

# THE COLUMNS



By Pupils; For Pupils | HSD's Newsletter: Issue 149

Photo - Ruby McNair

## 149BC - The start of the Third (and final) Punic War between Rome and Carthage

Every week I sit in the evenings, desperately trying to work out what to write. Has there been anything on this week I can talk about to use up words? Always trying to fill space and yet I have nothing to say. Who is this for? Does anyone read the editorials? Does anyone even read the columns outside of our writers and my granny? Why, when I have dissertations, driving lessons and a feeble attempt at a social life, do I even bother writing a little blurb at the top that nobody cares about? Usually in a despairing bit of writing like this you might find a sentimental declaration that this is for you, for the single anonymous reader that makes it all worthwhile. But I'm in a cynical mood tonight so stuff that. LETS LOOK AT THE NEWS! I'M SURE THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING DEPRESSING IN THERE! Let's maybe calm down a bit. (Regains sanity for a moment) Ahem. The winter term is winding down and the Easter holidays are rapidly approaching. For all those whose holiday plans are still intact, enjoy. emoji's are fun.

Edtr. Charlie

## The Paris Elections

Jack Mitchell

On Sunday, socialist Emmanuel Grégoire was elected mayor of Paris; he will take office on Sunday, replacing incumbent Anne Hidalgo. The result was one of many in the second round of local elections across France.

When he takes office, Grégoire will extend the more than two decades long tenure of left-wing control in the French capital. This signals that, despite the rise of the far-right in the RN party, there is still an appetite for leftist leadership in the nation. However, the party saw a substantial increase in support, electing its highest ever number of officials in local government. It also managed to win outright in towns such as Carcassonne in southwest France. Much of the party's support has been increased by the efforts of its young and charismatic President Jordan Bardella, who assumed the role a day before his 26th birthday. He has ensured the party is appealing to new, younger voters instead of continuing to simply appeal to its typically older supporters who joined under Jean-Marie Le Pen or his daughter Marine, who is the RN's parliamentary leader and Bardella's predecessor.

The local elections this year may hint towards potential voting patterns for next year's presidential election. Current President Emmanuel Macron is not eligible to stand due to already having been in the role for two consecutive terms. The far-right has been seen by many as the frontrunner in this election, although other candidates could threaten this view. From the centrist camp, former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe is the main candidate, having announced he would stand in 2024. The longest serving of Macron's Prime Ministers, Mr Philippe has served as mayor of Le Havre since 2020 and was reelected to this post in the local elections. However, as the traditional centrist types have been struggling in the increasingly polarised environment of French politics, he may not have as much success in the presidential election as his former boss Macron did.

While those on the far right may seem very strong, so do its opponents in the far left. More radical than the type of socialist who won the Paris mayoralty, the LFI party is led by veteran politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon and has proved a thorn in the side of the more traditional parties in recent election. While not mainstream enough from a policy perspective, the party is in a coalition with the more moderate socialists and the greens.

Ultimately, who will win the French presidential election next year is still unknown, but the recent result in Paris shows there is still an appetite for the left to be in government. Whether they can stand in the way of the far right and prevent France from becoming like many other European nations may prove to be a vital question. We will only find out in April of next year.



# Really quick review of Project Hail Mary

Project Hail Mary is a movie about a guy who wakes up on a spaceship and remembers he's on a mission to save the world, and finds an alien space rock he calls Rocky, and they go save their worlds together. It's really good, go see it. It's based off a book by Andy Weir, author of the Martian, the film stars Ryan Gosling (as the astronaut, not the space rock) and is directed by Phil Lord and Chris Miller, the duo behind the Lego Movie, Cloudy with a Chance of meatballs, and 21 jump street. Again, it's really good, classic wholesome space adventure, special effects are amazing, particularly on Rocky.



## The answer to Haoqi's Mystery Riddle Thing!



A hunter leaves his camp to shoot bears. He walks 1 mile south, where he encounters his first bear. Due to the bear's skilfulness (or the hunter's lack of, you decide which way round), the bear snatches his gun and destroys it. In panic, the hunter runs 1 mile west. Then he decided it had been a long and tiring day, so he headed 1 mile north and arrived back at his base camp.

