

# THE BRANDEIS HOOT

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*April 17, 2026*

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Front Cover By:  
Abi Streger, *Special to The Hoot*

Back Cover By:  
Liam Gurevitch, *Staff*





# News Made



Some stories don't need entire pages to get their message across. Still, we must find some way to get the information from our brains to yours. For this purpose, we bring you News Made Small.



## Performing artists for Springfest 2026 announced

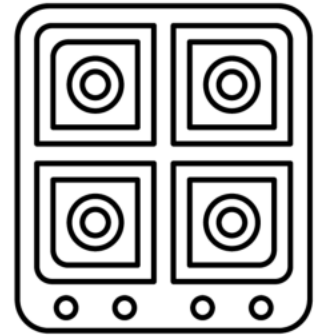
BY: Jenna Lewis, *Editor*

Springfest will take place on April 26 this year, with the recent announcement of headliner Zara Larsson. Larsson is the 25th biggest artist on Spotify and recently performed at the Grammys. The opener is an artist called Notebook P, a rapper with 7,371 monthly listeners on Spotify. The Department of Student Engagement (DSE), in collaboration with the Campus Activities Board (CAB), is providing an opportunity for students to receive their wristbands and food access tickets ahead of time, with available pick-up dates on April 21, 22, 23, and 24 between 11 a.m. and four p.m., with an evening window from six p.m. to nine p.m. on that Wednesday..

BY: Jenna Lewis, *Editor*

A dairy kitchen is now available for kosher students on Tuesdays and Thursdays in The Stein, returning to regular dining hours. This kitchen is an addition to the currently provided meat kitchen in the Faculty Club. In the previous weeks following the fire at Sherman Dining Hall, only the meat kitchen and meat options were available to kosher students.

## The Stein Opens as a Dairy Kosher Kitchen



## Food Drive

BY: James Carven, *Editor*

The Brandeis University Staff Advisory Committee is hosting a food and toiletries drive through April 30. Donations will benefit the Brandeis Pantry. Donation bins are located in various locations across campus, including the Shapiro Campus Center, Shapiro Science Center, Gosman, and the Library. The Library is also allowing people to make donations instead of paying any fines that they have incurred.

## Living in the Moment

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### MISSION

As the weekly community student newspaper of Brandeis University, The Brandeis Hoot aims to provide our readers with a reliable, accurate and unbiased source of news and information. Produced entirely by students, The Hoot serves a readership of 6,000 with in-depth news, relevant commentary, sports and coverage of cultural events. Recognizing that better journalism leads to better policy, The Brandeis Hoot is dedicated to the principles of investigative reporting and news analysis. Our mission is to give every community member a voice.

### SUBMISSION POLICIES

The Hoot is a publication built by the community, for the community. We welcome submissions of all kinds from many different subjects. If you want to make your voice heard, send your submissions to [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com) with the relevant tag. The Hoot reserves the right to reject any submissions the editing team deems as being in violation of its policy.

### CONNECT

To connect with our editorial board, reach out at the [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com), visit [brandeishoot.com](http://brandeishoot.com) or visit our Instagram page [@thebrandeishoot](https://www.instagram.com/thebrandeishoot). To read more Hoot content, visit [brandeishoot.com](http://brandeishoot.com) to see content from our older issues.

### ADVERTISE

Advertising in The Brandeis Hoot helps spread your message to our readers across the Brandeis campus, in the Waltham community and beyond through our website. All campus clubs receive a 33% discount off our regular prices, and students and faculty receive a 25% discount. To reserve your space in the paper, email us at [ad@thebrandeishoot.com](mailto:ad@thebrandeishoot.com).

### GIVE A HOOT, JOIN THE HOOT!

Writers, editors, photographers and graphic artists wanted to join The Brandeis Hoot, your weekly community newspaper. To learn more, send us an e-mail at [ad@thebrandeishoot.com](mailto:ad@thebrandeishoot.com), or visit our website <http://brandeishoot.com/join>.

### UNSOLICITED SUBMISSIONS

We welcome unsolicited submissions from members of the community sent by e-mail to [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com). There is no word limit on submissions; however, try to make sure that it can fit on one page. All submissions are subject to editing.

The culture of college is very much an “on to the next” mentality. Students often think about their chemistry test next Thursday, an essay due in a week, or the frat party happening on Saturday night. This constant focus on the future is important, and indeed often helpful. It drives us to accomplish tasks that need to get done and gives us an impetus to hold ourselves accountable. However, this mentality obscures focus on the importance of living in the moment. There is a cliché that the present is a present, which sounds rather simple, but is really true. We, as college students, do a great many things that take us out of the present, and our lives would be more fulfilling if we appreciated the here and now more.

Of course, one thing that takes many young people out of the moment is social media. Students may frequently find themselves scrolling through reels on Instagram or TikTok rather than experiencing college life. This did not happen by accident. Social media giants YouTube and Meta were recently found liable for intentionally designing their algorithms to be addictive, with a jury awarding the plaintiffs six million dollars in damages (an amount which, in our opinion, is pitifully low and highly unlikely to force these multi-trillion dollar companies to change anything). We at The Hoot hope that people can spend less time on social media and more time living in the present.

Being in the present also alludes to our desire for connection. While social media can be an isolating force, it can also be a creative outlet for individuals to share their lives with others. However, nothing beats real, in-person experiences with others. For graduating students, the inability to easily stay connected with your friends is an ever-ominous presence over our day-to-day interactions. One friend may live in the state over, while the other may reside in an entirely different country altogether; there will never be a time when everyone will be living in the same place, at the same time, and easily accessible again (except maybe a reunion, but I digress). Knowing this separation is imminent, whether you are graduating next month or in another three years, we are reminded to be intentional with the time we spend together, and should brace ourselves for new methods of maintaining presence in the lives of our friends.

How we work to remain in the present is a challenge. As mentioned above, cutting back on social media usage and staying in the moment when talking with friends is a good start. Other simple things to try include immersing yourself in the outdoors, maybe listening to music or reading a book in one of the spots we mention below, getting physically active, and taking time each day to simply breathe. These steps will not immediately fix the problem, but progress is incremental, and any improvement would be extremely beneficial. As this academic year comes to a close, it is important to remind ourselves to be grateful for the present and enjoy each moment to the fullest.



# The Hoot Recommends!

With several days of warm weather in the past week, many of us here at Brandeis took some time out to enjoy the great outdoors; frolicking on the lawns, walking through the flowers, and having a good time in general. Unfortunately, however, we have all been fooled. This weather is what New Englanders know as a “false spring,” and soon the weather will be back to its gloomy, 50-something degrees and cloudy self. However, in the rare event that warmth should return, here are the best outdoor places we recommend on campus.



**Jenna:** I am a vampire who does, indeed, melt in the sun. Now that we have the exposition out of the way, I think my favorite outdoor spot on campus would have to be the bench outside of Pearlman. Specifically, the side with the long walkway and the giant tree. It has a very whimsical energy, and there is basically no one there ever, just the way I like it. It is also a good viewpoint to see people walking about, and easy access to grab an iced tea at Starbucks for all your picnicking needs.

**James:** Unfortunately, I do not spend as much time outside as I would like, particularly during the school year. For a large portion of the year, the weather is not pleasant in this part of the world, and the outdoor areas near my dorm are not great. However, one place on campus that I particularly enjoy is the area around the Louis Brandeis statue. Although it’s a 15-minute walk from Charles River, so I don’t just go there to study; if I’m on campus and need to kill some time, I’ll occasionally do so there.



PHOTO CREDIT: Brandeis University

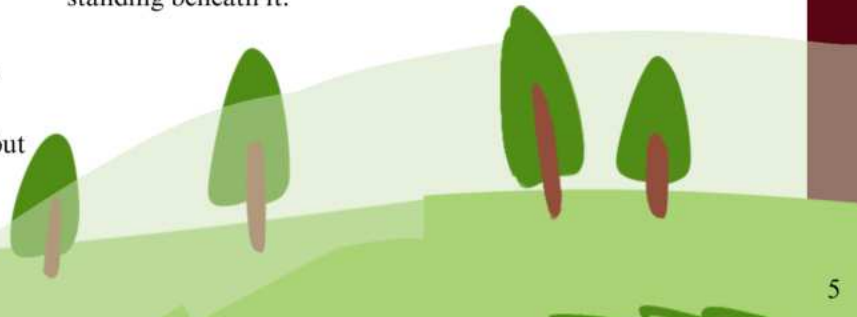
**Anna Jane:** I really like the field behind the SCC. It is pretty open and kind of a major walkway, which makes it perfect for people watching. It is great for people watching, but honestly, it is kind of private too, since people usually sit by Usdan or Fellows Garden. I’m a big field-by-the-SCC fan.

**Richard:** My favorite outdoor spot on campus would have to be the Adirondack chairs by the Massell pond (if they have not been overrun by geese). I’ve had many great, deep philosophical conversations with friends there. Even if you’re by yourself, the pond is a serene place to do work, put on headphones and listen to music, or even just sit back and ponder.



PHOTO CREDIT: Brandeis University

**Michael:** I don’t really have one single outdoor place I enjoy the most. To me, this whole campus kind of feels like one huge garden. I’ve felt this way ever since I took my first campus tour here, and it’s never really gone away. You’re surrounded by landscaping, beautiful flowers in the spring, plus copious amounts of sculpture scattered around. However, if I absolutely HAD to pick one place, it would be underneath the Rabb building at night, when it’s lit up in a warm yellow, contrasting with the blue of the evening sky. With the great, multistory, concrete mass of the building looming over the Rabb steps, it gives off major “Roman triumphal arch” vibes as you’re standing beneath it.





# Features



## Brandeis Festival of the Arts introduces new 24-hour marathon format

BY: Michael Sun, *Editor*

The Brandeis Festival of the Arts—a longstanding campus tradition—is being reformatted this year to a continuous, 24-hour arts marathon named “Art Never Sleeps,” which will take place from six p.m. on April 18 to six p.m. on April 19. The Hoot sat down with Concert and Events Administrator for the Creative Arts, Natalie Sciallo, and Festival of the Arts student committee members Devyn Oh ’26 and Iyegbekosa Ohanmu ’27 to discuss the Festivals’ reimagining.

The Festival of the Arts has been an important part of Brandeis culture for many years, ever since it was begun by Leonard Bernstein, the director of Brandeis’ Center of Creative Arts, in 1951. According to Sciallo, “The Festival of the Arts was started several decades ago, by Leonard Bernstein himself, and it was a signature event of the School of Creative Arts. [Bernstein] believed that the best way for people to learn any discipline like science, math, anything, was through arts and through community experience.” Sciallo continues, “It’s had a very strong legacy through the years, and my hope is that we can really bring it back and make students the forefront of a very strong, established event ... to put students in the spotlight and give them the funds and resources and outlets they need to exhibit their talents.”

When reimagining this year’s Festival of the Arts, Sciallo said that “the hope was to appeal to a broader student audience and to promote this idea of that artistry is always taking

place, even in the darkest and quietest moments, even when you’re asleep, even when you know it’s pitch black at seven o’clock at night, or inspiration can always strike, and the students are the greatest testimony of that.” Ohanmu added that, “As students, we are awake all the time,” and that the new format would highlight that experience.

Sciallo said that while “in the past, the Festival of the Arts has been about a week, sometimes longer,” the goal this year was to create an “artistic village.” According to Sciallo, that “basically implies that there are things happening pretty much everywhere you turn on campus, which I really want to be the reality.” Sciallo continued, “Our hope is to just create a huge hub of artistic activity that doesn’t have gatekeeping. You don’t need certain skills to be a part of it. You just have people who want to express their art.”

