

THE COLUMNS

By Pupils; For Pupils | HSD's Newsletter: Issue 146

Photo - Ruby McNair

So. Another week already. Feels like it's been longer to be honest. Ya know. What with...everything. (I'm talking about the war if you can't tell, sorry :) Ah well. It could be worse. Humanity has had a pretty good run, haven't we? Anyway, I'm sure some nice things have been happening in the world. Oh look, a sad monkey has a cuddly toy. And...yeah that's about it. Never mind. The world will still be here next week, or won't we all look silly! But we have a great selection of articles this week. I mean, obviously I'd say that, I don't think I'd get away with saying; 'it's a bit crap guys, a few articles have clearly been phoned in and it could do with some variety' Not that's at all the case with any of these articles! They're all great! Enjoy!

~ Charlie, Editor

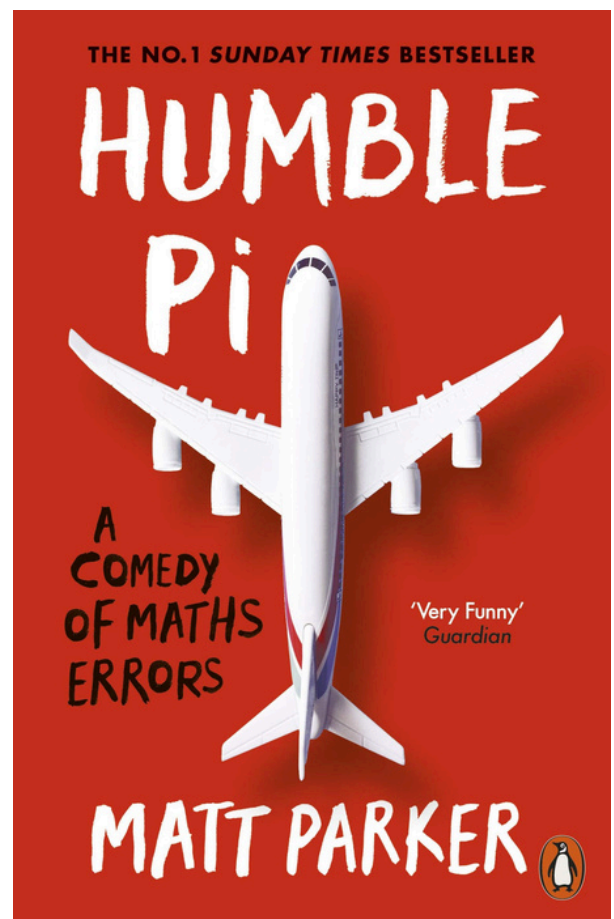
Book Review - Humble Pi

Haoqi Liu

This is not a maths book where you gaze into the heart and soul of those horrible elongated S thingymabobs (they're called integrals). This is a book which explores what happens when the people doing maths get it wrong, where you enjoy light-hearted humour, but also gets us to reflect on tragic accidents that can happen due to mistakes.

I first saw *Humble Pi: A Comedy of Maths Errors* in the Oxford Waterstones. (I assure you they are not the only supplier.) I got a copy, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the book since.

The book is a generally humorous collection of true stories, where people have made mistakes with interesting or notable consequences. Examples include the time where you could buy a military jet for 7 million Pepsi Points, or how the current £2 coin is mechanically impossible. If you have a coin handy, see for yourself! There are 19 gears connected in a circle — something that would seize up in real life. There are also more serious notes, but not without humour either. For example, that time when the pilot was dangling outside the windscreen of a plane. Or explaining said aviation accident using Swiss cheese. Every story in the book is entertaining, reflective or meaningful in some other way, and this is why I found it to be a great read, and would recommend it to you as well.



Under the Floorboards – Further Findings: Case File 2

Underage Vaping – Series Finale

Al Forbes

Hello readers. I have realised that my last “deep dive” was a month ago. Impressive how I’ve managed to hold off writing another for so long. Well, here we go.

Introduction

Vaping exploded into youth culture almost immediately. Colourful packaging, sweet flavours, e-cigarettes just slotted into place with today’s youth. But beneath the bright wrapper hides something else. Chemicals. Nicotine. Aerosols. Things we don’t fully understand yet, still thrown out in bulk to young people even today.

This feature peels back how vapes are made, what’s inside them, why teenagers try them, how schools are responding, or not, and what the research says about short- term and long-term harms. Welcome back to Under the Floorboards.

