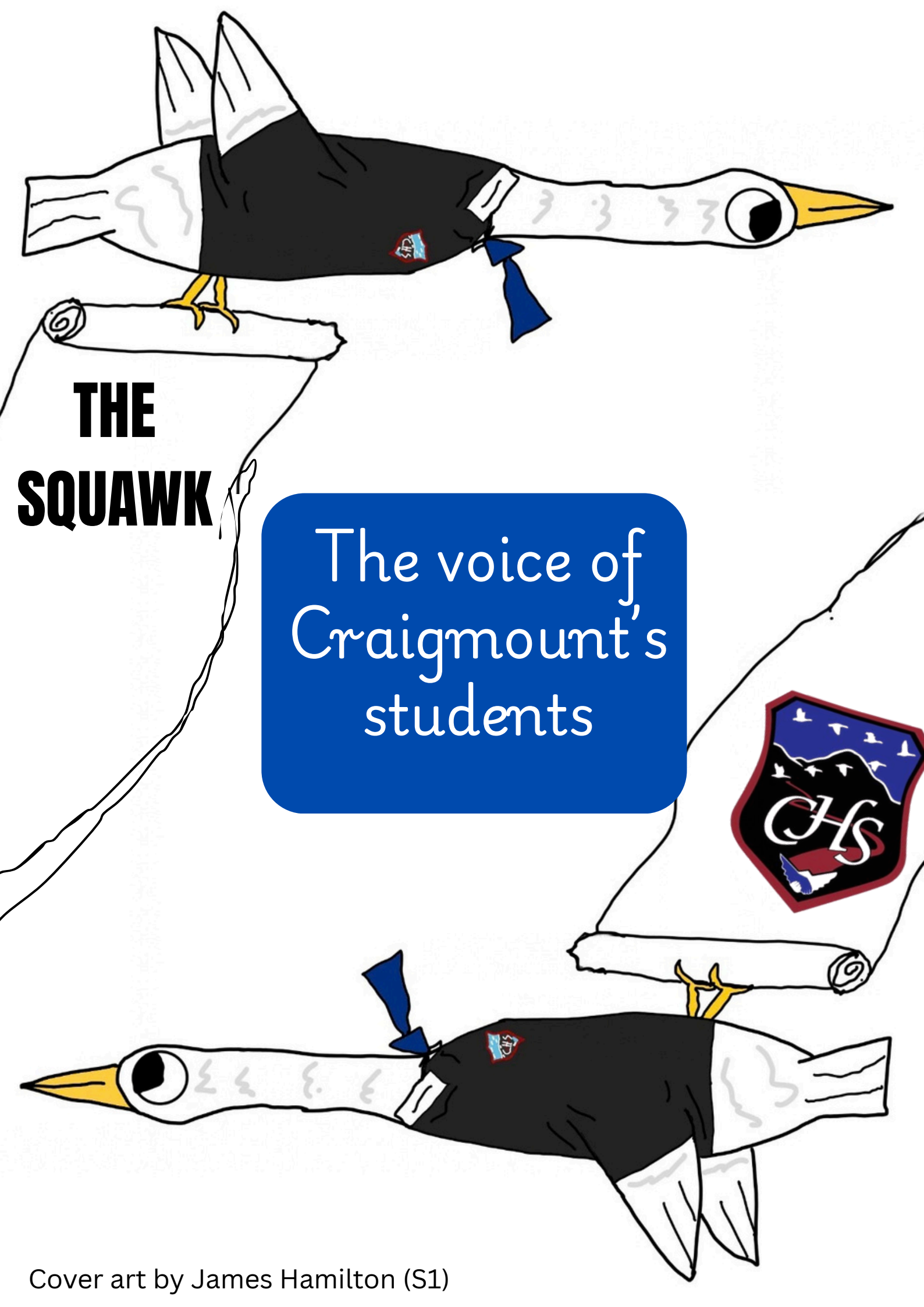


A cartoon illustration of two penguins. The penguin at the top is standing on a scroll and holding a small scroll with its beak. The penguin at the bottom is also standing on a scroll. Both penguins are wearing black shirts with a small logo on the chest and blue ties. The background is white with some faint, stylized lines.

THE SQUAWK

The voice of
Craigmount's
students

A WARM WELCOME

As always with the new term in September, we're joined by the new S1's from schools all over our learning community, and with that comes a fresh view point on the school and our curriculum. To make sure every year group feels seen and represented by their newspaper, we at The Squawk interviewed some of the newer students about what they think of our school community and moving into the next phase of education: here's what they had to say!

How has your first week of school been?

Good but scary!

Very good, I made a lot of friends

Really good!

Really fun because there's been lots of people who've been really kind

Is there anything about high school you think is better than primary school?

Getting to know new people

Moving from class to class

Everything!