There were several challenges with adapting to the new format. According to Sciallo, “the school year is ending, so spring is a huge time for finals and huge events, and we don’t want to oversaturate what’s already going on at Brandeis. So I think one of the compromises we’ve proposed is to incorporate events that are already taking place in the spring as part of the festival.” She continued, “this has been a huge event throughout many like basically the beginning of Brandeis, and we’re completely rewriting it into this new format. And we want to make this appealing to students, but also honor its history. I think that can be a tricky balance to maintain. And you know, there’s some community members who have been going to this event for years, and we want to make sure that they’re represented, but we also just want to make this by the students, for the students.”

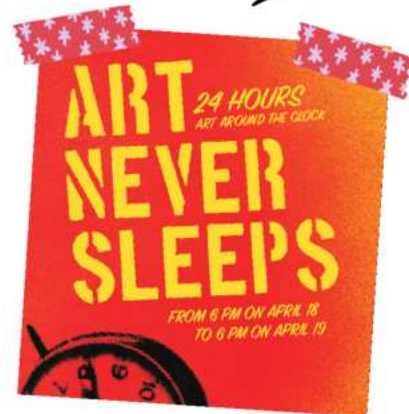


PHOTO CREDIT: *Brandeis*

As for the types of performances students can expect, the Brandeis Television Club will be showcasing their film festival, and there will be an opening performance with a variety of genres, such as brass band, R&B and jazz fusion. Oh, a music major, will be performing jazz-pop and electronic music from an album he is making, while Ohanmu, also a music major, will be performing as part of a duo described as “like R and B soul, but rock fusion.”

Students for Environmental Action will also hold an exhibition of visual art. Sciallo stated, “They’re looking to capture the feelings of students who are upset with the world around them, or just the environment around them, and to gain some testimonies, to hear how people are feeling, how they’ve been coping with the world around them.” The Theater Department will also host a performance called “Small Mouth Sounds” in Spignold, which Sciallo characterized as “a very abstract play, and it will be funny, but I’m sure heavy at points.”

Lastly, Sciallo said that the 24-hour format would continue for next year’s Festival of the Arts. “Of course, it depends on the feedback we get this time around, but we really want to make this everything it can possibly be, so that students are engaged and happy with this 24-hour format. But we’re hoping to continue it.”

# Simon Malls ... Who is Simon?

BY: Jenna Lewis, *Editor*

This article has been a personal interest of mine for a while now. I grew up constantly going to malls. When I was a kid in Los Angeles, malls were equivalent to meeting at the playground; you went with your friends, ate at the food court, and used a few bucks to buy a “buy two get 50% off one deal” on one tchotchke or another at a chain retailer. As I got older, malls became a way for me to bond with my mother, choose from a variety of inexpensive food options in the food courts, take walks inside to escape the snow in the Massachusetts winter, and to shop, of course.

A few years ago, I believe at the Cape Cod Mall in Hyannis, MA, I noticed the words “Simon” on the monitors around the mall. When I went home to Los Angeles, CA, “Simon” showed up again. A few conversations with friends from other states and other trips to various malls in Massachusetts and, again, “Simon” appeared on the side of buildings, on the signs to the restroom, everywhere. The only mall they didn’t seem to own was The Mall of America. So, in the “pursuit of knowledge unto its innermost parts,” here is everything I could find about the Simon Malls Property Group.

The first and most obvious question: Who is Simon of “Simon Malls”? Well, turns out Simon is a surname, and, while brothers Herbert and Melvin Simon started the business with strip malls in Indianapolis in 1960, David Simon, the most recent Chairman of the board, CEO, and President, who is credited with building up the Simon Property Group, actually recently passed away on March 23 of this year. One of his five children, Eli Simon, took over his position following his passing. A press release from the company said the following about David Simon,

“In 1993, at just 31 years old, he orchestrated the Company’s initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange—raising nearly \$1

billion in what was then the largest real estate public stock offering in history ... Named Chief Executive Officer in 1995 at the age of 33, David became one of the youngest CEOs of a major publicly traded company in America ... Under his leadership, Simon Property Group delivered a cumulative total shareholder return of more than 4,500% since its IPO—a record that places David among the most successful value creators in the history of public markets, in any industry ... At the time of his passing, Simon Property Group owned or held interests in more than 250 properties comprising over 200 million square feet across North America, Europe, and Asia, generating billions in annual revenue.”

While there is some indication that the Simon Property Group was created through several acquisitions, leading to questions about the ethical dubiousness of monopolies and conglomerate practices, it is certainly clear that the Simon Property Group is leading in its industry. The press release also indicated that contributions would be made to the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, UJA Federation of New York, and Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, following David Simon’s passing, so it does seem that Simon Property Group, or at least the Simon family, participates in some advocacy efforts with their financial success.

“We look at malls in our portfolio as living, breathing organisms. If the mall’s not getting better, it’s getting worse,” said Eli Simon in an interview with the Financial Times about the changes being introduced in some of the “Simon Malls,” including Roosevelt Field, King of Prussia, Phipps Plaza, and Southdale Center, as well as their general pursuit of “redevelopment” since 2024. While it was challenging to find information about “Simon Malls” and Simon Property Group from non-Simon sources, and there are a lot of shareholder and investment intricacies that are simply above my pay grade to explain in this Hoot article, Simon does seem to be pursuing some unconventional technological additions to the mall experience with their Simon

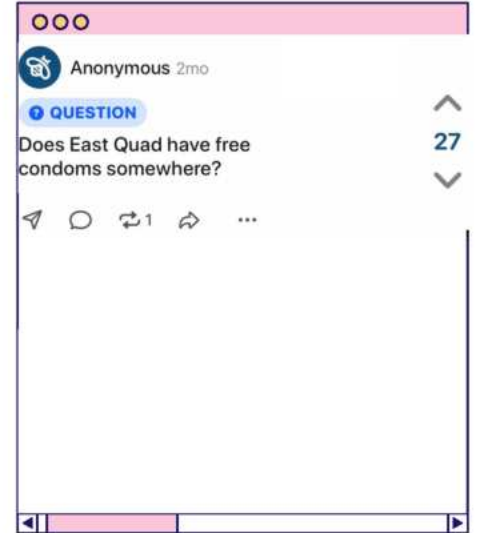
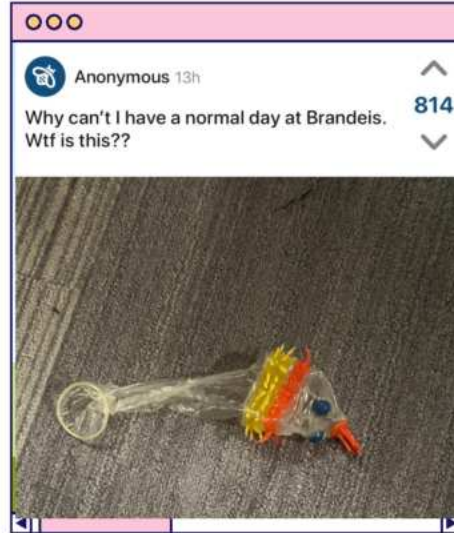
Innovation Group digital “ecosystem.” Aka, I think they just made an app for the mall, because everything needs an app these days ...

In terms of competitors in the industry, it seems like their main competition is from Westfield Group, an Australian-based company that also operates in New Zealand, with their United States company titled “Westfield Corporation,” because I guess all the Simons weren’t hard enough to keep straight. The Westfield company actually owns the malls I frequent the most in Los Angeles, including Westfield Century City and Westfield Fashion Square in Sherman Oaks—Simon owns the Beverly Center, though, which, for you non-Angelinos, has more “icon” status and is featured in a lot of LA reality TV B-roll (see *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives* Season 3 during the LA Press Tour episodes). Some random facts worth noting are that the family associated with the Westfield company is the Lowy family, and they have been pursuing ticketless parking in some of their locations, which, in my opinion, is the kind of “innovation” of which Simon Property Group should take notice.

So what does this knowledge about Simon mean for the average mall-enthusiast? Honestly, I’m not sure. I don’t think I feel any better, really. If you are curious if your local mall is a “Simon Mall,” keep an eye out for two diamond shapes with touching points and the word “Simon” nearby, and you’ll have your answer. The Burlington Mall is a “Simon Mall,” for example. A fun fact you can tell your friends is that the difference between a “mall” and a “shopping center” is whether or not it is enclosed ... so there’s something actually useful for you. Now, if you need me, you can find me at a Simon-owned mall food court, wishing I didn’t eat so much of that rubbery chicken from the Americanized Japanese stir-fry place ...



# Fizz Posts of the Week



**THATS A NICE LOOKING CLUB YOU'VE GOT THERE...**

**IT'D BE A SHAME IF YOU DIDN'T GIVE IT ENOUGH EXPOSURE**

Feature your club in The Hoot.  
Contact us at  
[eic@brandeishoot.com](mailto:eic@brandeishoot.com)





# Opinions



## Why are meal points even a thing?

BY: James Carven, *Editor*

Presumably, most people at Brandeis have had a meal plan at some point during their time here. Whatever meal plan you ended up choosing, it inevitably included some amount of "points." Even the cheapest plan has at least \$60 worth of points, and any plan for someone who lives on campus includes at least \$175 in points, with the most having \$400 in points. There is even a points-only plan that includes \$271 worth of points and nothing else. I just have one question: why?

What exactly are points? The name makes it sound like something you would earn, maybe as a prize from some event or something. The reality is much less exciting. They are dollars. That's it. One point is one dollar. There is no discount if you get a lot of points; \$50 gets you 50 points, and \$300 gets you 300 points. There is no way to get a meal plan without points; they all include at least 60 points. Worst of all, unlike with regular dollars,

any points that are left unspent at the end of the year simply disappear, forcing students to make unnecessary purchases.

Unlike real dollars, however, points can only be spent on campus. A lot of what points can be spent on are things that are or should be able to be purchased using meal exchanges. Some items at Einstein's, like the big breakfast burrito and the cookies, can only be purchased with points. However, Einstein's already accepts meal exchanges for pretty much everything else on the menu, so it shouldn't be too hard to accept them for a few more items. One of the most popular places to spend points is Dunkin'. Located in Usdan, Dunkin' is one of the best breakfast options on campus and is a truly iconic symbol of Massachusetts. However, their offerings are similar to other places that accept meal exchanges, and there is no reason why they cannot (for a full explanation of why they should take meal exchanges, refer to my first ever Hoot article).

The only place where points couldn't be fully replaced by the meal exchange



system is the C-store. However, as the name suggests, it is a store. People go to stores to spend money. And for those who want something from the C-store without spending money, they already accept meal exchanges for a number of offerings.

This brings me back to my original question: why have points at all? If one point costs one dollar and buys one dollar's worth of food, why not get rid of points altogether? Most things that people use points for could easily be added to the meal exchange system, and the ones that can't can already be purchased using real money. Given that points provide no additional benefit to students' meal plans while raising the costs by hundreds of dollars, Brandeis should get rid of them entirely, or at least offer a point-free meal plan to allow students to save money.



## A Recap of Brandeis Cop Calls



**March 27 – 19:46:00**  
An investigation took place for a minor motor vehicle accident involving van 41. Since when did Brandeis have 40 other vans?



**March 30 – 15:48:37**  
A two car motor vehicle accident on South Street under Squire Bridge. "Don't worry it's water under the bridge." - Tiger Woods



**March 29 – 22:33:00**  
Report of an erratic motor vehicle on South Street. Reportedly struck a barrier. For more information on barriers, consult Fizz Posts OTW.

