

AMP

november 2023 | volume 20 | issue 3 | ampatutd.com



Comet Girl Autumn

Fired Up For Fall

How Many Games Can a **GIRL**
GAMER Game...

DART is on the highway to **Hell**.

SpongeBob acknowledges
racism.

AMP

Editors' Desk

Changing Seasons

Hello again, Comets! We hope you had a Happy Halloween — and that you left enough time between costume parties to study for midterms. That's right, we're officially more than halfway through the semester, as unreal as that sounds. This is where exams and major assignments really start to pile up, but it's really not so bad. After all, it's the beginning of November, which means it's almost Thanksgiving, which means it's almost Winter Break, so the semester might as well be over already. Easy, right?

However, for many Comets, waiting til the semester ends will not be enough to ease all their worries. Towards the beginning of October, ongoing tensions between Israel and Hamas escalated, resulting in an official declaration of war. This humanitarian crisis has led to the deaths of thousands of Palestinian and Israeli civilians. The loss of innocent lives is always an inexcusable tragedy. Because so many students have ties to the Gaza Strip and the people suffering there, this has had visible effects on campus. In the past weeks the Spirit Rocks, three large rocks near the SSA building that students are allowed to spray paint any message on, have been one way students have expressed their frustrations and grief. Multiple student groups have gone back and forth painting the Israeli and Palestinian flags on the rocks alongside wishes

for peace, even guarding the rocks so their messages won't be covered. So far there has been no violence involved, only civil and open discussions in front of the rocks. When UTD officials asked that the rocks stay unpainted for a campus event one day, all parties agreed easily. In the same way, when Students for Justice in Palestine held their poetry fundraiser night, pro-Israel students held off on painting the rock until the event had ended. We're proud to see that, even when they disagree, the student body can handle this so maturely.

We also find it pressing to mention the email President Benson sent out attempting to address the Israel-Hamas war which, at the time of writing this, has not been amended. In this email he expressed his sadness about the loss of Israeli civilian lives, but didn't mention Palestinians once. Ignoring an entire population who are also suffering is simply ignorant on President Benson's part. We want to make it clear that we here at AMP want all Comets to feel safe, and to feel that they belong at UTD. We hope he will make a statement rectifying this and apologizing to the many affected students on campus. Our heart goes out to everyone who is experiencing grief, loss, and fear because of these events. We see you.



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Opinions expressed in AMP are those of the editor or of the writer of the article and are not necessarily those of the university administration, the board of Regents of the University of Texas System, or of the operating board of the magazine.

Have an opinion?

Think you're funny?

Write for AMP! Contact us at ampatutd@gmail.com and follow us on social media @AMPatUTD for more information.

AMP HOROSCOPE

Aries: A glimpse into your future: “I’m so eepy,” you think as you down your fourth jar of store-bought nacho cheese.

Cancer: The astral power of crabs is helping you make it through the rest of the semester. Tear off one of your big, meaty claws and offer it to your crustaceous benefactors. It’ll grow back.

Leo: The stars have revealed that they secretly do have a metric for objective beauty, and you’re being offered a limited-time deal to inherit that sacred knowledge! They just need to know the wacky numbers on your credit card (front and back), your mother’s maiden name, your SSN...

Virgo: Most of the stars are kinda forgetting about you this month, but you’ve got the favor of the only one we care about: the Sun. Stare directly at it and absorb its generous bounty.

Libra: You’re gay.

Scorpio: The great and magnificent cosmic powers that be feel bad about forgetting your birthday, but they might send you a card — even if it’s a couple days late.

Sagittarius: The stars want you to eat a rainbow. Don’t care when, don’t care how.

Capricorn: Current Objective: Survive.

Aquarius: If you stare at the screen hard enough, maybe your assignments will just do themselves.

Pisces: If Lightning McQueen visits you in your sleep, just be chill. Don’t make any sudden movements. He’ll pass soon enough.

Taurus: Stop picking at that scab.

Gemini: “Just do stuff and hope it works out.” — Nostradamus, probably.

SASHA WUU

sophomore | atec
gay sun, trans rising,
enby moon

MOON MEALS

A UTD TV COLLAB

What's up, everyone! On today's episode of Moon Meals I'm going to be giving you a list of some of my favorite local spots for different foods, and what I recommend trying!

Tealatte Bar

My must-try recommendation from here is their Rose Green Milk Tea. The drink is a lovely shade of light pink, with a delicate rose taste and hints of green tea. I absolutely adore it. Another one of my top two favorites here is their Hapa Haoie, which is a matcha and white chocolate drink. It's sweet, smooth and pairs exceptionally with the boba pearls. I also recommend trying out their strawberry mochi donut, which has a sharp and fresh strawberry taste and a pillowy texture.

Sweet Hut Bakery and Cafe

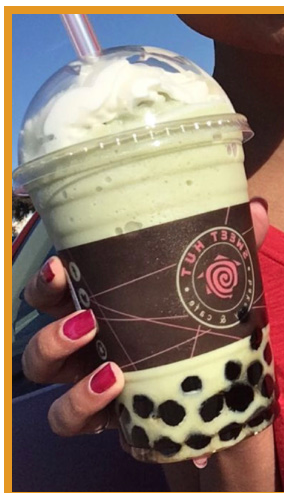
I've loved this place since high school. I've tried the majority of drinks on their menu, and you pretty much can't go wrong. My top favorites are their peppermint milk tea and their matcha frappe. The peppermint milk tea has the perfect amount of flavor without being overpowering, and the matcha frappe is creamy and delicious (get it with whipped cream). If I want to switch things up I get their hazelnut milk tea, or their fragrant jasmine green milk tea. Their spring onion hot dog bun is also so good, and their Taiwanese style salt and pepper chicken nuggets has a firm breading, and is well-seasoned with roasted basil leaves.

Ramen Hakata

This is a must-go for ramen lovers. I've tried little bits of many dishes here, but my absolute favorite is their Tsukemen. Tsukemen is a type of dipping ramen, where the noodles and toppings are served separately from the tonkotsu broth. I'm particularly obsessed with how thick and chewy the noodles are, and how flavorful the broth is. The pork chashu holds its flavor great, and the shiitake mushroom texture suits the dish well. The egg is also perfect, especially if you let the yolk absorb a little of the broth. Finally, you have to close out the meal with their strawberry mochi, which tastes so fresh, delicate and light. The presentation is absolutely lovely.

Rodeo Goat

I'm absolutely fiending for their Bad Hombre burger. It's sweet, with a fruity citrus kick from their fantastic mango pico that leaves a burst of flavor in your mouth with every bite. It has candied bacon, caramelized onions, gouda, a cream cheese spread, and Trailboss habanero sauce which adds just a little bit of spice without overpowering the flavors of the burger. The patty is tender and overall the flavors were balanced so that every bite was delicious. It's slightly on the pricier side for a burger, but I think it's worth it. I washed mine down with a chocolate milkshake for a decadent and filling meal.



Sweet Hut Bakery and Cafe



TeaLatte Bar



Ramen Hakata



Rodeo Goat

MINUKI MEDIS

senior | psychology
Your local bringer of chaos!

MUSIC

as the days grow longer and colder
(are you there somewhere)



NOVEMBER
a modest proposal



A Fall Playlist

design by: brianne bitar

Dear Reader,

The autumn season is all about change and transformation, the departure of summer, and the inevitable arrival of winter. It is rusted road signage and the well-trod path beneath worn boots. It is not a destination, but a journey. Sandwiched between two incredibly bold seasons is the ever-popular and toasty season of fall, wrapped in woolen scarves, heeled boots, and warmed by a cup of sweet apple cider — if the temperature drops below 70 degrees, that is...

Several AMP staff members have put together a playlist that represents their feelings about the fall season. The common themes within this playlist are the wonder of sweet memories, a remembrance of dreams past, love both found and forlorn, the joys and pains of growth, and all the crazy experiences on this road trip called life. These themes are embodied in high-energy musical experimentation, smooth and jazzy coffee shop tunes, raw, unadulterated lyrics, and breathy, keening arias of mourning and hope for the days to come. Listed in this playlist is an assortment of genres, instruments, and creators, coming together in a catalog chock full of unique flavors and treats!