Looking at the responses, it's refreshing to see such positive responses to joining high school and an exciting outlook on the years ahead of them! For their privacy, the s1 students interviewed will not be named, but I would like to thank them for speaking to me, a big scary senior, and for being so eager to get their voices out there! Hopefully we've not scared you off The Squawk as we'd love to see some younger years engaging with their school and community!

As a senior, I remembering being younger and thinking exams were the absolute end of the world, so to hopefully ease the worries of any S1 mini me's stressing about the future, we also wanted to give the students the opportunity to learn a bit more about the senior phase as well.

Here are some of their questions:

How are the exams?

The word exams honestly makes it sound much worse than it is. Throughout the years you'll do formal assessments and essays under timed conditions, and while it's not the same as being crammed into the gym hall and watched over by examiners, the structure is the exact same. The best thing to do to prepare for the senior phase is just give your all in every test and try your hardest: the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Is school hard?

This question is hard to answer as one person with only one experience of school, but my best answer for this is that for some it might be, but there is loads of support you can find to help you if you are struggling, academically or socially. Some of the supports that can be provided for you are IT (using your iPad for assignments), quieter places to sit exams, the wellbeing hub downstairs, pupil support leaders, reduced timetables and many more. The school community is here to support you and give you the best experience possible, so don't be afraid to advocate for yourself!

Thanks again to the SI's for their help (even if one of you thought I was a teacher and made me realise how old I am) and welcome to Craigmount!

*Hannah and
The Squawk*



Sunny Dancer



Film Review

by Charlotte Grant

Sunny Dancer, directed by George Jaques, is a coming of age story that follows a girl called Ivy Pritchard who's parents send her to Children Run Free camp during summer to make friends after she is ten months free of cancer. Ivy doesn't want to go despite her parents being insistent that this will be good for her.

The film is such a raw and feeling representation of teenage life and the experiences of young people with cancer whilst maintaining a realistic and heartfelt outlook on their futures. It is guaranteed to make you laugh out loud, cry, and feel everything in between.

As previously mentioned, George Jaques wrote and directed the film. You might recognise Jaques from other films he has worked on including *Death On The Nile* and *A Town Called Malice*. Jaques' mother was diagnosed with cancer at a young age which inspired him to write a story showing the lives of those going through the same thing. However the unique thing about George Jaques is that he did not stick to the usual portrayal of cancer patients in the media. Jaques wanted to make his film a comedy that shows the joy of life, regardless of what a person is going through or has gone through, and worked closely with the Teenage Cancer Trust to make his dream a reality. Jaques wanted to show that those living with cancer are living too and they get to have a fulfilling chance at life. In fact, at the camp in the film they state that it's "where kids come to be kids" which just shines the perfect light on the message of the film.

Second to the fantastic writing and directing, the cast of the film was truly incredible, with many famous faces. Bella Ramsey, who starred in *Game Of Thrones*, *The Worst Witch*, and *The Sheep*

Detectives, plays the main character Ivy Pritchard. Their performance was phenomenal. Ivy is a rebellious and slightly mischievous girl and Bella fulfilled the role with grace and confidence. They did not disappoint the viewer with the wit and determination they gave to Ivy; additionally, in the more reserved scenes where Ivy refuses to try to make friends as she feels bitter towards being stuck at camp for four weeks, Bella still manages to convey every feeling of their character's through their body language and limited movement, making the character feel isolated without making Ivy feel inconsistent or disoriented to the viewers.

Another famous face is, the one and only, Neil Patrick Harris. Most well known for his roles in *How I Met Your Mother*, *A Series Of Unfortunate Events*, and *The Smurfs*, Harris portrayed the character of Patrick in *Sunny Dancer*, the camp master. The character is fun, loveable, but holds a sad backstory that really makes you know that he supports and nurtures all the children in his care to the best of his abilities. Patrick doesn't strive for perfection, but he strives to make life liveable for teenagers with cancer, where the world won't define them by just their diagnosis. You can really feel that Harris put time and effort into making his character the adult that all children need in their life: honest and accepting.

And finally another, perhaps not so well known name, (but I love her so she's going in, just deal with it) is Jessica Gunning. Known for her roles in *The Outlaws*, *The Magic Faraway Tree*, and *Pride*, she played Karen Pritchard, Ivy's mother. Gunning usually plays very comedic and silly roles, and yes Karen was an absolute diva whom all viewers of the film loved very much, she also has some heavier scenes where we see her speak to her daughter on darker topics (tearjerker scenes, for real. Take tissues to the cinema, people!) Karen was a classic parent: embarrassing her child at every given possibility whilst remaining sensitive and learning from her errors. Gunning fit the role to a T; the character simply wouldn't have been the same if she had not been the one to play her. Also, and I'm not saying anything more than this, James Blunt appears at some (unspecified) point in the film.