*\*This recap is meant to be fun and informative, please do not attempt to find the identities of these individuals.*

# On the

BY: Stephen Gaughan and Jack Granahan, *Staff*

This column, *On the Other Hand*, began at *The Hoot* last semester as a successor to the *Devil's Advocate*, written by the authors for *The Justice* from 2023-2024. The goals of both columns were the same: to take on difficult issues of importance in popular American discourse. *On the Other Hand* has debated a government shutdown, ranked choice voting (RCV), the capture of Nicolás Maduro, and the prospect of military intervention in Iran. The *Devil's Advocate* debated congressional term limits, the filibuster, the ouster of US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the death penalty, federal abortion funding, candidate Trump's constitutional eligibility for the presidency under the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, aid to Ukraine, pardons for then-President-elect Trump, court-packing, and—satirically—the law of gravity. We are grateful to *The Hoot* for providing our column a warm and welcoming home this past year.

Both of our columns were intended to provide impassioned stances on some of the difficult issues of our time, not for the sake of debate itself, but out of a deeper love of country, and both hope and fear for its future. In this final edition, we discuss that very subject, the future, presenting reasons for both pessimism and optimism as the United States enters its 250th year.

## Reasons to Remain Resilient:

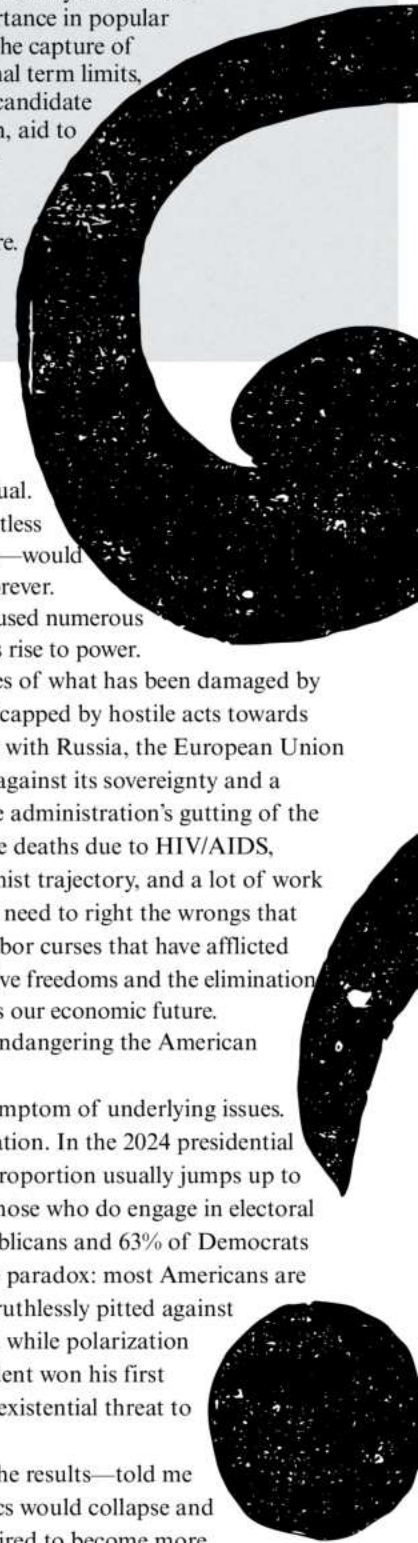
My co-writer and I have, for the last several years, made little secret of our thoughts on the incumbent presidential administration. However, it would be an incredibly daunting and likely disingenuous endeavor to place every single concern we have for the future at the feet of one individual. Much of this nation and the world's tragedies—from the ongoing opioid crisis that has shattered countless American families, to the renewed genocide actively being committed against Darfuri people in Sudan—would still occur, unimpacted, in a universe in which Donald J. Trump remained an eccentric businessman forever. That said, in being the most consequential human being of the 21st century, the president has both caused numerous concerns that I hold about our future, and exposed many worrying issues that substantially predate his rise to power.

Broadly speaking, I believe that the rest of this decade will need to consist of picking up the pieces of what has been damaged by the incumbent administration. We must attempt to repair the *Pax Americana*, which has been handicapped by hostile acts towards historically reliable American allies. As a result of lapses in American support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, the European Union has been preparing a contingency plan for a world without American leadership. In light of threats against its sovereignty and a destructive trade war with the U.S., Canada has undergone a rapprochement with China. Due to the administration's gutting of the PEPFAR program, hundreds of thousands of people on the African continent have died preventable deaths due to HIV/AIDS, prompting emerging regional actors to look elsewhere for allies. America has been set on an isolationist trajectory, and a lot of work will be needed to redirect America back to its status as the free world's unambiguous leader. We will need to right the wrongs that have been committed against immigrants, both for moral reasons and to prevent the demographic labor curses that have afflicted the rest of the industrialized world. We will need to reckon with the breakdown of women's reproductive freedoms and the elimination of civil rights protections for LGBTQ individuals. We will need to curb the deficit spending that threatens our economic future. And perhaps most importantly, we will need to combat the trend of democratic backsliding that is endangering the American republic. Addressing these issues will be difficult and require substantial political capital.

In other areas, President Trump can be described not as a source of problems, but instead as a symptom of underlying issues. The most worrisome concern of this type that I have is regarding political participation and polarization. In the 2024 presidential election, 36% of eligible voters opted not to go to the polls; in midterm and off-year elections, this proportion usually jumps up to more than half of the electorate, with young voters being the least likely to vote. At the same time, those who do engage in electoral politics in the U.S. are prone to maligning those who disagree with them; an estimated 72% of Republicans and 63% of Democrats believe that members of the other party are "immoral." American politics is trapped in a destructive paradox: most Americans are either detached from the political decisions that nevertheless affect them greatly, or are divided and ruthlessly pitted against their neighbors who disagree with them. Neither of these phenomena is healthy in a democracy, and while polarization has become exacerbated over the last decade, it became a serious issue long before the current president won his first election. The disturbing lack of political participation, coupled with extreme polarization, poses an existential threat to our politics.

The day after the 2024 presidential election, a professor of mine—knowing I was unhappy with the results—told me that "every breakdown is a breakthrough." He posited that one of the two plagues of modern politics would collapse and bring down the other: Americans, dissatisfied with the enshittification of our politics, would be inspired to become more civically involved. I want to believe this, and I always believe that there is a possibility for things to get better. I just don't know what we need to do to come back from this place. We can always reaffirm our damaged geopolitical alliances, but it will take time to rebuild the trust that the *Pax Americana* was built on. With regard to polarization, the resurrection of the FCC's fairness doctrine, which mandates unbiased coverage of contentious issues, is an oft-proposed solution. However, a new fairness doctrine would mean very little in a world where the internet and social media have created ideological echo chambers and peddled disinformation and fake news. I do believe in the end that this country will endure, if for no other reason because we have gone through far worse and come out stronger on the other end. But I do not know what it will take, except that it will be a monumental and grueling process.

IN  
FAVOR



## Reasons to Despair:

My co-writer and I have, for the last several years, made little secret of our thoughts on the incumbent presidential administration. However, it would be an incredibly daunting and likely disingenuous endeavor to place every single concern we have for the future at the feet of one individual. Much of this nation and the world's tragedies—from the ongoing opioid crisis that has shattered countless American families, to the renewed genocide actively being committed against Darfuri people in Sudan—would still occur, unimpacted, in a universe in which Donald J. Trump remained an eccentric businessman forever. That said, in being the most consequential human being of the 21st century, the president has both caused numerous concerns that I hold about our future, and exposed many worrying issues that substantially predate his rise to power.

Broadly speaking, I believe that the rest of this decade will need to consist of picking up the pieces of what has been damaged by the incumbent administration. We must attempt to repair the Pax Americana, which has been handicapped by hostile acts towards historically reliable American allies. As a result of lapses in American support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, the European Union has been preparing a contingency plan for a world without American leadership. In light of threats against its sovereignty and a destructive trade war with the U.S., Canada has undergone a rapprochement with China. Due to the administration's gutting of the PEPFAR program, hundreds of thousands of people on the African continent have died preventable deaths due to HIV/AIDS, prompting emerging regional actors to look elsewhere for allies. America has been set on an isolationist trajectory, and a lot of work will be needed to redirect America back to its status as the free world's unambiguous leader. We will need to right the wrongs that have been committed against immigrants, both for moral reasons and to prevent the demographic labor curses that have afflicted the rest of the industrialized world. We will need to reckon with the breakdown of women's reproductive freedoms and the elimination of civil rights protections for LGBTQ individuals. We will need to curb the deficit spending that threatens our economic future. And perhaps most importantly, we will need to combat the trend of democratic backsliding that is endangering the American republic. Addressing these issues will be difficult and require substantial political capital.

In other areas, President Trump can be described not as a source of problems, but instead as a symptom of underlying issues. The most worrisome concern of this type that I have is regarding political participation and polarization. In the 2024 presidential election, 36% of eligible voters opted not to go to the polls; in midterm and off-year elections, this proportion usually jumps up to more than half of the electorate, with young voters being the least likely to vote. At the same time, those who do engage in electoral politics in the U.S. are prone to maligning those who disagree with them; an estimated 72% of Republicans and 63% of Democrats believe that members of the other party are "immoral." American politics is trapped in a destructive paradox: most Americans are either detached from the political decisions that nevertheless affect them greatly, or are divided and ruthlessly pitted against their neighbors who disagree with them. Neither of these phenomena is healthy in a democracy, and while polarization has become exacerbated over the last decade, it became a serious issue long before the current president won his first election. The disturbing lack of political participation, coupled with extreme polarization, poses an existential threat to our politics.

# AGAINST

The day after the 2024 presidential election, a professor of mine—knowing I was unhappy with the results—told me that “every breakdown is a breakthrough.” He posited that one of the two plagues of modern politics would collapse and bring down the other: Americans, dissatisfied with the enshittification of our politics, would be inspired to become more civically involved. I want to believe this, and I always believe that there is a possibility for things to get better. I just don't know what we need to do to come back from this place. We can always reaffirm our damaged geopolitical alliances, but it will take time to rebuild the trust that the Pax Americana was built on. With regard to polarization, the resurrection of the FCC's fairness doctrine, which mandates unbiased coverage of contentious issues, is an oft-proposed solution. However, a new fairness doctrine would mean very little in a world where the internet and social media have created ideological echo chambers and peddled disinformation and fake news. I do believe in the end that this country will endure, if for no other reason because we have gone through far worse and come out stronger on the other end. But I do not know what it will take, except that it will be a monumental and grueling process.

On the Other Hand was a recurring column in The Hoot, which sought to promote critical approaches to the issues of our time and respectful dialogue. The arguments made therein should not be taken as the views of The Hoot and its staff, or even as those of the writers, unless explicitly stated. In this edition, Jack and Steve discussed the future of the United States, with Jack presenting a darker note, and Steve a more hopeful one. Now they bid farewell to you, the reader.

Other  
Hand



# Sports



## SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW BALL?

BY: Richard Grau, *Editor*

Chances are, if you are reading this, you go to Brandeis. And if you go to Brandeis, well, let's just say you may not know a lot about sports. The stereotypical Deisian isn't exactly a rabid sports fan. And that's fine! To attend Brandeis, you obviously don't need to be interested in sports or even have a basic understanding of how they work (with the possible exception of quadball). However, since coming here last August, there have been numerous situations here on campus where I've been sitting with people and, whether it be just over the course of normal conversation or because I was watching a football or baseball game on my phone, they would ask about something going on. I realized that many people are curious about sports but may not go out of their way to seek out information. Thus, an idea was formed. There will be a recurring installment in The Hoot where I will dive into a specific topic in sports. It could be about a rule, a phrase, or anything else pertinent to sports knowledge. That's how "So you think you know ball?" was born.

We'll use the following scale to determine the difficulty level of the article of the week:



### Explaining the NBA Playoff Format

**Intro:** With the NBA (National Basketball Association) playoffs getting underway this weekend, I thought it would be helpful to explain the format all the way from the initial play-in round to the finals.

