threats - which targeted imports unless allies supported U.S. strategic goals - rattled investors and raised fears of a fresh U.S. - EU trade conflict.

However, on January 21, 2026, Trump withdrew from those tariff plans after agreeing upon a framework agreement with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Arctic cooperation, including Trump's pursuit of Greenland. He also clarified that the United States would not use military force to seize territory.

Every morning, I wake up and hear something else absurd on Radio 4, from tariff theatrics to Venezuelan oil-snatching, every day something new.

The stock market was hit hard as well this week as investors rushed to withdraw their shares from various companies. European stock markets climbed, with benchmark indexes such as the STOXX 600 and national indices in Germany, France and the UK posting gains as tariff pressures eased.

Earlier in the week, when tariff threats were at their peak, markets globally felt the ripple so much so that U.S. equities saw notable fluctuations. However, U.S. stocks rebounded sharply after the president's tariff retreat, with major indexes like the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500, and Nasdaq all rising more than 1% on the news. Investors are relieved that a trade standoff with key allies might be averted.

MARTY SUPREME – REVIEW

Kirsty Caddick

Marty Supreme, directed by Josh Safdie, is a gripping movie that follows the arrogant table tennis star Marty Mauser and his journey through the sport. It brilliantly portrays his drive and 1960's New York, particularly the corruption in the police force.

I arrived knowing this would be great but left completely and utterly amazed. In the first thirty minutes the movie convinces you it is all about table tennis before erupting into something much more than that. It was heartfelt yet explosive with pace, desperation, and humour. Timothee's acting was outstanding throughout, and in my opinion, this was his best performance to date. The way he displays the confidence, vulnerability, and ambition of Marty was indescribable.

This film felt like a gift that kept on giving and highlights life's inevitability of struggle and how seemingly unreachable dreams can come true through passion, and discipline. I also loved the rawness of Marty and how the film was character-driven. The cinematography was brilliant too, darker tones and close-ups, creating a tense atmosphere.

Overall, an exhilarating, thought-provoking, film, which left me thinking, is success worth the sacrifice?

QM Services

Service	Ran By (MT= Management Team)	Where/When	Teacher Supervising	Details
Email	MT	<u>Mon-Sun</u> (subject to availability)	Mrs Watson	Contact whenever
Firefly Page	MT	Resources > Pupil Info > LGBTQ+	Mrs Watson	All the info you need, updated regularly
Suggestion Box	Co-Managers	Library (See library opening times)	Librarian	See library opening times
B&B (Books and Bracelets)	MT	<u>Wednesday, 13:10</u> , MB11	Mr Anderson	Bracelets, books, crafts, and small events
Afterschool Sessions	Co-Managers	<u>Wednesday, 16:05</u> , Lunch Hall	None in the room	Low pressure, comfortable, session for those who can't/don't want to come during the day
Friday Sessions	MT	<u>Friday, Lunch</u> , MB11	Mrs Watson	New events every week for everyone

Queerious Minds is The High School of Dundee's one and only LGBTQ+ club for all. Our services are for everyone, whether you're gay, queer, straight, or more. Pick a service from the list above and come see for yourselves!

HMS UNICORN – 2025

Photographed and Edited by Al Forbes



THE COLUMNS – BEHIND THE SCENES

Haoqi Liu

Putting together The Columns is a surprisingly complicated process, and I thought I would share with you some insight into what goes on behind the scenes, and the struggles and celebrations that come with it.

The Monday Meeting

This is where The Columns starts every week. The editors, temporary editors, regular contributors and people who pretend they're interested but do no work (aka me) all come together and discuss. It starts with annihilating everything from last week's edition out of existence, then some deliberation on what to do for the edition, then it quickly falls apart into fun and silliness, for example:

choosing silly fonts, or putting in deliberate mistakes.

We also discuss politics and current affairs, for example (not naming names) the current president of the US. It's a great casual place to hang out and I recommend coming along if you have time.

We will figure this out ourselves!

(hopefully)

(we might make a mess of it).

i'm so sorry Charlie and Emma- Rosie



Above: Evolution of The Columns design - Alastair looked at the first one and nearly puked

Designing the Design

This is where the temporary editors decide to throw in a surprise for Charlie, so spend hours making a funny and unique but also passably elegant appearance. It's a long process for perfection (if you call the result perfect): in turn, pick every element on the page, for each element, in turn, meddle with each setting available, for each setting for each element, in turn, select every option and compare. Decide how curvy the curviness should be, decide how translucent the watermark should be (and then delete it), decide how large the line spacing should be... After many long hours, I reached a conclusion, which is what you saw last week!