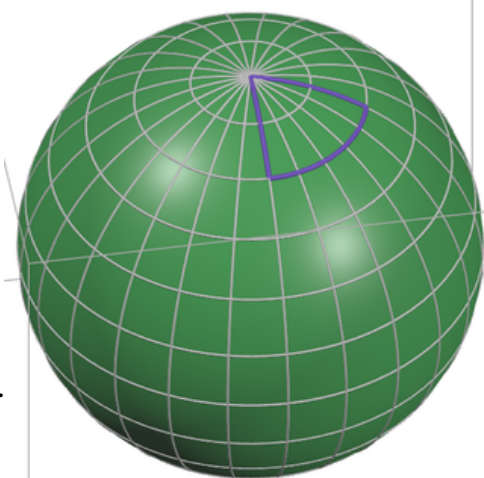
### What colour was the bear?

The bear was white.

For this bewildering situation to make sense, we need to start from the start. When the hunter goes a mile south, west, then north, it seems like the hunter should be 1 mile west of where he started. So he is clearly not back at his camp. But the earth is not flat! Cardinal direction do not simply follow a rectangular grid, it is impossible to project a sphere onto a rectangle. The key idea here is that longitude lines converge at a point at both poles, so from any point on earth, if you go far enough north you will reach the north pole.

Thanks to this bizzare system, if his camp is at the north pole, then it works out. When the hunter goes a mile south, he is 1 mile south of the north pole (this is kind of obvious). But, when he goes west, he maintains the same latitude, and the north pole is 1 mile north from any point at this latitude. So the fact that he travels west is no longer relevant. When he travels 1 mile north again, he is back at the north pole (his camp).

Now that we have established his location, we need to think about what kind of bear might be present on an arctic ice cap. The answer is of course, a polar bear, which is white.



Above:  
a diagram showing the hunter's route, which starts and finishes in the same place.

This took me half an hour of desmos chaos to produce.

*I love desmos*

Disclaimer: Haoqi did not write the above cursive sentence.



What happen when...

## A mathematician goes curling?

Curling is often seen as 'the chess of sport', full of thinking and logical ideas. So naturally, I wanted to see if being good at maths makes you good at curling. And there's only one way to find out...

So on Tuesday evening, with a few other fellow pupils, I went to the ice arena. I was excited. Curling was something that I had wanted to try for years, but never had the chance to. It was finally time.

Here's how it unfolded.

On the ice, with Morag as my coach, we decided to just get straight into it. After a seconds-long demonstration from her, I took my first shot. What immediately followed was that I tried to lunge, lost my balance, and ended up in a heap on the ice. I giggled at my silliness.

After discovering the groundbreaking theory that not falling over makes it easier to deliver the stone, it was time for take 2. My first shot might have set the expectations too low, because I surprised myself when the granite gracefully slid down the ice, nicely aligned, though slightly on the gentle side.

It was only a few more shots later when the stone pleasingly landed in the button (the middle of the target). I was very happy; curling was not going to join rugby, guitar and volleyball in my list of utter failures – the things that I have never progressed in, and will never succeed in, no matter how hard I try.

Such a beautiful shot prompted the attention of Woody. He came with a professional manner, correcting and perfecting everything I did to get me ready for 'actual' curling. The improvements just kept rolling in, and after some time I felt like I had achieved a strong foundation in the sport.

To wrap up, we brought in Isla to make two pairs, and played a fun, informal game known as 'short curling', where you play into the target that is right in front of you (rather than the other side of the sheet). There were many high quality shots that I was very impressed with, both from me and from others. There was also a questionable quality shot at the end (not by me). Two metres is not a particularly far target to aim for.

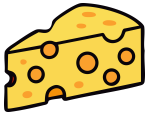
As a final cheery note, we went upstairs to find the table piled with chocolate Easter eggs. Hence, we spent another several minutes joyfully chatting and snacking.

So there you have it, the story of a mathematician going curling. I can definitively say that I loved every moment of it, and I am sure I will be continuing when it restarts next winter. For now though, it's back to maths.



And now, presenting Haoqi's ridiculously long folio piece...

## The Day the Cheese Failed



“We cannot change the human condition, but we can change the conditions under which humans work.” — James Reason.

When a tragic accident occurs, we have a natural tendency to point the finger of blame at the individual at the scene. However, this overlooks the complexity of the situation and does not provide a complete or accurate explanation of the cause of the accident, only a psychologically satisfying one.

Blaming individuals like this is both counter-productive and dangerous, as in real life, accidents happen due to a chain of passive, system-wide failures. Understanding why requires looking beyond the individual, and, surprisingly, at a stack of Swiss cheese.