Stats

In Great Britain alone, surveys show a notable share of 11–17-year-olds have tried vaping, around 20% have ever tried it. On top of that, 7% of teens, most commonly older teenagers, currently vape. NHS surveys in England found current e-cigarette use rises with age. Single-digit percentages at younger ages, climbing to nearly 1 in 5 at mid-teens in some slices of the data. Recent figures suggest youth vaping has not disappeared. If anything, it has settled in.

Contents of a Vape

But what is in a vape?

Commonly, nicotine. Propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerin, which produce the visible cloud. Flavouring chemicals. These flavourings were originally designed for food, not lungs. Inhaling something is not the same as eating it.

Laboratory analysis has also detected metals from heating coils, carbonyl compounds formed when liquids are heated, and other reactive chemicals in the aerosol. Metals like nickel or lead do not scream “health boost”. Carbonyls include compounds that, in other contexts, are linked to irritation and long-term harm.

And no, it is not “just water vapour”. That phrase needs to retire... stat.

How Vapes are Made

Most disposable and refill vapes are simple in structure. A battery. A heating coil. A reservoir of e-liquid. A mouthpiece. Simple design means easy mass production. Cheap materials mean cheaper products. Cheap products mean easier access. When something addictive becomes affordable and aesthetic, it spreads fast.

The Adolescent Brain

Nicotine and the teenage brain are not a dream team. Brain development has been proven to continue into the mid-twenties. Nicotine can interfere with attention, learning, mood, and impulse control. It can rewire reward pathways, making addiction easier and quicker, sometimes before daily use even begins.

Short Term Effects & Risks

Everything in life carries risk. Crossing the road. Climbing stairs. Texting your friend dramatic updates at 11pm instead of revising for a test. (*cough cough* anyways).

But dizziness, nausea, nicotine poisoning, coughing, bronchial irritation, and shortness of breath are not exactly luxury side effects. They are common short-term reactions. There have also been cases of serious lung injury linked to certain vaping products in the past. While not every user experiences extreme harm, the possibility is not fictional.

Long Term Unknowns & Cancer Risk

Vaping is relatively new. Cigarettes took decades to fully expose their damage. The presence of carcinogenic compounds and metals in vape aerosols raises concern for long term lung and heart effects. Scientists are still studying it, which is precisely the point. We do not fully know what twenty years of teenage vaping looks like in middle age.

Being the experimental generation is rarely glamorous – and can be dangerous.

Why Young People Vape

Research points to several key motivations:

Flavours and attractive designs. Bright colours, dessert names, sleek packaging. It looks less like a health risk and more like a tech accessory.

Curiosity. What does it feel like? What does it taste like? What is the hype about?

Peer influence. Social acceptance is powerful in school corridors.

The belief that vaping is less harmful than smoking. While often presented as “safer” for adult smokers switching away from cigarettes, safer does not mean safe, especially for non-smokers, and even more so for minors.

Stress and emotional coping. Exams, friendships, identity, pressure. It can feel like something to hold onto.

Promotions and accessibility. If it is cheap, visible, and normalised, it might not feel dangerous.

But remember this. None of these reasons make someone foolish – it makes someone human. And being human means that you can change.

How Kids Get Vapes

Despite age restrictions, access still happens.

Some buy from shops that “accidentally fail” to enforce the law. Some get them from older friends or siblings. Some order online. Some borrow and share. Enforcement is inconsistent. Devices are small and easy to hide. Bathrooms become vape parlours.

Schools: How it Might Feel Like Not Much Is Happening

Many schools have policies banning vapes. Confiscations happen. Sanctions happen. Assemblies happen. But detection is difficult. Devices are discreet. Vapour dissipates quickly. Staff cannot monitor every corridor at every moment. There is also tension between punishment and support. Is a student caught vaping someone to discipline? Or someone potentially developing a nicotine addiction who needs help?

Final Thoughts

Underage vaping is not just a trend. It is a literal cultural shift wrapped in neon plastic.

It sits at the crossroads of marketing, addiction science, teenage psychology, and patchy enforcement. It thrives on aesthetics and ambiguity. It survives on the idea that it is “not that bad”.

Maybe it is not cigarettes in 1970. But it is also not harmless air.

Peeling back the floorboards reveals something less glamorous than the packaging suggests. A device designed to deliver nicotine efficiently. A generation navigating pressure and identity. And a question we are still answering in real time.

The case is not closed.

It rarely is.

Bonus

So, I’ve just realised that this article (on the work document I’m typing it on) is three pages long (sorry to the Editorial Team – trust me; I feel for you, I know the pain), I’m nearly four hours past the deadline to hand articles in, and this whole article I sound like a pilates teacher got just dragged through a bush after reading of a fortune teller website, but here am I making Charlie’s life a living hell one word at a time.

