

AMP

december 2023 | volume 20 | issue 4 | ampatutd.com



Merry Crisis

Was **Skylanders** Really That **Bad**?

Yule Wish You Were Celebrating This Holiday!

The **Church** Doesn't Want You to Know **THIS** About **Anime**!

AMP

Editors' Desk

Season's Greason's



Welcome back, Comets!

Since we last saw you, AMP is excited to announce we attended the College Media Awards convention in Atlanta. We got to meet other college media editors, heard from hugely influential journalists, and learned about many aspects of magazine production. While there, we were given an Honorable Mention in layout design! In other words, among college publications across the country we're in the top 5 in design. We're so proud of all the contributors and executive members who made this possible, and we hope to keep improving.

We also have an update on the Spirit Rocks we mentioned just last month. There have been weeks of peaceful debate between different groups on campus, using the rocks as an outlet and a billboard for their messages. But apparently, administration didn't realize

that establishing a public opinion forum meant students would express their opinions, and at some point all this perfectly reasonable back and forth between opinionated young adults just became too controversial. So, without warning or explanation, these landmarks of our school have been completely removed. In their place UTD has planted a few scraggly trees, but that spot just looks sad and empty at the end of the day. We're very disheartened by this decision, especially since AMP is also a platform for student opinions. We know how important it is to make campus voices heard, and we hope that the removal of one of those opportunities won't lead to groups acting out in less savory ways to fill the gap. Maybe to administration the Spirit Rocks are just big paint-soaked boulders, but to the student body this is an enormous and unjust loss.

Gavin Arriaga - Editor-in-Chief

Sneha Raghavan - Managing Editor

Victoria Bruno - Art Director

Agnes Garrett - Web and Copy Editor

Sasha Wu - Marketing Director

Mickey Dolphin - Asst. Marketing Director

Shreya Parimal - Asst. Copy Editor

Brianne Bitar - Asst. Art Director



THIS ISSUE:

- 4 December Horoscopes
- 5 Moon Meals
- 6 DJ Showcase: Into the Zahraverse
- 8 Resolutions with Ratford
- 10 Tis the Season...for Yule Lads?
- 12 Skylanders Was Not a Cashgrab
- 14 Journey Home
- 16 From Strike to Screen
- 20 Anime: The 13th Apostle?!
- 22 Comet Closet

Cover Design - Nico Fleming

Contributors

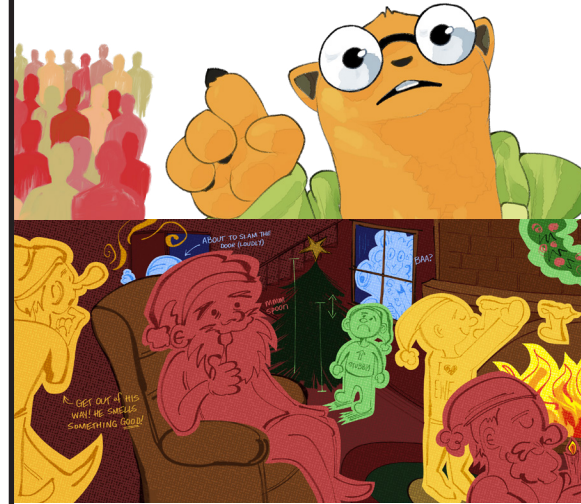
Victoria Steiner, Gregorio Olivares G., Mickey Dolphin, Minuki Medis, Sasha Wu, Shreya Parimal, Rayhan Younas

Designers

John Mai, A. Sultana, Nico Fleming, Connor Le, Bryce Sheehan, Phebe Dean, MJ Ly, Susan Zhang, Brianne Bitar, Victoria Bruno

Media Advisor

Jonathan Stewart



Editor-in-Chief

Gavin Arriaga

Managing Editor

Sneha Raghavan

Art Director

Victoria Bruno

Asst. Art Director

Brianne Bitar

Web/Copy Editor

Agnes Garrett

Assistant Copy Editor

Shreya Parimal

Marketing Director

Sasha Wu

Assistant Marketing Director

Mickey Dolphin

Disclaimer

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: Give in to the voices.

Taurus: You've got it figured out this month. You don't need anyone else's opinion. In fact, what are you even here for? Bask in your infinite wisdom, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Gemini: If you find yourself in need of a spare towel in a foreign place, your solution may come from an unexpected direction. It'll also be, like, super awkward, so maybe just don't go somewhere you'll need a towel.

Cancer: Your guardian angel is looking out for you. The stars have taken offense, because you were actually in their territory. Expect a turf war.

Leo: Santa's elves have been replaced by AI, so they've left the Christmas industry and are now Hanukkah elves. Do with this information as you will.

Virgo: The stars have decided. You gotta send in the dodos. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

Libra: You'll accomplish everything you want to. The problem is figuring out what you want. You indecisive little punk.

Scorpio: The hand of fate has chosen you for trial by combat. Er, sorry, wombat. It's basically a fat rat spat on a big flat mat. And you get a hat.

Sagittarius: Your Taurus friend is gonna be a huge dumbass all month. You've gotta get them back on the right track. Let them know exactly how stupid they sound, all the time. And don't let up.

Capricorn: The stars hope you have fun getting your birthday presents doubled as your Christmas presents, if you're a December Capricorn. Which was really mean of them, honestly.

Aquarius: Ghosts are real! And they think you're kinda cringe. Sorry about that.

Pisces: A glimpse into your future: Death itself is at your door! They need a place to crash for the weekend.

SASHA WUU

sophomore | atec
leo sun, capricorn
moon, cancer rising

MOON MEALS

A UTD TV COLLAB

Where: 312 N Greenville Ave Suite 100, Richardson, TX 75081 | When: Open Mon - Sat 8am - 8pm, and Sunday 10am - 8pm

Okaeri Cafe

This month we visited Okaeri Cafe, a super cute Japanese cafe located about 10 minutes from campus. Their name comes from the Japanese word Okaerinasai, which means "Welcome Home." The decor inside is adorable, with floor-to-ceiling chalk drawings, shelves of plushies, and an adorable statue of their mascot. Another unique trait is that they offer booths with traditional Japanese seating; you remove your shoes and sit at a low table as twinkling fairy lights surround you, elevating the dining experience as a whole.