**Background:** The NBA is divided into two 15-team conferences: the Eastern Conference, with teams like the Boston Celtics, Miami Heat, and New York Knicks; and the Western Conference, home to the Los Angeles Lakers, the Dallas Mavericks, and Oklahoma City Thunder. Sixteen of the teams make the playoffs, with eight teams from the East and eight from the West. The only time a team from the East plays a team from the West is in the final round. First, the teams from each conference must play amongst themselves in a bracket-style system until one team from each region reigns supreme. The bracket is organized by seeding, which is determined by regular season record; the team with the most wins over the course of the season is the one seed, second-most wins is the two seed, and so on.

**The Play-In:** Before the playoffs can get underway, there is a precursor round called the play-in. During the play-in round (which just occurred this past week) the East's seven and eight seed play against each other, and the nine and 10 seed play. The winners of the seven vs. eight seed game move on to play the two seed in the playoffs. The loser of the seven vs. eight game plays the winner of the nine vs. 10 game, and the victor of that game plays the one seed. This works the exact same way within the Western Conference.

**The Playoffs Themselves:** Each series in the NBA Playoffs is a best-of-seven contest, meaning the winner is the first to four wins. The one vs. eight seed game and the two vs. seven seed game have already been explained above. The format for the remaining teams follows along the same structure: the three plays the six, and the four plays the five. This series is formatted so that the higher seed hosts games one, two, and, if necessary, five and seven, while the lower seed is the home team for games three, four, and, if required, six. After all the matchups conclude, then the one/eight winner plays the four/five winner, and the two/seven winner plays the three/six winner. This process repeats until there is one team standing from each conference. Then the victorious team from the West plays the Eastern champion to determine who holds the Finals trophy at the end of the year.



# A glance at Brandeis' Spring Sports Teams' Practice

BY: Liam Gurevitch, *Staff*

To anyone that knows me, you know that I am incredibly unathletic and don't typically pay attention to sports. Why, then, would I of all people be writing for the sports section? I am doing it for the same reason I also joined our ultimate frisbee team, TRON: to try out something new and learn. I am not very good at frisbee, but I play because I enjoy it. Life is all about trying new things and enjoying them, y'know?

What I truly appreciate about frisbee at Brandeis is that you don't have to try out to join, and you don't have to be good at playing. After a long day of classes, writing papers, and doing homework, running across a field trying to catch a disc in the air is so head-clearing. The feel of the air and crunch of the grass is a welcome difference from the quiet of the library. This section will not only be my way of learning about our sports teams and what they play, but also a chance to give you a perspective from a non-player. Most people here don't pay too much attention to sports, but our teams are hard at work preparing for their seasons.

This past week, I was given the opportunity to watch the softball

and baseball teams practice on the turf. I didn't know what to look for when I arrived, but it was an exciting blur of activity. Before I continue, it is important to note the difference between baseball and softball. As I recently learned, softball uses bigger balls, has a smaller playing field, and two fewer innings, or rounds. Both sports involve hitting a ball with a bat and running around bases to get back to the home plate and score points.

At Brandeis, our baseball team is a men's team and our softball team is a women's team. The softball team was practicing their pitching and catching, which was very exciting to watch. They all looked in sync and like they were having a lot of fun, which is very important for a victory. As I watched their drills, they were all cheering each other on. Jordan Wallace '28 shared with me that she is really looking forward to the rest of the season and that the games and practices so far have been fun.

The softball team has won all their games so far, and Jordan says that she

loves the synergy she has with her teammates and getting to play with them all.



Her final message was to encourage more students to attend home games and support the team.

The baseball team, on the opposite end of the field, was working on a mix of throwing drills. I heard the crack of the bat against the ball



and the slap as the ball hit the glove, sounds that I'm not used to hearing, and that made me want to concentrate on the players. Along with the drills, they were also doing some yoga stretches to condition themselves for better playing. I didn't expect to see yoga on a baseball field, but I know that sports conditioning is a very important aspect of playing, which includes mobility training that leads to better movement and faster running.

Overall, both teams seem very cohesive and I hope to see some Brandeis spirit at our upcoming home games.



BY: Liam Gurevitch, *Staff*



## Reviewing every episode of ‘Smiling Friends’: season three

BY: Michael Sun, *Editor*

With the release of its third season, “Smiling Friends” has officially come to an end. And what a ride it’s been—it’s safe to say that over the course of just three seasons, “Smiling Friends” has become the defining adult show of our generation. It’s fitting that the third season contains some of the show’s best episodes, though you can see some signs of burnout settling in, with some bits starting to land flat. Despite this, the quality remains high. Here are all of the episodes of “Smiling Friends” season three.

### “Silly Samuel”:

While Silly Samuel has to be the weakest of the clients that the Smiling Friends have seen (his whole thing is that he’s a goofy cartoon character that just wants people to respect him, and that’s it), the B-plot with Mr. Boss and Allan trying to survive a random building inspection is what most people remember this episode for. As it turns out, a giant yellow smiley face-shaped building is not exactly one of the safest places to be in. Who knew? This episode has some of the best Mr. Boss moments in the show, spawning the oft-quoted lines “ALLAN, WE ARE SO FUCKED”, “Do you realize? Do. You. Realize. Something?” and “Deus Misereatur Nostri.” It’s a shame that they couldn’t make the main story of the episode as interesting or hilarious. But nevertheless, it’s still comedy gold. “Hey, did that guy just turn into sand?”

7/10

### “Le Voyage Incroyable de Monsieur Grenouille”:

“Le Voyage Incroyable de Monsieur Grenouille”: While every episode of “Smiling Friends” has had its fair share of weird and wacky things going on, this episode truly made me go, “Huh?” The plot follows Mr. Frog, who has sunk into a deep depression; not even horrific acts of violence at the UFC make him happy anymore. The solution to his problem, however, comes not from Charlie and Pim, but from a very bizarre and weirdly tragic live-action sequence in which he meets his father, played by Creed Bratton from “The Office,” painted head to toe in green. Overall, this episode ends up being a very beautiful send-off to Mr. Frog, though the 8/10 pacing feels a bit stop-and-start.

### “Mole Man”:

“Mole Man”: Mole Man is supposed to be a caricature of insane stalker fandom types, though he doesn’t stand out as much from all the other villains in the show. While Mole Man kidnaps Charlie and Pim, who spend most of the episode running around his underground tunnels, Allan and Glep are forced into the role of making people smile, which instantly goes wrong when Allan mispronounces their name as “the Smooling Fronds”; it only gets worse for the two from there. While it’s a solid episode with a lot of funny bits—especially a certain Allan line at the end—I still think Mole Man could have been better written.

7/10

### “Curse of the Green Halloween Witch”:

“Curse of the Green Halloween Witch”: This episode is best watched blind. I’m going to say as little as I can about this episode; you HAVE TO see it for yourself. Let’s just say this: do you remember those creepypastas you read online as a child? The ones about the lost episodes of cartoons where the characters went insane and died in gruesome ways? This episode is EXACTLY that. Yes, this is real, and yes, this aired on national television. They even got permission from Sony to use PYRAMID HEAD in the episode! It’s so gory and demented, but in such a nonsensical, over-the-top way that all but the most squeamish viewers burst out into laughter. On top of all that, the animation, the visuals, and the voice acting are some of the best in the entire show. But again, you just have to watch this one for yourself. It’s absolute insanity.

10/10

### “Pim and Charlie Save Mother Nature”:

“Pim and Charlie Save Mother Nature”: The gang is relaxing in Mr Boss’ cabin in the woods when Pim and Charlie decide to go on a whimsical adventure! They then meet Mother Nature, but OH NO, she’s fucked up and evil! Mother Nature herself is probably the best use of claymation in the show; she and her minions morph around and shapeshift, with the animators making as much use of the natural properties of clay as possible. Despite this, the main storyline still manages to get overshadowed by the sub-plot, this time with Mr. Boss and Allan getting a little ... freaky. Then there’s the ending—the best ending line in all of Smiling Friends. I’m not going to spoil what it is, but it’s hilarious.

9/10

### “Squim Returns”:

“Squim Returns”: Who is Squim, you might ask? None other than the first Smiling Friend from the 1990s. Squim is an instant favorite—he’s animated in an authentic ‘90s “radical” cartoon style, is constantly hyperactive, and runs around performing his iconic Squim dance. He’s also positive, like Pim! Except maybe a little too positive, as Pim learns to his horror. This makes Squim sort of like the reverse image of the Frowning Friends from Season One—one critiquing mindless negativity, the other critiquing mindless positivity. Meanwhile, Charlie has decided to skip work to play his favorite Steam games, until he eats a really bad kebab and starts tripping balls in a head-spinning psychedelic sequence. In fact, this entire episode is a beautiful showcase of animation, showing how much the show’s budget has gone up since 2020.

10/10



### “Schmalogles”:

As if “Squim Returns” wasn’t enough hilarity, the very next episode somehow manages to be even funnier. This episode perfectly epitomizes the “Smiling Friends” style of comedy. This is a demented parody of the Smurfs, infused with as many stupid hypothetical situations as the writers could fit in. Imagine if Gargamel used his crystal ball as a desktop computer to show Pim where he is on the Norwood scale of male pattern baldness. Imagine if the Smurfs randomly turned into hyperrealistic, rotoscoped muscular men for a few seconds, and it was never acknowledged again. Imagine if Charlie had to defend himself from a false SA allegation while eating at the local Wawa. The bits just keep coming and coming one after another, and they are stupid, every one of them, but they NEVER miss. Random, wacky nonsense tied into a coherent plot—what could be more “Smiling Friends” than that?

10/10



### “The Glep Ep”:

At long last, we have an episode focusing on the most mysterious member of the Smiling Friends: Glep. The adorable little green guy, who only speaks in gibberish and watches Youtube Shorts all day, has been an enigma throughout the show’s entire life. What’s the deal with him? Now we know. The cute little gremlin creature has been through a LOT—he was born in 329 AD, has seen civilizations rise and fall, and without him, the Smiling Friends wouldn’t even exist. If Glep wasn’t your favorite character before this episode, he will be once you see it. It’s a heartwarming tale of how the Smiling Friends came to be, and shows that Glep DOES have a role to play after all—as the quintet’s voice of wisdom.

9/10



PHOTO CREDIT: Adult Swim



PHOTO CREDIT: Adult Swim



### “Friend-Bot (Version 12589218731809213528796879521)”:

With this episode, “Smiling Friends” tackles one of the most important issues in the world today—the rise of AI and LLMs and the massive societal changes that come with them. When Charlie and Pim come into possession of a robot that can do anything they ask it to, they use it to replace their jobs and descend into mindless idleness, much to Pim’s dismay. With bits poking fun of everything from scam websites to people who are obsessed with AI-generating art, “Friend-Bot (Version 125892187318092...)” definitely hits close to home in our neurotic, chronically online age, though it doesn’t explore the effects of AI as deeply as it ought to. Then again, literally no one, let alone Smiling Friends, has the answers to where AI is ultimately leading us, so give it some slack.

8/10

### “Charlie’s Uncle Dies and Doesn’t Come Back”:

I can’t imagine a better episode to end “Smiling Friends” on. Charlie’s uncle Bilbert is a much better version of the bully from season two’s “Gwimbly”; he’s written to be malicious and depraved in a way that actually manages to be unsettling, forcing Pim and Charlie to undergo some emotional moments. Nevertheless, the very real-world crimes are portrayed with insane cartoonish antics, as is the style for “Smiling Friends.” From the drug dealer speaking with a helium voice to the shitty 3D-modeled gremlins fighting in an underground ring, this is a masterpiece in dark comedy. Then we get to Allan’s subplot, where he goes on a date, giving us a number of hilarious reaction images and innuendos, until it ends in a way that will SHOCK YOU!!! (NOT CLICKBAIT!)