Aside from the change and check process, we did have some sort of idea of what we wanted: bright and bold, and in my opinion we were successful in achieving that.

Article Avalanche!

This is the first productive step of the process. It consists of the most fun part, and the least fun part, combined.

When I receive a flood (okay, maybe a *slight* exaggeration given we fell short of the 48 page target) of emails containing all of the masterpieces which will be ctrl-c-ctrl-v-ed in here, I take great pleasure in reading them. I really do, and I can honestly say they were amazing. To all contributors: you have ^{finish off} the week, s, please keep going!

However, it's not all relaxation, as I also need to be on the lookout for any ^{finish of} the week ^{opening} paragraph have hitched a ride into the edition. Some peo ^{are perfect, some are... (*)}

91 The Haoqi Party - Typographical Change - Both votes this May!

Consistency is Key (and painful)

Haoqi is a perfectionist. Therefore, I declare CHANGE. It's like all of the political opposition, except the change actually happens. Pre-print margins fixed at 0.5cm on both sides. Body font size - 11pt. Body font - Droid Serif. Alignment - justified. You'll notice the titles are consistent as well. No random fluctuations, we're not quantum physicists (apart from Tom).

Unfortunately, this does take its toll, and the consistency tweaks take a rather long time. Notable ones last week include 2100, where we had to manually half the size of the paragraph break every line to fit it, cramming my own and Rosie's subject rundowns on the same page... Basically this level of perfection takes a very long time, and even then, it's upsetting to see some mistakes still slip through the gaps. (Our messages group chat had a meltdown when Al and subsequently everyone else accidentally missed an "or".)

(*) If you struggle with keeping your writing free from mistakes, I recommend the use of ChatGPT.

AI isn't great, but I can confirm it does wonders when it comes to proof-reading.



The Library Meeting

This, I found very strange last week, but maybe it's a good idea after all.

A bunch of weird, speed-walking teenagers stumble off to Central Library to edit the edition together in a last-minute meeting. This is actually where most of the productive work gets done, but we're not very efficient at it, hence it runs until about 5:45pm.



Counting & Calculating Pages

The Columns has never and will never publish an edition with 10 pages.

As this booklet is formed of A3 paper stapled together, and each sheet comes with two halves with two sides each, this forces the edition to have a page count that is divisible by 4. Most of the time the edition is 8 pages long. This week however, we had 9 pages at our library meeting, which means we must somehow find 3 additional pages of content. This is literally the worst case scenario we could have encountered. As a result, you may notice some of the techniques we employed in inflating the page count. But you're reading this, and there's 12 pages, so clearly we were successful. (This was written before we finished.)

Publishing – A Bureaucratic Business

Finally, after many long hours, late nights, and early mornings, we're finished! Now we just need to get it published to show the world! How hard can that be? Very, it turns out.

I never expected this, but publishing the edition involves emailing four separate staff and four separate pupils, and including a whole host of information alongside it.

Turns out, compressing a PDF is a lot harder than you might think as well. I think this took me around 20 minutes, and the conclusion that I reached was those random websites that are probably full of trackers and stuff actually do the best job.

Then I have to calculate $9+6=15$, pick up 15 copies of the edition from amazing Andy (from reprographics) and start up my own delivery service with the gang. Ah well, it's a good way to get some steps in I guess.

Post Mortem – Why did the colours get messed up in the print?

An edition of The Columns is not finished once it's published, at least, not for me.

If you compared the print and digital editions from last week, you'll notice that the digital is considerably more bright and bold than the print. I wanted to find out why.

This turned out to be a big chunk of learning complicated technical stuff, but I think I've got it now.

You are reading the digital edition, and in case you didn't see last week's colours, here's an example:

ALASTAIR'S TEA (WHERE EDITORS DIE)

When this gets printed, it automatically gets converted from RGB (red-green-blue) to CMYK (cyan-magenta-yellow-black) since those are the colours of ink available in the printer. However, many bright, vivid colours which can be displayed using RGB cannot be displayed using CMYK, because RGB mixes light while CMYK mixes ink which will absorb a certain amount of light, so the computer must choose the closest printable match, which turns out to be this disgusting mess:

ALASTAIR'S TEA (WHERE EDITORS DIE)

I never saw this because I never exported to CMYK, which forced the printer to do so automatically, so this is something that I will be doing different this week. Additionally, I will be making a separate version for printing, which allows me to lighten the colours so they become closer to what we are looking for.