This was my first time trying takoyaki but I never expected to love it so much. Takoyaki balls are made of a chewy wheat-flour base and filled with chunks of octopus. They're topped with furikake flakes, bonito flakes, green onion, Japanese mayo and Okonomiyaki sauce. The combo of the Okonomiyaki sauce with the Japanese mayo was so flavorful, but the flavor of the takoyaki balls themselves was also unique and clear. It's definitely incredibly filling, and could probably be an entree by itself instead of just an appetizer! After a few of the takoyaki balls the sauce can start to feel a little overpowering, but paired with a drink or entree it works great.

The omurice was so delicious! The egg on top maintained a perfect silky texture, never being too solid or too watery, which is demonstrative of a well done omurice (it also makes me deeply depressed that I can never get the texture right when I try making omurice at home). The fried rice was also really flavorful on its own, but I enjoyed drizzling the surrounding sauce on the rice to really elevate the rice and eggs flavor. It was a hefty portion, and much more filling than I assumed by looking at it. I definitely ate way more than I usually would because it tasted so good and was an incredibly comforting treat after a very chaotic few weeks.

My friend also enjoyed their katsu curry. I had a few pieces and was impressed by how crispy the breading was on the pork katsu. It was a little firm for my preference, however that made it more suitable to dip into the curry. The carrots and potatoes were soft and absorbed the flavor of the curry really well. The curry had strong notes of spices without actually being spicy, so it's perfect for people who like the flavor of spice without melting their tongue. My friend also liked the quality of the short grain rice underneath, and aesthetically I liked the golden crisp of the katsu.

The strawberry matcha latte successfully balanced its flavors so that nothing was overpowered, which is often difficult to do with a matcha latte. It was smooth, creamy, and refreshing. In general, it was an instant boost of serotonin because the light pink from the strawberry was vibrant and the rose petals on top added an extra layer of pizzazz to the appearance. It was definitely the perfect sweet drink to pair with the savory food.



Appetizer:

-Takoyaki \$8

Entrees:

-Omurice - traditional fried rice \$12

-Katsu Curry \$14

Drinks:

-Iced Matcha Latte with Strawberry Foam and Edible Rose Petals \$5

Prices before student discount - 15% discount with Student ID

MINUKI MEDIS

senior | psychology
Your local bringer of chaos!



DJ SHOWCASE: INTO THE ZAHRAVERSE

Welcome to “electronica <3,” where music is waves of neon hues, strobes of bright pink, and flashy purple – the brainchild of senior Neuroscience major Zahra Ismail. As she herself would describe it, her show is a “celebration of many genres... because that’s how I feel when I listen to electronic music. That’s a part of me, that’s literally who I am.” The show airs every Wednesday from 3-6 p.m. and features programming that spans the multiverse: techno and house music, surrealist sounds, and EDM-inspired genres such as electropop.

“electronica <3,” which is Zahra’s third show with RadioUTD, serves as her entrance into the music multiverse, where she challenges herself to spotlight specific genres and place an emphasis on “production and sampling choices within subgenres, and on black, female and LGBT+ artists/producers/DJs for their contributions to electronic music.” Zahra first began her journey with Radio with her trainee segment “The Speed of Sound,” where she interviewed local creatives, discussed album production and sampling, and played music that leaned into “R&B and indie rock... with maybe just a little bit of pop.” With her second show, “Comme des Garçons,” Zahra played a variety of music that ranged from pop music to more experimental tracks, while still maintaining her love for electronic music. “That’s why I decided for this show to just be fully electronic because I was like, I’m kind of tired of the variety. I just want to dedicate myself to one category

and then, from there, I can kind of push myself to stay there, stay in that world and find more music,” she said.

When asked about the inspiration behind “electronica <3” and her love for the genre, Zahra cites Tumblr as her main inspiration. “The good old days, the glory days,” she reminisces from when she was active, “there’s an audio and visual component that inspired me... a lot of surrealist images, a lot of photography.” The show obviously has an auditory component, but there’s visual art within its aesthetic if you know where to look. Zahra herself designed the show’s icon, which is an image of dark, fractured glass lit up in rainbow hues. As she quotes, “it adds a futuristic touch” to the show. The tuner page on the Radio website further encapsulates the vaporwave aesthetic with other gifs and images. As for the music Zahra personally listens to, she finds that she needs some kind of visual, as it’s “the only way I can listen to music... I like both of them so much. So they have to be connected, you know?” For this reason (despite my insistence that Spotify is the superior streaming service), Zahra streams albums on YouTube, where both senses are fulfilled. A few of these albums on repeat are “Fountain Baby” by Amaarae and “Shower Shoes” by Malcom Todd. While discussing Amaarae’s latest album, she described it as “electronic, and then there’s also an afrobeat aspect to some of the music. And then there’s also, like a ballad, and then there’s some rock in there... some R&B, some indie. Big fan of that. That’s top tier.”

photo credit: shreya parimal
design by: victoria bruno

DJ DEETS

On repeat — mosquito by pink panthress

Book to read — angels and demons by Dan Brown

Currently reading — in the midst of winter Isabel Allende

Coffee order — pumpkin chai latte

Elite pizza topping — pineapples and mac and cheese

Sign — Leo

Smth you hate or love — strongly love Ciccis

Fav obscure animal — capybara or meerkat

Fav movie — Da Vinci code



Along with being a DJ at Radio, Zahra is also involved within management. As a Programming Director, she enjoys training new people and helps trainees navigate the process of going on-air. Once the trainees are adjusted, she performs air-checks, where she listens to past shows and brainstorms ideas for improvement and engagement. In addition to assisting trainees, Zahra creates the programming schedule for new shows every semester which reflects Radio's "niche, creative music tastes."

Zahra realizes that joining Radio is what helped her outside of Radio as it's helped her creatively in other aspects, including photography, filmography, and music production. She's fascinated by surrealist photography, which "translates into electronica because I like surreal sound as well, so... experimental music, that's a big thing for me." These cohesive ties between audio and visual media are what compose the ZahraVerse: the celebration of "songs that make you want to dance."

As for the future, Zahra teased a resurgence of "Comme des Garçons" in collaboration with "electronica <3" (affectionately titled "Comme des 'Tronica") in honor of her first show. "It was pretty fun because it was my first, actual, full-fledged show... but I think I like 'electronica <3' more," she laughed. Zahra is a combination of media, magic, and excitement. Her interest in music, photography,

and filmography all stem from a love for self-expression and identity, and all synthesize under the broader umbrella of the ZahraVerse.