Try something new, you may be surprised at what it has to offer. Maybe your next new favorite is here.

With love and warm spices,
The AMP Team

Agnes

When I think of fall, and more importantly 'fall' music, I tend to lean towards more mellow, sometimes cozy and melancholic music. So of course, I had to add songs that convey that vibe to the playlist! I think my favorite out of the songs that I contributed would have to be 'homesick' by the band Wave to Earth, who I actually got to see perform in Dallas this August (a 10/10 concert experience). They ended up performing 'homesick' as a surprise song in their setlist, which just makes the song all the more special, even if the song isn't all that cheerful. I would probably put 'The Stars of Track and Field' by Belle and Sebastian as another favorite fall song of mine. I've realized that I tend to listen to a lot of Belle and Sebastian's music during this time of year, and I feel like both them and Billie Marten are able to make music that encapsulates the vibes of fall so well.

Brianne

To me, fall is all about coziness and nostalgia. One of the songs I chose for this playlist is 'A Dance Round the Memory Tree' from the Prince Caspian film. Chronicles of Narnia is such a bittersweet story to me, and this song encapsulates the longing and pride I feel when looking back on my younger self and realizing how much I've grown. The other songs I chose were 'rises the moon' by Liana Flores and 'L4' by Mooncake. It can get so hard to focus on the joys of the present and future when trudging through the slog of life's challenges, but these songs say that even though things may be tough, hope is on the horizon and better things are yet to come.

Victoria

Fall weather, specifically November, reminds me of going on a long car ride through an orange, warm-toned forest. If I were to greet Winnie the Pooh he would wait until all my songs are played because he understands, respects, and loves my tastes. But joke's on him, I have a deep-seated vendetta against that pretentious bear. I'll make him listen to all my songs and drive back home. After all, it's not about the destination, it's about the journey. And the majority of my songs revolve around girls, because girl month is every month. You're welcome.

Shreya

Autumn is the season of change. The darkening of the leaves, the weather, and even the skies signifies the end of spring and summer and prefaces the cold chill of winter. But we're not quite there yet. I feel like a hibernating bear these days, wanting to slumber for months on end, feeling my heart beat slow and steady. So, I've added a few songs that fit that vibe. BTS's Let Me Know is one of the more upbeat tracks on this playlist, though still slow and measured. It's almost... melancholic, with just a tinge of desperation. Next up is I Found by Amber Run, which is another soft and somber track that reminds me of the falling rain. After this, Mr. Sandman by SYML. Of all the tracks I've added, this one is my favourite. It's a bare-bones song, with stunning vocals and a light, lilting melody

that still somehow manages to weigh heavy. Last but not least is Bon Iver's Roslyn, which I first discovered in the Twilight soundtrack. This one speaks for itself — is there anything that says autumn more than Twilight? However, the song itself is beautiful, and most definitely worth a listen. With that, remember to take it slow this season, and to stop and watch the leaves fall. They're turning colors just for you.

Gavin

Fall is such a fleeting season, especially in Texas, that it was a little hard for me to define it by sound at first. I eventually landed on chill, vintage, and indie sounds, and especially songs with melancholy themes. I added a fair amount of citypop for that nostalgic vintage vibe, because even though it's a bit more upbeat it somehow still hits you in the feels. I also knew I had to include something by Jack Stauber, because his sound is so quirky and liminal; I tried to avoid his more overplayed songs and instead went for Two Time, a favorite of mine with odd lyrics and layered sounds that make you feel a little out of place. The other set of songs I'd like to call out are Don't Go and Valerie by the band First of October, because they're so creative and I really encourage everyone to go watch the making-of videos they release on YouTube every year. These two songs sound so deeply emotional and personal, but the truth is those lyrics were written as part of a challenge, and probably weren't based on a real relationship at all. I love using my imagination to try and fill in the gaps left by the resultingly vague but somehow terribly sad songs.

Sneha

Though Texas has just barely decided to start to cool its air to autumnal temperatures, some of my favorite artists have been proactive in giving us stunning new music for the season. "Dreamer" by TXT and "Slow Dancing" by V are both recent releases by long-time beloved artists of mine, two sweet, soft pieces that also happen to be titled after some great ways to spend your fall (after midterms are over and done with, of course). October also brought us the highly anticipated debut album of Jay Chang — whom, if you've been in a room with me for more than five minutes, you have definitely heard of. "Up To You" is a more sensual, loving number that makes for a beautiful soundtrack for your chilly walks around campus — or your road trips through the parking lots, if you so prefer. Happy listening!



BRIANNE BITAR

junior | atec

Pun maestro and 'weird but true!' fact
enjoyer.

Ratford Replies



design by: damon nicholson

Dear Ratford,

I have a roommate, Robbie (fake name), who I have gotten along with this year. He's generally quiet, never eats my food, keeps the place squeaky clean, and is always down to play some pool if I get stuck on my homework. We have a bad rat problem in my dorm, for some reason, and maintenance has been no help.

Robbie decided to set up some rat traps to get rid of the rats. I asked him to get some traps that wouldn't kill the rats because I don't like dead rats in my room. The first couple of rats he caught he released nearby, but the one he caught most recently he's really become obsessed with. He claims that the rat has a personality and that he doesn't want to release it. He has even started calling it "Ratrick Swayze."

I have many concerns with this (attracting more rats, what to do if our RA finds out) but most of all I just don't want to live in a room with a rat. I also don't want to get in trouble when it was not my idea to have a rat in the room in the first place! Robbie has been a good friend and roommate and I don't want to spoil things with him, but the rat needs to go.

Sincerely,
Should I Rat Him Out?

Dear Should I Rat Him Out?,

I think I know what's going on here. See, my cousins have been telling me about this swanky little spot they found near campus a few months ago. Always clean, a fridge full of snacks, and humans who don't want to kill them! They just get set free and come back a few nights later. I've got my own hole in the wall already, so I never took them up on the offer to hang out there. But based on your description, it sounds like that must be your dorm they're partying in.

As for this "Ratrick Swayze" character... this is just a hunch, but he's probably my cousin Ratchard. He's definitely a rat with personality, that's for sure, and he's the most likely to stick around in places he probably shouldn't. I would know, he crashed on my couch for a solid eight months while swearing up and down he would be out by next week every time I asked. But honestly, he's not the worst roommate you could have ended up with! If Robbie's made friends with him, I say why spoil the fun? All you've really got to worry about when it comes to Ratchard is his tendency to stay up late at night squeaking showtunes. (Actually, that's probably why your roommate named him that.) If any RAs come around trying to kick him out, just have him put on a performance! They'll be so impressed that they'll have to let him stay. So all in all, I don't see any problem with having Ratchard—

Oh. Wait. What if it's not Ratchard?

You need to check one eensy, teensy, extremely important, life-threatening thing for me. Does Ratrick Swayze have a white patch of fur on his forehead? If not, then all is well. But if he does... that's my cousin Ratward, and you need to get him out of that dorm now. And if Robbie is still refusing, at the very least, promise me you'll never let Ratward out during a full moon. Trust me on this.

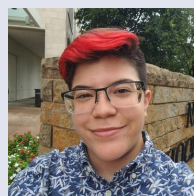
Sincerely,
Your Best Pal Ratford Roquefort



ALANA PLATT

senior | accounting

Would you have a great empire? Rule over yourself.