Conclusion

I hope this article has enlightened you on what goes on behind the scenes to put together the edition. I certainly had fun making it, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did!

00:04, today

Sleepless Nights

I've just looked in the version history, and Al was editing stuff at 11pm last night, and Rosie was editing stuff so late last night it's technically today. You're allowed to sleep you know!

 OReadyR

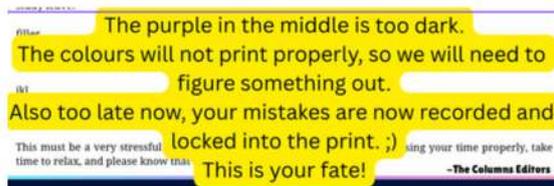
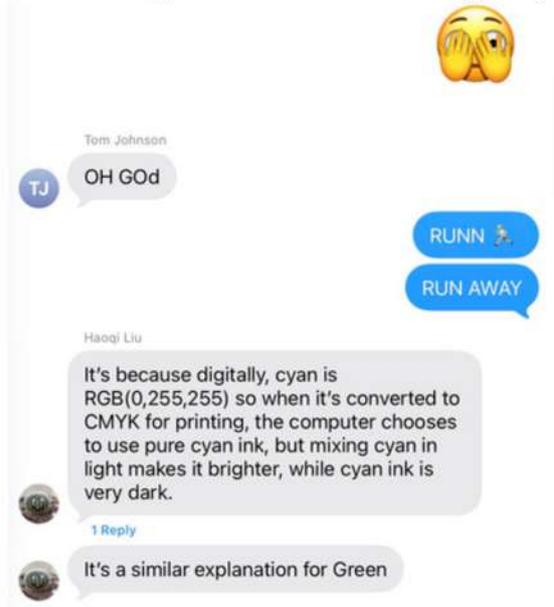
EDITING THE COLUMNS AS AN F2

Al Forbes

I'm not exactly sure how to start this one off if I'm being honest. It is such a privilege to be an editor, even if it is just for two weeks.

But regardless of The Columns, this week and the past week has been more than a lot in so many ways that I can't describe. I think the biggest mistake is that as an F2, I don't need to deal with much compared to those pupils higher up the school, and it is to those people I ask that they politely step outside and attempt to think for once.

This process has been tiring to say the least, for every single one of us. We all play an equally big part of this (more like the writers do but still). I guess what I'm saying is: don't take all this hard work for granted. I can't stress how lucky we are to have such a good school community - let alone the brilliant writers that come along with it. Now - let me give you a behind-the-scenes scoop on editing The Columns...



The "Multi-Mouth Method"

I think both Haoqi and I know how painful this can be. It's either we are running about campus, trying to find someone, or messaging and emailing over 10 people at once... And why, you might ask? I would tell you but I honestly don't remember. Probably why I have to try and talk to them again...

The Columns Group Chat

Yes, your editors have a group chat! On your left I have extracted some of my favourite bits from the past two weeks, from Haoqi explaining colours whilst both myself and Tom try to escape, to troubles with emojis and facial expression.

Also, side note, what the absolute heck is Haoqi's profile picture? A demented pompom sitting on a table? I can't look at that without shuddering.

Editing the Editor

finish off the week. opening paragraph'

So... one of the acting editors (Haoqi) who shall stay nameless (Haoqi) has been critiquing his (Haoqi's) fellow editors.

See, great thing for me is that now I can type my article straight into the edition. Now, of course, the other editors can see my rough draft and my spelling/grammar mistakes.

And someone had the nerve to highlight it as I wrote my piece. I'm speechless.

Secret Notes

So, we sometimes aren't bothered to message each other about any updates we have made or stuff we have to do... so we just leave notes.

They seem to have accidentally gotten more threatening as the days passed.

But yes, it is so fun when you log onto Canva at (literally) 22:41 on Wednesday 21st January 2026 to find a lovely message waiting for you...



I Need Sleep

It was on that day that I realised - he has a very punchable fa-

Truth be told, we leave editing until last minute... and by last minute I mean Thursday evening at 16:30 in the library sat in front of the computer discovering that we are three and a half pages short only to realise that we aren't (don't ask).

