

SEPTEMBER 2021 | ISSUE 8

# NDUB STUDENT PRESS

OFFICIAL STUDENT NEWSLETTER OF NWSS



**SPACEBOY MAKSI:  
NDUB'S UP-AND-COMING  
SPOTIFY STAR**

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# THE SIDE DOOR: OPERATION VARSITY BLUES

## BY SUHANI HANS

As a member of New Westminster Secondary School's graduating class of 2021, I have managed to survive the notoriously harrowing "application season." Between rereading essays and personal profiles until they were fully ingrained in my brain, and constantly refreshing my application status—it is an understatement to say what a relief it is to have made it out the other side.

College admissions has become more about prestige rather than a journey of educational fulfillment. Do I want to go to Harvard because they have the best programs, tools, and learning environment for me to thrive, or do I want to go so I can put "Harvard '25" in my Instagram bio? Looking at the origin of the word "prestige": It was borrowed from the French language in 1656, initially meaning "a conjurer's trick," creating the connotation of deceit. In the 19th century, it developed an extended sense of "blinding or dazzling influence." That change, in turn, influenced the term "prestigious," which now simply means "illustrious or esteemed," a definition fitting to describe the college admission dream.

In the U.S., the stakes are higher than ever, with most Ivy League schools having an acceptance rate of less than 10%. Given the demand for impossible test scores, impeccable extracurriculars, as well as the ever-growing competition, it is no surprise that the entire college admissions process has been gamified, driven by both greed and the fear of missing out. It was these very factors which precipitated this scandal, prompting wealthy and influential parents to exploit the system using means only available to them.

### The Front Door vs. The Back Door

It is said there are two ways to gain entrance to an elite university in the U.S.—through the "Front Door" or the "Back Door." The "Front Door" entails the standard, ethical process of getting into an elite school based on academic merit. The "Front Door" is the method used by most students, in which they showcase genuine, outstanding academic achievement, exceptional community work, and extracurricular activities, which provide the foundation for a distinguished application. The "Back Door" method is only accessible to the wealthiest of the 1%, necessitating a multi-million dollar donation from the parents to their child's school of choice. In order to get their kids into Ivy League schools such as Harvard or Stanford, parents have paid over \$45 million as a direct "donation" to the school, in an attempt to secure a spot for their child. Despite this radical form of indirect bribery by their parents, these students are still not guaranteed admission to these elite universities, and in some cases are denied. This lack of certainty and the extreme monetary measures involved with the "Back Door" method led to the creation of a new path, one that guaranteed a spot for hundreds of thousands of dollars versus millions of dollars, which further rigged the college admissions experience: The Side Door.

### Rick Singer's Side Door Guarantee

Originally a traditional college prep coach, Rick Singer coined the term "Side Door" in his organization The Key, a college counselling and preparation service. In 2013, Singer established the Key Worldwide Foundation, presenting it as a charity; however, it has now been proven that this was merely a front for his web of unethical ways to guarantee college admissions for the children of the wealthy. This charity was a means for Singer to distribute the money he received from affluent parents and filter out bribes to various university administrators to secure spots for these kids. Parents would pay Singer anywhere between \$200,000 and \$6.5 million to ensure their child would attend the elite university of their choice—this was a significantly lower cost option than the "Back Door" option, which could not guarantee results, thus making the "Side Door" the ideal scheme.

### What is the "Side Door"?

The "Side Door" method of admissions entailed many illegal and unethical practices which Singer used in providing guaranteed admission for the students. In the U.S., there are three primary factors which are considered when an application is being evaluated: the student's overall grades, their extra-curriculars, and their standardized testing scores (the SAT and ACT). Singer had managed to find ways to fabricate aspects of all three of these elements, as well as work with internal associates to further manipulate and deceive the system.

Singer instructed parents to fabricate falsified documents stating that their children had learning disabilities; thus, allowing them extended time to write exams such as the SAT and ACT, giving them an unfair advantage over other students. He also worked with Standardized Testing proctors, ensuring certain officers were working where his client's students were taking their exams. Singer had these proctors correct the student's exams, manipulating their scores until they were within the desired range for these elite universities.

Singer also falsified records of extra-curricular activities, creating a cartel of college athletics administrators who received bribes in exchange for securing spots for these undeserving students. He targeted the athletic department heads and coaches of smaller-tier sports such as sailing, water-polo, and volleyball, knowing that suspicious activity in these departments was likely to go unnoticed. After providing a "donation" to these programs, which would be pocketed by those involved in the scheme, Singer would ask these coaches to secure spots for certain students, providing photo-shopped pictures of his client's children playing that specific sport. The bribed coaches would then vouch for these students as stellar recruits to the admissions department, with department heads (also bribed by Singer) handling any potential questions or concerns. Singer had expanded this web to reach some of the most elite schools in America, bribing college athletics administrators and department heads from Stanford, Yale, USC, Georgetown, and UCLA among several other universities. What made this scheme work was that it was quite rare for the admissions department to communicate with the athletics department on these specific cases.

### The Accused and the Wealthy.

From celebrities to CEOs, some of America's most beloved faces were caught in Singer's web of deceit. Singer preyed on the fears and insecurities burgeoning in these parents during the notorious "application season"—a time already filled with many sentiments of self-doubt and anxiety felt by both parents and their children. He instilled and enabled these parents' doubts, undermining their children's abilities to make it on their own, insisting they would need his help. In the case of Emmy and Golden Globe winning actress Felicity Huffman, her daughter had the scores and extracurriculars to make it on her own, but it was Singer who persisted. He expressed that she did not have the grades and would never be able to gain admissions without his help.

One of the most shocking reveals amidst this scandal was the fall of a favourite childhood star, Lori Loughlin, who played Aunt Becky from the television series Full House. Loughlin and her husband, Mossimo Giannulli, were accused of paying Singer over \$500,000 in bribes to have both their daughters Isabella Rose Giannulli and "Olivia Jade" Giannulli admitted to USC. Singer photo-shopped photos of Olivia Jade on a rowing machine, pretending she was a member of the crew team allowing her to gain entrance through Singer's "Side Door," also involving bribes to the university's athletics department. Upon receiving an acceptance letter from USC, Jade's counsellor was contacted by a USC admissions administrator as part of the routine procedure; however, when her counsellor heard from the USC administrator that Jade was an active member of the crew team, he expressed he had no knowledge that she had ever played the sport.