GAVIN ARRIAGA

senior | marketing

I'm being so normal right now

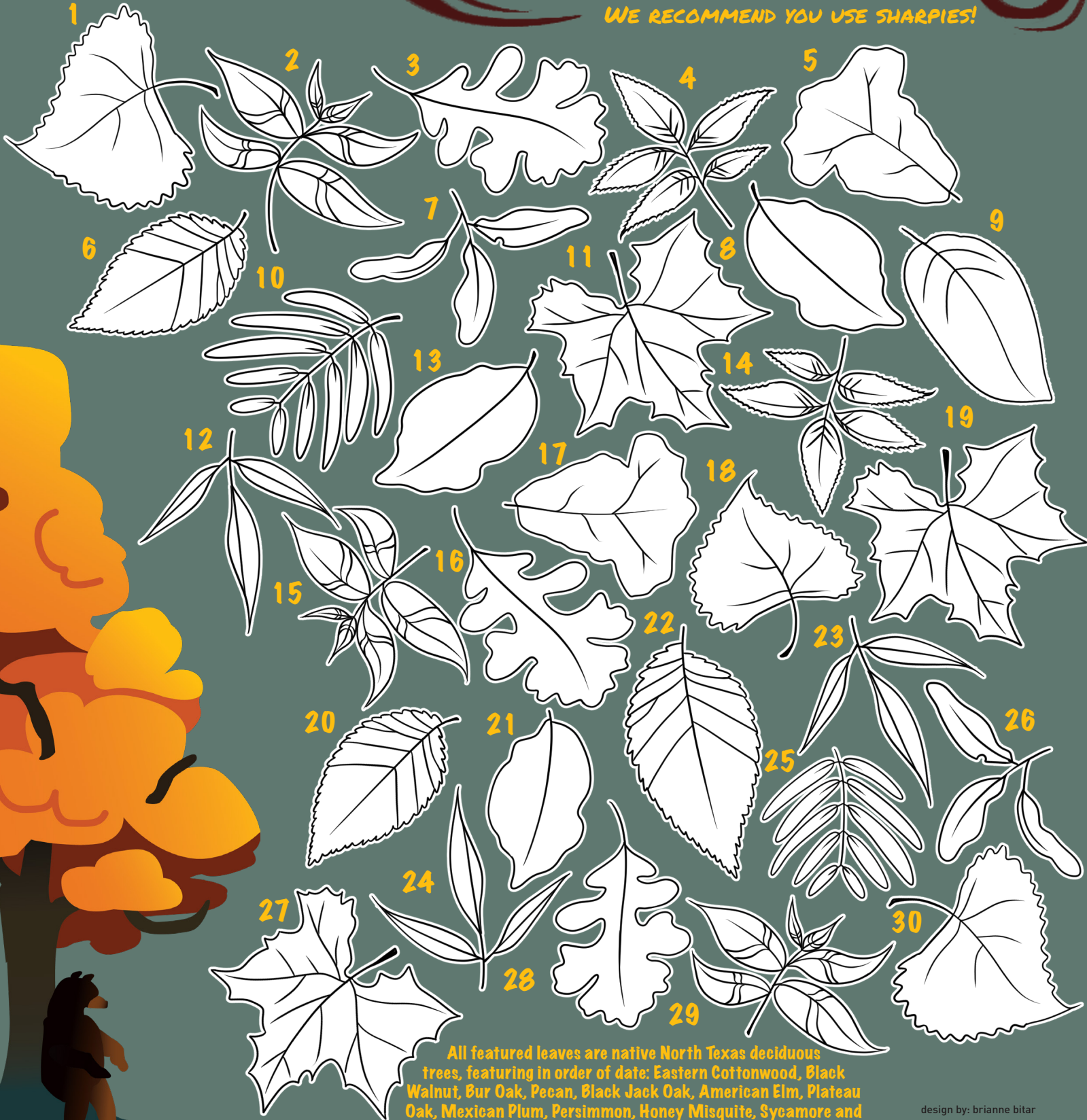
FEATURE

KEY: Good ●
 Okay ●
 Bad ●

NOVEMBER

MOOD TRACKER

WE RECOMMEND YOU USE SHARPIES!



All featured leaves are native North Texas deciduous trees, featuring in order of date: Eastern Cottonwood, Black Walnut, Bur Oak, Pecan, Black Jack Oak, American Elm, Plateau Oak, Mexican Plum, Persimmon, Honey Misquite, Sycamore and Flameleaf Sumac.

design by: brianne bitar

Mascot Picnic

Use the table to figure out which mascot brought which picnic supplies and drink.

	Plates	Blanket	Napkins	Utensils	Cups	Sweet Tea	Lemonade	Water	Soda	Apple Cider
Temoc										
Ratford										
Enarc										
Tobor										
Lovejack										
Sweet Tea										
Lemonade										
Water										
Soda										
Apple Cider										

1. Enarc, who didn't bring the soda as his drink of choice, also didn't bring the plates or the utensils.
2. Tobor brought either the napkins or the cups.
3. Lovejack, who brought the sweet tea as his drink of choice, didn't bring the blanket.
4. The mascot who brought lemonade also brought the napkins.
5. Enarc brought apple cider as his drink of choice, but did not bring the cups.
6. Of Ratford and Tobor, one brought the utensils and the other brought lemonade.
7. Temoc did not bring the blanket.
8. The mascot who brought water also brought the plates.

C O Z Y X L R Z C N
 E V O I E E T U R I
 K T B A T Q Q E A K
 V F V A O Z L T N P
 K E E C K S N S B M
 S W C C W M Y E E U
 S X Z I U M G V R P
 O W F T D O H R R B
 O T U R K E Y A Y H
 N A C E P Q R H U B

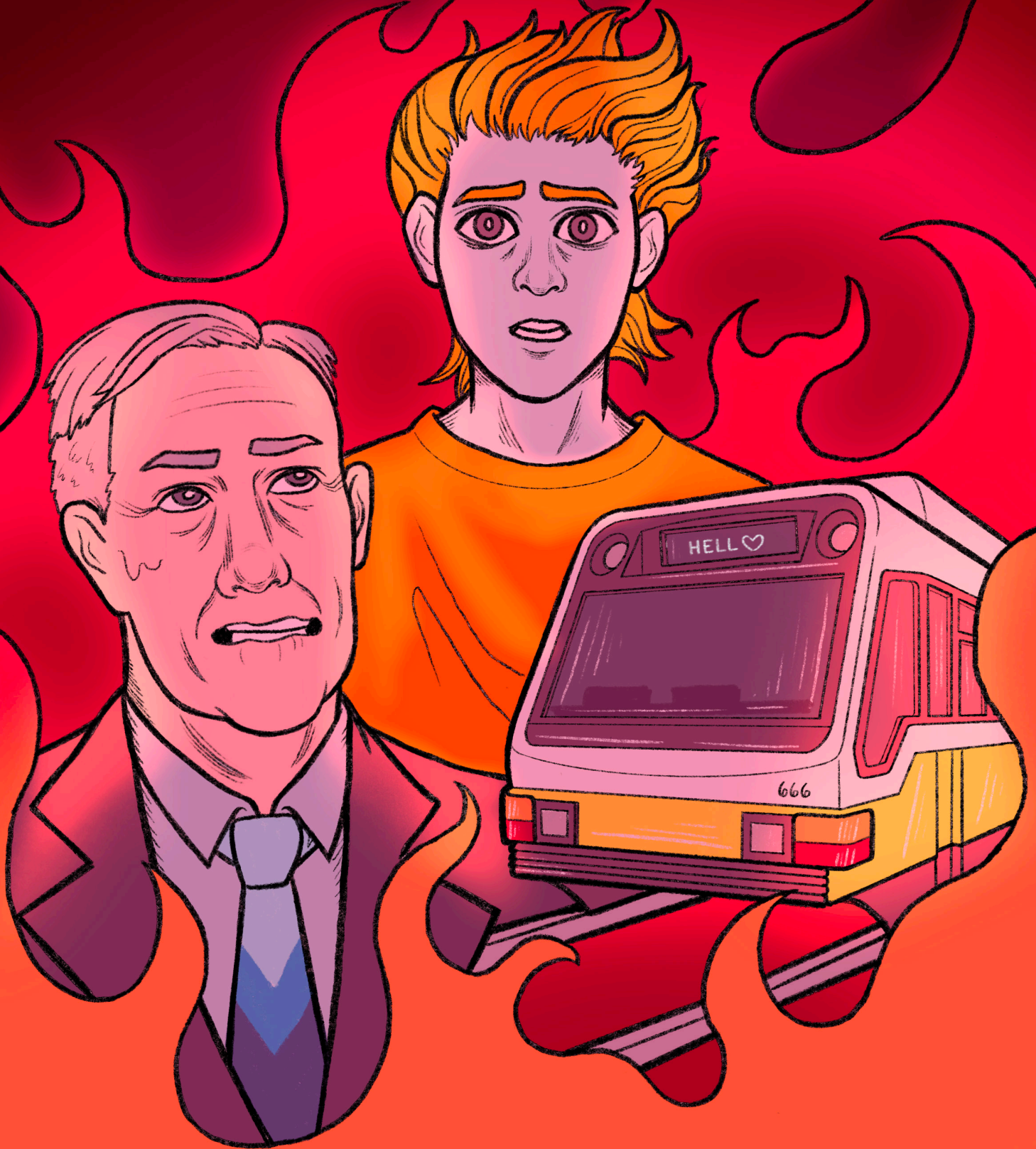
AUTUMN
 CRANBERRY
 PECAN
 TURKEY
 CIDER
 HARVEST
 PUMPKIN
 COZY