If my words so far have not yet convinced you to run (not walk) to your nearest cinema to purchase your tickets to watch this brilliant film, then allow me to do so with the filming locations of *Sunny Dancer*.

Why? I hear you ask, well that would be because the film was shot in various places across Scotland, mainly in the areas up north in the highlands around the Auchengillan Outdoor Centre near Loch Lomond, which we all know are truly gorgeous and perfect for the rural campsite vibe that Jaques was going for.



And finally to shine a light on what made this film possible: The Teenage Cancer Trust.

The Teenage Cancer Trust are the only UK based charity to support and improve the lives of young people aged 13-24 through living with cancer. They help to make young people with cancer feel more comfortable when they are in hospital, organise events to help teenagers diagnosed with cancer connect with others to form friendships and bonds with those going through similar things, provides emotional support to help cancer patients cope with their diagnosis, and lift up the voices of those with cancer to make sure they receive the resources and help they require. Sunny Dancer highlights that cancer does not define a person's life and that those living with life-threatening illness and disabilities can still live a full and happy life both during and after their cancer treatment. The film focussing on this instead of hospital appointments, cancer treatment, and sorrow was vitally important to demonstrate how cancer does not fully represent or take away from their personality and identity.

Personally, I loved the film. I thought it was such a different but needed outlook on teenage life and love. It has such an unfiltered and messy approach to young identity with those you share common experiences with that just stripped everything back to the plain essence of life itself.

Enough about me, though, here's what some fellow viewers of the film thought:

Anonymous Craigmount parent said about the film: "I thought it was a beautiful film about teenage love where adults and young people had to look at each other's lives from their perspectives. It was a surprising that it was introduced by its director who explained that his film was not about cancer but the lives of the people living through it. I felt it was refreshing to see a director so young as he would have a real insight into teenage life because he's only just come out of it himself. What I didn't like was that the camp was run by an American. I felt that it didn't make sense and that Harris should have played his character with a British accent. Regardless of this, Patrick was a likeable character who did not reflect badly on the film's overall performance."

Anonymous former Craigmount pupil said, "I just loved it. I don't think I'd change a thing. It was sad but it gives great perspective on life. Everyone should go see it because it is very relevant to teenagers. The world we live in is so out of touch and the film is about connecting with people and not letting experiences define who you are which can be applied to many contexts and is very relatable to many young people."

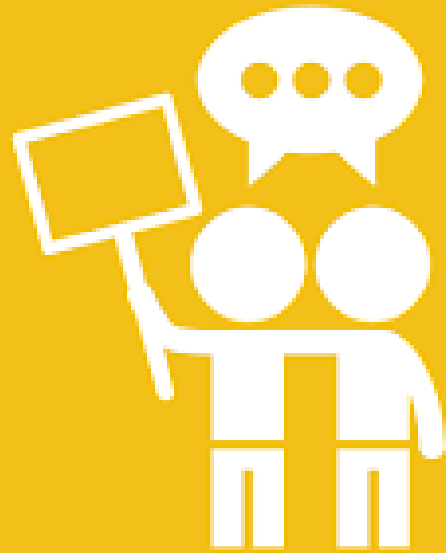
Please be aware that this film is rated a fifteen and contains strong language, sex references, alcohol and drug misuse, and themes of mental health and grief.



If you want to find out more about the work of the Teenage Cancer Trust and the film, visit

<https://www.teenagecancertrust.org/>

Right of the Month



SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS

Every child has the right to peacefully meet, gather and join groups. This right is protected by Article 15 in the UNCRC. It means that children should be able to come together to share ideas and express their opinion as long as they do so peacefully and safely. This could look like joining a club or taking part in a peaceful protest.

Governments, parents and teachers all have the responsibility to protect this right. Governments should make sure children are allowed to gather peacefully without unfair restrictions and should provide safe places where this can happen. Parents should listen to their child and encourage them to take part in safe activities. Teachers can encourage pupils to work together, share ideas and understand how to express their views.

So what can we do to help? We can make sure everyone feels welcome and included joining group activities. We can listen to different opinions, treat others with respect and speak up when someone is being treated unfairly. By working together and respecting one another, we can make sure every child has their right to peaceful assembly.

Additionally, you can join pupil action groups such as ourselves (the Rights Respecting PAG) and help us make sure every child knows their rights. We are working towards passing our gold award assessment, scheduled for September and we could really use more hands and voices! If you are interested, please take to Miss. Hope in World Languages.

DELTARUNE:

The game where your choices don't matter

Deltarune a game where your choices... do not matter! ... or do they? It is REALLY unclear currently.

Deltarune, a game that takes place in the alternative reality of hit-game Undertale. You play as Kris, a silent teenage human, along with a purple dinosaur ~~Barney~~ Susie.