Sadly, I will not be able to continue this “deep-dive” series any longer. I managed to fit a few others in this term after pressuring from my cult-like readership but alas, I am announcing my retirement.

I just wanted to say thanks to said cult-like readership for being so keen to read this series, and thanks to everyone else who has voiced their enjoyment. I’m also sorry that I won’t been able to do my much-anticipated UK social media ban article but maybe a new writer will do so...

Usually I spread a message like “don’t be hateful” or “don’t go down an alleyway at night in school uniform... or preferably ever,” but in this segment – I have but one message to convey to you today and onwards.

Be kind. Be grateful. Be thankful.

And hopefully that will help built the path to a greater future.

10:21 | 09.02.2100 | UST+8 | Xin Beijing, Xi Empire

Yan Mei sat beneath the shade of a narrow willow by the riverbank, knees drawn to her chest. The air was thick and hot, the kind that shimmered against metal fences and glass towers. She had tried all morning to think of a plan — how to find out more about her father’s secret work, how to stay alive in a city that suddenly felt alien — but each idea dissolved into fear. She had lived her entire life behind walls of safety, and now she wasn’t sure how to breathe without them.

The hum of the city was broken by laughter — sharp, mocking, close. A group of boys, sixteen, maybe seventeen, swaggered down the embankment. They wore mismatched uniforms and the confidence of those who’d never been told no.

“Newbie,” one of them said, jerking his chin toward her. “That one. Pretty thing. How you doing, sweetheart? Cat got your tongue?”

Yan Mei’s pulse jumped. She looked around — the willow, the slow river, a few houses in the distance. No one who could help. She forced herself to meet his eyes. “Don’t touch me. Don’t you dare.”

“Scared?” another jeered. Their laughter cracked the still air. It was almost absurd, this ordinary cruelty, in a world that was already ending.

“You can leave me right now,” she said, voice trembling but clear. “My father is the head of Icela—”

The words caught in her throat. Too late.

“The Icelands?” The boys froze. “What would a commoner like you know about that?”

“We’ll take her to the boss,” the first one said. “See what he makes of her.”

They stepped closer. She stepped back — one, two — and her heel met nothing but air.

Splash.

Cold closed around her like glass shattering. But it wasn’t water. It was weightless, endless, falling.

When she opened her eyes, she was standing in a vast lobby — the same metallic corridors she had glimpsed the day before, but alive now with people. Voices echoed. Screens flickered with shifting maps. Dozens of corridors branched out like veins of light.

She drifted forward, disoriented, and followed a passage that led into what looked like a food court. The smell of broth and soy hit her senses, grounding her. She ordered a small bowl of noodles from a humming machine, sat down at a plastic table, and tried to steady her hands.

“Mind if I join you?”

The voice was low, accented — not from the Xi Empire.

She looked up. A man stood there, smiling faintly. His coat was worn but elegant, the fabric unlike anything she’d seen locally.

“I saw you stand up to those boys,” he said. “That was brave.”

Yan Mei blinked. “That wasn’t bravery,” she murmured. “I stepped back. Who are you, anyway?”

“Vincent Lloris,” he said, inclining his head. “I hail from the once-great city of Paris.”

She frowned. “Paris? I’ve never heard of such a place.”

He smiled, but his eyes were tired. “Most haven’t. Paris no longer exists. But once, it did. Tell me, young lady — what division of the Icelands does your father run?”

Yan Mei hesitated. “I... I just heard him mention something called Icelands Division 2.0.”

Vincent’s expression changed. A shadow crossed his face, his voice tightening to a whisper. “Then, child, you don’t yet understand what you’ve heard. And you’d better pray you never do.”

War in Iran

Kirsty Caddick

Khamenei is dead, what happens next?

Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei has died, according to official state announcements. As the most powerful political and religious authority in Iran, his death marks a major moment for the country.

Iran does not work like a presidency

Whilst there is a president, a parliament, and a judiciary, one position sits above them all: the supreme leader. He controls the military, the Revolutionary Guard, the judiciary, state broadcasting, and appoints half of the Guardian Council directly.

What happens immediately?

There is no ‘vice supreme leader’ instead, there is Iran’s assembly of experts—an 88-member clerical body who are responsible for choosing the next supreme leader.

The power player: the IRGC

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not just a military. They control major economic sectors, intelligence networks, elite security forces, and ballistic missile programs. In instability, the IRGC could play a stabilising role.