BRIANNE BITAR

junior | atec

Pun maestro and 'weird but true!' fact enjoyer.



The InFernal Circles of DART

Arithmetica

Have you ever wondered if the best way to make trains work was to take away their funding? I hadn't either until my ears were blessed by the word-sludge imparted upon me at the DART board meeting on September 26th that finalized the organization's plans for a new fiscal year.

"My motion... is to instruct staff to work with \$5 million less in their operating budget," said Mark Enoch, the representative of Garland, Glenn Heights, and Rowlett, as he attempted to compromise between the agreed-upon budget terms for DART and Paul Wageman's insistence that DART have its funding reduced by \$25 million during the final hours of discussion.

I will concede that I am not an economics major, but the notion that drastic last-minute budget cuts and demands that millions of dollars appear from some mysterious elsewhere seems farcical at best. Public transportation is incredibly important for urban communities, but no one will want to use it when it consistently fails to meet their needs. I love trains and buses — I yearn for them, and yet Paul and Mark want to take that from our communities. Their math just doesn't add up, because increased funding improves the services provided by DART, which in turn increases the number of riders. Perhaps people that actually want to support public transport should be overseeing public transport organizations. I recognize that October has just ended, but that doesn't necessitate the presence of ghouls in positions of power.

Lethargo

Effort is a difficult thing to give, but one would presume that those on a board of directors for Dallas' public transport agency would put in a modicum of effort when conducting their affairs. I just constantly kept asking myself: is this honestly an official meeting, or is this perchance just an elaborate performance meant to deter my civic activism? There was an almost alarming lack of procedural awareness and care throughout all of the DART board's proceedings: more time was spent wondering if elevators fell under the jurisdiction of landscaping rather than discussing, debating, and voting. It was just disheartening to see these unelected officials lackadaisically flail about. That disappointment soon turned to fury as I came to the realization that the chief perpetrator of the most absurd claims being presented, Paul Wageman, was the representative of the city of Plano, a city which has been on a campaign of slow, obstructive, and petty withdrawal from DART as a whole.

Jon-Bertrell Killen of Dallas pointed this out when he said, "...Cities are actively going to legislature, trying to pull out of DART. And then they also want to say 'I want to have a firm hand in guiding the future and choosing where the service plans are,' that just don't add up."

Killen emphasizes the hypocrisy demonstrated by Wageman and his ilk in their ravenous attempts to jeopardize the efforts of DART while actively making efforts to leave the organization. 'Fiscally conservative' brutes like Wageman somehow fail to grasp procedure and math to the point of slowing down all meetings, but they are incredibly energetic in their efforts to leave the very institution they want to dismantle.

Tempus

The life of a student, worker, and just honestly any adult person is incredibly busy. We are constantly rushing from work to school to errands to appointments and so forth, and time isn't something that can be spared in most of these instances. I can't just arrive 2 hours late to my doctor's appointment and still expect to be treated, yet frequency issues and delays make it so that this is the kind of setback you have to plan around when using DART. Students ought to be able to use public transit to safely get to and from appointments, celebrations, and any number of events, yet the current DART service hours, frequencies, and delays simply do not allow for this to be viable. However, Tier 2 is a proposed DART plan for a redesigned bus network with significantly higher frequencies for all routes, longer service hours, and the creation of new lines throughout the network, which could solve all of that.

A UTD student named Connor said, "When I saw the Tier 2 DART plan, I was just amazed by how much better this would make my life. I really like using DART during the rush hour; however, outside of the rush hour it can be rough. You can be dealing with 40 minute waits or even deciding whether you rush out of the store now to catch the bus or take your time and wait an additional hour for the next bus."

DART has the plans that would fully revolutionize the DART system by making it a viable option for countless people, yet this plan has as of now not been implemented. Why? Why must Wageman and his vile cohort strip me of trains and buses? The main obstacle to using them is timing, and DART has the plans already prepared, but they aren't being implemented because some old rich guys don't see it as immediately profitable. Aaaaaaah!



Frequentia

Sorry, anyways... frequency is really important. If buses and trains were running their routes as frequently as Wageman made me want to die during every minute in DART meetings, then there wouldn't even be a need for cars whatsoever. Trains and buses everywhere at all times. Tragically, this is not the case.

Connor also said that, "On weekends it can be really difficult to use the [DART] system because of the issues with frequencies. Sometimes I just stay home instead of using DART out of convenience."

I really felt this statement at my core. I want to go out and do more things, but I also don't want to spend hours in the indecipherable Texas weather as I wait in vain for a bus or train to show up and ferry me to my location.

Devan, a UTD student that has also faced the unquenchable horror of public transport in Plano, said, "If you want to go anywhere that isn't on the 883; if you want to go into downtown Richardson, if you want to go up into Plano; good luck. I mean, we are looking at 30, 40, even hour long headways if you are lucky and manage to be within the short service hours."

Increasing frequency is a necessary step that not only improves the DART network as a whole, but also works to resolve pre existing issues like accessibility, delays, and inexorable disdain for Paul Wageman. If I am happily enjoying a train ride, then I can't sit in silent fury contemplating my disdain for Wageman. It's honestly a win for everyone to increase the frequency of the buses and trains via implementing the planned Tier 2 network.

Accessibilitas

The issues we've already discussed regarding timing and frequency combine to create such an inconvenient and unintelligible mess that the DART isn't really accessible for our needs. Cars are expensive. School is expensive. Everything is expensive, and this places a severe limit on what is and isn't accessible to students. Public transport as limited as DART only further compounds this issue. Sameera, a UTD student who is familiar with the mess that is the inaccessibility of DART, said, "I want DART to be better because I want to have more choice as to what businesses I patronize, and I feel like everybody has a story like this. I got my dentist bill in

the mail today, and it was higher than what I would have wanted because they were out of network. But, I went to it because it was the only one close to campus. When scheduling my recent doctors appointment I was given 3 options, yet 2 of them were in Plano and would require that I take hours out of my school day to make the appointment. So I went to the one that was close even though it wasn't the best option."

The facade of choice is shattered once you realize that it simply isn't feasible to go to the cheapest or highest quality locations.

Civitas

Not everyone can afford a car, yet our car-centric infrastructure makes it so that these disenfranchised communities are only further restricted. Areas like Dixon Circle, a community in south Dallas with incredibly low rates of car ownership, are dependent on public transportation to a high degree. Without public transport, a large swath of Dixon Circle would be unable to get to work, get groceries, or get medical care. And yet, DART elected to remove bus 12, this community's main route, as part of cost cutting measures and an experiment with more expensive means of transit. Individuals from Dixon Circle have been campaigning for a restoration of their bus route, because this community truly needs it.