Next semester is Zahra's last semester at UTD, but the effect that Radio had on her will always stay with her. "It's been fun," she smiled, "because before joining radio, my hobbies were... they weren't as intense, if that makes sense. And there wasn't really a balance of, like, my brain being engaged in an academic way and then my brain being engaged creatively." She laughed as she recounted memories of her earlier semesters without Radio, where she essentially didn't have anything to do. Student Media served as the beginning of her creative ventures, and Zahra found herself meeting friends and exploring new music. As she says, "I think that's like the common reason for a lot of people [to join]... you wanna dedicate time to something creative, something outside of school, but still something that, like, benefits you in the long run. So that's been fun for me."

"electronica <3" is a testament to Zahra's love for music and creativity, as well as her love for the work she's done at Radio and the people she's met. As Zahra says herself, "Stream 'electronica <3' for clear skin!"

RESOLUTIONS WITH

RAY FORD



COMETS SHARED THEIR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS WITH ME, SEEKING MY KNOWLEDGEABLE OPINION!

To eat more cheese.

Oh em gee! Wouldn't you know it, that's also MY New Year's Resolution! It was also my resolution from last year, and the year before that, and the year before that, and —

To pass all my classes next year?
Probably? Help me.

Don't tell anyone that Ratford is advocating dishonest conduct, but offering some cheddar to your professors couldn't hurt... and by that I mean literal cheddar cheese.

To be as iconic as you!

Aww, that's so sweet of you! Unfortunately that's impossible, but I think you can pull off a very, VERY close second-place!

To not blow my rent money on
cheetos... again.

Worry not, I am here for you! Here is a list of amazing non-cheeto alternatives for you to indulge in instead: swiss cheese, cheddar cheese, parmesan, mozzarella, pepper jack, brie, gouda, ca membert...

To be less nice.

That was my ex-wife's old resolution, after we split up. Except it was only towards me. I'm still hiding from her.

To come out by publishing a research paper
under my new name.

Ooh, that's a wonderful resolution! I'll be rooting for you! By the way, did you know I'm conducting some research of my own? I'd like to learn how many marriages are sunk by an ALLEGEDLY "excessive" amount of spending on cheese.

To learn how to count to 4, then learn what
comes after 4.

...What do you mean what comes AFTER four? That's the end, isn't it? See, I'll count it on my fingers right now! One, two, three... four! That's all of them! I've only got four, not a single one more! Haha!

To sponsor the ATEC building so they
have to change the name again.

I may or may not be poaching this one. Kidding! I'd never steal someone else's resolution! Totally unrelated, but how does "The Ratford Building for Arts, Technology, and Exotic Cheeses" sound?

To befriend the campus squirrels and be
their dark overlord, training them to be a
furry army that will help defeat my greatest
enemies.

No, no, no! You got it all wrong! If you want a quality, STRONG furry army, you gotta go with us rats! Or actual furries!

To work up the courage to say hi to Temo-
er, my crush...

You got this! I'm sure everything will work out, and soon enough you'll both be stargazing under the Love Jack... Oh, how romantic that was for us...

...I still miss her sometimes.

To become the new Ratford.

H-Huh?



RAYHAN YOUNAS

junior | psychology

Currently hard at work procrastinating



TIS THE SEASON...FOR YULE LADS?

The winter season has for too long been dominated by the Christian faith. Well, it's time for Jesus to step aside, because the Yule Lads are the new faces of the holidays. Christmas traditions already borrow extensively from Pagan rituals and practices, such as the raucous feasts of Roman Saturnalia or the frigid Yule of Scandinavia. Today Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Krampusnacht, Eid il-Burbara, and Christmas, among other celebrations, are all held during the early winter period of December. And yet, no one is talking about the boisterous, quirky, and fascinating traditions ascribed to the 13 Yule Lads of Iceland, which take place at the same time. Through proper adoration and appreciation of the Lads, we as a society can set forth on the arduous task of separating the modern holiday season from grotesque consumerism, and instead place our ideals where they ought to be, enshrined in some goofy little spirits.

With 13 Lads to choose from, you are guaranteed to find something wonderfully exciting and different to explore for the holiday season. Just imagine it: you get to spend the entire year planning the defense of your home against the combined mischief of the Lads. Perhaps you place all of your pots in the highest cupboard and place decorative locks on it to prevent the estimable Pot-Scraper from stealing your leftovers. You make it a ritual to finish all your yogurt and dairy products before Skyr-Gobbler can arrive and eat it all. You place lights around your home to make sure there aren't any shadows for Gully Gawk to hide in and steal your cows or milk. And, you place festive decorative candles and doorway ornaments to counter the efforts of Doorway-Sniffer or Door-Slammer. Don't even get me started on what you could do to combat Meat-Hook. The Yule Lads provide a veritable treasure

trove of inspiration for all sorts of decorations and traditions throughout the holiday season.

The first and oldest of the Lads, Sheep-Cote Clod, is said to saunter into our world with the rhythmic hammer of his wooden legs and lyrical style of speech on December 12th, and he conducts his cantankerous sheep harassment for two weeks until his departure on December 25th. After Sheep-Cote Clod, one new Yule Lad arrives each day. 12 are sneaking about on December 24th by the arrival of the final Lad, Candle-Stealer. The Lads are incredibly courteous with the modern person's schedule, as they give over 20 days of possible chaos and celebration to choose from. You might be a person that is hesitant to change when you celebrate things, yet the Lads give you a simple solution: don't. If you celebrate Christmas or its associated Eve, you can keep these days special by celebrating the arrival of the first 12 Lads on the 24th, and the well overdue departure of Sheep-Cote Clod on the 25th, maintaining your usual schedule. New Years coincides with the departure of Door-Slammer (good riddance), and you could incorporate some good old door slamming to inject some vitality into those end of year parties. For at least the next three years, Hanukkah will also be overlapping with the presence of the Lads. Kwanzaa is comfortably nestled in the turning point of Lad arrival and departure. And the general time frame provided by the Lads gives most people ample time to spice up their celebrations with some Yule Lad mystique.