### After the Dust Settles

When Morrie Tobin, an LA based financier, was accused of a financial fraud case, he presented a tip regarding the Yale soccer coach, Rudy Meredith, who accepted \$860,000 in bribes over three years in exchange for college acceptances. This led Meredith to expose Singer's operation to the FBI, who was later arrested in 2018. Singer agreed to cooperate for the FBI, helping them to catch those involved in the scheme including many wealthy and influential families in America, in exchange for a lesser sentence. Over 50 members of Singer's web involved in the College Admissions Scandal have been charged, with the sentencing for these affluent parents ranging from two weeks to several months of jail time. Ironically, the man behind this entire operation, Rick Singer is currently a free man, living in Sacramento following the scandal. His trial will be scheduled after all the accused are sentenced and convicted, which could take much longer than desired. This leaves us with this final question: Why would these people who have everything, risk it all for a college admission? Why would these wealthy families risk their reputation, their lifestyle, and their credibility for an acceptance at a school just as good as any other?

The irony in this is that while these universities were considered the victims in this scandal, they seem to have benefited the most from it. Stanford received over \$770,000 in donations from Singer's operation which they were allowed to keep and use at their

discretion. This scandal only further increased the prestige of these schools, as we have seen how these wealthy and affluent members of society are willing to commit fraud and risk going to jail just so their children could be admitted to these schools—making them appear even more exclusive. Despite the closure of the “Side Door,” the “Back Door” entrance to universities remains open and a viable option for the extremely wealthy. With the dust settling, it is clear that the true victims in this situation are the hardworking and virtuous students who are treading their way through the treacherous waters of “application season.” These are the students who work day and night to gain their admission through the “Front Door.” The College Admissions Scandal should be taken as a learning experience for these elite universities to reflect on the competitive culture they have enabled through their rigorous application process. Perhaps this is the ideal opportunity for post-secondary institutions to reconsider how they evaluate students, and modernize the traditional “Front Door” entrance.



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# SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

## BY MAKENA THOMAS

At the age of five, most kids walk into a school for the first time. Several children may weep as they cling to their parents, while others confidently walk through the doors. Regardless of any confidence portrayed, we're all slightly nervous on our very first day. Parents may be frightened or occasionally shed a tear as they watch their child walk away. No one can control what goes on within these walls; no teacher has their eyes on every student constantly. However, in elementary school, students are monitored closely. Any form of bullying or harassment will most likely be spotted and dealt with accordingly.

As the years go on and we progress to middle and high school we get more freedom. There's more choices, less supervision, but unfortunately some people take advantage of this leniency. Cruel words are carelessly thrown around, slurs are normalized, and suddenly it's acceptable to ridicule a classmate because of their appearance or ethnicity. The blatant disrespect and harassment many students receive from fellow acquaintances becomes an everyday occurrence. The reality of NDUB is not like the cliché teen movies of the 80s, 90s and early 2000s, where the protagonist speaks up against the malicious popular kids. At NDUB, you witness or experience vindictive acts and behaviour by countless people as you walk through the halls. How did harassment become incessant on our school grounds? This behaviour is so normalized that it's gotten to the point where victims feel safer remaining quiet. If you muster up the courage to speak up, it feels like the entire school is turning against you.

Personally, I've witnessed countless instances where boys have tormented other boys, and girls persistently have tortured other girls. Nevertheless, the most concerning and common issue is how guys treat the women in our school. I'm not saying boys are the only problem, because girls can be wicked as well, but I can guarantee you that more girls feel unsafe in our school than any cisgendered man ever will.

Unfortunately, this is the reality that many NDUB students face. There's constant anxiety, stress, paranoia, and the feeling that nothing can be done. It's not just one person who's at fault, it's anyone who's ever witnessed a vile act and remained complacent. We've hit rock bottom, so it's only up from here. We need to spread more awareness, educate on the proper definition of harassment and assault. Part of the issue is that people are unaware of what their actions and words can do to a person. Another part of the problem is that NWSS students don't have proper sex education. P.E teachers are supposed to cover health but several of my acquaintances have never had a health class at our high school; that's a major issue. An additional solution could be to have speakers come into the school, survivors of assault and harassment, so the persecutors could understand how their actions may affect someone long-term. Closer supervision in hallways and class would also be extremely beneficial.



I started a petition a few weeks ago regarding this issue, and was blown away by the response. I'm so proud of all my fellow classmates who came forward with stories and so grateful for the 800+ people who've signed the petition. It even managed to catch the admin's eye and they're taking the issue very seriously. In fact, several other students and I are now having weekly meetings with administrative members to further discuss the necessary actions that need to be taken. The school needs to recognize that no person should feel the need to hide a hoodie in their locker because a male classmate constantly makes remarks about their chest. No person should have to wait in their classroom for their friends to arrive because if they walk in the halls alone they'll gain an unwanted follower. No person should be forced to just shrug off the catcalling and inappropriate comments that are thrown at them, and no person should feel unsafe in a building that's meant to be a place of education and growth. All in all, we need to do better. Every student, and every teacher needs to step up. We need to fix this problem before it becomes irreversible.

# MEET SPACEBOY MAKSI, NDUB'S UP-AND-COMING SPOTIFY STAR

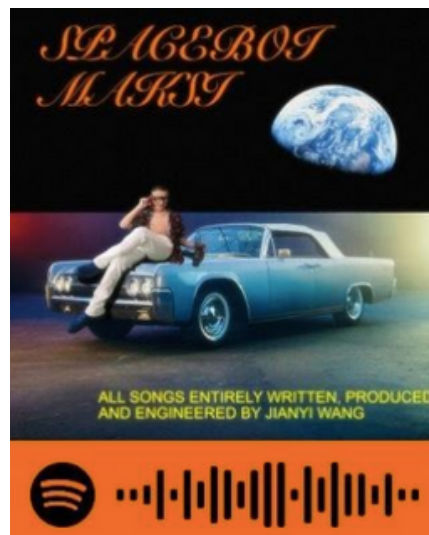
BY YVONNE ILAO

For those who enjoy R&B, funk, indie rock, or trap music, and are seeking new artists to listen to, look no further. Max Wang, who uses the stage name Spaceboy Maksi, is a musician and recording artist who recently graduated from NWSS. His first EP, *Thunder Vacation*, was released in 2020.

*Thunder Vacation* combines the rich instrumentation of indie rock with the hard bass and beats of trap music. Its beat provides energy and drive to the accompaniment, which in turn incorporates innovative chord progressions that surpass much of today's popular music in terms of musical complexity.

At times it feels as if the listener is surrounded by layers of lush, ethereal sound. Max's vocals are raw and passionate, and the bass in "Call Me" and "Bubble and Tea" is groovy beyond belief. All in all, *Thunder Vacation* succeeds in creating an electric, dynamic atmosphere that defies categorization into a single genre.