9/10



# I Had a Conversation with Sally

BY: Nancy Zhang, *Special to The Hoot*



## Coffee

I was in a cafe staring at the California sunset when I met her. She looked very zen at first, but also puzzled, like a lost puppy. From the way she stared at me, I knew she was trying to start a conversation, but was too shy to do so. I decided to help out, and pushed my cup of coffee in front of her.

“Thank you. That is very nice of you.” Sally said. She pulled up a chair and sat in front of me with such nonchalance, as if we were besties for years. That’s how I knew she craved company, but had an ego that dragged her actions. “But I don’t drink coffee. They gave me mad headaches.” she said.

“You get headaches when you drink coffee?” I asked.

“No, afterwards. The withdrawal symptoms.” she answered.

“So you’re looking out for a problem in the future.” I said.

She spread her hands out. “Aren’t we always?”

“Not really.” I shrugged.

She paused before speaking again.

“I am not from here,” said Sally. Her voice was floating. She was here; in front of me, but her eyes were wandering. Not present.

“I can tell.” I said.

“I am a visitor,” Sally said. She was avoiding eye contact and scanning the place without a focus in her pupils. She stirred the tea spoon in the cup without any rhythm, and after some time, decided to take a sip. She gave out a quiet and quick moan and leaned back, relaxed. Her eyes cleared up a bit with a glow, but in the blink of an eye it was gone. I had a sense that something else might cheer her up even more.

“Smoke?” I pulled out a cigarette from my purse and reached into my pocket for a lighter. Again, Sally was giving me that look of hesitation. “Headaches again?” I asked her as her lips were half open. She shook her head.

“Fine.” I lit up, inhaled, then exhaled. Sally tried to breathe in the smoke, despite her refusal, like a man in a desert inhaling the cool night air.

The chatter around us died down.

“What do you do?” Sally asked aggressively.

“I drink coffee and occasionally smoke. I skateboard a lot. I like palm trees and dogs.” I answered smoothly.

“That’s cute.” She scoffed. “But what about your occupation?”

“What’s an occupation?” I asked.

“A job.” she answered curtly.

“What’s a job?” I asked.

“What you do for a living.” she said.

“I just said it.” I said as I lazily made whirlpools in my coffee with the tip of my nail. “I drink coffee and occasionally smoke. I skateboard.”

She rolled her eyes. “Is that all you do?”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “What do you do?”

“I’m a janitor.” She said, “I make sure that no malicious people enter the neighborhood. I make my community a better place.” She took a breath. “I get paid minimum wage.”

“Sounds like a Robocop.” I said.

“What’s a Robocop?” She asked.

“If you mean the specific mechanism behind it, I don’t know. What I know is they’re half living machines that make us safe.” I answered to the best of my ability.

“Cool—like they catch thieves and robbers and stuff?” She said quickly, suddenly getting more invested.

“What are thieves and robbers?” I asked.

She sat back down, blinking. “People who take away your property, like money, without asking you.”

“What’s property? What’s money?” I asked.

“Nevermind.” She waved her hand, like the question was a mosquito in the air. “What do you mean a Robocop makes you safer?”

“They make sure we don’t get killed. They guard our lives.” I said, finally able to answer her questions. “Isn’t it super cool? They protect our most important possession.”

She tapped her nails against the table. “So, in this goddamned place, your life is your only property?” She slammed a fist on the table. “No tangible units of wealth? God, it’s so fucked up.”

Sally rambles on in some jargon I don’t understand and reaches for my smoke. From the way she takes care of it, she has to be a chain smoker. She is so hypocritical. She knows what she wants, yet she keeps delaying her pleasure because of some unknown future possibilities. Sally is not respecting her present, her biggest gift, the single most valuable package that came with her the moment she was born. She is trying so hard to constrain herself, and I know it is going to backfire, from the cup of

coffee to inhaling my smoke. But I will let her, because I am only saving her from destroying herself. It's not unrealistic that one's most feared consequence eventually comes back to bite them in the worst yet most predictable way.

I know Sally is fucked up, and I think she knows it too.

### **Sally is Silly**

The silence wasn't long. Sally's eye lit up again as if she was suddenly charged after days of starvation.

I said: "I can't think of any more things that deserve to be claimed as your own except your presence."

Sally was shocked. So shocked that she chugged the entire cup of coffee. She apologized and told me she would pay for a refill. Before I could say anything, she sprinted to the counter, but, of course, she was shocked again because no one was there. Sally turned her head at me, looking confused again with her doe eyes. Silly girl. I walked to the counter and told her she could simply pour herself another cup.

"No payment? No barista? What the hell?"

"No." I told her. "What's a payment? You always give me these strange-ass concepts. It sounds so brutal—as if you need to give up something to get something."

"But what if some greedy person decided to fill up all the coffees that he does not need, so everybody else has no coffee to drink anymore?"

"Why would they do that? How would they take anything out of it? They would have too much to carry in their hands, and they can always come back for another cup if they need more. People would come back here if they need a fresh cup as well, rather than getting expired, stinky drinks from those so-called greedy people. Why would they want to have more?"

Sally was again so confused. I felt like she was about to cry. She was asking if I was serious. She could not believe that in this random town, one does not need to work their ass off for a surplus of supplies. She simply could not believe that security was guaranteed for everyone. No property, no job, no chain of command based on total compensation and last names. No nothing. Individuality was praised in a non-religious, non-biased, perfectly healthy way. Sally was tearing up. Now I am the person who was panicking. I remember my psychiatrist told me that venting is a good way to cure mental diseases, a term I only hear from out-of-date textbooks with broken covers and missing pages.

Sally asked for another smoke, but I only had one joint left, so we shared.

Sally's eyes immediately started bulging with veins. She said she was a disgrace in her community because she could not afford the so-called luxuries, and she was not contributing to her family and society. I asked her: "Isn't keeping your neighborhood safe a significant task?"

"But it's such easy work." She said, "Everyone can do it. Machines and Robocops can easily do it with such efficiency."

"So it's important and easy, and you choose to do it." I said. "Why does it make it a disgrace?"

"No one wants to do it." she said sourly.

"No one wants to do it, yet you choose to do it." I said. "Doesn't that make you a great, selfless person? You would rather stay at home and do nothing, but you choose to contribute to public safety. In fact," I smiled. "Sally, I think you're great."

Sally's eyes started drifting away again.

"But this work does not pay as much." she said quietly.

I spoke up. "Say it's easy work and it does not make you feel valuable, so what kind of work is valuable?"

She thought for a moment, then said: "Finance, technologies, marketing..."

"Do those works make the world a better place?" I asked.

"Maybe?" She said, unsure.

"Tell me." I asked.

She started listing off different pieces of helpful technology. "Your phones, products, malls..."

"Sounds like charity work." I said.

"No!" she shouted, before calming herself. "In our world, you would need to pay for those things. Every single penny goes to buying those services. If you have more, you get to enjoy more. Vice versa."

"So those highly important works provide your community with ways to make people pay rather than enjoy things." I said.

"No, they enjoy things as they pay..." she said.

"That does not sound very valuable to me." I said after thinking for a moment. "Those who work invent products that people need, but come with prices that I assume are not easy to compensate for."

"I wouldn't say people 'need' those things." Sally said. "Some of them are just fluff."

"So," I said, putting the pieces together. "Those who do important work invent products and services that people don't need and make those who don't need it trade for those with their own work, and that's what makes those works important." I held her cold stare in my eyes. "Is it right, Sally?"

"... Sort of." She glanced away for a moment before returning to my eyes.

I continued: "In the meantime, you do relatively simple work that is not challenging but secures a nice, safe community, where people enjoy without trading anything off for it, right?"

She looked away again. "People think low of me." she said.

"Do they scold you? Hit you?" I asked.

"... No." she said.

"Then what do they do?" I asked. (See Page 18)

“They don’t do or say anything, because I don’t belong with them.” Sally said, speaking up. “They talk about terms that I don’t understand and think low of me for not understanding them.”

“Did they tell you that?” I asked.

“No,” she mumbled. “I just figured.”

“You didn’t know that you don’t need anything to trade for coffee here. I had to tell you this new piece of information. Do you think I think low of you? Sally, the truth is, I don’t understand your people. I don’t understand the value system there. People are proud of the sophistication levels of their skills. It’s like a super fancy vase that cannot hold much water. A vase that is so fancy that you need multiple levels of encoding and decoding just to take little sips, and you need to act all high and mighty because you believe that it’s those convoluted steps that make the resource scarce, and scarcity equals its value. But you, holding a paper cup with ample water that can quench many thirsty mouths, are considered valueless because you decided to do something that is very accessible and understandable by your people. It’s so unfair. No one should judge you based on how you provide service to people.”

Sally put down the joint and took a very serious look at me.

“You should tell them. That you matter.”

She was silent for a couple of minutes, and I was silent too.

Sally stood up. I noticed there was grease on her hair, and her shoes were full of dirt. I never asked where she came from, but I guess it was too late. She was leaving.

### **Sally Left**

The joint was burned till it was only the length of a nail. There was a stinging pain in my fingertips. I crushed the remaining sparks and dropped them inside the coffee cup.

The pager inside my pocket rang abruptly. Time for my shift. I reached for a couple of wrinkled dollars from my pocket and stuck them under the coffee mug. I couldn’t fight my addiction after all. The headaches were killing me.

I walked towards the exit and pushed open the front gate. The auto bell chirped.

“Bye Sally!” Said the barista behind me.

I nodded at her and continued going.

## **UTC’s performance of ‘Clue: On Stage’ truly excelled**

BY: James Carven, *Editor*

On Friday, March 13, Saturday, March 14, and Sunday, March 15, the Undergraduate Theater Collective brought their performance of “Clue: On Stage” to the SCC Theater, and it was a truly impressive performance. “Clue: On Stage” is a comedic adaptation of the 1985 film “Clue” and is based on the board game by Hasbro. Six individuals, known only by color-themed aliases, are invited to Boddy Manor for a mysterious party. When their host ends up being murdered, the characters try to find out who is responsible before anyone else can be killed.

Director Hannah “Phoenix” Feldman ’27, along with the entire cast, really brought the story to life. Every character was portrayed flawlessly, with every cast member allowing their character’s unique personality traits to shine. Especially impressive were the performances of Sean Walker ’28 and

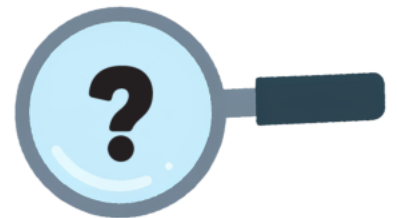
Rowan Scasselatti ’26. Walker, making his acting debut, nailed the role of Miss Scarlet, a madame and one of the most eccentric characters in a play full of eccentric characters. Scasselatti delivered an impressive performance as Mr. Green, a nervous wreck throughout the entire play, who is revealed to be an undercover FBI agent only posing as the actual Mr. Green. Scasselatti’s performance is made even more impressive by the fact that, in addition to starring in the production, he also served as its fight coordinator.

Of course, such an excellent performance would have been impossible without equally talented work from the crew behind the scenes. The set design was particularly impressive. On only one small stage, the “Clue: On Stage” crew was able to bring to life nine separate rooms, two secret passageways, and the manor’s entrance. Although a sign was suspended from the ceiling to tell the audience which room the characters were in, it was rarely necessary, as the various sets often made it quite obvious.