Up until this point I have been using the translated names for all of the Lads because the original Icelandic names include Giljagaur, Ketkrókur, Hurðaskellir, and Þvörusleikir. I honestly could not tell you how to properly pronounce any of these as my



mouth is incapable of making these impressive Icelandic sounds. And yet that is the beauty of the Lads, they are both ephemeral and straightforward. I know exactly what Spoon-Licker's modus operandi is by just name alone, and the premise is so intriguing that it begs to be researched in further detail. It is like a voice in the wind calling upon me to complete some great goal, the goal of learning about the practices and traditions of a non-dominant culture. Icelandic is a language spoken by roughly 300,000 people, and while not yet endangered, the miniscule number of speakers indicates the precarious nature in which the stories and ideas of its past find themselves in. Languages such as Yakkha, Kuruba, and Dahaalik find themselves critically endangered, and with them are the tales and histories recorded in them also endangered. Institutions such as the Catholic Church spent centuries destroying everything that deviated from their narrow set of beliefs, leaving us with a small variety of things to celebrate each winter. But there is a practically infinite supply of traditions, cultures, and ideas which are buried in the past and can be repurposed for a modern world. It's time we brought back the Yule Lads and the avant garde week-long ragers of Saturnalia to the modern world. What marvelous creations might arise from the conjunction of laddish mischief with bombastic Ancient Greek end-of-year festivities? I dare not even think of it, for it would be too great for me to comprehend. We shouldn't let things fade away just because they aren't popular or mainstream.

As humans we rarely have unique thoughts, since our conceptions of the world are based on the knowledge of our predecessors that has been rearranged to fit new situations. We, unlike the Greeks who originally celebrated Saturnalia, might recognize that Saturn

is just a gas giant and not some narcissistic child-eating titan. But that doesn't mean we can't have big winter parties that encourage a shattering of the status quo. Forget about all the gaudy and drab hallmarks of our currently commercialized winter season, and instead focus on celebrating all the obscure, intriguing, and deliciously mischievous events you want to. By choosing to focus on one Lad per year, I am at least set for the next 13 years of celebration thanks to the wonderful Yule Lads. I could even bump that up to 17 if I throw in a celebration for their ogress mother Grýla who eats children that misbehave, the Yule Cat that eats those that commit fashion crimes in the winter, and the two ambiguously existent Yule sisters that put melted wax in socks. It all ultimately boils down to a simple math expression: $13 > 1$. There are simply more Lads than there are Jesuses (Jesi? Jesopodes?), and as such they would easily win the winter deity fight. Wouldn't you rather be on the winning side?



GREGORIO OLIVARES G.

freshman | political science and 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.



SKYLANDERS WAS NOT A CASHGRAB

Toys-to-life is a unique video game style where certain gameplay is attached to toys you can buy in a package or separately from the game. When people talk about toys-to-life games, they often refer to them as cash grabs that always end up as failures. Disney Infinity, Lego Dimensions; some people to this day still argue about how useless Amiibos are. The biggest target of this however, is the one that started it all — Skylanders. In the beginning, the game didn't seem to have a promising start. For one, the first game was titled “Skylanders: Spyro’s Adventure” and was released three years after the last Spyro game at the time (which in of itself, already did poorly). It excited a lot of starved Spyro fans only for them to be disappointed about a game that barely includes Spyro at all. With Skylanders having an unfortunate introduction as a franchise, most people didn't give the games a chance. It also didn't help that a lot of people were not on board with the idea of buying toys separately (like trading cards) in order to broaden their gaming experience. However, even though it may not have been the Spyro sequel that fans wanted, these fans and the general public alike missed out on a unique concept and gameplay that promoted people's imagination while also being a simple but fun game.

With the large variety of Skylanders the franchise had (currently totaling around 175), players had many playable characters to choose from. Unlike other toys-to-life games that had pre-existing characters that most players were familiar with like in Disney Infinity or Lego Dimensions, players got to personify the Skylanders that they got in any way they chose, including customizable clothing options and choosing movesets out of a skill tree. This isn't even counting Skylanders from Imaginators, which allowed you to create your own Skylander from scratch, or the ones from Swap Force, which allowed you to mix and match parts. From the Skylander collection that I currently have, I've always been attached to the one I started out with, Snap Shot. On top of being able to accessorize him, the game also allowed players to nickname their Skylander. Since Snap Shot was a “crocagator” and he had an Australian accent, I named him “Crocky”, a pun on the word “crickey”. Along with what the characters offered to players, the toys themselves were of pretty good quality. They weren't your standard, cheap, low quality toys that you'd find in a McDonald's Happy Meal — lots of thought was clearly put into their designs. Snap Shot's figure has scales all over his body, and instead of

just having a simple paint job to represent these scales, the figure actually has texture going down his whole body. As a kid, I used to pet him on the head all the time because I loved the texture of the scales. Snap Shot also has a “traptanium weapon”, which is a bow and arrow made out of crystal. Because the weapon was made of a blue translucent plastic, I’d often hold Snap Shot to the light and try to look through him. Although my Skylanders collection is not remotely as large as some other fans’, it was the first time I got to know what it felt like to have a collection you could appreciate and admire. I used to collect rocks, leaves, buttons, cards, and stuff it all into a bag or box, to the point where it seemed more like hoarding than collecting. With the Skylanders, my parents even bought and set up a shelf right above our TV to display the toys. Unlike things like trading cards or Funko Pops which usually worked off of a base, each Skylanders character had its own unique design. With every Skylanders game, new artists and designers were included all the

time to incorporate something new, unique, and custom-made. During the time when Imaginators was still new, there was even an official mobile app where you could design a playable Skylander and have a custom-made toy of the design be delivered, which can’t be said for most toys-to-life games, or even with toys as a whole!

Skylanders’s concept was unique in that it involved the player in these stories. In the franchise’s lore, the Skylanders, who are the heroes of their world in Skylands, were banished to our world and need our help to be brought back to stop the evil forces of the main antagonist of the franchise, Kaos. Players were known as “portal masters” that would offer a connection for the Skylanders between our world and theirs. For example, my first ever Skylanders game was Trap Team, which my brother and I got for Christmas. For this game specifically, my brother and I were not only able to play as the Skylanders, but we were also able to capture and control the villains that we encountered. This concept was further reinforced by having the portal you get with the game play voice clips of the captured villains through a small speaker. Through this interactivity, my brother and I would often talk back to the villains whenever they spoke. Towards the end of the game, this concept of involving the player with the world of Skylands was emphasized even more. Kaos, the main villain of the franchise, develops the ability to break the fourth wall and speaks to the player. While traversing his base, Kaos would often try to show his “power” by doing things such as

communicating through the portal’s speaker or making the player’s controller shake. When it came to his boss fight, Kaos would often fly up to the screen and take items from the “real world”. At the time, my brother and I’s minds were blown by this entire concept and were even a little intimidated by Kaos. We often would transfer these concepts into real life, playing with the toys and making our own pretend adventures with the Skylanders.