Possible scenarios

Controlled succession

A pre-approved cleric is selected. Continuity is emphasised, and the security forces would tighten measures. Iran’s regime survives. Markets would likely react to the uncertainty, and protests would be suppressed quickly.

IRGC consolidation

If there is internal disagreement, the IRGC could effectively dominate the transition to a new supreme leader. A system with increased religious military influence, over political decision-making.

Fragmentation

If elite factions disagree, (clerics vs military vs political elites), We could see an internal power struggle, temporary instability, and protests escalating.

Is Iran’s system designed to survive these shocks?

My Top 10 Book Recommendations

Maisey Lafollette

Since Thursday was World Book Day, I thought I would recommend some of my favourite books, which I think every reader should experience.

1. **SPQR** by Mary Beard. I was recommended this by Mr. Kent and it has not disappointed, it's perfect for any Classical Studies enthusiast. The book covers everything from Romulus and Remus to The Senate and the Emperors in a clear and entertaining way.
2. **The Butterfly Assassin** by Finn Longman. A story of a teen assassin with questions of morals and redemption that pulls at your heart strings surrounded by a creative world.
3. **Aurora Rising** by Amie Kaufman & Jay Kristoff. This is a sci-fi story where Tyler has to lead a squad filled with the academy's worst students and a mysterious girl named Aurora who belongs in the past. The story has a found family, drama and mystery.
4. **Legendborn** by Tracy Deonn. Bree has just lost her mother and has moved to an accelerated college program. There she discovers magic and a secret society of descendants of the Round Table. The book tackles loss, discrimination, and discovery in a heartfelt way.
5. **Catch Your Death** by Ravena Guron. This book will have you guessing until the very end. Three girls are trapped in the mansion of a wealthy family, and there's a murderer on the loose. The characters are fascinating and just when you think you have the answers another mystery appears.
6. **Gone** by Michael Grant. Every adult disappears and children are left to fend for themselves, leading to chaos and on top of it all some discover superpowers. In order to survive the children have to face hunger, illness, each other and themselves.
7. **Infinity Son** by Adam Silvera. Emil and Brighton are twin brothers living in a world where some have powers given by the stars or stolen from creatures. On their eighteenth Emil discovers powers and has to join the Spell Walkers, a rebel group fighting for peace. Silvera explores sibling dynamics, justice, and oppression.
8. **The Girl With All The Gifts** by M.R. Carey. Set in an apocalyptic future the story explores the journey of Melanie and other members of a science facility, while they flee to a safer location after their base was destroyed by monsters known as the Hungries. Melanie discovers she is one of them and the story explores what makes someone human.
9. **Such Charming Liars** by Karen M. McManus. Kat and her mother Jamie are con artists attempting to steal from a billionaire. Little do they know Jamie's ex husband and his son Liam are also targeting the same family. Kat and Liam develop a sibling relationship and face themes of families and relationships all while committing a crime or attempting to prevent one.
10. **The Great Gatsby** by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Nick Carraway moved to New York and is neighbours with Jay Gatsby who is famous for parties. Gatsby is in love with Nick's cousin Daisy who is already married. Gatsby attempts to win her back, angering Daisy's husband. Nick himself develops feelings for Jordan Baker a famous golfer. Great Gatsby explores love, money and social status through the various relationships and is a must read.

Seven questions for staff

Lucy Smith

Welcome back! Today I walked the hallowed halls of the senior management team to bring you...Mrs Watson!

1. **Cats or dogs and why?** – Dogs, because they give you cuddles while cats arch their backs and walk away
2. **What did you want to be when you were younger?** – I wanted to be an architect but found physics too academically demanding
3. **What is your comfort film/TV series?** – ‘Friends’, there isn’t a single bad episode
4. **What department would you like to be in?** – Music
5. **Who is your favourite musical artist** – Oasis - I’m a 90s girl
6. **What was your first job?** – Part time church organist while I was at school
7. **What is your go to karaoke song?** – I don’t do karaoke but if I did it would be a duet of ‘Islands In The Stream’ by Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers

Another dog person...but that was to be expected I fear. Overall an excellent set of answers, I think they just keep getting better and better. See you next week!

This was done by Haoqi

Editors' Note

I can't believe that someone would remove the apostrophe! Absolutely shocking!

The editors should learn how to grammar! This note belongs to the editors!

(Disclaimer: it was not written by the editors, that's what the mischievous midgets are for.)

Your Editors - Charlie, Emma, Shan, and Lucy