We finish the night off at 10:30, barely able to type messages to each other in sentences.

00:04, today

Grammar (Don't Judge)

Funny how I'm an editor and yet I can't write or spell properly.

22:58, yesterday

O'ReadyR

ForbesAA

Like, when someone says "grammar", I'm like "who is that?". It got so bad that as I was typing my article in here, Haoqi took out his virtual pen and highlighted every mistake I made in red.

It was on that day that I realised - he has a very punchable fa-

Also, I can't stop spelling grammar with an er at the end. I'm doomed.

Conclusion

Well, this brings me to the end of my life as a Columns editor... I can't think of a conclusion - so, bye! | Rosie & I talking (she hates AI)

Great! As long as they aren't from ChatGPT

No

But I just ran them through ChatGPT a few times over each so they aren't as bad

I'm going to highlight all your spelling and grammar mistakes.

And keep it in the final edition.

DISADVANTAGES OF AI

Rosie O'Ready

AI is everywhere, I'm sure you'll agree. ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, Grok, AI filters, AI Google summaries, AI images and videos... whether you like it or not, AI is everywhere. And this is a problem.

First of all, I'll explain the difference between generative AI and traditional AI. Generative AI is an AI model which creates something new, like AI art and music, photos, and videos. Traditional AI is something like Siri or Alexa, or recommendation systems such as on Netflix. It can't create something new, but it can make decisions based on given data.

One disadvantage of AI, if not the main disadvantage, is the climate impact. Generative AI systems like ChatGPT or DALL-E use huge amounts of electricity, and one request on ChatGPT uses 10x more power than the same request on Google. This increased use of electricity then creates more carbon dioxide emissions and more pressure on the electricity grid. Even more power is used in the deployment and maintenance of these AI systems.

Apart from the electricity usage, AI systems use up huge amounts of water during their training, deployment, and maintenance. This water comes from many places, like rivers, but the data centres which run AI systems are using more and more freshwater resources according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute. This use of freshwater supplies can deplete an already limited source of water for rural communities.

According to the Institute, large data centres can consume up to 5 million gallons of water per day, which is equivalent to the water use of a town populated by 10,000 to 50,000 people. A day. Only 0.5% of Earth's water is available as freshwater, and every time somebody types in a new command to ChatGPT, every time somebody wants to see what they'd look like as a cartoon, more of it gets used up. ChatGPT's 'pre-training phase' alone used up 700,000 litres of water. And I haven't even mentioned manufacturing.



Additionally, this freshwater can't be easily reused. According to a page on the UK government's website which explains how water used in AI/cooling systems is disposed of, freshwater which doesn't evaporate cannot be reused for cooling purposes as it has become contaminated with dirt or chemicals. Water scarcity is already an issue for many communities, don't make it worse for the sake of convenience.

A slightly less terrifying but still valid problem with AI is that it is damaging to those in creative fields. AI 'animation', AI 'art', AI 'music' are becoming more and more popular. Recently, a Swedish folk song which received around 5 million streams on Spotify was revealed as being made entirely by AI, and was consequently banned from the music charts.

People in jobs such as graphic design are struggling for work, because people are choosing to use AI, which removes opportunities and can make it impossible for graphic designers to keep working. AI 'art' is slowly becoming more prominent in fandoms, and even in museums. On the 13th of January this year, a student at the University of Alaska ate part of an art exhibit created by Nick Dwyer with the use of AI.

The student, Graham Granger, did it as an act of protest, and claims that he did it because: "it was insulting to see something of such little effort alongside all these beautiful pieces in the gallery". The project involved the creator making photographs - with the help of AI - of himself and an AI chatbot, who he says had acted as his therapist.

In this day and age, AI seems inescapable. It's everywhere. It can have its uses, such as in medicine, and its benefits, such as being cheaper or faster. But so far, AI is being used far too frequently for increasingly trivial reasons, and having a devastating impact. People are using it to write essays for them, to answer questions, for advice, for quotes, for interviews, for fact-checking, for... yeah. Everything. But next time you're stuck on that essay, or are bored and trying a filter for fun, please think of the impact you're making.

A guide on how to turn AI features off on Google and Pinterest will appear in next week's edition of... The Columns.

WOMEN IN MYTHOLOGY

Rosie O'Ready

Isn't every week the best week to talk about epic mythological Greek women?