I spoke with Max about the EP and his music career:



## How would you describe your music style?

When I first started producing music, it was mainly trap/R&B music, because they were what I listened to the most, and trap music, in particular, was easy to make. Just recently, I started to explore other types of music—both as a music creator and a listener. I like to mix different genres together.

## What made you decide to start producing music? Which artists, and what genres of music would you say have influenced you?

I started writing music in middle school. When I came to Canada, I was eager to complete my music in more polished forms so I could distribute it and share it with others. However, I did not have the money to hire professional music producers and I did not want to rely on other people to finish my songs, so I started learning music production on the internet and from books. During different stages of my music journey, I was inspired by different musicians and music genres. But as of this moment, I would say Bee Gees is my current favorite band, and 80s/70s disco music's production is what I'm trying to study.

## MEET SPACEBOY MAKSI, NDUB'S UP-AND-COMING SPOTIFY STAR

**I understand that you are self-taught, which is pretty impressive. What was your process when learning how to produce music, specifically your instrumentals? What were some of the challenges you encountered?**

Music production these days is pretty straightforward and simple. Most people produce music digitally, meaning there are rarely actual instruments involved other than a computer. And producers these days only need to know how to use the software, the chord progressions, and drum patterns. Before I started learning production, I already had some knowledge in chords, so learning to produce for me has always been learning the software and some drum patterns.

**What inspired your EP, *Thunder Vacation*? Can you describe the emotions you felt while writing and recording the songs?**

Every song in *Thunder Vacation* is unique and inspired by different things. Together, they don't have much of a collective theme. The inspiration behind the most popular song in this EP, "Call Me" is interesting. I wrote this song when I was 15 years old. At the time, I was watching the sitcom *Friends* for the first time. Somewhere in the first season, Rachel got mad at Ross for making a list to compare her with another girl. Then, there was this rainy night in New York City where Ross tried to call Rachel but she wouldn't answer, so he called the radio station to play a song for her. I was just clicked by the plot and I wrote down the lyrics:

*"I look through the window, waiting for your call.  
Rain of New York, blur the world.  
Turning on the radio, the song that we wrote.  
How come a person you love, pretend she doesn't know you."*

And these lines became the first version of "Call Me" that I released in 2018. However, in the new version that is included in *Thunder Vacation*, these lyrics were replaced, but you can still see how "Call Me" is inspired by that episode of *Friends*.

Another fun fact about *Thunder Vacation* is that I made the entire EP in the summer prior to the release. Before the summer I bought a new computer to make music, but while I was switching the files, my hard drive got damaged and I lost all my music projects — over 100 unfinished and finished songs. I always had this plan to release an album before senior year, but then I lost all my songs. I was devastated for a while. But I got over it quickly and spent the entire summer making music, sometimes for over 15 hours straight. In the end, I made a couple of new songs and remastered a few MP3 files I had in iCloud, and then released the EP.

# OPERA'S FUTURE IN NORTH AMERICA

## BY ELENA MASSING

**“Of all the noises known to man, opera is the most expensive.” - Molière**

How can we break away from the idea that all opera fanatics are old, rich, and white, when this statement is deeply rooted in history? The North American opera industry has its fair share of flaws, particularly racism, classism, and large companies' reluctance to produce contemporary works, that prevent it from reaching its full potential. The alarming decrease in live performance as a result of the pandemic will also hugely impact the industry—however, confronting these obstacles may be exactly what's needed to save the future of opera.

In order to understand opera's place in North America, one must understand its relation to musical theatre—a truly *American* art form. Opera, according to Britannica, is “a staged drama set to music in its entirety, made up of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.” There's a very fine line between opera and musical theatre, possibly no real difference at all; composer Stephen Sondheim explained, “The only thing I have to say about the difference between opera and musical theatre is that opera is musical theatre that takes place in an opera house in front of an opera audience. This is perhaps not as meaningless as it sounds. The opera audience brings different expectations to what they see and demands different things from the performers, which affects the casting and the approach to the work at hand.”

Art is deliberately created; when classifying something as an opera, creators will interact with the expectations of the audience. Some composers may choose to conform by writing something that is ‘traditionally operatic,’ whereas others may break the mold that exists as a result of past works and their commonalities. To employ metaphor, a tomato is a fruit. However, if one were to bite into a tomato expecting the sweetness of a fruit—a strawberry, for instance—they might be disappointed. If they instead ate it hoping for a vegetable, its taste would be closer to what they had anticipated. The tomato didn't change, rather the consumer altered their mindset. The difference between opera and musical theatre lies not in the art itself, but in the perception of the viewer.

Due to negative preconceptions of the art form, explicitly classifying a piece as an opera may reduce interest, both in terms of its content and its perceived audience. Perhaps younger people see opera as dated, hard to relate to, or an ‘old people’ thing. Though these aren't necessarily true, it's hard to convince people to let go of these stereotypes if they aren't willing to experience the *reality* of opera. If *Hamilton*, which, by definition, is an opera, had been advertised as such, would it still have seen the immense success that it did when classified as musical theatre? Due to its hip hop influences, one could argue that the show is targeted at a younger generation, and it's possible that if it had been called an ‘opera,’ people would form the wrong opinions beforehand, then feel less inclined to go and see it.

Even operas that are immensely popular today, such as *Carmen* or *La bohème*, were negatively received by critics and wealthy audience members upon first release due to the fact that they portrayed the lives of commoners. Over time, they have risen to the top of the opera world, along with countless other works now loved by millions, demonstrating an obvious shift in viewers' interests. Despite their ongoing success, it's clear that the classics are steadily growing dated. Though classics present universal themes of love, loss, and other aspects of the human experience, there are features unique to the time they were created, as well as being aimed at a different demographic than who may be viewing it now. Contemporary opera, on the other hand, takes ambitious new approaches to the art form, incorporating features that are more pertinent to the lives, events, and interests of the 21st century.

Mental health struggles affect everyone, but remain a stigmatized topic of conversation. That certainly hasn't stopped contemporary opera composers from tackling them in their writing. Ricky Ian Gordon's 2019 opera *Ellen West*, based on Frank Bidart's poem of the same title, follows the tragic, true story of a young woman and her psychiatrist working through her struggles with anorexia; her case was a foundation for eating disorder research, since very little was known about them during her life in the early 20th century. *The Center Cannot Hold* by Kenneth Wells also delves into mental illness, as it recounts law professor Elyn Saks' experiences with schizophrenia. Seeing characters and stories on stage that are highly misunderstood, perhaps even feared, helps one to figure out how to approach these issues in one's own life. Métis playwright Marie Clements, along with composer Brian Current, brings attention to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in her opera *Missing*. It takes place in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, as well as along the Highway of Tears, and includes lyrics in English and Gitksan. When expressed through art, these darker themes are, in some ways, more digestible, and inspire action to fight against the problems at hand.