After accidentally entering a closetless closet, they begin falling into the DARK WORLD. In the Dark World, Kris and Susie meets Ralsie! The prince from the dark. Throughout the game. Kris, Susie, and Ralsie set off to shut down the dark fountains.



Where I think the game shines best are the use of chapters. Toby Fox (the creator of Deltarune) uses chapters for the game, which means that the overall game experience is longer. On average taking around 18 hours to complete (that's not including different routes.) That is a good thing because it gives more time for the story to develop and characters to grow. For example, Susie starts off as the stereotypical bully archetype, but as the story progresses, she becomes this softer character and becomes great friends with Kris.

Chapter 1!

Chapter One feels like the simplest chapter out of all of them. The story begins with you creating an avatar. Once you choose the legs, body, and hair of your avatar, it gets deleted. "Your choices do not matter." You awaken as an emo Kris, a human in a world of monsters, harassed by Susie. A teacher sends you and Susie to the closet to receive chalk. Turns out Susie ate the initial chalk. However, when they reach the room, they come to a realisation that it is a black void. Susie and Kris hesitantly enter the closet; within the closet they begin to fall.

They awaken in a place similar to the normal world, but darker... literally. After a while of aimless walking and puzzle solving, they find themselves standing in front of a castle. From the shadows a cloaked figure approaches Susie and Kris, claiming to be "the prince from the darkness: Ralsie." Ralsie explains to the two that there is a prophecy that includes the three of them. You see, the world remains to be balanced by the light and the dark. But Dark Fountains threatens this balance and could cause an unknown disaster called "The Roaring." It is the job of three heroes; a human, a monster, and the prince of darkness to close these fountains.

Comedy: 7/10 Gameplay: 6/10 Story: 5.5/10 Uniqueness: 5/10

Chapter 2!

After the events of the first chapter. Kris and Susie find themselves back in their boring life, sitting in school. Seeking adventure Susie takes Kris back to the closet. However, before they could get the chance to open the door, a reindeer called Noelle approaches the two. Noelle flusteredly hands Susie a lunchbox full of chalk. They all neutrally make plans to meet at Library to discuss their school project. Then when Noelle left, Susie slammed the closet door open. There it is again. The void. Kris and Susie confidently jump into the void and end up back into the dark world. Most importantly, Ralsie is there too.

Their reunion is cut short when Susie tells Ralsie about the school project. Ralsie, fearing that the school project is impotent, says that they will hangout later but right now they need to focus on school. At first, Susie hesitated but eventually agreed. With that, they left the dark world. With nothing else to do, they meet Noelle and Berdly (another annoying student) in the computer room of the library. However, Susie or Kris are unable to enter the computer room because it was replaced by another black void. Sensing trouble and fearing for their friends, Susie and Kris enter the void.

Not long afterwards they battle with Berdly and after this incredibly pathetic fight and almost getting caught by Queen, they end up meeting up Susie and Ralsie again. Turns out that Ralsie had taught Susie how to cast a healing spell. Which may or may not be incredibly weak at the beginning. With the whole team back together (plus Noelle) they continue their quest for the dark fountain.

Once all the puzzles are dealt with, and Susie has checked up on Noelle. Kris, Susie, and Ralsie faces Queen one more time. Because if the fountain says open then the whole world will turn to chaos. Titans will form from the fountains and devour the land. The inhabitants of the Dark World will perish into stone; the human and monsters will spend their lives in constant darkness. Turns out Queen didn't know that could happen and obviously freaked out about it. She willingly let them pass and close the fountain.

Comedy: 8.5/10 Gameplay: 7/10 Story: 7/10 Uniqueness: 7/10

This is where I consider the game to pick up steam. The chapters are longer; the story gets more complicated, it starts feeling more like it's own thing rather than the generic RPG. The biggest highlight of this chapter (at least to me) is the comedy. It really feels like Toby Fox really put his full effort into the comedy of this chapter. The comedy really shows in Queen. She genuinely has the funniest dialogue within the whole game.

Do I recommend this game?

Absolutely. If you are a fan of RPG's, puzzle solving games, or even just wanting to play an indie game. Its story does get pretty complicated eventually, but when the quality of each chapter gets better and better, it becomes much more enjoyable and interesting. The game is pretty much on everything; PlayStation, Nintendo Switch 1+2, Steam and only for £20.99.

If you are still on the fence about buying the game. The first two chapters are completely FREE as a demo. So, if you have the free time check out this game. I guarantee you will enjoy it.



Review

Written by Charlotte Grant

Showstopper! The Improvised Musical came to the Edinburgh Fringe 2026. It is a fun, interactive show that takes hilarious twists and turns as the audience shouts out the most random contributions which the cast then have to work into whatever storyline they have created so far.