Number 1

The goddess Artemis. She is the goddess of the hunt, childbirth and childcare, nature, and many other things. Her sacred animal is the deer, and in the myths she has a chariot pulled by 4 golden-horned deer. She is a maiden goddess, and it is often said that all the maiden nymphai (as well as some maiden heroines) were her companions, and that all maiden girls were her figurative companions.

Number 2

The Amazons. These were a group of female-only warriors in Ancient Greece, who were renowned everywhere for their incredible physical agility, strength, archery and riding skills, and in general the arts of combat. According to Stephen Fry, in the Ancient World they are in fact credited with the invention of mounted warfare.



Number 3

Penthesilea. She was the Queen of the Amazons, and led the Amazons into battle in the Trojan war. It is said that she accounted for eight Achaean men (the Greek side, in simplification), and she brought with her twelve of the best Amazonian warriors. She was so fearsome that she inspired the other women of Troy to fight for their city, however they were discouraged from joining the fray by a seer, who pointed out that



Penthesilea and the Amazons had trained since they were young, and that the women of Troy would most likely get themselves killed instead of helping the cause. Penthesilea was also a daughter of Ares, the god of war, and by the same father, the younger sister of Queen Hippolyta (also epic).

Number 4

Atalanta. She was a princess, abandoned at birth, then taken in by a bear and then a group of hunters who found her when she was just a child. Due to her unusual upbringing, Atalanta was most happy in the wild, and was a skilled huntress. She believed, as did most who knew her, that she was the fastest person in all of the land. And – according to the myths – no one was faster than her. Technically, Melanion beat her in a footrace, but he used trickery and the help of an immortal goddess, so the odds were just a tad uneven.

Number 5

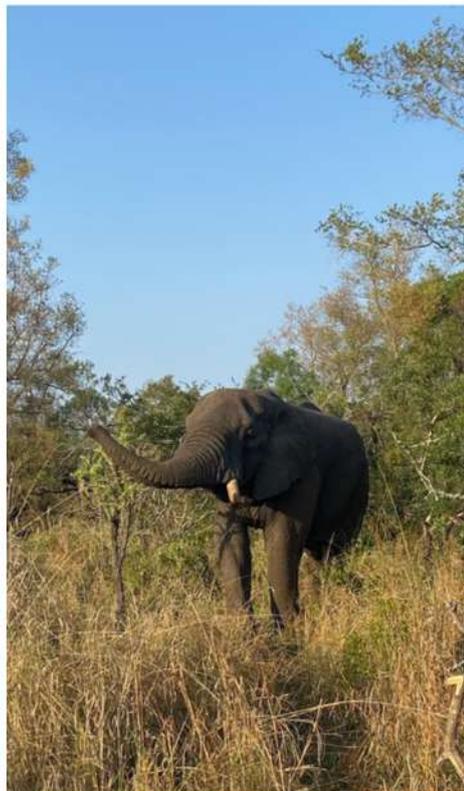
The Goddess Aphrodite. Many see her as ‘just’ the goddess of love and beauty, and she certainly is. But she is also a goddess of war, which many people overlook. This combination could be deadly to anyone who dared insult her, as love and war can be dangerous things. She was primarily worshipped as a goddess of war in Sparta, Thebes, and Cyprus, however there were many other places. Aphrodite had several sacred animals, including the ram, the dove, and the sparrow.

Extra

Another who is not in Greek mythology, but was in fact a real person, was Hypatia. mathematician, and astronomer in Alexandria, Egypt, in around 350 – 415 AD. She was incredibly clever, and constructed things such as astrolabes and hydrometers, though she didn’t invent either of these things. She was tolerant to both Christians and Pagans alike, and was a teacher to both religions (in ancient times, this was pretty rare). However, her life was ended abruptly as she was murdered brutally and mercilessly by an angry mob. In the 20th century, she became a feminist icon, and symbol of the feminist movement.

MY PHOTOS FROM AFRICA

Photos Taken by Tessa Sanders



2100 - CONTINUED

A Serial by Hal Arita

21:00 | 07.02.2100 | UST-2 | UNKNOWN, ICELANDS

Deep in the fortress of ice and steel, the so-called contaminated stirred. They were prisoners of different ages, some born before the collapse of the old world, others caught in the first outbreaks. But now, something was awakening. The cold corridors echoed with faint whispers, and the frozen walls seemed to pulse as if alive.