This franchise was more than just the toys. Skylanders was one of

a kind in that it had an expansive world with lore and overarching stories. Compared to other toys-to-life games with characters that kids were already familiar with, Skylanders gave them the ability to not only imagine scenarios for the characters, but to also be a part of the story itself and see the various interactions from the non-playable characters. Kids got to see adventurers Flynn and Cali tease each other and develop a complex relationship, they got to see their Master Eon who



guides the player return to life after being destroyed by Kaos. Kids even got to see Kaos undergo character development as he rebelled against more powerful and menacing villains than him. The franchise has a show, a comic series, and several books to expand on the lore even further. Even though the hate of the franchise has died down with the series, to this day, I still hear fans speak fondly about how they as the portal master got to fight against enemies that were creeping into the real world, even if fans are currently few and far between. Some kids would even get their parents involved in order to save this expansive world. Skylanders allowed children to use their imagination in real life as their characters were brought to the real world. It strengthened their minds as well as their bonds with friends and family. Although some people missed out, Skylanders still held a lot of promise to those who did play. Even if the series hasn’t gotten a mainline game since 2016, I still recommend it to those who haven’t tried it!



VICTORIA STEINER

junior | psychology/child learning and development

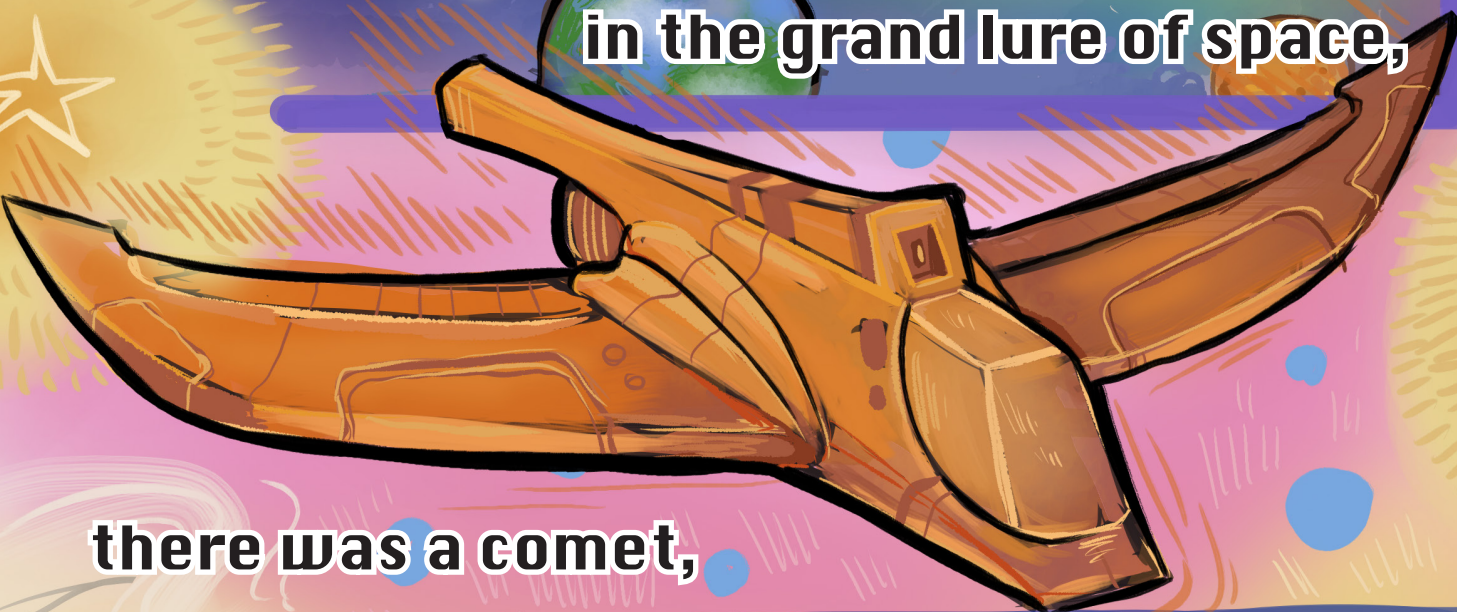
I play games for THE LORE

One day,

in the grand lure of space,

there was a comet,

**who crashed into a planet –
presently known as Earth.**



Lost, he decided to travel the world



until he found himself a home.

And created a home for others.

FROM STRIKE TO SCREEN



The Synopsis

Within the past year, the WGA and, later, SAG-AFTRA both went on strike — the refusal to work until employers provide better working conditions, for anyone with their head under a rock — representing the screenwriters and actors of America. As an ATEC student interested in TV writing, and, perhaps more importantly, as one of the 80% of Americans who watch TV almost daily (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018), this was important to me, just as it should be for everyone reading. Everyone should care about the condition of every labor issue in the U.S., but what makes these strikes so special is that they have a direct impact on the most popular form of American entertainment: TV. The strikes are both over — SAG-AFTRA finally reached a deal with studios just this past November — but the issues are far from gone, and as people who more than likely also watch TV every day, I figure all of AMP’s readers deserve to know more about the issues faced by the people who make everyone’s favorite shows and movies, both revolving around the strikes and moving forward.

The Exposition

Before we get into the strikes from this year, however, I’d like to shine a bit of historical context on the situation. This

is far from the first time strikes have happened for either the Writers’ Guild or the Screen Actors’ Guild, but it’s been over sixty-three years since both struck at the same time. The key issue then was the fact that producers under AMPTP — studios like MGM, Disney, Warner Bros., and today Sony, Netflix, Amazon, Apple (even though I have not met a single person who talks about Apple TV); not the named people in the opening credits listed as “producers” on TV and film — were making bank off TV and without sharing a proportional amount of the profits with the people who actually made the goddamn piece, much like one of the key issues this year. The writers’ strike lasted 148 days for film workers, which happens to be the exact same number of days as this year’s, and the actors’ strike lasted some 42 days. And, with both parties completely refusing to work, production on eight then-upcoming features halted, forcing production companies to come to the table despite their “completely uncompromising attitude,” as stated by Curtis Kenyon, the WGA president at the time. While the negotiations didn’t lead to much in terms of residuals on work from before the strike — residuals serving as the main form of pay for writers after a film or TV episode is released — residuals and contracts were increased for work done after the 1960 strikes, and pensions, healthcare, and welfare were all established, defining a massive success.