The night that I attended, the audience decided the cast would be performing a musical about the *true* discovery of penicillin, entitled: **My Favourite Pills**. The audience chose that the songs would be inspired by *The Sound Of Music*, *Chicago*, and *Wicked*. The story followed Alexander Flemming's assistant as she fought to be noticed as the true person behind all of his discoveries. As the musical progressed, Flemming and his assistant use two orphans from a nearby workhouse to help aid their studies with tragic results. The laboratory cleaner finds a Petri dish of mould (penicillin), which Alexander claims and agrees (behind his assistant's back) to make into medicine to give to all the other orphans in the workhouse to help save them (much to the annoyance of the ghosts). Alexander leaves, thinking that his assistant is dead, but he returns to the lab to find his assistant, the cleaner, the two ghost orphans, and for some reason Queen Victoria, Winston Churchill, and Amelia Earhart(???) were also there, ready to claim what is rightfully theirs (hell yeah, girl power! Plus Churchill but we can just forget about him for now...)

The cast were truly exceptional: the way they effortlessly bounce off each other's ideas and work together to make up wacky songs and plot points that excite the audience. The narrator character, who acted as a sort of host to the audience, was truly hilarious, his ability to dip in and out of the scenes to drive the story forward (and make some questionable jokes) was a delight to the audience. Similarly, the live band were extraordinary at making up tunes and sound effects that add to the storyline, accompanying the main cast perfectly. The set was also something I really admired. It was very versatile and the cast interacted with it amazingly, moving things around to draw the audience in and give them the real idea of what was going on.

I have attended a couple improvised fringe shows over the years and not one has ever let me down! Every time has been side-achingly hilarious and makes everyone want more. I would highly recommend any one of them, and the best part is, no two performances of the show will be the same! You could go to the same improvised show two, three, four, why not every time! And each performance would be distinct, unique, and equally as funny and enthralling. I cannot wait to see what the 2027 fringe shows have in store for us!



Should you ody-see it?

Please, please, from this point on, spoiler warning. I know, misleading title, but let me have my puns.

Written by Ollie McLean

Homer's *Odyssey* is, quite literally, a millennium old classic. Originally sang as a defining part of Ancient Greek religion, *The Odyssey* regales the epic of a homesick war general sailing across the Aegean ocean back to his wife; now standing as primary sources of contact with that bygone era. As such, when Christopher Nolan takes a shot at retelling this beautiful story of love, loyalty, and arrogance, many heckles are raised. Nolan's *Odyssey*- which, might I add, is now the first result when you google 'The Odyssey'- runs a full two hours and forty minutes in attempt to encapsulate the context of the world, the context of *The Iliad*, and the entire story of *The Odyssey*- a series of books that notoriously take weeks to finish. Fortunately, I managed to scrounge together the opinions of those I deemed experts in the field, and those who were unaware of the story of *The Odyssey*- as to seem less biased.

I asked multiple of our very own Craigmount teachers, Mr Gaughan (English/ Media), Mr Higgins (English/ Classics), Miss Reid (RMPS), Cat Burns (our careers advisor), and Ms Crosbie (History), of whom opinions varied massively. To these candidates, I asked three very vague questions: “Did you enjoy the film?” “What were your initial criticisms and/or compliments?” and “What were your interpretations of Odysseus’ character?”

Surprisingly, almost everyone I asked echoed the idea that the time passes without you noticing it, with many stating that something was always happening. Additionally, the everyone said the cinematography was always flawless; Nolan chose to use entirely practical effects, and Göransson’s score primarily included Ancient Greece instruments such as the lyre and the aulos, which many participants claimed improved their immersion in the world. Building upon this, Mr Gaughan claimed that Nolan makes epics designed specifically for the grandeur of a cinema setting, which is clear to see in the *Odyssey* (take one look at Agammemnon’s aura-farming on the big screen and tell me he’s wrong).

Another commonly used mantra was that of knowing what to be prepared for. Many agreed this is very clearly a Nolan movie, for better or for worse. A claim championed by Cat Burns, who claimed, “Go in expecting Nolan’s *Odyssey* and you’ll be fine.” The director affected the experience for Mr Higgins so much, he condemned the film to three out of five stars. Suggesting Nolan struggles to find the heart in a film, forcing him to ask, “so what?” by the end of it. While Nolan’s film left Mr Higgins ‘cold,’ he did define it as a

‘Good Film’ but nothing more. Saying this, Mr Higgins did enjoy the film, particularly noting his appreciation of the conversation between Penelope and Odysseus... then Odysseus did ‘John Wick’ and that was fun. This idea of lack of humanity was argued both by Mr Gaughan and by Ms Crosbie. of humanity was argued both by Mr Gaughan and by Ms Crosbie. Mr Gaughan claimed the political aspects throughout the film portrayed themes of misandry masterfully, namely in Morton’s portrayal of Circe; he suggested the misandry was contrasted masterfully by the stance Morton’s character takes- using implied prior experiences to expect the cruelty she preemptively responds to. Echoing this, Ms Crosbie stated that Nolan’s attempt at the themes of suffering, loss, and the cruelty of war were tackled succinctly and masterfully, adding that they particularly speak to the modern day.