It is natural for us to want to simplify a complex situation. Analysing it thoroughly requires significant mental effort, so the human involved in the incident is the most obvious point to blame. This is known as the fundamental attribution error. Finding a ‘villain’ also creates an emotionally satisfying explanation, as it reduces uncertainty and anxiety, and provides a target for negative feelings.

However, blaming an individual masks the many issues in a complex system that all contribute to the disaster and diverts all the attention to one person. This creates a stigma around making mistakes, causing a negative culture of not admitting or dealing with mistakes when they happen. As it is impossible to investigate or improve something that remains hidden, this allows errors to be repeated with no change in safety standards.

An alternative analogy was proposed by James Reason, known as the Swiss Cheese Model. It imagines safety systems as slices of Swiss cheese stacked on top of each other, each slice representing a separate layer of defence, with the holes representing the weaknesses of each layer.

Independently, each layer is rather likely to miss. However, the many layers of a complex system can all work together, and the chance of all the holes lining up becomes very small.

When a slice of cheese is weakened (for example, no one to double-check your work), it becomes a latent failure, lying dormant, offering little or no protection. On its own, a latent failure may make negligible difference, compensated for by other layers of cheese, and can often be undetectable within the system.

This is all fine until an active failure occurs, which is a mistake made in the moment (and is often the human we are wrongly blaming). This is imagined by an accident trajectory through the cheese, and if it makes it through all the holes, an accident happens. When many latent failures co-exist, the chance of an accident increases dramatically, but only when an active failure is there to trigger it.

The beauty with this analogy is that when an accident trajectory does line up with all the holes, it is a system-wide failure, showing that no one slice is responsible, regardless of how obvious it is. If one slice of cheese has been painted neon pink, while the rest are a typical yellow, does that make it the pink cheese's fault for a disaster?

This model becomes even more compelling when applied to real life incidents. There are countless examples from the real world where the Swiss Cheese Model has been utilised (or not utilised!). We will take a look at a particular one with flight BA5390.

In 1990, on flight BA5390, a windscreen panel blew off its frame, sucking Captain Lancaster out of it; he dangled out the side of the plane for 20 minutes while the crew scrambled to keep the plane in the air.

It is easy to blame the shift maintenance manager who fitted the windscreen with the wrong bolts. However, taking a look at the entire system will reveal the sheer number of slices of cheese which had to fail. Staff shortages, lack of double-checking, lack of proper tools, unmarked bolts, disorganised and incomplete storage, poor lighting... This list could continue indefinitely.

These are all latent failures, which have existed, perhaps even for years, but they have been dormant, shielded by more cheese. When the active failure (the human making a mistake) triggered an accident, there was insufficient cheese to stop it, resulting in the disaster. This demonstrates that accidents are caused by a chain of overlooked weaknesses, not a single mistake.

To really show what latent failures can look like, when BA bought the plane from Boeing, it already came with the wrong bolts and nuts. The plane had been flying fine with those for years. Ironically, when the incompatible nuts and bolts failed, the new bolts he selected were actually the correct specification!

The first step to preventing accidents is to accept that we're not perfect — us humans are necessarily going to make mistakes at some point. Even mechanical systems occasionally malfunction.

While preventing these errors is impossible, reducing the likelihood of them slipping through the cracks is the most effective method for accident prevention. This means stamping out the latent failures: the layers of security which are not functioning properly.

With BA5390, it is shockingly easy to find latent failures with surprisingly simple fixes. For example, a fresh label on the parts drawer when the old one fades, preventing them from being mixed up.

The absence of basic preventive measures is also a latent failure. Independent double-checking, clear reporting systems and opportunities to voice concerns are all integral parts of accident prevention which should never be neglected, but often are.

Instead of aimlessly attempting to curb human error, strengthening the system by adding more layers of cheese ensures that mistakes will never find their way through and cause a disaster.

While cheese holes aligning might seem like a silly way to think about accidents, the explanations it provides are life-saving.

Accidents rarely occur due to an individual's fault. They are caused by multiple long-standing latent failures quietly embedded within a system, only revealing themselves when an active failure triggers them.

In the case of BA5390, it is precisely these latent failures that caused the windscreen to fail. Thanks to his heroic colleagues, he lived to tell the tale, but it is still vital to learn from such incidents, fatal or not.

Blaming individuals not only ignores these latent failures, but also fosters a culture of fear, discouraging transparency and preventing improvement. In contrast, acknowledging our own fallibility allows us to focus on reinforcing safeguards, eliminating latent failures, and creating environments in which mistakes can be blocked before they become catastrophic.