It wouldn't be the only success in the coming decades, either. About once each decade until 1988, the WGA would go on strike and win more in residuals, pay, creative control, and a handful of other protections related to changing times, such as residual adjustments based on cassettes, foreign markets, and in 2007-2008, digital releases/streaming. The first consistency across all of these strikes is that the writers found real results from the power in withholding labor, even as they resorted to sleeping in their cars and picketing in the heat. The second consistency is that the strikes happened as studios continually short-ended creators, particularly with residuals. Furthermore, studios always looked for other ways out of negotiating; particularly in the 1988 and 2007-2008 strikes, Hollywood tried filling the gap with reality TV to fill the gap in revenue, which led to the genre's rise. The studios soon realized, as everyone eventually does, that reality TV sucks, and had to go back to actual writers creating actually good content. Studios have also tried just continuing shows and film production without their vital writing crews, leading to active and noticeable dips in quality. In fact, let's take a moment to just look at some of those impacts from the strike preceding this year's.

Shows and Movies Affected by the 2007-2008 WGA Strike

- **"The Office," season 4** — Michael Scott's character leaves the show, courtesy of Steve Carrell calling in sick with "enlarged balls" in solidarity.
- **"Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen"** — wound up with a heavily rushed script, as one could tell merely by watching the movie.
- **"Breaking Bad," season 1** — actually benefited from writing changes made because of the strike, as show creator Vince Gilligan originally planned to kill off the character of Hank Schraeder — one of the most engaging characters throughout the entire show. The season was also limited to seven episodes.
- **"X-Men Origins: Wolverine"** — the one with the shitty Deadpool with no mouth. Rushed script.
- **"Pushing Daisies," season 2** — critically acclaimed, until too much time between seasons made people not care anymore. Got canceled mid-season 2.

And, of course, this isn't to discount the dozens of shows that simply had episodes cut, such as "iCarly," "Scrubs," "Grey's Anatomy," "Bones," "Family Guy," and many more.

SAG-AFTRA went on strike as well during these decades after the '60s, albeit fewer times against Hollywood — although one of its strikes against the American Association of Advertising Agencies did get rated the 6th largest strike in America by USA Today in 2020, showing the perpetuity of the guilds' staying power, collectively. All of this to say, when

both the WGA and SAG-AFTRA went on strike this year, given the history, it was a big deal. It was the first time either had been on strike since 2008, and it's a pretty big red flag that the studios weren't giving the writers and actors their fair shake. And this year, that took shape in a lot of different ways.

The Inciting Incident

I've been writing creatively for years now, and I can pretty easily speak for creators of all kinds when I say that creatives are ridiculously exploitable. We love what we do, and I'm far from the first person to say I'd continue writing for the rest of my life for free, no matter how everything else goes. And, based on the way studios keep trying to skimp out of paying for the valuable labor that goes into entertainment, the studios clearly know this. As such, the fact that residuals were once again one of the key issues this year comes without any surprise. Back in June, Spencer Rothbell, a writer for Netflix-original "12 Forever" and a few years' credit as head-of-story for "Clarence," tweeted (Xeeted? Posted? Elon Musk is a huge loser) a screenshot of one of his residual payments for \$8.57, though many other writers and actors reported seeing less than half this much — with some checks coming in at actual pennies. Perhaps the most iconic of these examples is one of Kimiko Glenn's TikToks during the strikes, where she shows off her residuals as a recurring character for almost half of the episodes in the widely acclaimed, award-winning series "Orange is the New Black." Despite checks listed for dozens of episodes, the payment only amounted to \$27.30, with several showing payments of anywhere between \$0.01 and \$0.04. This is something relatively unique to the streaming era, as residuals used to be calculated based on the number of views for cable, or cassette/DVD sales, etc. in addition to the labor and success surrounding the end product. According to the Washington Post, this system used to be able to pay a person's bills, depending on the circumstances (Anders 2023). With streaming, residuals are calculated based on the number of subscribers under a streaming platform as opposed to views or any metric of success specific to an individual piece of media, which has the perhaps egalitarian claim of leveling the playing field for popular and unpopular shows, but truly means CEO's and other executives at the big studios can undercut residuals to line their own pockets, leading to the pitiful numbers above even for popular releases.

Residuals are not the only way writers and actors earn money, however. Another key issue, at least for writers, was contracts; while most people look for year-round employment, writers and actors enter into contracts for weeks at a time until production on a show or movie is finished or the contract expires and is not renewed. Major actors must obviously be on a production from start to finish, with exceptions, but writers had little job security preceding the strikes.

Writers used to have shorter contracts, and fewer writers were required to be on staff. This meant fewer weeks of employment, fewer people being employed, and overall a lot of uncertainty about one's income throughout the year. Additionally, the timing of payments were inconsistent, with many writers and actors on TikTok, Instagram, what was formerly Twitter, and other social media sites speaking up about how they had to frequently send emails in order to get paid any of what they were owed for their work. Michael Jamin, a TV veteran with numerous credits including five years on "King of the Hill," even posted in July on his Instagram about how the classification of "qualified earnings," which determine whether a writer qualifies for health insurance, were timed and classified deliberately to prevent people from qualifying for health insurance.

Finally, one of the biggest concerns giving rise to the strikes is AI. AMPTP studios actively pushed for the use of AI like ChatGPT and the plethora of AI art generators in order to write and visualize stories with fewer human employees, and some AI are even capable of emulating a real person's voice and image, as was the case for the box-office flop "The Flash" (2023) and (spoilers) "The Mandalorian" second season's cameo of a young Luke Skywalker. Not even addressing the fact that Disney found the perfect guy to just...play...Luke, nor the ethical issues of puppeting dead actors like in "The Flash," the threat of AI stands to render writers obsolete and actors' visages stolen in a move that both profits off of and discards creatives in a creative industry, a fact ever the more true given that the databases these AI use to make all of their work are saturated with the work of real people. AMPTP stood poised to strip artists from their art, taking out the human element of emotion and experience that defines the TV and films people go home to enjoy for three hours per day (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018), and as many people on strike pointed out, ending the current and future careers the strikes were for.