Public transport isn't just a luxury for weekend outings, and it certainly shouldn't be math class for Paul Wageman. Public transport is a vital part of many communities, and improving it will only result in more opportunities for people in all participating and neighboring areas.

Classis Bellum

The average wage for a DART employee is \$17 an hour according to the figures reported by ZipRecruiter, while the average wage for an employee of the City of Dallas is within the range of \$35 to \$46 an hour. Even entry level jobs such as 911 Call Taker Trainee have an hourly wage of \$20, which exceeds that of a DART employee.

The workers of DART are expected to make wide scale improvements to boost ridership numbers, while vultures like Wageman seek to further lower DART's operating budget which only places an even higher burden on the employees. DART employees aren't receiving wages which are competitive enough for the region and type of civil work they do, nor are they being paid enough to outpace the inflation of recent years. It doesn't help that DART has gone so far as to sue the Amalgamated Transit Union local 1338, which services DART employees, as a means to get out of meeting worker's demands.

The issues within DART won't be fixed by merely improving routes and implementing new plans, even though that is a huge help, unless the issues facing DART's workers are also resolved. What

good is it to have more trains and buses if there is no one there to drive, clean, or maintain them? We cannot simply allow carrions like Enoch and Wageman to feast upon the cadaver of DART and its funding when the present issues are so clear and ready to be solved.

Pecuniae et Officia Corporatum

DART is run akin to a private corporation, and most of the members appointed to its board all come from the fields of banking and road economics. This executive DART board doesn't execute the needs of the people because the individuals appointed to it specifically come from backgrounds where revenue was the only thing that mattered.

Ellie, a UTD student, said, "I was a little concerned earlier when [board members] wanted to drastically cut the budget from what the plan is, which seems a bit ridiculous to me. I don't want to name names or anything, but people coming from a toll road agency after working there for like a decade and then coming into transit to say we don't need funding doesn't make sense. It isn't like the North Texas Tollway authority would tear out a lane if tolls went down, so it seems absurd that we would respond to lower ridership by reducing funding."

Public transportation isn't just another private equity venture, it is a vital service upon which thousands of people depend upon. It requires long term planning and high amounts of investment to see success, and to have individuals on the board and within the organization as a whole that fail to see this is laughable. We ought to demand much more from DART, because it can do better. Other cities, such as Berlin, Prague, Shanghai, and New York City, have demonstrated that great public transit is feasible and worthwhile. Assist transit campaigns in Dallas, attend meetings, and support the workers that provide us with these services. We shouldn't allow our trains and buses to be sullied by unelected officials.



GREGORIO OLIVARES G.

freshman | political science & philosophy

How can I know that I am me when the perception of self I hold seems to be so malleable? Rather easily, I liked mangoes yesterday and I continue to like them today.



Surviving a Pandemic with the SpongeBob Musical

“SpongeBob SquarePants: The Broadway Musical” first made its premiere in 2016, three years before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite it predating this world-changing event, the musical left a scarily accurate portrayal of the pandemic and people’s responses to it. Businesses were figuring out how to thrive during lockdown, doomscrolling became the new trend, and the government was scrambling and slow in making any kind of progress or initiative while constantly butting heads with the mainstream media. As time continued to move forward, everyone was panicking and already giving up.

In the SpongeBob musical, SpongeBob lives his usual, normal day in his hometown of Bikini Bottom. That is until the town begins to shake! The long dormant Mount Humongous has awakened, and thus becomes a threat of apocalyptic proportions to Bikini Bottom. The mayor scrambles to find a solution, the media puts on pressure, and citizens are advised to stay indoors. While everyone agrees with Plankton’s plan to build a rocket that can send everyone out of Bikini Bottom, SpongeBob

remains adamant in protecting his home and the community it embodies. Thus, SpongeBob makes a team to stop the volcano from erupting. The members of his team represent three kinds of prominent people during the pandemic: Sandy, the outgroup to blame, Patrick, the misinformed, and SpongeBob, the rare and elusive optimist. They aren’t just simply representations of the pandemic, but each character offers something that can be learned in case another pandemic were to ever arise.

The first of the bunch is Sandy, and her arc constantly emphasizes a theme of xenophobia. Sandy, a “land creature”, finds comfort in her new home of Bikini Bottom, as she didn’t fit in back at her home in Texas. Everything appeared to be fine, as she had friends who supported her and cared for her, until it was announced that her home would soon be drowned in lava. Despite her willingness to help save everyone and provide useful knowledge in the matter, the people of Bikini Bottom needed someone to blame. Because of Sandy’s outlying characteristics, she became the target. All the citizens of Bikini Bottom used her as a

scapegoat for their hatred and decided to “blame the squirrel”. With the hatred overwhelming her, Sandy doubts her capabilities as a scientist and her right to be a citizen of Bikini Bottom.

During the pandemic, rumors spread about the fact that COVID-19 originated from China, thus, people began to call it the “China Virus”. Because of the frustration of being locked inside and being required to wear masks, it began to turn into hatred towards the virus itself. People began blaming the Chinese for causing the pandemic in the first place. Even Asian Americans that weren’t Chinese who lived in the United States their whole life were tormented by the bigotry and hatred of those who wanted someone to blame the pandemic on. Despite how hard those of Chinese heritage attempted to do their part for their community by staying indoors and wearing masks, it seemed like they’d experience resentment no matter what they did. Both Sandy and those of Chinese heritage just wanted what was best for their home. They both were lost in where they belonged. They both began to question their life choices, who their friends were, and even their own identity. What Sandy needed was a friend to tell her how important her skills were to her home. What people needed were friends and family who appreciated them for who they were.

Although hatred is never warranted, it always comes in a crowd. Before Mount Humongous threatened Bikini Bottom, Patrick lived a simple life of watching TV and taking naps in his rock while also spending time with his friends. When it came time to stop Mount Humongous from erupting, Patrick was happy to help SpongeBob achieve his goal at first. However, throughout this story, Patrick is constantly pushed to the sidelines and would often be cut off when attempting to propose an idea. He’s disregarded because of his simplemindedness and “stupidity”. Although it may not seem like much to his friends, it doesn’t stop Patrick from feeling frustrated. When a group of people become available and willing to listen to Patrick, his horizons suddenly open up. He doesn’t need to stick around with a “friend” who will cut him off before he can even open his mouth. With his frustrations turning into hatred, he resorts to name calling his best friend, which upsets him, and thus both their resentment piles up until their arguing becomes so heated that they don’t want to interact with each other anymore. Making up his mind, Patrick turns to the sardines which listen to everything he has to say and boosts his ego. However, just because they support him, doesn’t mean they could be called his true “friends”. Although they revolved their entire culture around him, the sardines prevented Patrick from making the right decisions. It prevented him from seeing the glaring, fiery issue that was looming over his home. Although his ideas may not be the greatest, in the end, he just wanted to feel cherished and heard, even if it meant going down a path of poor decisions.