By improving the conditions under which humans work, the holes in the cheese can be prevented from ever lining up.

Music & Lyrics by  
**STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**



# PIPPIN

Book by  
**ROGER O. HIRSON**

**Tues 16th – Fri 19th June 2026 at 7.30pm**  
**The Space, Dundee. Tickets £20, under 18s £15**

**Originally produced on the Broadway stage by Stuart Ostrow. Directed on the Broadway stage by Bob Fosse. 2013 Broadway revival directed by Diane Paulus. Theo Ending Originally Conceived In 1998 By Mitch Sebastian.**

**This amateur production is presented by arrangement with Music Theatre International.  
All authorised performance materials are also supplied by MTI**

23:36 | 09.02.2100 | UST-2 | Unknown, Icelands

Boom. Boom. Boom.

The sound rolled across the frozen plains like thunder from an ancient world. Drums — deep, hollow, and impossibly far beneath the ice. No one alive had made them, yet they beat with terrible purpose.

The contaminated moved in rhythm. Not wild or mindless, but orderly, as though following a forgotten song. Their skin shimmered with frost and metal, their eyes empty but awake. A squad from the African Tribal World had come earlier that night, hauling a dozen infected bodies toward a containment pit. They worked quickly, desperate to leave before the storm broke.

But they never left.

From the ridge above, a voice — cold, mechanical, and human all at once — gave an order. A figure draped in fractured armour, the Runited Kingdom insignia still faint on its shoulder plate, stepped forward and raised a hand.

The drums answered.

The soldiers screamed as the infected rose again, tearing through the snow like a tide of limbs and teeth. Ice cracked. Chains snapped. Something vast stirred below.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

And in the silence between each beat, the world seemed to listen.

## Chapter 8

02:00 | 10.02.2100 | UST+2 | Johannesburg, African Tribal World

Tau woke up Amahle who was still sleeping. After a dull ride across the plains, they had reached Johannesburg. The people here were very friendly, and he managed to stay in a hotel for free. He had booked a plane to Lagos. He had heard about planes like the A380 and was excited but also a bit scared.

Amahle gave a mutter, “want sleep.”

Tau smiled, “We need to go now Ama,” but there was also a hollow kind of sadness. He was going to be fully leaving his home. Whether he would return, only fate would decide.

They arrived at the brightly lit Johannesburg ATW Airport. It was such an experience. There were colourful shops lining the large hall and

{EDITORS NOTE: THIS IS THE LAST PAGE OF HAL'S SERIAL, SO I GUESS THAT WRAPS IT UP. UNFORTUNATELY HAL IS NO LONGER CONTINUING THIS STORY, SO FOR THE DOZENS WHO I'M SURE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING IT CLOSELY, MAKE UP YOUR OWN ENDING. LET'S SAY, I DUNNO, A METEOR HIT THE EARTH AND THEY ALL DIED.}

# Seven questions for staff

Lucy Smith

Welcome to the penultimate week of this incredible series! Today I've brought you a relatively new teacher, all the way from the Latin department...Ms Deeks-Nisbet!

1. **Cats or dogs and why?** – As much as my cat drives me mad, and wakes me up every morning at 6 am, it's got to be cats. Dogs are far too much work.
2. **What did you want to be when you were younger?** – I wanted to be a teacher, so when I was in university I joined a program to teach English in Japan, and stayed there for 7 years
3. **What is your comfort film/TV series?** – 'All Creatures Great and Small' because my daughter wanted to be a vet
4. **What department would you like to be in?** – I am quite sporty, and have coached netball, so definitely PE
5. **Who is your favourite musical artist?** – It's been eclectic over the years, right now it's the band 'James' as it's really nostalgic
6. **What was your first job?** – When I was 17, I taught English as a foreign language down on the South coast of England
7. **What is your go to karaoke song?** – U2's 'With or Without You'

I may or may not have chosen her because I knew that she would be a cat person...But a good set of answers nonetheless. See you all for the final interview next week!

## Editors' Note

*In last week's edition, there were 6 missing punctuation marks, excluding the final editors' note, which is informal so punctuation doesn't matter.*

**DON'T DROP THE PUNCTUATION!**

*edit: Charlie dropped a full stop this week, so I added it in, and coloured it red.*

You do it then, smart \*ss

Your Editors - Charlie, Emma, and Lucy