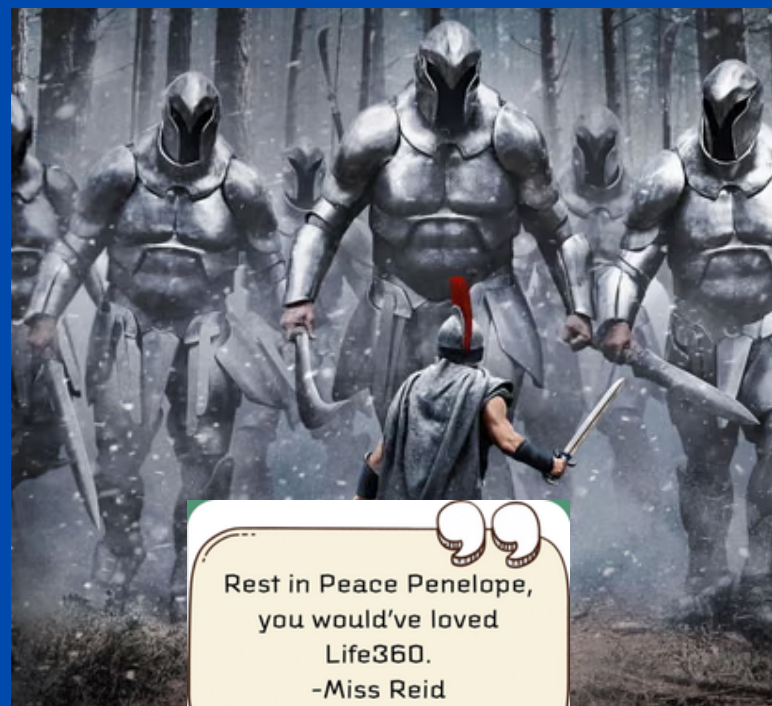
Following my participant’s initial impressions on the movie, I asked what parts of it spoke particularly to them. There were many notes on Circe’s scenes, noting specifically the practical effects and commenting on the political significance of the scene. From Miss Reid, a statement about the character’s importance to the current feminist movement, claiming her ability to use her femininity to drop Odysseus’ men’s guards, allowing her to overpower them through non-conventional means stood as a pillar of modern resistance- placing femininity both as a strength and as an ironic commentary on how a strong female character is still defined by their gender. Following that, multiple candidates noted their appreciation for

Samantha Morton's acting capabilities, claiming she was the best casting decision made across the film, with multiple taking issue at some of the other casting choices- suggesting they are many of the same faces that have been seen across Hollywood innumerable times.

To conclude my interview, I asked my participants their opinions about Odysseus' character. Answers revolved around the concept that Odysseus was a highly generic character, acting more as a story device to move the plot along than his own highly interesting character. It was implied that he was more of a vessel for the Greek's suggested guilt over the Trojan war, rather than grappling with his own guilt. Mr Higgins suggested Odysseus was a more irrational character than in Homer's telling and seemed to be a character by which Nolan could take a stance politically- implying his purpose was to show Nolan's thoughts on the consequences of warfare.

This idea of Odysseus being a placeholder character with no real depth was argued by Ms Crosbie, who notably does have a crush on Matt Damon. She argued Odysseus' character focused on his regrets and his troubled past. She claimed his decisions were often deeply uncomfortable to watch, but he seemed to be doing his best as we all do. Ms Crosbie claimed she enjoyed the fact Odysseus' character was not used to glorify war, but to emphasise the disgust and the fragility of conflict.

Overall, the general consensus of my participants was that you should indeed go and watch Nolan's The Odyssey, particularly if you're interested in greek mythos, are looking to get into it, or simply want to watch a generally solid action film. While the movie does miss the mark significantly in relevance to our knowledge of the ancient world, I can assure you no classicist is taking up arms about the topic, nor will Miss Lawson use Nolan's film as anything more than a visual to represent a preestablished concept- so you have no need worry about consistency.