The sound and lighting effects of the production worked together wonderfully and truly brought the play to the next level. The lighting, designed by Ev Levine ’28 and operated by Eli McCombs, was able to bring

out the creepy atmosphere of Boddy Manor, while simultaneously highlighting each individual character in their respective color. The sound, which was designed and operated by Dalya Lessem Elneceve ’27, was flawless. Everything from the gunshot noise to the repeated doorbell sounds was timed perfectly. And of course, the entire play takes place during a thunderstorm, which required the sound effects and lighting to be timed perfectly, which they were.

“Clue: On Stage” was the best performance I’ve seen at Brandeis. It felt more like a professional production than a college performance. Every cast member portrayed their character convincingly, and the play’s crew truly went above and beyond to make this performance spectacular. Overall, I would give UTC’s performance a 10 out of 10.



*\*Ev Levine was not a part of the writing or editing of this piece.*

# 'The Winter's Tale': A Review Full of McCarthy Era Shenanigans

BY: Chloe Ballew, *Editor*

This semester, Brandeis' own Hold Thy Peace has put on a production of one of William Shakespeare's "problem plays": "The Winter's Tale." A play dubbed problematic not for its content, but for its unclear genre—with the first three acts featuring intense drama and many deaths and the last two acts being full of comedy,



PHOTO CREDIT FOR THIS STORY:  
@htpbrandeis

love, and a happy ending. Director Naomi Stephenson '26 suggests a solution to this conundrum in her version of the play. She adds a level of comedy to the first few acts, which helps to bridge the gap between later ones. She is assisted in this feat by the talents of Laurel Kane '26, who plays Leontes. Kane manages to toe the line between properly portraying the dark themes and insanity of King Leontes and introducing an underlying comedic element which is expanded upon post intermission.

The other actors in the cast each bring something different to their respective roles which makes the play feel alive. Maya Gonta '28 portrays a variety of characters, Paulina, Dorcas, and Time; and does so with a level of intensity that pulls the audience in. Her deeply serious portrayal of her roles could have felt disjointed from the rest of the characters, yet the way the other actors engage with her characters make it feel like a decision rather than an accent. A decision which adds a level of

emotional intensity to the first three acts. This is especially true due to the many serious monologues the character Paulina delivers.

Other notable performances include Elijah Operhall '28 as Camillo and Cleomenes, Gabi Steagall '29 as Perdita and young Mamillius, and Ellen Richards '27 as Emilia and Mopsa. Operhall portrays a rather convincing Camillo, full of loyal anxiety in the first half and a longing to return home in the second. Steagall transforms from the tragic young prince Mamillius into the beautiful Perdita in a way which convinced me that they were played by separate people until glancing at the program. And Richards, while subdued in many ways, brings a level of depth and a feeling of a true internal world to her characters.

Outside of the acting, the costumes, sound, lighting, and props were fantastic. The costumes had a lot riding on them, as much of the 1950s aesthetic of the production was reliant on the dress of the characters. Costumer Elizabeth Retakh '28 and assistant costumer Michal Ditkoff '28 did not disappoint. The first half of the play is full of fantastic suits and decade-accurate dresses, and the second half features a variety of colors and classic hippy garb. Together, the two sets of costumes create a clear image of Cold War America without directly stating it. This is assisted through the wonderful sound design done by Eva "Ev" Levine '28. With a collection of '50s and '60s classics, audio clips from the era, intense sound effects, and recorded audio, Levine manages to set you in the world of the show simply through sound.

While the show is beyond recommendable, it is important to acknowledge the few shortcomings that did exist. Before I delve in too much, I want to acknowledge that it is entirely possible that some of my comments could be caused by mechanical issues beyond the control of the production staff. However, I hope that anything denoted here that may be caused by equipment might encourage the administration to put some money towards renovating the SCC theatre.



The central flaw of the production rests almost entirely in the first half of the play, that being a lack of movement during certain scenes. While it is clear that some actors, such as Kane, are very comfortable making big movement decisions, others seemed more hesitant. This can be expected from newer actors and isn't hugely detrimental to the show; however, it was distracting, especially in scenes with fewer characters on stage. Thankfully, the second half of the show faced no signs of this problem. This can potentially be attributed to the dance numbers, fuller set, and larger number of characters on stage on average.

Outside of the movement problem, there were minor sound issues including a light buzzing sound in certain parts of the auditorium and problems picking up some actors' lines, as well as small problems with the fit of certain costume pieces. However, as previously mentioned, these problems seem more attributable to older equipment and a tight budget. Despite these small aspects that one would likely miss if not looking to write a review, the technical aspects of the production were all around delightful.

All together, this production of "The Winter's Tale" managed to take what could be a challenging play, due to its shifting genre and mood, and made something deeply engaging. Everyone involved in this production should feel very proud of the work they put into it. I look forward to the next endeavor from Hold Thy Peace.

*\*Ev Levine was not a part of the writing or editing of this piece.*

## It's all about the games!

BY: Judah Belgrade, *Staff*

Throughout the year, I've been playing video games. Old games, new games, it doesn't matter when it came out. All that matters is if you have fun. And to quote Reggie Fils-Aimé, "if it's not fun, why bother?" This school year has been a long one, as it is every year. New experiences lengthen one's awareness of each moment, before it becomes expected and usual, then it becomes a short year. However, the spice of life that is my game library keeps me aware of every day spent in this college environment, blending around me. They mark nodes in time I can look back on, remember the good with the bad, and experience something beyond the now and the then on their own: they come together to help me reflect on more than just the past and the present, but what I can take towards the future.

What I mean to say is that I've been reading a lot of Fire Force, and here are five games (that I've never written about before) out of the many (more than 10) games I played in the '25-'26 school year.



**Later Alligator: Genre: Minigame Point-and-Click Adventure | Released: Sept. 18, 2019 | Where: PC, Switch | Developed by: Pillow Fight | Published by: Pillow Fight**

You play as a detective hired by the ever-paranoid Pat the Alligator and travel across Alligator New York City to snuff out a soon-to-be murderer from all of his Alligator family members and friends! Oooor they're all planning a surprise birthday party and good ol' Pat is fretting over nothing. Meeting the distinguished members of Pat's neighborhood of friends and family features hilarious dialogue, expressive and personalized animations, and tons of minigames to master just in time to attend Pat's party. Not many games are this effortlessly charming and funny, but that's because everything has been tuned to fit the '70s style Alligator New York City we all know when we see and hear it. It's a grand 'ol time!

**Umbrawclaw: Genre: Action Platformer | Released: May 30, 2024 | Where: PC, Xbox, Switch, Playstation | Developed by: Inti Creates | Published by: Inti Creates**

A game that came from the crestfallen hope that his cat might come back to life one day, Satoru Nishizawa's fourth directing position after the acclaimed Blaster Master 03 Trilogy is a platformer unlike any other. You play as the deceased house cat Kuon and journey through the Soulplane, a land filled with unsightly monsters and ferocious creatures, with the goal of escaping to reunite with your owner, Tsukumo, a young girl who always took good care of Kuon. As you explore the striking colors and paper-cutout-inspired environments, you collect gems to unlock abilities that reflect the traits of other animals, like a porcupine's spikes to attack, a bat's wings to fly, a tiger's legs to charge, and many others. But you only gain access to them by taking damage yourself, and spending one of your nine lives. After you lose your lives, you take on a humanoid form, with more traditional controls and more powerful attacks. But once you leave the level, do you give up your power and restart from the bottom of the chain? Or do you keep your powers, and become something further from yourself ...

**Paranormasight: The Seven Mysteries of Honjo: Genre: Puzzle Visual Novel | Released: March 8, 2023 | Where: PC, Switch, Mobile | Developed by: xeen | Published by: Square Enix**

Not usually my vibe, but this truly was one of the most gripping narratives I've ever experienced. You play through multiple intersecting storylines, uncovering the mysterious arrangement of murders across the city of Honjo, Japan, where a deadly game has begun, full of people given supernatural abilities to curse those under specific conditions, only the curse bearer knows. You can't trust anyone, and you don't know who to trust, as the clock moves closer to night, and the curses come to light again, piecing together the mystery becomes a matter of life and death. The gameplay is a deceptively simple visual novel, but the puzzles are much more aware of that fact than you might think. With sharp character designs featuring unnervingly expressive faces and a soundtrack that sends as many chills down your spine as there are grooves, this is one to play in the dark. With the lights off and your nose just inches away ... from your fate ...



PHOTO CREDIT: *Nintendo*



PHOTO CREDIT: *Steam*



PHOTO CREDIT: *Nintendo*

**Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin: Genre: Metroidvania | Released: Nov. 16, 2006; Aug. 27, 2024 | Where: Nintendo DS, PC, Xbox, Switch, Playstation | Developed by: Konami, M2 | Published by: Konami**

In 1944, during WWII, Jonathan Morris and Charlotte Aulin, descendants of those entrusted with the Belmont's Vampire Killer whip, go and explore a castle that has mysteriously appeared over Europe, fearing that Dracula's resurrection during the global conflict would bring the world into ruin. But instead of playing as one character, you play as two. Jonathan does the weapons, and Charlotte does the spells. This leads to one of the most unique Metroidvania games out there, as the combat is built with juggling two characters with a tap of the button, as their strengths and weaknesses compensate for each other. Charlotte can cast buffs on Jonathan as well as hit far-off targets with mana-consuming spells, and Jonathan has a variety of melee weapons for whatever the occasion requires. You could also have both characters on play at once, one being controlled by you and the other by a computer, letting the mana bar also be their health, adding a risk-reward aspect to the combat and exploration. It is my favorite of the DS Castlevania games, and with the Dominance Collection, they can now be played on modern hardware, where the newest title in the series, Castlevania: Belmont's Curse, will be the first new mainline game in 18 years.

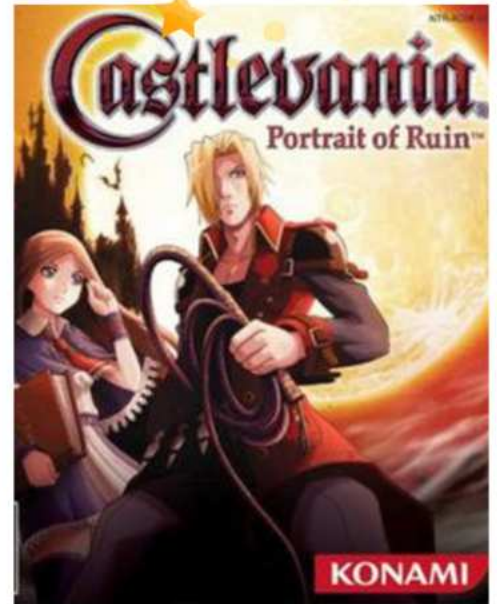


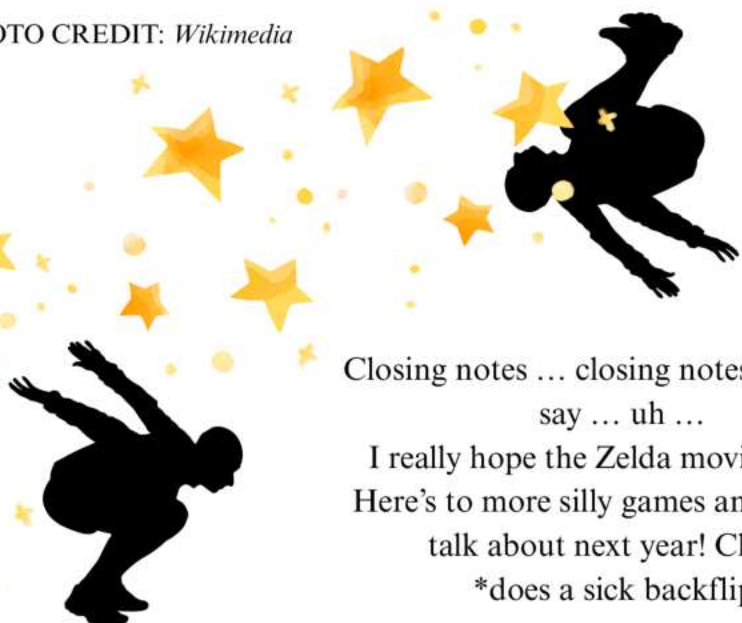
PHOTO CREDIT: *Wikimedia*



PHOTO CREDIT: *Wikimedia*

**Hollow Knight: Silksong: Genre: Metroidvania | Released: Sep. 4, 2025 | Where: PC, Xbox, Switch, Playstation | Developed by: Team Cherry | Published by: Team Cherry**

It's Silksong. What do you want me to say? It's all already been said. The fluid animations, the expressive acrobatic combat, the rich environmental storytelling, the multitude of bosses to fight and friends to meet, and the illustrious soundtrack. What else is there to say? ... Well ... honestly ... it wasn't THAT difficult really. Hollow Knight was harder, but that's because I didn't think I was able to beat it. The fact that I got through it gave me a hundred times more confidence to carry through Silksong than I ever thought possible, and that helped me beat some of its toughest challenges with a smile rather than a frown. That giant fly fucking sucks though fuck that guy.