Beyond the fortress, the world began to feel it. In Recife and Natal, townspeople reported glimpses of a monstrous shape, a terrifying hybrid of steel and ice moving through the mist. Farther east, in Dakar and Bissau, tremors rattled the streets — quakes that seemed to come from deep beneath the ocean, from the place everyone assumed was unreachable: the prison itself.

This was an experiment gone wrong; one the World Powers had buried in secrecy: ICE — the Iceland Cure Experiment. Somewhere inside, the truth of why the world had fractured into five powers lay hidden.

A small group of experimentalists, remnants of the old United Kingdom, still survived underground. They had knowledge, but not power. Until now. One prisoner had escaped northward, weaving his way into their ranks, subtly influencing decisions. Another had broken free south, slipping into the African Tribal World. Suddenly, no one knew what was real, or what was coming next.

Chaos had begun.

The once-impenetrable walls of the Vault groaned and cracked. Gates that had held for decades were giving way. Ice that had been frozen for centuries was melting, dripping and splitting under forces unknown. And somewhere in the shadows, something waited — patient, hungry, and ready to reclaim the world.

22:00 | 07.02.2100 | UST+4 | INCHON, NEW SOVIET POWERS

Misha was suddenly grabbed from behind. A harsh voice muttered close to his ear. “Don’t move. Don’t speak.”

Pain exploded across his forehead as something hard struck him. Darkness swallowed him almost instantly. When he came to, the truck’s cargo hold creaked with every turn of the wheels. Dust motes floated in the dim light, and the faint smell of oil and damp metal filled the air. Beside him sat a bearded man, his eyes sharp and alert.

“Mikhail... you awake?” the man whispered.

Misha blinked, trying to steady himself. “Alexei?”

Alexei Morozov nodded grimly. “Yeah. Been awake. Where... where are we?”

“I don’t know,” Misha admitted, his voice hoarse. “Hours on the road, it feels like. It’s... it must be the 8th now?”

Alexei glanced toward the shadows at the truck’s edges. “Seems so. Hours, maybe more. They’ve been driving us for a long time.”

“Have you seen who our captors are?” Misha asked, trying to keep his voice low, though the tremor in it betrayed him.

Alexei shook his head. “No. But they’re not from the New Soviet Powers. I don’t recognise their uniforms or their insignias. Could be Neutral... or something worse. They move like they know the land, but not like soldiers of any world power.”

Misha swallowed hard. “Neutrals don’t attack... not like this. Surely not.”

Alexei’s gaze met his, calm and unshaken. “When it comes to chaos, Mikhail... never assume. You learn that too late.”

Misha leaned back against the cold metal wall of the truck, his mind spinning as the shadows danced over Alexei’s face. Outside, the wind whipped against the truck, carrying the night and its secrets with it. And once more, darkness claimed him.



05:48 | 08.02.2100 | UST+8 | XIN BEIJING, XI EMPIRE

Yan Mei had managed to escape. The moment she was put onto the station platform, she bolted, the crowded hum fading behind her. For the first time in her life, she felt what freedom truly meant.

She ducked into a small nightclub, keeping to the shadows, blending with the late-night crowd. There, she spent the night carefully—listening, watching, and hiding. When dawn came, she found scraps of food and kept close to her father's workplace, her heart pounding with each familiar step.

Sure enough, she spotted him. He moved with anxious precision, constantly checking his watch, muttering under his breath. Yan Mei followed at a distance until he reached an alleyway ending abruptly in a brick wall.

He didn't hesitate. He walked straight through it.

Yan Mei froze, stunned, her instincts screaming caution. But curiosity and determination won. She stepped forward carefully, feeling absurd, and held her hand against the wall.

Then her body followed. She was falling—chilly air rushing past, the ground vanishing beneath her—until she landed lightly in a luxurious lobby, ornate and silent, almost surreal in its perfection.

Ahead, she saw her father descending a set of winding stairs, each step deliberate. Yan Mei shivered, the sleeveless dress doing little against the chill, but she moved quietly after him.

At the bottom, a narrow corridor stretched ahead. Her eyes widened when she saw the sign: Top Secret: ICE Division 2.0.

Her chest tightened. She had seen that same snowflake symbol flashing on her phone just days ago.

She crept to the doorway her father had entered, holding her breath. Through the sliver, she caught snippets of conversation:

"How close are we to finishing it?" her father's voice demanded.