Rest in Peace Penelope,
you would've loved
Life360.
-Miss Reid

Here are some of The Squawk's favourite Greek Deities and Heroes:

Baneen - Medusa
Charlotte - Hera
Caitlin - Medusa
Hannah - Dionysus

Eve - Medusa

Ollie - Echo

Tyler - Poseidon

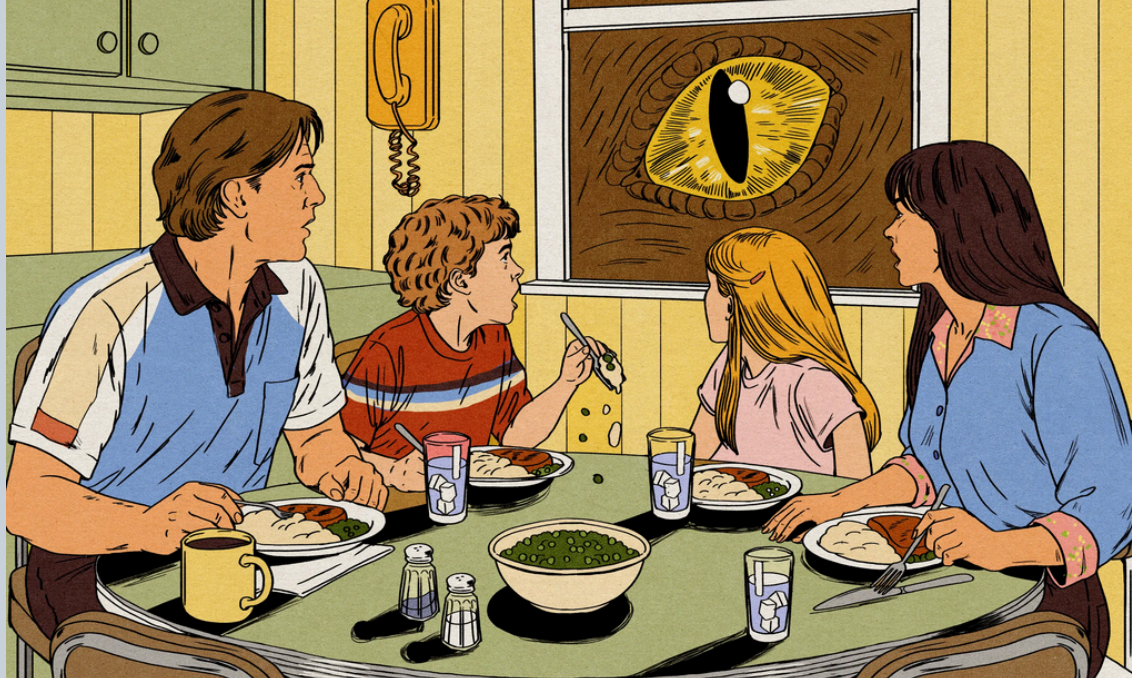
Tola - Zeus

Olaf - Icarus/Daedalus

Kaitlynn - Hypnos



Written by
Caitlin
Crozier



The End of Oak Street

The End of Oak Street is an engaging action-thriller that depicts the chaos that erupts when a suburban neighbourhood in the 80s gets terrorised by dinosaurs after being transported to pre-historic times. Starring Anne Hathaway and Ewan McGregor, the plot follows the Platt family as they attempt to escape these unknown surroundings and find a way to survival out of this ancient time.

In our opinion the film is a modern day take on the dinosaur horror trope, exploring themes of time travel, family, and community. We were on the edge of our seats whilst lounging back on the cineworld recliners. The film is thrilling enough to keep you engaged and make the stakes feel high whilst still being tameable to be a 12-age rating. We gave the film 4 stars on letterboxd, admiring the camera angles and cinematography of the action-packed release directed by David Robert Mitchell. The film follows a group of four that later turns into five with Anne Hathaway's character, Denise who is an aspiring writer acting as the glue keeping the family together and the star keeping the viewer's eyes engrossed to the screen. The family of Greg, Denise, Audrey, and Brian remain a united front despite the tension brewing between the parent's relationship, allowing the viewer to feel a powerful sense of alliance and solidarity within the group regardless of their family problems. Although the intrigue and the shocking nature that the dinosaurs bring to the film keep us engaged enough to continue watching, it is mainly a desire for these characters to survive that makes the viewers entertained and fixated to the screen in the film's most tense moments.

Jurassic Park appears to be the most obvious point of reference the film is pulling from, taking the concept of dinosaurs existing in modern day and making the concept more of a horror. The film turns the idea darker, for the most part dealing with how humans would survive in this situation rather than taking the time to revel in the coolness of the existence of dinosaurs. The shift is clear with writer-director David Robert Mitchell gathering inspiration from films such as *The Twilight Zone* and *Poltergeist*, darker films from the sci-fi and horror genres, shifting clearly from the warmth of *Jurassic Park*. Despite comparisons that could be made, the film effectively creates its own world.