Closing notes ... closing notes ... what to say ... uh ...

I really hope the Zelda movie is good! Here's to more silly games and anime to talk about next year! Cheers!

*\*does a sick backflip\**

## Sunblighted: Chapter Nine

BY: Tales from the Empty Notebook, *Special to The Hoot*

Last time on Sunblighted:

After providing Lih with food and shelter, Tev tells the tale of Sul-Um-Im's blessing, a decayed religion that she believes is connected to the mysterious appearance of Lih and Gerfol.

She says that Can and Thi were sacrifices saved by three warriors who go by the names: Sul Um and Im. each was blessed by the God of the Winds of Change, and one day they would return in some form or another to rid the world of Shades.

Tev believes that the Sunblighted is connected to this myth. somehow.

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““What does the Sunblighted have to do with any of this?” I grit my teeth, avoiding Tev's desperate eyes with the dying fire. “From what I know, the Sunblighted is a failed savior of humanity that only delusional fools like you cling onto for hope.” The room suddenly goes quiet. Tev grips my hands even tighter, but I have more to say. “Everyone claims that the last of some holy order will return after training from beyond the edge of the world and save us,” reminding myself of my conviction, I turn to Tev without hesitation. “But he is nothing but a tall tale left over from an age when elders suckled on the fresh fruit of hope.”

“How can you say such blasphemy!” Tev speaks in angry whispers, sadness adding to her rage. “The Troupe of Tomorrow comes round every season to spread the tales of the Sunblighted's journey throughout the world! How can you say that he is not real?”

What is she talking about? I pull my hand from her grasp and rise over the table. Are there others looking for the Sunblighted? “Who are these travelers?” Tev opens her mouth to speak, but closes it and wipes her eyes with her sleeve, covering her face. Resting on her arm reveals her mouth, which has turned mischievous, sharp teeth shining through cracked lips. Is everyone I meet a pretender?! I chastise myself. Damn it all. And yet, she now has my attention.

“Oh, Tev!” A voice blanketed in dust calls down from the stairs as a middle-aged woman in a plain green dress and browned working smock takes slow, even steps down. Her eyes are a light brown that might have once matched her hair, but time has turned some lines of young brown to ageing gray. “We have not opened yet! You cannot bring in guests until ...” She stops speaking and wearily eyes me up and down. Does she think I forced myself in? I hurriedly glance around the room for an escape route, but the light sound of something akin to a mouse squeak brings my attention back to the woman.

Her eyes are wide for just a moment before a similar grin to Tev's escapes her lips. Her bony cheeks turn a slight red, and her eyes shine bright as she takes faster steps down the stairs, eyeing my weapons laid out against the mantelpiece. I tense up. Is she a threat? She turns back from the weapons and puts her eyes on me, eyeing me up and down again. Her age could be a ruse for her strength, as it shows her knowledge.

“Well, I did not realize the Troupe of Tomorrow had such affable guards this time around!” Her tone turns so fast that I blink in

surprise, only for her to appear at my side almost instantly, her eyes blindingly close to my own. I jump back, but she grabs my hand tightly, exactly like Tev, and vigorously shakes it. “How do you do! My name is Bew, and this is my daughter Tev, but you already knew that! I hope the journey was not too rough,” she stops talking, taking heavy breaths.

“Bew!” The grin on Tev's face went blank, like all emotion was drained from her face, leaving it pale as stone. “He is not part of the Troupe.” she says with a stone-cold tone, launching a blame-accusing glare like an arrow through my head. “He is just a lost adventurer looking for a place to wait out the rain.” Tev turns to the woman; her mother, and places that blank stare back on her face, but Bew wears a smile that could fill a room with the warmth of a thousand hearths. Tev tries to keep her composure, but her straight face falters into a small smile as she speaks: “He was just about to leave.”

“An adventurer, oh!” Bew turns back to me as Tev's face falls into her hands again “You see that smile of hers? She hides it well.” Bew's eyes stare at me for a few moments ... Oh. I am supposed to say something now.

“Y-yes, I guess ...” I look away and notice a procession of villagers walking about through the glass panes. “Where are they going?”

“Oh, he does not know? Hm! He really is an adventurer.” Bew lets go of my hand and lightly taps my shoulder before standing next to Tev, reaching for her hand. Tev bats it away with a light yet stiff backhand.

“Shops are opening for the festival! Oh!” She runs from Tev's side and ducks under the bar counter, before returning as fast as she left with a new leather satchel, already filled with provisions. I take it from her, with my feelings of gratitude rendering me unable to bring up words before I realize: Where is my old bag, now that I think about it? The last thing I remembered was seeing Tev atop the hill ... after ... Suddenly, I feel a deep pit of anger in my gut. The cheese and bread might have satiated my hunger now, but that Gefrol trickster must have stolen my bag. My hands shift into restless fists. That sneaky conman!

“We had it lying around unused. No need to thank me. Strange that you were running around out there without any food, but adventurers are so wild now! Not like the old days.” She jumbles through her words wistfully, all while grabbing rags and new candles from under the counter. “Anyways, while I did tell you, Tev,

that you would help me prepare this morning for the incoming travelers by washing and cooking and cleaning and being present and kind," as she says all these things with loud emphasis, Tev seems to hide further and further into her habit and a pang of guilt pinches at my heart, though I cannot figure out why. "I will allow you to enjoy the festivities this time." Bew flicks her hand towards the door, still smiling. "Now be off, you two!"

Tev gives a muted sound as I glance towards my weapons, and she takes my hand and walks us to the door. As the door shuts behind us and we walk into the now dry starlight, I catch a glimpse of Bew whispering fervently, deep in prayer.

"She seems nice." I look at Tev and realize how tall I stand in comparison. I can see the crescent emblem's slight imprint on her hood in whole before she pulls it off her head, letting her brown hair flow free, and lets go of my hand, briskly walking away.

"Hey!" I catch up with a quick jolt, trying not to trip on the uneven stone street with lantern-lit corners and sudden drops in the steps. She walks fast for being so small, I think, ignoring how deep we go into this maze of a town. "Do you know someone by the name Gefrol?" She stops moving and turns back to me, that gray, bland look still plastered on her face. "I know the name sounds strange, but I promise it is just one man. He is a conman that stole my bag of supplies and provisions—"

A few children run past me from one house to another, holding a shiny, glazed rock-like substance on wooden sticks. I lower the arms I unconsciously put up in defense and grit my teeth again. They should be more careful. What could possibly make them so excited? And what was it that they were holding? I look to where they appeared from and see a wooden stand with an awning set up in front of two stores. A boney man and muscle-bound woman stand behind the stall, the woman circling sticks in a liquid of the same golden hue, and the man then places them into a pot of bubbling water placed above an earthen container full of fire. He takes the stick out with a flourish, revealing that the liquid has now crystallized into a jagged rocky formation. He hands it to a staring child; gazing in complete wonder. The man suddenly looks towards me, speaks to the woman next to him, then turns back to me.

"Hey, you! Performer! You look as if these honey crystals have enraptured your mind! Heha! Come over and try one!" he says.

I shift my eyes away from the stand, "Me?" I ask, looking around to see people between sets of stairs turn to face me. Why do I keep being seen for something which I am not?

"Who else?" the man continues. "You dress just like him!" The crowd around me takes note as well. Kids walk up to me and start pointing at my face, my clothes, all in enraptured excitement. "And the marking on your neck, you can barely see it under the scarf, but not even the most boisterous of entertainers are like—"

"Kib!" The woman next to him speaks up. "Will you stop bothering the performer? He is obviously agitated." She gives him, Kib, a stern glare. "You might have just spoiled the reveal."

"Come on, Mol, the performers never come up this far into town." Kib says, pleading while clasping his hands around hers. "Might as well put in a good word for the Sunblighted when they see him about."

As I walk closer to the stand, the woman, Mol, shakes his hands free and sighs. "Oh, now, you come on. We are not children anymore." She takes a golden glazed stick and hands it to Kib. "If you want to do something nice, just ask him."

"Excuse me," I say as I approach the stand. "I couldn't help but notice ..." They stare at me, expectantly. They must be intimidated, I think, stifling a sudden awkward cough. Maybe I should leave them alone ... But I feel like I need to know how they made these beautiful things in such a dark world. "How did you produce such a large amount of ..." I gesture vaguely to the basin.

"Honey?" Kib suggests.

"Yeah." I say, looking down at the wooden pegs displaying an arrangement of those jagged sweets. "I have never seen it on my travels."

"I would not be surprised to hear that." Mol says as she hands a few off to some adolescents. They look about as old as Tev. "They are found only in these woods." She gestures to the surrounding trees that hide this town. "Hives of stinging creatures form this almost out of nothing, and cracking their habitat open leaks this sweet lifeblood." Kib hands her a few more sticks, and she takes them to the fire, all while speaking, like there is a rhythm they effortlessly live in. "We only take a handful of these hives, as it is believed that this is what keeps the nature of our woods so peaceful—"

Suddenly, I hear laughter coming from behind me. I turn to see Tev, trying to cover her mouth, but the laughter seems to escape her mouth and spread across the streets. "You think that the bees protect us from the Shades?"

"Oh, do not give me that Tev." Mol's eyes become slits as she stares at Tev, her tone more tired than angry. Kib takes a step back, avoiding the crossfire of glares. "A living being makes more sense than a random campfire."

"You know it is strange that it always stays lit, right?" Tev walks up to the stand, firm in her stance.

"Actually, it is more strange that the hives only come round if the weather stays predictable." Mol straightens her back, revealing a towering stature over Tev. "You must also think those performers tell you about the real Sunblighted's journey?" Mol says in a quieter tone, then looks back up at me. "No offense, of course, you do great work, which gives us a reason to celebrate the nature that protects us."

As they continue to bicker, I take one of those honey sticks, and lick it. The rough crystal texture sends shivers across my back, but the sweetness is intoxicating as I hold it in my mouth, sucking on the glazed delicacy. Fascinating. I think, turning to Tev to get her to stop bothering the couple—

SNAP

The winds stopped rustling the trees, the people stopped walking across the stones. All the world stood still, as if time itself had stopped.

"Hey Lih!" a sly voice loudly exclaimed behind me. "Enjoying your sweet treat?" I tensed my jaw. I know whose voice that belongs to.

Gefrol waved to me from down the street, but I did not wave back. "So, what do you think of the world you created?"

## Sunblighted: Chapter 10



BY: Tales from the Empty Notebook, *Special to The Hoot*

"I made this?" I said in disbelief. "What did you do ..." the words dissolved on my lips.