There's one main issue: these operas aren't getting enough exposure, especially since large companies exclude them from their repertoire. North American companies rely on donors to support their productions, so solely producing approved content ensures that they can maintain close ties with their sponsors. This restricts creative teams to following the status quo of performing a cycle of tried-and-true classics; satisfying their donors and keeping audiences coming, but never exposing the general public to hidden gems of the past and completely neglecting contemporary composers.

In other parts of the world, opera is thriving. The United States has 125 opera houses spread across the country, as opposed to Germany's 89—keep in mind that it's about the same size as New Jersey and has a quarter of the United States' population. Opera is funded by the state in most of Europe, meaning that companies aren't as desperate to garner the support of the wealthy to stay afloat; they have more freedom in terms of content, and tend to stage a larger variety of shows, including the contemporary or experimental works excluded from North American repertoires.

When schools cut funding going towards arts and music programs, it reinforces the idea that art isn't important. When they're older, successful, and looking to donate to a worthy cause, they won't even consider giving to the arts, since they didn't develop that

love during childhood. There are surely, however, plenty of billionaires that expose their children to the arts, so longevity isn't necessarily the main problem—instead, the institutions that they're supporting will primarily reflect a highly wealthy demographic, meaning they won't be as responsive to everyone else. Even with all the donations accumulated from average people, opera houses are only able to survive as a result of massive sums of money from the mega-wealthy. Perhaps large opera companies actually *do* want to stage shows that are newer, or simply not mainstream, but recognize that doing so could put their funding at risk.

Additionally, while the fact that members of minority groups can be opera fanatics is true, their lives or interests tend not to be reflected in the opera's content, since they are less likely to be included within the wealthy donors funding it. Opera's diversity problem isn't limited to its viewers—minorities working within the industry face discrimination. Instead of being introduced to classical music during early childhood, many people of different ethnic backgrounds discover it later in life, meaning they're forced to work significantly harder than their white counterparts. The budget cuts to arts education in schools create even more barriers for children coming from low-income families. Companies don't always realize that minorities, because of their cultural upbringing, might not have the same experience as white performers, musicians, and other members of the creative team.

The Metropolitan Opera—the epitome of both opera and classism—certainly isn't known for its inclusivity. Despite George Gershwin insisting that *Porgy* feature Black singers in the leading roles, the Met, which had commissioned the opera, refused to put it on unless it instead starred white singers in blackface. *Porgy* premiered on Broadway in 1935, and the Met continued to ban Black performers until 1955. The company always had a white actor in blackface play the lead in *Otello*, as well, and didn't decide otherwise until 2015. Their first production of an opera by a Black composer is taking place during their 2021-22 season. Female composers are also frequently excluded from the Met's repertoire. In 2016, Kaija Saariaho became the second woman to have an opera presented at the Met, over a century since the first time in 1903.

The Met is a household name, but that doesn't make it an accurate reflection of the entire industry. Many local opera companies strive to provide opportunities for those who aren't recognized in larger institutions. Opera Mariposa is Canada's first entirely disability-led, disability-run opera company. They are committed to creating inclusivity in the arts by "providing subsidized tickets for underrepresented groups, and livestreaming shows around the world for those who cannot attend them in person." Unfortunately, local opera productions seem to be overlooked in favour of shows put on by larger institutions, despite still having high-calibre singers and musicians.

"One of the main functions of art is to provide a reflection of the society in which it is found. I absolutely believe that opera is thriving, because the new work being created and produced is committed to that process of reflecting....with reflection. Opera will be around for a long time to come, and if we ever get this pandemic out of the way, people will be coming to it," said Canadian opera director Brian Deedrick, when asked about the future of opera. Live performances may seem like a thing of the past, but opera



companies worldwide have defied impossible odds in order to continue producing art. As a result of current limitations and the cancellation of their 2020-21 season, the Met is streaming recorded performances from their archives as part of a “Nightly Met Opera Streams” series. Each show remains accessible for 23 hours, and anyone can watch them without cost. Vancouver Opera is trying out a “Digital Season.” They continue to stage new performances in compliance with provincial safety measures, which means that casts typically have less than 10 members, musicians and crew are kept to a minimum, and everyone maintains substantial distance from others. The operas can be viewed online by anyone who purchases a subscription to all four shows, or a single ticket to the opera of their choice—student discounts are being offered.

Digital options, regardless of how incredible they may be, may never measure up to the magic of live performance. Even so, online streaming has had countless benefits, and could potentially be a good long-term strategy. Hefty admission prices that once prevented people from attending are significantly lower, with some services even being free of charge. This has taken a toll on artists who rely on these funds to make their living, but on the bright side, overall production costs may be lower, as well—sets are simpler, casts are smaller, and audience space isn't needed, so shows can be staged in smaller, less expensive facilities. With the option to do several takes, it's also easier to implement special effects, or mix art mediums that couldn't otherwise be combined. In addition to providing more creative freedom, digital productions ensure that audiences have time flexibility; operas are available for viewing at any time, making them easy to slot into a busy schedule. Though a trip to the opera house is thrilling for some, viewers who may feel out of place—specifically younger people and POC—can alleviate their anxiety surrounding the environment by watching from their own home. Younger audiences are also already familiar with technology, so streaming services are easily accessible.

Why bother saving opera? Why put in the effort to resurrect an arguably “dying” art? It is unlike anything else—comedic or tragic, it is the epitome of theatrical beauty and a testament to the skill required to produce musical greatness. The future of opera could be promising, if the industry chooses to seize the opportunity to diversify their content. Whether the solution lies within digital distribution, local and diverse companies, or a combination of these and more, opera can no longer rest on its laurels. If opera could become a subversion of its stereotype, the possibilities of radical, unexplored avenues can only lead to a revitalization of this classic musical tradition.



# NEVE'S RECENT READS

## *We Sold Our Souls* by Grady Hendrix

For those who have read a couple of these book reviews before, chances are you'll recognize the author of this issue's book, Grady Hendrix. Having also read and reviewed a couple of his other books, *My Best Friend's Exorcism* and *The Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires*, I decided to check out another one of his uniquely eccentric horror novels. *We Sold Our Souls* revolves around an exciting set of elements (being a horror story about metal, monsters, and misogyny), when former metal guitarist Kris Pulaski is pulled back into the throes of her old band, Dürt Würk, and ends up meeting her ex-bandmates for the first time since the '90s. Ever since Kris signed that strange contract and Dürt Würk's frontman, Terry, parted ways with the band, it seems as though Kris has never had any luck since that night. In fact, Terry



is the only former band member who has managed to achieve a successful life, having formed a new band named Koffin that took the world by storm. When Koffin announces a revival tour, followed by the biggest metal music festival in history (an imitation of Woodstock, named Hellstock '19), Kris knows that something has been off ever since the night they signed those contracts, and sets off to get the help of the past Dürt Würk members to uncover what happened all those years ago.