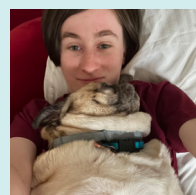
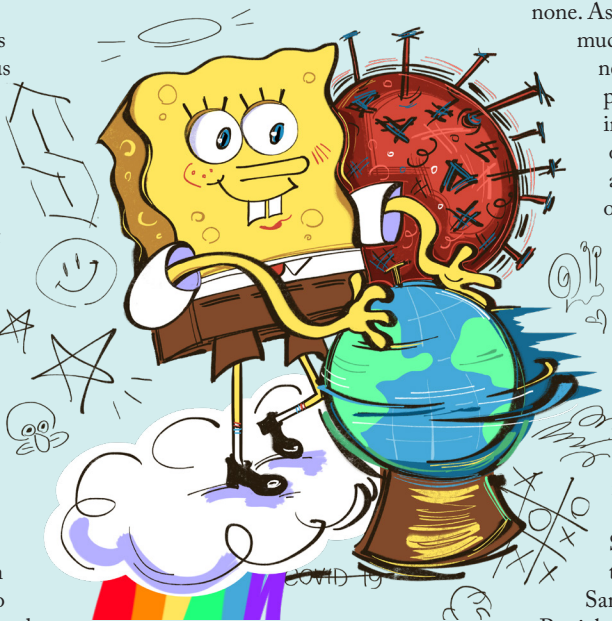
Throughout the SpongeBob franchise, Patrick has always been considered stupid, dumb, and close-minded among other things, both by the characters and viewers of the show. Sound familiar? You may frequently hear these names in comments on social media or maybe even family arguments. However, no matter which side may be in the right, many arguments often descend into shouting, name calling, and sometimes even death threats. Many family relationships and friendships fell apart during the pandemic because of the political heat surrounding it. Despite how many times we say we hate the person for their drastically opposing opinions, there’s always a part of us that wants to keep that relationship. Their opinions get in the way of that relationship. The issue however, is that despite us wanting them to listen to us, we often don’t

listen to them. If we don’t listen to them, they will find ways to find people who will, which will further their ideals. Just like our ideals make sense to us, their ideals also make sense to them. Although parents may refuse to vaccinate their children to prevent them from getting autism or being tracked by the government, their intentions of wanting to protect the ones they love are still there — in their own weird way. And people can change — some anti-vaxxers changed their beliefs after being impacted by the virus. Just as much as Patrick had listened to SpongeBob, SpongeBob needed to give Patrick the chance to speak, as conversations are a two-way street. If we give our loved ones the attention and care that they desperately want, although we may not always agree, it gives them the chance to listen to a different perspective and not having to rely on people who reinforce their uninformed views.

Meanwhile, as everyone else in Bikini Bottom had already given up without viewing all their options, SpongeBob throughout the musical remained optimistic and attempted to seek all possible ways to protect his community. He tried his best to block the falling rocks that nearly crushed the citizens of Bikini Bottom, he cheered up his friends who were screaming and in panic, and he stubbornly attempted to brainstorm solutions even when everyone told him that there were

none. As everyone was stuck inside with not much to do, doomscrolling and watching the news became commonplace during the pandemic, which caused a noticeable rise in depression and anxiety. Everyone was on edge and getting restless. It seemed as if there wasn’t much hope. Although optimists were often considered uninformed, they held an important role during the pandemic. Instead of putting down others, SpongeBob focused on lifting up his friends and looking for the best positive outcome with the resources he had. Eventually, because their only plan of building a rocket to leave Bikini Bottom failed, the citizens became so panicked and pessimistic that they caused havoc, nearly destroying the very town they were trying to save. On the other hand, SpongeBob kept his head high and was able to see things objectively. He recognized Sandy’s skills as a scientist. He appreciated Patrick for being his best friend. He called the citizens out on their self-destructive behavior and showed them that the sun was still shining, that there was still a chance to fix things and save their town.

Although the SpongeBob musical may be marketed towards children, it holds a complex and mature message that we should all listen to. With fears of a new wave of COVID on the rise, we need the SpongeBob Musical’s message now more than ever. Instead of scrambling, attacking others, and rushing to a solution of hatred, we need to band together and do whatever we can to inform others, uplift those who are down, and take the proper precautions to keep ourselves and everyone else safe from a pandemic of volcanic proportions.



VICTORIA STEINER

junior | psychology/child learning and development

Living out my inner child

GIVE US MORE GIRL GAMES

“Animal Crossing” is a girl game. It’s a game franchise with a vocal female fanbase. “Animal Crossing: New Leaf” had a 56% female player base. Culturally, it was picked up by a lot of women during the pandemic. Women playing “Animal Crossing” get misogynistic crap from ‘true gamer’ men for playing ‘girl games’. So, it’s a girl game, right?

Well, it’s not supposed to be. “Animal Crossing” is marketed without gender. You build a house and try to fix up an island or town so cute, anthropomorphic animals show up for you to befriend. There’s nothing gendered about that. It’s meant to be a game for everybody. What gives it its massive female audience?

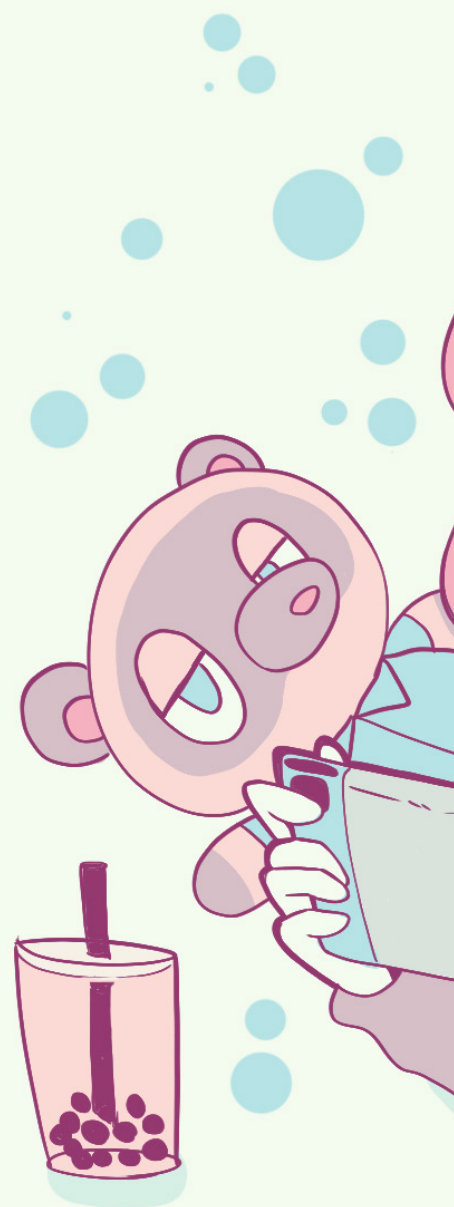
The answer is simple: women don’t get anything else. Games marketed to women are few and far between, so we end up crowding gender-neutral games, planting our flag on games that are supposed to be for everyone — because everyone includes us, and there’s nothing for us specifically, so we make do with what we have. Let’s take a look at how female gamers interact with games marketed at different demographics, how we got here, and why it’s both deeply familiar and deeply frustrating for most women.