The other worker's response was measured, almost scolding. "Patience is a virtue, and it is one that you do not have."

"We need it quick! There isn't much time. The New Soviet Powers are waging war. The Middle East Jewels and the African Tribal World have a decent relationship, and the Ultimate Trump States won't interfere. If we can control the Iceland's, we control everything!"

Yan Mei's heart raced. Every word made the danger more real, more urgent. And yet, a spark of pride ignited within her.

She turned and sprinted up the stairs, her breath ragged, terror and exhilaration intertwining. She didn't know what awaited her outside, but she knew she had glimpsed the power—and the danger—behind ICE.

10:03 | 08.02.2100 | UST+3 | CAIRO, MIDDLE EAST JEWELS

Layla woke up to hunger after a sleepless night. This time, she did not have a bed. She did not have family. Fate seemed to hate her because she did not have anybody else. Cairo was now mostly deserted.

After multiple air strikes, most of the place had burned up. There were now a few people who scavenged the streets for anything, but Layla knew it was useless.

She went eastwards to where the city was still intact. She knew that there would definitely be somebody to speak to. She just didn't know who. She didn't really know anything either. But she knew that she would find out everything.

Everybody had heard the same story that the Grand Vizier al-Hashim had ranted at Putina without effect and then something changing in the Iceland's. But apart from that, she was just as clueless as anyone else.

She left the west of Cairo with just one thought: to find out.



SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR STAFF

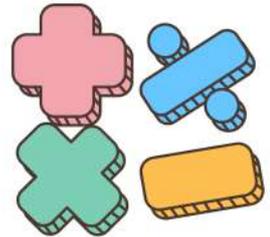
Lucy Smith

Welcome back! Today I bring you, from the much loved maths department...(drumroll please)...

MRS CRAIG!

$$(\sqrt[n]{a})^m = \sqrt[n]{a^m} = a^{\frac{m}{n}}$$

1. Cats or dogs, and why? - **Dogs – I have a dog called Juno. She's loyal, loving and great company.**
2. What did you want to be when you were younger? – **Pilot – perhaps inspired by watching 'Top Gun' when I as younger**
3. Comfort TV show/movie? – **'Forrest Gump', one of the few movies I have watched several times – emotional, historical, a great movie**
4. What department do you wish you were in? – **The Maths Department would always be my top choice, if I was pushed for a second it would be PE or HFT**
5. Favourite musical artist? – **Madonna – A strong independent women**
6. What was your first job? – **I worked in the Horn Milk Bar while I was a student**
7. Go-to karaoke song? – **I was unfortunately not blessed with a singing voice, if I had to sing karaoke I'd choose a song where the crowd would join in to drown me out! 'I Will Survive' by Gloria Gaynor**



Yet another dog person...but nevertheless an excellent set of answers. I will never complain about Forrest Gump or Top Gun. Until next time!

EDITORS' NOTES

correct use of apostrophe

The editors... c'mon we talked about this last week! Stop reading this! Stop! Move on!

Wow, what a fortnight it has been for me. A coding competition, a maths competition, then clever cookie Haoqi decided to sign up to editing The Columns?? Anyway, this has been incredible for me, and I have thoroughly enjoyed every moment spent! (Including all the nonsense!) Thank you for reading and bye!

–Acting Editor Haoqi Liu (F4)

Despite my one-sided war with Canva, the past two weeks editing The Columns **have** been excellent and entertaining. It's **been** a fantastic experience and I **want** to sincerely thank **everybody** who's contributed to this edition and the last, every article has been thoroughly appreciated. Have a lovely day!

–Acting Editor Rosie O'Ready (F4)

So, as I'm writing this, I've just run from Central Library to Robert Ferguson, then back here, trying to find someone to do a filler. These two weeks have been hell, but also amazing. One last thanks to my fellow editors! Also, final thanks to the brilliant writers! Thank you for reading.

–Acting Editor Al (Alastair) Forbes (F2)

Let me just take this opportunity to thank Tom on behalf of the team. I know that you might say that you haven't done much, but you have been more important than you might have thought. Thank you so much Tom, we appreciate you!

–Acting Assisting Editor Tom Johnson (F4), written on his behalf by Al

Get pranked Charlie! (psst...look at the title) ALSO, 12 PAGES AGAIN! WE ARE THE DOPEST DUDE!