Although it could just be personal preference, this novel has a genius setting/theme of heavy metal and horror that had me intrigued from the start. But *We Sold Our Souls* is hiding a lot more beneath its simple synopsis. It's a story about myth and darkness, old friendships turned rotten, and how one woman labelled as "crazy" and "jealous" gets to the bottom of things with just an old guitar and some unlikely companions. It's an ode to all those conspiracies about rock music and the devil, while also humorously insinuating that "sell-outs" are in cahoots with demons from hell. (We could probably say this about black metal too, because I'll be honest. Does any of that music sound like the product of rainbows and hugs?)

Side note: If these Grady Hendrix books have piqued your interest, another recommendation is his 2014 novel, *Horrorstör*. It appears as a furniture catalogue, laid out with design plans and blueprints, but holds something much darker. Just think of a haunted Ikea.

## NEVE'S LATEST LISTENS

the parts we could not abandon by cutsleeve

In a western-centric society, Asian rock bands are not seen all too much, especially not an Asian band consisting of all LGBTQ members. But hailing from Toronto, Canada, is the queer, East Asian band cutsleeve, their first EP having debuted with the energy of a door being kicked down. The five-piece is made up of drummer Lian McMillan, lead guitarist Hannah Winters, bassist Hillary Fong, lead vocalist Chanel Fu, and rhythm guitarist Amanda Wong, the group having seasoned in Toronto's DIY scene of punk and indie. Following cutsleeve's first performance together in 2018 at the Queer Asian



Youth Pride Stage, this EP was put into the works and came out in 2020. Their music is a perfect alternative rock blend of indie and punk, all six songs of the EP standing out and having their own unique sound—with tracks like “flesh” being softer, while “(don’t) like me” is on the louder side. But each song is complemented by Fu’s sweet and soulful vocals, and the instrumentals filled with just enough angst to hit you hard without being overwhelmingly loud. In addition to cutsleeve’s musicality comes their lyricism and the topics of their songs, alluding to the struggles of and the experiences that come with mental health, queerness, and being an East Asian POC. Both “yellow fever” and “durian eyes,” reference the fetishization of East Asians paired with discrimination across western society—“if you’ve got durian eyes/Are sick of being fetishized/Who am I?” cutsleeve’s music is an ode to representation and the act of being seen, no matter how underrated the band may appear, and helping to expand the space for Asians and queer individuals in rock music. On a personal note, what I love most about their music is that I can begin to see myself, a half-Asian, in rock for once.

**Singles:**

“STFU!” by Rina Sawayama

“LUFU” by Øzi

“Lotus Eater” by Hotel Pablo



# CLARISSA'S ALBUM PICKS

## Head In The Clouds by 88rising

Asians are currently facing an international rise in hate crimes, spurred on by misconceptions about COVID-19, but this is especially prominent in North America. For this reason, I'd like to showcase some of the often overlooked, highly talented Asian artists in music. 88rising is an Asian-American group that makes pop/rap music. Within the group are several well-known solo artists, such as Joji, Rich Brian, NIKI, and many more. It is a platform for Asian-Americans to demonstrate their musical talent—it's inspiring to see so many people with Asian roots flourishing in the industry.



Each of the members of 88rising took part in this album in their own way. Though they have only made two albums in the span of six years, these albums are certainly worth the listen. Their debut was called "Head In The Clouds"; an intriguing title, and a perfect album for late night drives with friends. Even though this album only contains 17 songs—running around 56 minutes overall—it's one of my favourites of all time. Seeing so many Asian artists coming together demonstrates an incredible sense of solidarity within the community. However, the rise of violent hate crimes poses a threat to even the most famous of Asian people—a person will never know if they could become a victim. Despite this fear, this album and its creators demonstrate resilience, strength, and talent.

### **Singles:**

"Miss Connection" by The Keystones

"Something" by Dayglow

"Summer Snow" by Dawson Hollow





Be the Cowboy by Mitski



Mitski, an American indie rock artist with a Japanese background, started making music in 2012. Her latest album, *Be The Cowboy*, was released on August 17, 2018. Even though this album was released almost three years ago, it is still one of my all-time favourites. She kicks it off with "Geyser"—a strong starter is crucial to get the listeners in the mood, and Mitski does so flawlessly. Her most well-known song is "Nobody." It may be overplayed on TikTok, but it is still an uplifting, high-energy song (if you ignore its extremely melancholic lyrics). To be

frank, her whole discography is depressing. Mitski's greatest asset is her ability to craft lyrics that inspire you to think beyond their surface value. That is what makes the album a masterpiece; it evokes intense emotions within its listeners. In this case, most people will recognize Mitski's pain and sadness, but that depends on your personal perception of this album. In my opinion, out of Mitski's five albums so far, *Be The Cowboy* surpasses all the others. Go give it a try, and maybe even have a good cry!

**Singles:**

"Grapes of Wrath" by Weezer

"Taking What's Not Yours" by TV Girl

"Tangerine" by Tim Atlas



# THE BENEFITS OF IMMUNIZATION

## BY RIONA SARKER (UNICEF CLUB)

Vaccines are some of the most valuable developments made in public health; protecting large groups of people against diseases that will cause them harm. Unfortunately, not everyone has the same level of access to this life-saving technology, and a portion of those that do are skeptical of using them. However, there are a multitude of benefits to getting vaccinated, both personal and societal, and these benefits only ring more true in the time of COVID-19.

Getting vaccinated greatly reduces the risk of contracting diseases caused by viruses, especially ones with dangerous long-term effects, such as disability or death. In this society, paralysis caused by polio or blindness caused by smallpox, for instance, can seriously alter someone's life and future. Given the lack of accessibility in our society, disability makes it significantly harder to function alongside the rest of society without assistance; this could mean narrowing your job prospects. Evidently, avoiding death is considered a major benefit of vaccination. Another benefit is that you protect yourself from contracting, carrying, and spreading the virus. This means that you also protect the people you interact with from catching something from you. During this pandemic, the guilt that people feel for contracting and for giving someone COVID-19 has been highlighted; an important note to think about when considering whether or not to get a vaccination.