The Rising Action

With these problems in mind, the writers and actors took to the picket lines. With a career in screenwriting as my goal, it is perhaps in my best interest to avoid gaining bad blood with whoever could be my future employer. However, I can still state a few simple facts. AMPTP refused to provide a deal the WGA found acceptable for 148 days, and for SAG-AFTRA 118 days. AMPTP cut the trees providing shade over picket lines during searing summer heat. AMPTP planned "to allow things to drag on until union members start losing their apartments and losing their houses." AMPTP incurred billions in economic losses according to Vanity Fair when the WGA estimated initial demands would have cost roughly \$300-\$400 million, or about the same as Warner Bros. Discovery lost in this year's earnings alone. And, in spite of studio execs making comments like Disney's Bob Iger's assertion the writers and actors were being

"unrealistic" and "disruptive," the American public stood behind the strikes at a rate of 75% support from AFL-CIO's estimate. Because, as it turns out, it's very difficult to tell people who come home from a long day at work to watch TV and check social media that the people who make that TV and post about their struggles on social media (shoutout to Adam Conover) are the villains against a handful of people who could pay someone to hand-pick and hand-feed them grapes 24/7.

The Climax

Literally the only thing going for the WGA and SAG-AFTRA was morale and community. There is little fun nor comfort to be found on a picket line in the heat besides the fact that the writers and actors had the support of their audiences, family, and friends, and that they were fighting for the benefit of current and future people in their professions. Thanks to this, however, AMPTP caved to the WGA at the end of September, and then again to SAG-AFTRA just last month, with almost all of the demands being met for both. This means higher residuals (including a viewership bonus for streaming), a minimum number of staff writers with 10-week minimums for contract length, and AI protections in writing and acting, with the one catch of an "exceptions to consent" clause in the actors' agreement. For today, the professions live a little longer, because of the people brave enough to withhold their labor and fight back against companies' exploitations. However, none of it would have been possible without widespread support from people on the sidelines, and the repeated successes of these unions shows a key element of how unbreakable the entertainment industry's labor is, particularly considering their role in making a little something for audiences to enjoy every day.

The Resolution

At the time of writing, the dust is still settling, and SAG-AFTRA members haven't even voted on the new agreement yet. The hole in the AI protections clause still makes actors feel unsafe, but for now the worst of the studios' exploitations are abated. However, while these strikes were unique in what they gain as part of the entertainment industry, plenty of other strikes are going on right now that deserve just as much support. Teachers, baristas, auto workers, soon possibly flight attendants — many industries in the U.S. right now are fighting for their rights, and one of the benefits of the writers' and actors' success is that it can and should inspire other important pillars of our society to ensure fair compensation for their labor! Even within the entertainment industry, VFX artists, especially the ones at Marvel who were rushed into churning out whatever happened in the recent Ant-Man movie and various TV shows, also recently voted to unionize, so be sure to support them in whatever they do. The WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes are over, but the fight for labor rights is far from done, in and out of the industry.



**"THE FIGHT FOR
LABOR RIGHTS IS FAR
FROM DONE, IN AND
OUT OF THE
INDUSTRY."**



SASHA WUU

sophomore | atec

Doing things and/or stuff, probably



Anime: The 13th Apostle?!

I'm far from the first person to point out how badly the Catholic church needs new members, and I certainly won't be the last with how things are currently going. For decades, The Youths™ have been leaving in droves to pursue things like secularism, party drugs, esports, and stock trading. If we're going to continue as the dominant branch of Christianity, then something needs to change, and fast. After all, what would happen if we were no longer the most widespread religion on the planet? No more arbitrary hierarchies or traditions that are wildly out of touch with modern values? I can't even entertain the thought! But alas, we're living in a rapidly evolving era... how can the church possibly keep up with every little trend or capitalize on areas of interest that we have no

experience in? Well, dear reader, what if I told you that the church already has a hand in one of the largest pop culture phenomena of this generation? You wouldn't happen to be a fan of anime, would you? Because if so, I've got some glorious news! Anime is the perfect medium with which to spread the word of God. Not explicitly, of course. People can't know that we're directly involved in entertainment that would otherwise be considered blasphemous. But we've been pulling the strings since the very beginning, sowing the seeds of faith in the brain of every child who grew up watching Toonami. If you're having a hard time believing me, then allow me to provide some examples.

design by: phebe dean

An obvious example is “Neon Genesis Evangelion.” Firstly, it’s in the name. The book of Genesis is the first book in the Old Testament, and the word “evangelion” relates directly to the gospel, meaning “good news” in Greek. But who cares about etymology? Our intent in influencing Hideaki Anno when he created “Neon Genesis Evangelion” was to make a modernized version of the Bible that apathetic teenagers would be much more receptive to. Kids nowadays don’t care about the twelve apostles; they care about Asuka Langley. Judas’ betrayal of Jesus doesn’t hit the same anymore; we needed a revitalization of that tragic, homoerotic relationship that people could really get invested in, and we did that with Shinji and Kaworu. Many people now consider the Bible to be obsolete and find it difficult to follow — and truthfully, who can blame them? I may be speaking out of turn here but come on, Leviticus 19:19 forbids people from wearing clothing made from blended fabric. Where can you find clothing that isn’t made from blended fabric these days?! Leviticus 20:18 also forbids people from having sex on their periods. Now that I think about it, perhaps Leviticus is just a particularly strange book of the Bible, but I digress. I believe that through anime, we’re slowly changing the mentality that the Bible is too out of touch to connect with. Anytime you see someone with a “Kaworu died for your sins” bumper sticker on their car, that’s our influence working through them, repairing the damage that Leviticus did. God damn you, Leviticus.

Another example is “Puella Magi Madoka Magica,” an anime about young girls that have their wishes granted in exchange for becoming magical heroines who hunt witches. Not too far removed from your average magical girl anime, until you look a little deeper. See, every faith needs a prophet. Not only that, but a prophet needs to be trustworthy and compelling, someone you can really vibe with. That prophet is Madoka Kaname. She’s kind, earnest, and down to earth — a true friend to all! And at the end of her quest to liberate magical girls from their plight, she ascends to the heavens to have her wish granted, making it so that no more magical girls must suffer and die. Sound familiar? Jesus pioneered this strategy, which we in the business call Christ-maxing. Tangentially, we’ve started using gamer-speak so that young people have an easier time integrating into our faith.