With disturbing camera work and dialogue, the end of oak street makes you feel panic and dread throughout, especially in the films opening when viewers establish, alongside the main characters, that oak street has vanished and been taken over by menacing prehistoric animals. The shift from feeling safety and a sense of comfort from the semi dysfunctional family dynamic and the suburban neighbourhood get together that takes place is quickly stripped away from the viewer and replaced with the fear of impending doom as dinosaurs appear.

While the movie certainly surpassed our expectations, there were a few things that could have been improved with its execution. Time travel was a huge part to the storyline that made the film feel very unique compared to other dinosaur films, however it felt that there was not much backstory as to why the time lapses happened and what caused these random light portals to open up in their neighbourhood. It could also be mentioned that the ending of the film was rather rushed and can be perceived as just a neat way to finish the story instead of creating a more impactful epilogue that expressed the psychological trauma the family had went through. With the films last shots being the family happily reunited and enjoying a barbecue in their backyard, it expressed a simplistic way to cut to the credits and pretend like nothing had happened to them in the film which felt far fetched and unrealistic. Perhaps a better ending could have been to leave the film to grapple with the ethical weight of Denise altering the timeline and what happens to the variant version of her family left stranded in the past without Greg and the harsh realities they would have had to succumb to.

Overall, the end of oak street was a thrilling and memorable watch that explores the unfathomable idea of dinosaurs invading a random suburbia in America and keeps the viewer guessing what will happen next the entire time. We recommend you see it in cinemas and experience the unpredictability and enjoyment of the film!



Crown Court crisis

Written by
Maya Patel

In the UK, the backlog for Crown Court cases has reached more than 80,000 in England and Wales. It has been at a record high since 2023 and is projected to hit 100,000 by 2028. But how did this happen, and what is the government doing to fix it?

The backlog of cases was first exacerbated by the the budget cuts that the coalition government of 2010 pledged, slashing the Ministry of Justice's annual budget by £4.5 billion. It delivered some of these cuts by closing court rooms, and by 2022 over 8 Crown Court centres and over 160 magistrates' courts had shut down. Ministers also introduced a cap on the number of days that judges are paid to sit in court and hear cases in order to reduce spending—if there is no judge, there is no hearing, which meant that court cases were pushed back in favour of more complex cases that required immediate attention. Then the Covid pandemic occurred, leaving all Crown Courts closed for two months during the first lockdown other than for urgent and essential services. When they reopened, many courts were unusable as they did not comply with the social distancing requirements. All of these incidents added up, resulting in the backlog the Crown Courts face today.

So, what is the government doing to reduce the number of cases waiting to be heard? The introduction of 'blitz courts' has been successful on a small-scale in tackling the Crown Court backlog. Nottingham has been one of the first jurisdictions to implement a small amount of Crown Courts which hear dozens of cases every day, back-to-back, aiming to reduce the massive court backlogs. The idea is to put cases on a 'fast track,' primarily used for trials but also covering hearings and appeals. Of the cases heard in blitz courts, the most common are those of sexual offences and violence, which both make up almost half of the Crown Court's backlog at around 39,000 outstanding cases. The Ministry of Justice has maintained that blitz courts were a flexible approach that judges may choose to deploy, and the scheme is considering expanding to include other straightforward offences like drug possession and commercial burglary.

Specialist courts are also set to be rolled out in England and Wales. Within the next two years, each Crown Court is set to have at least one courtroom that is specially equipped to deal with traumatic cases, where victims will be able to view proceedings remotely through video link, and be provided with private entrances and waiting rooms separate from the defendant. Staff in these specialised courts are also expected to coordinate a trauma-informed approach to hearings, for example, by scheduling different arrival times for victims and defendants so to ensure they do not cross paths. Just 2.8% of reported rape offences lead to prosecutions and were the crimes that took the longest to investigate, but it is suggested that these new court reforms will fix these statistics.

Proposals to reduce the number of jury trials in order to tackle the huge backlog were also put forward by former justice secretary David Lammy but have since been criticised by most barristers and Labour MPs who feared it would undermine the integrity of the justice system. Prime Minister Andy Burnham has since considered reversing these plans after hearing that the reduction of jury trials could be counterproductive in decreasing the Crown Court's backlog of cases.

The Crown Court's backlog of cases may not have a straightforward solution, but the numerous reforms and improvements to the justice system have helped reduce the burden.

JUST FOR FUN...



MR GRAY DOWN IN HUMANITIES ALWAYS COMES ALONG TO TRAUMATISE MISS LAWSON ABOUT THE IDEA OF BAMBOOZLING CATS,



NO. I WONT THINK ABOUT IT..



MISS LAWSON... HONESTLY JUST THINKS HE NEEDS HIS HEAD CHECKED.. AND MAYBE STOP TRAUMATISING HER WITH IT TOO..

Come join us...

**HAVE AN IDEA FOR A STORY?
WANT TO INTERVIEW? WRITE?
RECORD? DRAW?**

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