Vaccination also protects against preventable deaths en masse, especially for children, who have weaker immune systems and less agency over their living situation. In the last 20 years, UNICEF has helped distribute vaccines to about 760 million children worldwide, which has prevented 13 million deaths, and no doubt improved the living standards of many communities. In addition to that, if done successfully, vaccination can eradicate diseases. As of today, the only disease that has been completely eradicated is smallpox, but polio and measles are headed in that direction. Smallpox was a deadly disease that mutilated its infected and was characterized by a red, bumpy rash that could grow to cover the majority of one's body. It was eradicated in 1980, and since then, around 150-200 million deaths have been prevented thanks to successful vaccination. This is considered to be one of the biggest achievements in international public health in history.

Given the personal and societal benefits of getting vaccinated in combination with the urgency of the situation, if you are unsure of whether to get vaccinated against COVID-19, the answer is that you absolutely should. COVID-19 is a disease that can have adverse long-term effects on the infected, such as damage to the heart, lungs, and brain. The rest of the long-term effects remain unknown; it is a myth that a total recovery from the disease is guaranteed. This uncertainty around just how bad the disease can be is not something to gamble on, especially considering that you may also spread it to your loved ones if you contract it. It can change your life, and theirs, in ways we are not aware of yet.

## THE BENEFITS OF IMMUNIZATION

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There is a global effort to bring vaccines to our communities, and we should not waste it. By the end of 2021, UNICEF and COVAX aim to provide equitable access to 2 billion COVID-19 vaccines to each of the 190 countries involved. By getting vaccinated, you contribute to the global effort to curb rates of COVID-19. If you are eligible to get vaccinated, please seize the opportunity and do so. People are working hard to provide vaccines for you and citizens like you. Don't be another bed in a hospital if you have a chance to prevent it. Don't be a risk to the cashiers and other employees you interact within the grocery store. A vaccine in this era is golden, and the chance to protect yourself against COVID-19 is one not everyone has.

# PALESTINIAN HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

## BY ANDREW WANG (UNICEF CLUB)

The modern day world is a turbulent, unstable place, with an unending need for humanitarian aid. Natural disaster, famine, political unrest, conflict and war thrust ordinary people into a struggle to survive and reclaim a sense of normalcy in their lives. Children are among the most vulnerable in such circumstances, unable to provide for and protect themselves from harm without the stability of everyday life. The reescalation of violence against Palestine has threatened the safety of many children, in numerous ways.

### OVERVIEW

Thousands of children in Palestine have been severely traumatized, 874 have been wounded, and around 70 have been killed as a result of recent Israeli airstrikes. Spirits are low, and families are discussing the terms on which they want to die, resigned to the possibility of death. Children are growing up in Palestine watching friends and family be killed, and some are suddenly being orphaned and left in an environment too degraded by violence to have supporting programs in place to take care of them. If adults are struggling to get by in such circumstances, what chance do children have? Children, dependent on their guardians, with no means of providing for themselves, and little life experience to get by with?

### DAMAGE TO INFRASTRUCTURE

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) centers were also targeted in the attacks, causing a 25-50% decrease in clean water supply, or a lack of access to these services for 1.2 million Palestinians. Additionally, there are barely any mental health services available to these distressed children; none of UNICEF's outreach centers or family centers are operational and able to provide services due to hostility in the area. Around 57 schools have been damaged and shut down as well, impacting well over half a million children. Another concerning consequence is the lack of power supply in Gaza, which has resulted in the temporary shutdown of one hospital. Casualty evacuation is difficult as the roads are covered in debris. In the midst of such an influx of wounded, in combination with the numbers of the infected by COVID-19 and the already poor healthcare system, it is crucial that these resources get up and running as soon as possible. Clean water, healthcare and education are basic resources that should be guaranteed to every child, yet, none of them are in Palestine.

### UNICEF's RESPONSE

Currently, UNICEF's partners are setting up help lines, social media platforms, and arranging help kits to support the children. However, there are tens of thousands of calls and messages, and only so many people to respond to them. UNICEF has also restored minimum functionality to some targeted WASH centers, and is working to provide WASH supplies to the most vulnerable. They are rebuilding schools distributing supplies to



children, and communicating with their partners to provide much-needed aid.

Despite the urgency of the situation, UNICEF's 2021 appeal for Palestine is underfunded. The regular reader may not be able to donate huge amounts of money to this cause, but governments and companies can, which is why contributing to public concern for Palestinians is so powerful.

# CHILD PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES

**BY RIONA SARKER (UNICEF CLUB)**

The goal of Child Protection in Emergencies is to prevent abuse, neglect, and violence against children during emergencies. This is particularly relevant in the state of Palestine, where children's rights are being violated. Children as young as 12 years old are becoming victims to various forms of ill-treatment, including but not limited to: detention, painful hand ties, and even torture.

This topic is important to explore because children in Palestine are living under constant fear of abuse, neglect, and violence. A study conducted about children living in the Gaza Strip showed that they are traumatized by the constant violence going on around them, with 88% of them being afflicted with fear. Even more concerning is that Hamas, a Palestinian militant organization, is even encouraging Palestinian children to take part in the battle against Israel, going as far as to encourage suicide. Children's rights, even to life, are being violated in this time of emergency.

The main reason why child protection is inadequate during these times in Palestine is due to the lack of funding of child support systems in Palestine. As the government relies heavily on international aid to fund these systems, they are often not enough to support the vast number of children who are suffering every day.

UNICEF SoP (State of Palestine) is working towards strengthening children's rights in Palestine in various ways. UNICEF SoP is looking at possible legal and policy reforms that would strive to create a more child-friendly system, including preventive measures. Another important point is implementing stronger psychological support facilities for children and their caretakers. Both of these goals that UNICEF SoP is working towards are directed towards providing aid and care for children who are victims of abuse, neglect, and violence.

Israel is responsible for enforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as per the international court of justice (The occupying power is responsible for the human rights in the occupied area). However, Israel continues to neglect these responsibilities, leading to violations of Child Rights. UNICEF is working towards strengthening monitoring and documentation on violations of child rights, measuring the impact on children, and demanding international humanitarian laws be followed more closely.