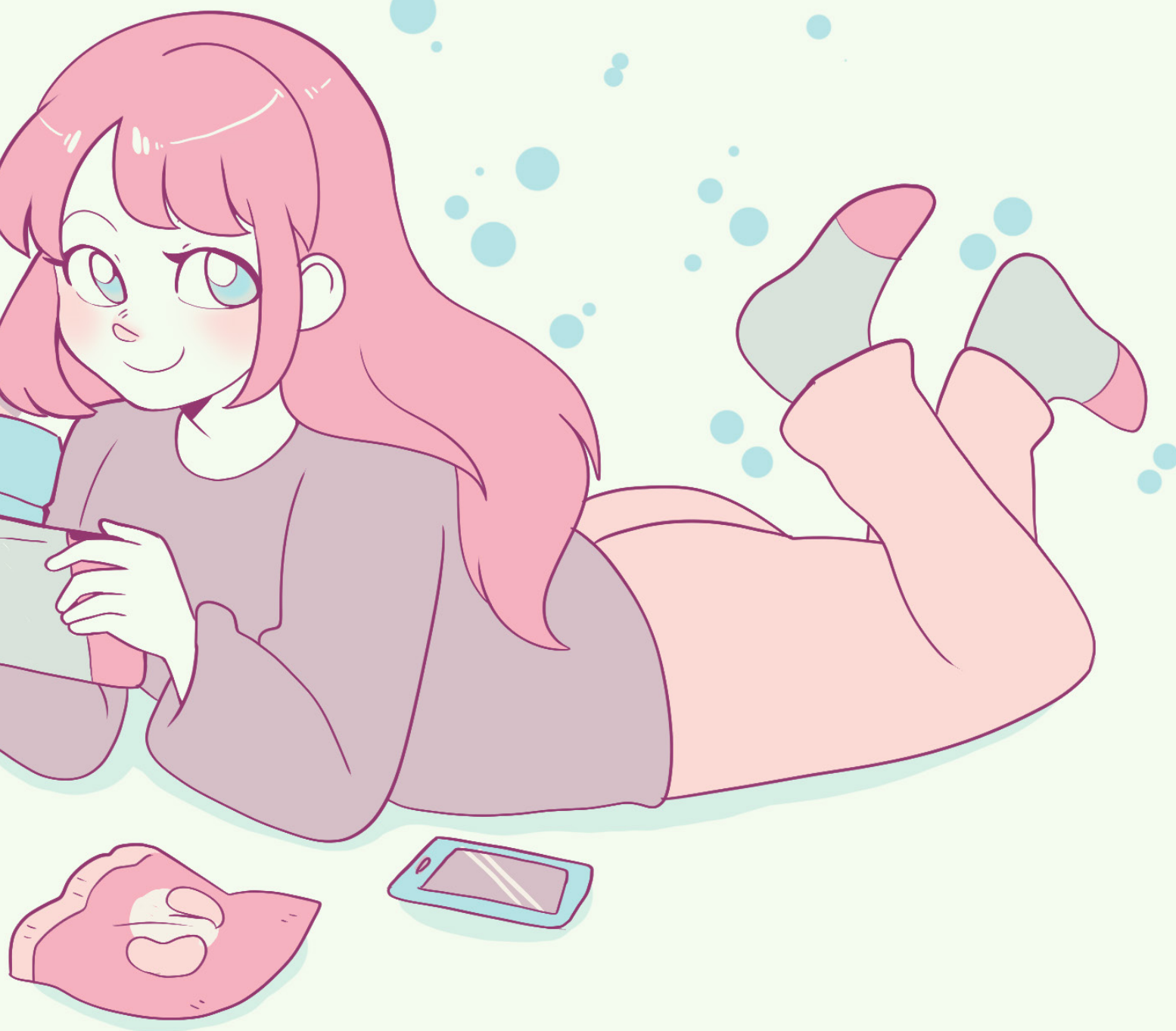
Games For Men

Here’s the thing: there aren’t really many girl games, but there are lots and lots of boy games. Sports games, shooters, most MMOs, and combat games all make up massive parts of the average AAA developer’s time. Generally, we assume what makes a ‘dude game’ a dude game is, well, boobs and guns. You shoot people, you’re very powerful, and women have big boobs and love you. Easy. And that’s sometimes part of it! Really though, in my opinion, what makes a game for men isn’t nearly so insidious, and it comes from a fundamental difference in how men and women experience video games. ‘Boy games’ are usually multiplayer online,

because for men, playing video games is usually a social hobby. It’s something you do with friends, it can be a way to meet people. For men, gaming can foster really strong bonds and communities despite the anonymity of the internet. Remind me again, how well do things go for women when anonymous men are involved?

So yeah, a lot of gaming in typically male-oriented games is heavily dependent on online features, which makes enjoying them a lot harder for women. For all the jokes about women not surviving in “COD” lobbies, there are women with their mics muted and masculine screennames in those lobbies





trying not to become the target of either hateful or sexual harassment that might come their way as soon as they so much as speak.

Now, that's not to say that the boobs and guns I mentioned aren't problems! Because yes, some of these games do, in fact, have women in them. Sometimes. Technically. A kickass NPC or a female PC does in fact happen. But even then, they're designed for the men looking at them, not the women playing them. Player characters find that the best armor also puts the non-optional double Ds of their character on display. Female NPCs flirt with you, or even just fully have a

boning scene that you cannot skip (looking at you, "God of War III"). Even having a female player character, sexualized as they may be, can feel like a win when so often playing video games aimed at men means being a dude whether you like it or not.

No matter what, the barrier of entry for women is higher for these games. We can't just play them as they're intended to be played, we have to jump through hoops to get something even close to a similar experience. Mute your mic, scour the internet for strangers who might not immediately call you a bitch if you join their party, be friendly but not too friendly,

wear the skimpy armor for the stats because you'll die without it, let the game remind you again and again that your non-optional male character is a total stud, make excuses for the game, make none for yourself. It's so much less fun because we have to do more work just to interact with a game that refuses to make an effort to include us.

Games for Women

I know, I know, I said they didn't exist, but I can't talk about girl games and boy games without addressing two elephants in the room.



The first is that games for girls are technically out there. As a former girlsgogames.com lover, I can't tell you they don't. "Super Salon High" on Roblox and "Anna and Elsa Dress Up" are definitely aimed at girls, it's just that they're aimed at girls in the literal sense- as in, little girls. And even then, I don't think it's controversial to say that little girls deserve higher quality games than borderline fetishistic pimple-popping games on the faces of Disney princesses. The second is that there are also games aimed at adult women. They exist. They're just generally indie romance games. Nothing wrong with that! I love a good romance visual novel. They're great, they let artists and writers show off their abilities, and they're fun, but also they are absolutely usually coming from small indie studios with launches more likely to come from itch.io than E3, and from teams sourced by asking on Twitter 'Hey does anyone know how to code?' It's absurd that such a massive demographic's only catering comes from small independent teams, and even then, it's largely romance-focused content. While I love these games, I can't help but see them as a symptom of a market left to rot by large developers, with indie teams picking at the bones with small-budget games. Games focused towards women have so much potential just sitting there waiting to be used, and can be so much more than an underground community.

Gender-Neutral Games

Most gender-neutral games tend to end up being either single-player or co-op, either isolated experiences or experiences meant to be shared with an already close friend. Classic examples are Minecraft, the Sims, most Nintendo games, all games with no or optional online element, and going without that doesn't ruin the key experience. These games are usually enjoyed by large audiences, but their targeting tends to focus on older kids and younger teens, which is seen in their difficulty curves. That's actually why many of them have optional online elements- they're meant to be safe for kids, which usually involves not exposing them to the internet at large. They're also where the majority of female gamers spend the bulk of their time! Games like "Stardew Valley," "Terraria," and "The Sims" are all single-player games known for large female audiences.

I love these games. I think they're great, I think they're fun, and I think they mean a great deal to a lot of people of all genders. I'm also still frustrated. The younger target demographic of these games can be a tough pill to swallow when games aimed at men are fine with and often celebrated for covering mature topics. Most gender-neutral games are rated E for Everyone, which is great.

They speak to a universal perspective, which is also great! However, video games are fully capable as a storytelling medium, and in the words of Reese Witherspoon,

women's stories matter. We deserve stories told from our perspective with things to say about more than choosing a hot guy to kiss. There are a few gender-neutral games with mature ideas and topics, but typically, 'mature' gets interpreted as sexualizing.

An example that comes to mind is "Genshin Impact," a wildly popular game with an almost 1:1 ratio of male to female players. It tackles themes like isolationism and political paranoia. It also. Cannot. Turn off the jiggle physics. This can turn running around as a female character from feeling like exploring a world to feeling out of place, like an intruder playing a game that isn't meant for you.

The Liminality of a World Made For Someone Else

There are moments as a female gamer where your character is referred to as 'he,' unchangeably. When the pixel art's character has jiggle physics on her visible cleavage. Putting on armor just to find it has a belly window and fishnets. An unskippable cutscene of a barely dressed woman trying to seduce you. It reminds us, in the middle of a game, that we are not supposed to play this game. It's not for us. When the game developers designed this armor or that NPC, they were thinking about the reactions of players who look nothing like us. We are intruders in this world, a world by and for men.