"Okay, okay, one at a time." Gefrol wagged a finger in my face. "You changed the fate of the world the moment you became Sulumim." He smugly clasped his hands behind his back, wearing a thin smile. "But not enough. People are still confused about who really controls the fate of the world." He grabbed a honey stick from Mol's frozen hand, and took a bite out of it. An almost exaggerated satisfaction washed over his face, but it is impossible to tell if he even truly feels those emotions. "Mmm, yeah, these really are best fresh. Anyways," he let go of the stick and moved closer to me. It floated in the air behind him. "You cannot get too attached. All you need to do is ensure that humanity makes progress, then we can continue onwards."

"Continue?" I said. "I have not even started. I need to learn more about all this," I looked at the plethora of houses with colorful rooftops and noticed the decaying temple-like structure at the bottom of the steps. "How it all came to be—"

"It is not worth it." Gefrol sighed. "They got too many details wrong. They do not actually believe in you, not the masses, anyway. They will not even remember you after this." he shook his head. "The goal of the Sunblighted is to become the savior, and since you missed your chance as a child to be raised as such; before the Shades became almost invincible, we are going to have to find another pillar of hope, to change the world once more."

"I understand that my actions changed the world, in some sense." I trailed behind Gefrol across the town. I saw children staring at performers, their spears of fire tossed and frozen in midair, people sitting at crossroads mid-conversation, the air missing from their breaths. The only sounds came from the steps Gefrol and I took, but only my breath moved the air. "But I was not born a warrior! I did not even defeat the Shade." I shook my head. "It was Canthi."

"Oh, but you are! It was the true fate of things that brought Canthi to save you." He said as I followed his aimless wandering. "You were saved by Canthi in the past because you are meant to be a warrior. If you died then and there, well," he stopped walking across the streets and headed straight down the steps. "It would mean that there would never be another savior."

I turned to follow, anxious to know what he meant. Eventually, we ended up at the bottom of the town, where a bridge connects the town and the temple. Gefrol stopped walking and gestured towards the vast building. The temple's empty windows emitted a strained orange glow, like a dying hearth.

"Look up through the roof of that long-forgotten temple," he said. "Then you will know who they speak of."

SNAP

In a blink, my scenery changes back to where I was standing before Gefrol showed up. The wind rustles through branches, Mol and Tev are still arguing, the sounds of steps and voices carry through the town, and the crystallized honey is still in my mouth. I look over at Mol, and she still holds the stick that Gefrol took. Or,

I muse. He never took it at all. It is as if the world does not know of his existence when he freezes time.

I grab Tev by the wrist. She looks up at me, and almost breaks my hand. "What is it?!" she says.

I point toward the multiple elevations of downward leading crossroads. "Is this the way to the temple?" I say.

Her face transforms from an angry glare, to stone-emotionless, to complete surprise. "Yes, right, I was almost distracted by these—" she stops speaking and waves her hands absentmindedly at the couple.

"Whatever, forget them," If Gefrol is right, that will not matter anyways, I think, regretting the words instantly, before settling the conflict in my mind. We head straight for the temple, avoiding any distractions. I step onto that dark wooden bridge, and Gefrol stands there, like he had never moved from that spot.

"I knew it." says both Gefrol and Tev at the same time. Tev hesitates, so Gefrol continues: "I knew I forgot something. Good thing you remembered the girl."

"And I knew you were not just some vagabond traveler." she says. "I kept him safe. I answered his questions. Now hold your half of the bargain."

"Bargain?" I turn to Tev as she turns her eyes away from mine. "How much of my fate was spoken behind my back?"

"Nothing serious." Gefrol says. "Thank goodness what you both want involves the same process," he gives Tev a shallow smile and pushes the door of the temple open. "At least, by way of the ends justifying the means." He gestures to its flickering insides. "Make thy presence be known, maybe some answers will arise."

As we step through the doorway, shallow lights dance, illuminating the shadow-filled temple, and a few candles stand alight within black mesh cages that are mounted on the musty walls. Despite the structure's massive stature, it feels much smaller when stepping inside, like the corners are filled with a physical darkness that makes it difficult to breathe. Within the heavy shadows, starlight trickles in from windows up high.

"Oh, Tev, it seems like you brought a new friend." An old man in a discolored habit speaks in a high-pitched tone from across the room, where an arrangement of candles are placed on a raised surface. He walks closer, swimming in and out of the flickering candlelight. "It seems like today has been an interesting day, after all. Ho ho!" He strokes his white beard and chuckles. Tev immediately crosses the room and launches into the old man's arms for a hug. They stand there and talk to each other—

"This is the world they live in." Gefrol speaks into my ear. "But we need to find your true purpose. This," he points to the two of them, "is what you are fighting for. Over and over, you will fight for people to live lives of love." I look at Gefrol, but his eyes are stuck on Tev and the old man's bright laughter. He blinks, and abruptly all sympathy falls off his face. "Ok! Enough reunion time! Vys, remember what I asked for?"

"Oh, right. Tev, there has been a new discovery." The old man, Vys, pointed above the raised platform of tables. "This man, Gef, was able to translate the scroll with the four emblems." He then points above the platform, where I see four looming shapes outlined in silver—

"Star, Horse, Moon, and Sun." I say automatically. My hands suddenly get agitated, as if they are looking to trace something. My left hand reaches for the scarf covering my neck, and pulls it off, revealing a birthmark that matches one of the symbols. I remember—

On the damp grass, as Sulumim, I had blindly caressed four wooden objects in my pocket, lamenting my woodworking abilities, but first calling them by names. I trace the circular line and all its jutting wavy lines, repeating each name I heard, trying to invoke some sort of meaning.

"Star ..." No. "Horse ..." No. "Moon ..." No. "Sun—"

My fingers freeze, my eyes stuck on Gefrol's wide grin, but I was not looking at him, I was looking within. I stare with disbelief at the stone wall within my mind, as the rocks began to crumble, failing to hold back those unwanted memories, they begin to flood my mind's eye in an instant—

"Hey Lih! Where did you get that scar, huh?" I was entering one of the avenue tunnels in the Cavedom, called Grisuē, which was between my village, Relk, and the neighboring one, Nuhē, when I noticed the usual group of lackeys following me from behind. At age 15, I was sent alone into the depths of a cave, searching for any leaks in the walls of the soon-to-be flattened cavern for easier carriage travel. It was imperative that I do this job.

"Did you think you looked better with a shitty cattle brand on your neck?" a different voice spat out from within the group. At that point in my life, I felt prideful in my work, despite the constant harassment.

I was told by the elder, Ser, my caretaker, that when they found me alone at the maw of the Cavedom; a baby swabbed in rare silk, the elders tore the silk from me and gave me a ragged cloth to keep me warm. No one knew where I came from, nor what the birthmark on my neck meant, so the elders didn't stop to provide for those they cared for first and foremost. But Ser swapped it back, wishing to see me grow. She gifted me with the value of working hard, as well as a fine knife to remember her, the sharp woman that she was.

While I was known as "the boy with the branded neck" since birth, she did not call me that. She named me. Called me Lih, saying it meant Light Bringer in the ancient tongue, back in the ancient time, when names used to have knowledge behind them, when words were written to be understood and not just spoken. She taught me what the names of the people around me meant, and how they describe or oppose the natures they exhibited. That was how I understood people. Eventually, Ser passed on when I turned 10. That was when I began working. That was when I needed her the most; when my understanding of people became tested.

I learned that the adults watching over us liked to keep me separate from the rest of the apprentices, probably at the request of the elders. All that did was make the other apprentices question me, harass me, place themselves over me, all while the uncaring watchman was conveniently not looking our way. And

yet, I worked extra hard to cover for the missing supplies that those bastards would not provide. Because Ser taught me that the only way I can prove myself here is not with fighting, but with helping the Cavedom. When she died, I learned that solitude meant that no one got in my way, and working with others was always met with disappointment.

So when I was finally given an assignment of equal impact for the effort I had always provided, and the reward being just as great, I knew I was doing something right. But then, the further I walked through the torch-lit cave, the faster those troublemakers caught up to me. One by one, they started kicking up dust in my face, laughing and circling me, calling me names:

"Bastard." They kicked up dirt. I walked. "Orphan." One of them grabbed my shoulders and tried to push me, but I shook her off and continued to walk "Shade-spawn." They threw rocks, but they always fell just behind my heels. "Wretched." They spat at my steps as I ran away. They tried to chase me, but I was faster, and they were not interested in following me deeper into the cave.

As I ran, I felt the surge of my emotions, and when it bubbled over, with an outburst of strength, I punched the wall with my right hand, cracking the stone and cutting my skin.

SNAP

My eyes shot open, staring at the ceiling from the cold ground. How long was I—

I snapped back to reality, my head pounding. "What ... how could I forget ..." I sat up on the freezing hard stone, and rested my head in my hands. "Wh-why can I not remember!" Tears welled up in my eyes. "It is like the mental dam has been plugged back up, but the waters that are my memories pool around my feet. I can look down and see who I was, but," I lifted my head and stared at my trembling hands.

Gefrol, from behind me, spoke up. "In your quest for revenge, you have forgotten what makes you, you." He sighed. "And no one else can find that for you."

"Why not just, use your godlike powers then!?" I shouted over my splitting headache. It pulsed through my head like my heartbeat was trapped in my mind. "You seem to know a lot!"

"I just told you, no one else can find that!" Gefrol pointed at my head. "Whatever is holding you back, is in there." He swung his arms around, gesturing wildly at the empty temple. "And this is not what we need. We need a real reminder of your destiny. We need to give hope back to the people, more change to the world, so you can kill the source." Gefrol pointed at my neck. "Because even if you do not believe it, I know for certain one thing about you.

SNAP

"You are the Sunblighted." he says, as the four of us stare up at the four symbols, their shadows pressing onto the floor on which we stand. "You can figure out how you got the idea of revenge later. But for now—"

"I have a duty." I say with wide eyes, thinking about Sulumim, and his sacrifice for the future. "And only I can do it." To protect the future. The future he died for.

"I must. . .



*Sky Heart*

*By Tehilla Oami, Special To The Hoot*



*Fiery Sunset*

*By Tehilla Oami, Special To The Hoot*



*Growing Stones*

*By Abi Streger, Special To The Hoot*



# Photos of the Week



*The Bay*

*By Liam Gurevitch, Staff*



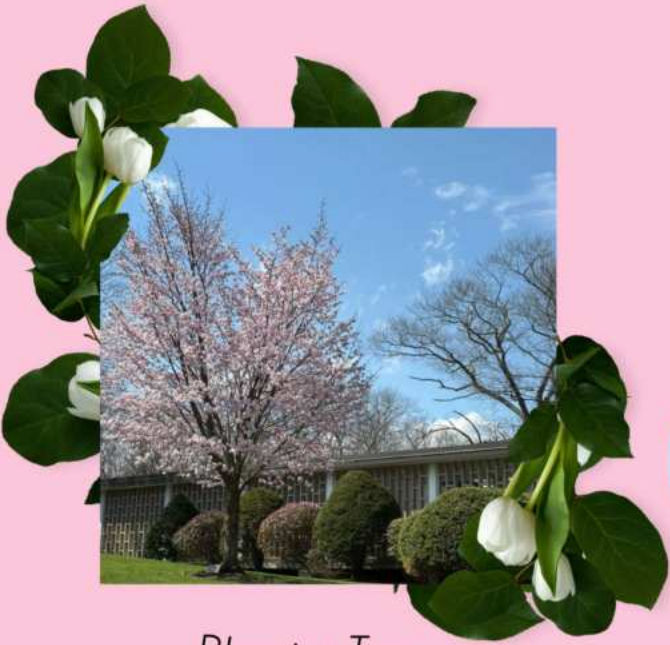
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*The Fountain*

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