# HOW TO MAKE A CUPCAKE BOUQUET

## BY YVONNE ILAO



*Note: you only need 6 cupcakes for the bouquet. I modified the Italian meringue buttercream recipe to make enough frosting for 12 cupcakes as the measurements were inconvenient to divide by 4. As well, it is a good idea to have a few “practice” cupcakes on which to learn the piping technique first.*

*It is possible to use American buttercream in place of Italian meringue buttercream, however it would likely melt more easily.*

### INGREDIENTS + EQUIPMENT:

#### Cupcakes:

- paper muffin liners
- ½ box cake mix of any flavour, prepared according to instructions to make 12 cupcakes  
(divide the dry ingredients by weight using a scale and use half the wet ingredients; if the recipe calls for 3 eggs, use 1 egg and 1 egg yolk)

#### Italian meringue buttercream frosting:

- Equipment — sugar thermometer, stand mixer
- 2 lg egg whites, room temperature
- pinch salt
- ⅛ tsp cream of tartar
- ¾ cups granulated sugar, divided
- 40 ml water
- 1 cup butter, softened, cut into tbsp-sized cubes
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- flavouring extracts of your choice (optional)
- food colouring of choice

## HOW TO MAKE A CUPCAKE BOUQUET

### For the bouquet:

- styrofoam ball
- 18 toothpicks
- tissue paper (green + any colour of your choice)
- basket or flower pot with a diameter slightly larger than the styrofoam ball

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Prepare cupcakes according to instructions. Use paper liners. Allow to cool completely.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer using a whisk attachment, beat egg whites, salt, and cream of tartar until opaque and foamy. Gradually add  $\sim\frac{1}{6}$  cup of sugar (use half a  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup measure) and beat until soft peaks form.
3. Meanwhile, add remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar and water in a medium saucepan. Swirl — do not stir — to combine and bring to a boil over medium heat. Once the sugar syrup reaches 235°-240°F (soft ball stage), remove from heat and allow the bubbles to subside.
4. Drizzle immediately down the side of the mixer bowl while continuing to beat the meringue. Beat until stiff peaks and run the mixer until the meringue is cool. If needed, refrigerate the bowl for 5-10 minutes.
5. Switch to a paddle attachment and continue to beat. Add butter cubes one at a time. If meringue looks soupy, the butter is likely melting; refrigerate the bowl for a few minutes. Add salt and vanilla, as well as any other flavourings. Beat on high speed until smooth.
6. Add drops of food colouring to the frosting. If you plan on using multiple colours, divide the frosting into multiple bowls and whisk in food colouring (note: it's much less tiring with a hand mixer). Prepare piping bags with appropriate tips and use a spatula to fill about halfway with frosting — do not overfill or it will be significantly harder to control piping. If you wish to create a multi-tone frosting, as seen in the photo above, fill both sides of the bag with even amounts of different colours, and pipe out the excess into a bowl until the desired effect is achieved.

### To pipe chrysanthemums



- Using a Wilton #352 or any medium or large V-shaped piping tip, hold the piping bag at an acute angle to the surface of the cupcake (less than 45°)
- Pipe small, linear petals outwards starting from the outer edge of the cupcake.
- As you approach the center, the piping angle will become more vertical.



# HOW TO MAKE A CUPCAKE BOUQUET

To pipe hydrangeas ----->

- Using a Wilton #21 or any similarly star-shaped piping tip, evenly pipe dots of frosting vertically in a swirl pattern starting from the center of the cupcake and extending outwards.



-----< To pipe roses

- Using a Wilton #104 or similarly-shaped piping tip, pipe a small mound vertically onto the center of the cupcake.
- Hold the piping bag horizontally, with the edge of the tip perpendicular to the surface of the cupcake, and pipe the inner rosebud tightly around the mound.
- Continue to pipe horizontally in small segments around the rosebuds, gradually increasing the length of each petal (it's easier to pipe with one hand, with the end of the bag tightly sealed).
- When you reach the outermost petals, turn the edge of the tip so that it is parallel to the cupcake in order to pipe flatter, rounder petals. Fill in any gaps.

To assemble

- If using a basket, you may need to cut the bottom of the styrofoam ball so that it lays flat inside. Line the basket or flower pot with tissue paper. Choose the six most presentable cupcakes. Use the muffin pan to trace the diameter of the cupcake onto a sheet of paper, then cut it out and use this to trace 6 rounds on the top of the ball. Be sure to place the rounds close together, so that the cupcakes will be as vertical as possible and will be less likely to fall. Insert three toothpicks halfway into each circle on the ball, and then carefully insert the protruding toothpicks into the bottom of each cupcake — this is why paper liners are necessary. Fix any squashed icing, and decorate with more tissue paper.

To store

- If using a flower pot, insert more toothpicks partially into the cupcakes and wrap with plastic wrap, making sure that the plastic does not smudge the frosting. If using a basket, wrap over the handle of the basket. Will last in the refrigerator for 5 days.



# WEIRD FOOD COMBINATIONS

## BY CLARISSA TANG

### 1. Apple Strudel with Cheese



The texture in this combination was similar to the cheese and lemon meringue pie from a previous issue. However, this time, the cheese was thicker so it did not taste as delicious. The cheese flavour started to overpower the apple strudel. I would rate it a **6/10**.



### 2. Salted Crackers with Kinder Bueno Mini Chocolate



This actually tasted pretty good! The Kinder Bueno mini chocolates never disappoint, so I am not surprised that it didn't taste bad with salted crackers. Overall, it was more salty than sweet, and had a crunchy texture too. This was definitely better than the apple strudel with cheese, and would 100% recommend it. It's an **8/10** from me.



**Winner: Salted Crackers with Kinder Bueno Mini Chocolate**

More weird food combinations are to come!

# THE FORGOTTEN

## SHORT STORY BY RICHARD KIM

I sliced through the boulder, leaving two molten halves. My hand gripped a glowing fiery red blade, slightly shaking from doing this all day. I was on quarry duty today, testing my strength, as well as the strength of the geomancers' boulders. The humidity of the quarry was only worsened by the sun beating down on my exposed skin. In my linen shirt and leather pants, I was sweating so much that I had to brush my forehead every few seconds to prevent the liquid from blurring my vision. It was far too hot for the brown linen jacket that finished my uniform, so I had tied it neatly around my waist. This quarry was situated in a sector that was filled with explosive plants and sweltering heat, so the Ministry of Zeo Arcaden sent lowly soldiers to work here. It was an important job, but not important enough to waste an entire regiment, just a few squads—especially given that people often went missing or were attacked in the sector's massive caverns.

"Hey, Sleepers, want to not get us yelled at by The Brick for slacking off?" The small, mousy boy that I'd met at the beginning of this gruelling course poked fun at my flaws by coming up with dreadful nicknames. "He's gonna come back from his break soon and I don't want to be the one to test the other elementals' abilities."

"Oh yeah, sorry, I just drifted off for a bit. Thanks Alwin. And what did I say about calling me names," I said, as I summoned my spell book and selected another spell to break bricks.

"But your regular name is so boring! Who in their right mind calls their child Elvan when they're not even an elf? That's like if I called myself Tulipflap, when I'm not a fairy!"

Alwin groaned as a small object flew at him and punched him in the gut. The boy had his jacket knotted over his stomach, so when his tiny assailant punched him, the knot drove deep into his stomach.