Typically, one of the biggest challenges for video game developers is minimizing the space between the player character and the character. It's a common challenge, getting consumers to feel what the character feels, to feel like their character is an extension of themselves and the world. This is responsible for the creation of most first-person games, for being able to choose your character name, and for intuitive controls, so that we, the players, feel like ourselves. And yet, those same developers seem dead-set on widening that gap for women. To remind us that no, we do not get to be a character in a world, we get to awkwardly puppet a man, or a woman dressed to men's fantasy, around a world filled with internet trolls and female NPCs designed more to be seen than spoken to. The responsibility is put on us to narrow that gap, to make the game work for us, to mod and to hunt down safe communities, and to just avoid that sidequest. It's on us. We have to go out of our way to make the game feel at all like it was made with us in mind. A lot of us don't even notice, because that's just the way the world is too.

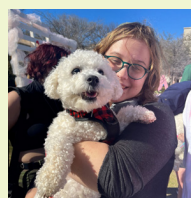
We get told as women, don't go out at night, don't go out alone, don't wear ponytails, always have a knife. Because the world is not for us. We have to make accommodations just to be left alone, and even then, certain things are just not allowed to us. Clubs, the night, we avoid them or we take precautions against them. It's exhausting to be doing something wrong by existing at the wrong time and place, it's exhausting to have to make changes and sacrifices and

ignore the people who think they have a right to your time — while not being too mean, because god forbid we hurt a man's feelings when we should be able to just exist! The issue with these places and with these games is they make us both product and prey. Every overzealous game dev giving triple-Ds to the character central to their game's marketing is no better than frat men putting scantily clad women in their rush videos, because both ways, women are no longer people to be spoken to, they are objects, prizes to be earned by rushing or by playing this game or buying that DLC. That's the struggle experienced as a female gamer — trying to consume a product when part of that product is a funhouse mirror image of you, a constant reminder that not only are you not in the audience of game developers, but you are also not entirely human to them.

Video Games Are Art, Art Is For Everyone

Video games are a creative medium, undoubtedly. They have the capacity to be, and often are, art. Art speaks to everyone in different ways and comes from a variety of experiences, and video games should be the same! A key part of art is the perspective it comes from, and there's no denying that not every perspective will speak to everyone. Games from a male perspective are fine, they're great. The key is in the difference between telling stories with a male perspective and telling stories through the lens of the male gaze. The first is art told from a perspective that may not appeal to everyone, and the second is art that turns certain audience members, women, into a part of the spectacle without our consent. A great example of the first is "God of War Ragnarök," which despite its predecessor's many flaws is an incredible game with themes surrounding fatherhood — it speaks to a fundamentally male experience without sexualizing the women players meet throughout the story. Your character is unavoidably male, but he's male for a reason greater than 'Oh, that's just the default.' It tells a story that isn't for women, without alienating women.

We deserve more than art painted from a blank mind, inoffensively old from no perspective. Art without gender is important, and it has its place, but so should art that speaks to gendered experiences. It is an uphill battle, one I see being fought every day, here on campus, in droves of women seeking to work in the games industry, and that fills me with joy. Right now, "Animal Crossing" may be all we have to call a girl game for now, but the future is so brilliant, I might have to turn my brightness down.



ELLIE MAGUIRE

sophomore | neuroscience
geek who went greek



It's Okay to Let Things Flop

As we all know, art is a completely objective concept and there's very little if any discourse around it. You see, art is a way of making money. As a matter of fact, art IS money. If it doesn't make money, then it's not art. That's the reason why no profound artistic work has ever been undersold, underrated, misunderstood or just flat out scrapped against better judgement. Yes, everything that succeeds does so for a reason. Who cares if something's "good" or not, if it fills our pockets then quality is of no consequence!

If, god forbid, you ventured into the mind of a media corporation CEO, you may find ideas like the ones above. The ideology that art can be separated into the categories of "good" and "bad" and that merit is gained through those labels alone is an intellectual battle that's been raging for centuries — or however long art has existed, which is probably the same amount of time that human consciousness has existed. It's not a new concept. But nowadays we're faced with a new way of quantifying art as "profitable" or "unprofitable." This wasn't always the case, but now that capital is king it's something that all artists must consider when creating their work.

All of this is to say, art can be difficult to assess sometimes. Lots of folks enjoy arguing about it, hell, some folks dedicate their entire lives to arguing about it, and yet we still don't have anything close to a definitive answer on what makes art "good," and how (or if) that guarantees its commercial success... or do we?

I'd argue that the quality of something and its likelihood of success are so unrelated to one another that it's a wonder why we equate the two at all. I'm sure that many reading this have an array of examples of creative works in their mind that were unrightfully snubbed in some way, whether it be critically, financially, or otherwise. Some that come to mind are Disney's "Treasure Planet" and the finished and unreleased "Batgirl" film that was supposed to hit HBO Max in 2022. "Treasure Planet" got terrible box office returns but overall positive critical reception (that sadly didn't save it), and "Batgirl" was canceled before it was even released. These scenarios occur all too often and will put a nail in the coffin of a piece of art before it even has a chance to live. Alternatively, there are pieces of art that succeed on every front despite their unconventional aesthetics. One such example, a tactical first-person shooter game called "Cruelty Squad," is by all means painful to look at. The colors clash, the text is difficult to read at times, the music can be just plain off-putting, and the textures make your eyes feel like they're licking sandpaper. And it's fantastic. The gameplay



is fun and every ounce of the game drips with style and intent. “Cruelty Squad” was received with overwhelming positivity and continues to be a beloved addition to the immersive sim genre.

So how could a project like “Cruelty Squad” outperform two ambitious pieces of media like “Treasure Planet” or “Batgirl?” Well, part of it is scale. The more money you put into a creative project, the higher of a gamble it is to make that money back. Take DC’s “The Flash” for example. The film cost \$225 million to make and \$150 million to market, bringing its cost to a whopping \$375 million. The film ended up losing \$200 million at the box office, making it the largest financial failure of any superhero film to grace theaters. It begs the question of why we keep creating works of art that cost more money than any general member of the working class will ever see in their lifetime, yet consistently shut down smaller scale projects when they aren’t guaranteed to immediately bring in immense profit.

This brings me to the gnawing question I have for both the entertainment industry and the creative world at large: when has the most impactful art ever been profitable? When you think of the art that really sticks in the public’s mind, the controversial stuff, the complicated stuff, it’s never the art that actually brings in money. Weird side-projects made by supposed nobodies, things made for a very specific audience or sometimes no audience at all, things that make us uncomfortable, things that make us

confront the human experience at its core. These are the kinds of works that change people, but they aren’t the kinds of works that make money, so they often fly under our radar. My question is why? Why are we letting capital dictate what succeeds and what doesn’t? Why do powerful works of art often fade into obscurity while some of the most generic, transparent works of art revel in commercial success? I want to live in a world where creative works can be made without having to sell themselves. Humans were blessed with the wonderful urge to create; we just can’t help ourselves. And regardless of how people feel about artistic movements like Surrealism, Constructivism, Dada, or any other controversial era in art history, those artworks exist. Whether we complain about them or sing their praises, they continue to exist independently of our opinions. I wish the moguls that control the art and entertainment industries would understand that capital isn’t a very good indicator of quality. Has it occurred to them that artists tell stories not to turn a profit, but to simply... tell a story? It’s human nature. It’s like some of us have a little time bomb in our brains that says, “I need to make this thing real or I’ll die,” for no other reason than us simply wanting to make it real. I’m not out here writing a self-published novel or making paper puppet stop-motion animations because it’s profitable! I’m doing it because my brain yells at me to make the things living inside of my head tangible in some way! I can’t explain it beyond that!

My extraordinarily long-winded point is this: let people make stuff that fails. Failure can be a lot of fun, it’s the entire reason that things like The Golden Raspberry Awards exist. We should be able to confidently point at a thing that sucks and say “Hey! I made that!” and have everyone clap for us anyway. Humans are going to create things of varying quality regardless of the money we do or don’t make from it, so why put all the focus on profit? Let artists be the freaky little weirdos that nature intended us to be. This world doesn’t have a finite amount of space for art, so let it happen.



MICKEY DOLPHIN

junior | atec

Bloodborne (2015) made me transgender but not in a way that’s comprehensible

by: keala chestnut



At Least If You Can't Sleep, He Can.

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