Although I could go on indefinitely, our final example is one of the most relevant since it recently got a reboot. The “Trigun” series isn’t subtle in its usage of Catholic imagery, which may seem obvious since one of its most iconic characters is a priest who wields an impractically large machine gun shaped like a cross. Enter Nicholas D. Wolfwood, who albeit isn’t the most ideal representation of the faith, seeing as he... well... kills people for a living and all. However, his faith in God is unwavering! Sort of...! As long as you don’t read the manga or watch the reboot! In the 1998 animated version of “Trigun,” Wolfwood sticks to his guns (literally) as a traveling preacher looking to spread the word of the Lord. The fact that he occasionally shoots people is of no concern to us, we don’t know any of them. Wolfwood embodies Christian values such as humility, compassion, and courage. His counterpart, Vash the Stampede, takes on an almost Christ-like role with his insistence on minimizing the suffering of others as much as possible, even if it’s to his own detriment. All three of Vash’s companions — Nicholas D. Wolfwood, Meryl Stryfe, and Milly Thompson — are akin

to disciples in the way they follow Vash on his travels and learn lessons alongside him. The character arc of Vash’s twin brother, Millions Knives, is even comparable to Lucifer and his fall from grace in the book of Isaiah.

Notice any patterns here? Anime is just the Bible with some flourish! For every example mentioned here, there are ten more examples that I couldn’t fit in. Anime is our last shot at getting church attendance numbers up, and although it’s a bit of a long game, I think that we still have a chance to turn things around for the better. If you approach anyone under the age of 25, then there’s a decent chance that they’re a fan of anime or are at least somewhat familiar with it. This is good! It means that our subliminal messaging has a higher chance of reaching them and drawing them into the faith! The battle doesn’t end there, though. We can’t simply rest on our laurels and presume that this will be enough to revitalize Catholicism as a whole. No, we need to continue shoehorning God’s word into everything we possibly can. This brings me to my ultimate proposal: a mobile gacha game where all the playable characters are saints. I don’t mean making the characters into anime girls who are based on saints, I mean I want a realistic rendition of Teresa of Avila except she’s got a sword and a magical familiar this time. Additionally, the primary benefit of developing a game with in-game purchases is that we can use that money to fund the Vatican. I know that Vatican City alone generates more wealth than the pope could ever need, but we could generate more, I think. I’m open to criticism on this idea, as long as none of those criticisms disagree with me or suggest that the pope doesn’t need any more money. The pope needs all the money, and to suggest otherwise is heresy. Either way, I look forward to hearing everyone’s feedback and continued investment in our Catholicism revitalization project. Blessings be upon you and your Crunchyroll account!



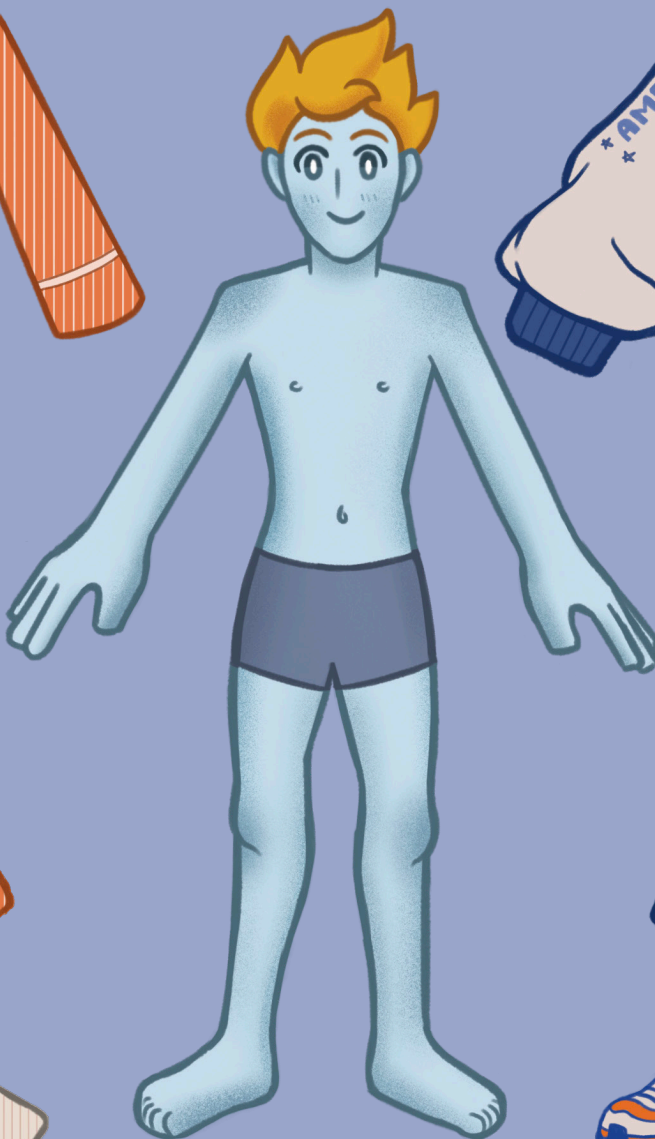
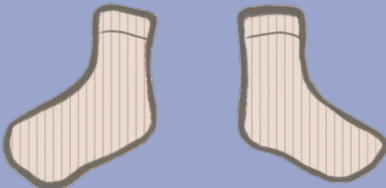
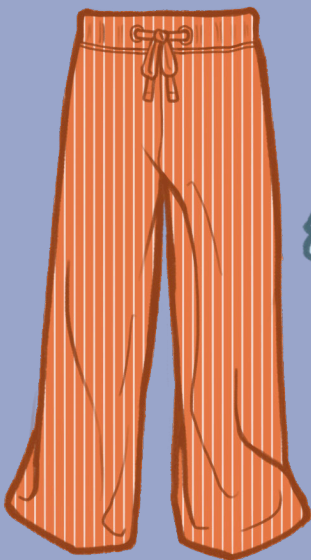
MICKEY DOLPHIN

junior | atec

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



COMET CLOSET





HELP TEMOC GET DRESSED! CUT OUT HIS OUTFITS AND HAVE FUN :)

The North Side

by: connor le



This is one way to keep warm.

AMP

ampatutd@gmail.com

Follow us on Instagram @AMPUTD

Follow us on Twitter @AMPatUTD

ampatutd.com