"That's a surname, Marble Brain! No wonder you're down here in quarry training with us instead of being in espionage training." The tiny fairy that had punched Alwin folded her arms, glaring at him. Her hummingbird wings kept her aloft, and her name, Melody, was stitched on her jacket. Alwin groaned while he writhed on the ground, clutching his stomach as an officer slid down the side of the quarry.

"Ms. Lotusdust, get him off the ground, now! You're not allowed to be assaulting your fellow trainees!" The officer chastised Melody, rushing over to our area. Alwin always called him "Brick" because of his hard head and square jaw.

"Seriously? Fine!" The fairy grumbled, placing her glowing hands on the Alwin's midsection. Her natural healing powers soothed his busted gut, erasing the slight bruises that she had caused. Alwin sighed, visibly more relaxed.

"Aww. You do like me," Alwin teased, as he gave the fairy a smug smile. Melody scowled, but continued to heal his wounds. When she was done, she lightly punched him on the arm and zipped back to her station as he rose to his feet.

"Alright scrubs, let's get back to work! I don't need slackers or sleepers; I need these rocks broken and those geomancers tested! I have a bet going with Captain Delano that I do not want to lose! I don't need to hear you whine, I just need you to do this," Brick



ordered as he smashed his head into a boulder, shattering it into a million pieces. As he raised his head, he looked a bit dazed, his forehead glowing green with magical protection.

"Let's go! We don't have all day!" The Brick stumbled a bit as he walked away.

I received a quartz block that dropped down from the chute above me, which I studied before deciding on the perfect spell to use. I exposed my hands to the sunlight, absorbing the solar energy, causing my hands to glow orange. I spread my hands to reveal an axe with a dual head, and a ball of flames connecting the two heads. I brought down the axe, gripping the Blazium handle, and broke the stone in half with one quick swing. I was about to make another weapon when suddenly the ground shook in the quarry. My new weapon was partially formed in my hand when the roof of the chamber of the geomancer opened up and several of them launched up into the air to engage the threat. I rushed to the area where the energy blast had occurred, where rubble had fallen. Brick broke the boulder that was pinning the leg of the kobold, Heppa, who was begging for help from others. Brick shattered the granite boulder with a glowing fist that left a trail of black energy with his swing. Heppa scrambled to hide behind me.

"I don't want to die, Jay! I still have so much to live for!" The kobold kept muttering frantically, gripping my shoulders as I tried to figure out how to get out of the crater. As another set of boulders shifted, I jumped onto one as it was falling but it was moving far too quickly.

*"The stories are lies, you can't climb falling rocks,"* I thought, as I hopped off the rock and onto the ground before it hit the ground, rolling to absorb the impact.

"What are we going to do?" Heppa asked, popping up from behind a fallen boulder. A geomancer ran to the side of the quarry. She was wearing orange-brown robes that went down to her knees, had a left-hand bronze and an emerald-green lion head gauntlet. The geomancer thrust her non-gauntleted hand forward and a stairway jutted outside of the quarry wall, letting all the miners and spell testers out safely. I threw Heppa up first halfway up the stairway before I jumped and shot jets of fire from my hands and feet to get to the top of the quarry.

"Hi," I said, rolling and standing to find myself in front of the geomancer. I brushed away the golden locks of her hair that blew in her face.

"Oh umm, hi! Wh-what... are we doing?" She stumbled back, flustered. I tried to steady her by grabbing her arms. Her dusty robes were velvety soft and smooth.

"I have to go but, uhm, nice talking to you!" I said, running past her and toward the booming sounds of battle. I ran through a cavern, running through all the combat spells that I could apply to this battle. As I thought of my battle strategies, my mind started to wander. I studied the glowing fungi around me. I stopped to scrape off the moss with a knife that I had removed from the geomancer's waist while she was distracted by my sudden landing. I remembered the fungi from the book my teacher forced us to read, for she was always a botanist at heart. I could never understand why she wanted us to know so much about different plants, but I'm glad she did, because a plan started to form in my head. I got to work, scraping moss then tying it together with strips of fabric

from my own ragged clothing. With my limited supplies, it was the best that I could do. At least both materials were flammable.

"Alteoom Elemictus!" I enchanted my little moss bundles to the top of the far entrance of the cave. My trap was almost ready. I found a series of large stalagmites that I could easily duck behind, out of sight. I drew upon the nearest source of natural heat, which wasn't difficult, since there seemed to be tiny lava rivers running through these caverns. I drew upon the lava's coursing power and blasted two rings into the floor with jets of white flames, creating a protection enchantment on the stalagmites. I ran to the far entrance where my bundles were attached and breathed in, then out. In. Out. Finally, I felt ready. I broke out of the cave into a spaious clearing, and was met with a boulder to the face. I ducked just in time, feeling the bottom of the rock brush my hair. There were giant boulders being flung and toxic clouds popping up everywhere. Even the ground was frozen, making it harder to move without slipping.

"Hey! Geomancers! Follow me!" I had to scream to be heard over the din of battle. That's when I finally saw what they were facing. The mages were pumping out all forms of poisons, and wore skull-like masks of pure white and ragged cloaks of dark blue, with some spots stained purple by the poison. Their eyes, which gave me a sense of dread and fear, seemed to be constantly crying an unfamiliar liquid. I gulped down my fear, then flung a volley of fireballs at the nearest squad of mages. They wailed an inhuman noise and started to give chase, and the rest of them seemed to follow like a hive mind. The geomancers also gave chase, sending pebbles like a hail storm, however, they were slowed down by a wall of poison, which blocked the entrance to the cave. Everything was going according to plan.

I turned, smirked, and pointed out the moss to them. The soldiers didn't seem to understand and thrust their hands forward, the elements battering me.

"Alright, alright, calm down!" I yelled and got up, swiping my arm over my mouth to get rid of the water that had hit me in the face. Thankfully, they hadn't used any poisons yet.

"Okay, okay," I said, snapping my fingers, which sent out a flurry of sparks, "now you can attack." I ran as fast as I could to the other side of the natural tunnel, my mind racing.

*"Please don't kill me. Please don't kill me. Please help me. Please let me run faster. Please, please, please, please."* My thoughts were racing as I slid behind a rock and protected my head. Explosions rung in my head as well as a high-pitched screech. After ten minutes of waiting for the ringing to stop, I looked up to see a drop of poison dripping from an outstretched hand.

"Good job for a former Destiny Guard. Pity that it wasn't well assessed." A woman with glowing lavender eyes and a dark purple sphere of swirling liquid in her hand smiled down at me.

# A MESSAGE FROM THE STUDENT PRESS

Thank you for reading the September edition of NDUB Student Press! If you are interested in joining the team this school year, please contact the email address below, or send us a DM on Instagram.

Questions? Comments? Concerns?  
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**"Neve's Latest Listens" Masterlist:**

