

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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OUR TEACHERS?

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A PLEBEIAN'S GUIDE
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DREAMS ON HOLD

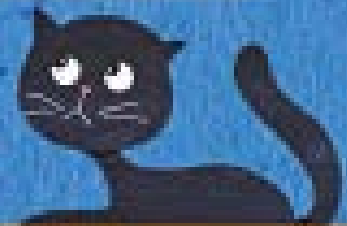


ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

EDITORIAL

My mother is a high school teacher. Ever since she, along with her family, has been under the lockdown at home, I've only seen her work. She begins her day making breakfast, takes multiple online classes administered by her school, does housework, goes back into hour-long meetings because the school is still trying to get used to this new technology... The day goes on.

It hurt me when I saw the news going around social media about kids trespassing into online classes to create nuisance and embarrass teachers. How can they do this? How dare they do this? It might be easy for you not to wear your uniforms and do classes with breakfast at hand. But remember, the teachers too had to unlearn and learn so much just to give you knowledge, all the while worrying about their jobs, families, relatives, and lives.

The virus may not be around one day. However, in the fight to give you proper education that lasts beyond a lifetime, it is the teachers who are the frontline workers. Treat them with respect.

-- Kazi Akib Bin Asad, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES REVIEW



ILLUSTRATION: FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

DARK

The Beginning Ends

FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

Disclaimer: Season 3 spoilers abound

As I'm writing this in our darkest timeline, I'm still reeling from the emotionally charged and unbelievably satisfying finale of *Dark*. The Netflix sci-fi series gained notoriety for its severely complicated, grim and equally captivating narrative, and after raising them to greater and often frustrating heights, the show rewarded its fans with an unforgettable resolution in the span of three seasons that left us all with enough theories to last the pandemic.

Commending *Dark* appropriately is a difficult task; they did too many things right and doing them all justice requires more words than I can afford. So instead, this review will focus on the one thing that impressed me the most as a writer: the writing. The rest—the perfection in casting for characters in different age groups, the jaw-dropping, mirroring and subtly symbolic cinematography, the impeccable set design, the background score constantly juxtaposing unhinged terror and tearjerkers, and the stellar performance by the ensemble cast—must take a backseat.

Dark reveled in its complex story, but did not lose itself amidst the ever branching, ever overlapping and ever looping narrative. The finale left me thoroughly amazed and equally content, while happily unsure of what aspect of this conclusion to love and applaud the most.

Is it their consistency with the different themes and symbolism? From the creation myth parallel with Adam and Eva to the rule of three, the show kept all its thematic narratives intact, without compromising each other, striding toe to toe with its core plot. My personal favour-

rite was their emphasis on the ironies, tragedies and power of familial bonds. It was the pursuit to protect their children that initially shattered the world, caused ceaseless cruelty and ultimately restored balance.

Or is it their loyalty to the sci-fi roots? The show didn't limit time travel, and later the concept of parallel realities, to a premise alone. They established the understanding of sci-fi elements as integral to the central story but kept it surface-level and fantastical enough to not bog down the narration.

Or is it their masterful unraveling of the labyrinthine plot? In the first two seasons, the story mounted mysteries over mysteries using a single tool: time travel. The last season, instead of resolving those mysteries as expected, dropped in the unforgiving mix of two new sci-fi components: branching realities and parallel universes. And yet, in just two episodes, it all made sense. It was downright impressive how they pulled this off—converging carefully scattered threads using a simple time-skipping montage and cleverly utilizing the rule of three with the introduction of the origin world.

The simplicity of the final mission was almost a reward. "You, loyal viewer, have trudged on through this cruel tale. Now it is time not to fret about whose parent is who or which Jonas is this now, but to enjoy the bittersweet culmination of our tragic characters, their flaws and emotions, and etch in your hearts a cave of somber memories."

Fatiul Huq Sujoy is waiting for that sweet release of public holidays to take him to exotic locations with high throwback value. Suggest him books to read during travels to make him look cool at s.f.huq11@gmail.com





PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Have we been kind to our teachers?

TASNIM ODRIKA

It has been a while since online classes began. Whatever excitement or anticipation there had been regarding online classes have successfully faded by now and these classes may even seem like a chore to a few.

It's clear at this point that the only thing that made our six hour long school days bearable to an extent was the brief moments of respite we shared with our friends. Staring at the black screen when the teacher is late to a Zoom meeting or sending text messages to your friends in between the online class does not quite strike the same chord in our hearts.

One fine day, it suddenly struck you and your friends—why not bring some “fun” into the class? In school, you would not even dare speak during this particular Math class; the teacher is strict. But who is going to admonish you when you are at your own house? You look at the technology used to conduct the online classes and instantly come up with a myriad ways to cut that boring Math class short the following week.

Soon, the week arrives and just as planned, you and some of your friends start playing random recordings in the background. The entire class erupts in laughter. The teacher ends up cutting the video call early because he could not find the students responsible for the disruption and it was not possible to conduct a class in such a raucous environment. It was a successful mission.

Now, the above described scenario is a fictional account but this occurrence has become quite rampant across the country. Educational institutions closed their campuses back in March and since then, most students have been locked inside their houses with minimal outside interaction to curb the spread of Covid-19. When online



PHOTO: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

classes commenced, it brought along an opportunity to get some of that interaction back albeit in a limited manner. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the current situation, these online classes also allowed some of the students to let out their frustrations in destructive manners.

What we fail to acknowledge here is the side of the teachers who are actually faced with these circumstances with little to no previous knowledge as to how to deal with these situations. We have to keep in mind that our present state is just as new to the teachers as it is to the students.

In conversation with a teacher from a reputed English version school in Dhaka, Nazneen Akter* recalls her story of the hectic preparations undertaken to bring

online education to her students. From testing various platforms to find the best one to use to connect with the students and getting properly acquainted with the technology, it has not been easy on the teachers. Throughout it all, their main target was to bring some structure back to the lives of their students since academic institutions will not open anytime soon. However, she and her colleagues were dismayed by the welcome they received.

“Sometimes students would make unnecessary noises and play records of profanities which would disrupt our lecture. I have encountered it once so far but my colleagues have been facing it for weeks. It is terribly unfortunate that certain students are not taking the concept of education,

though online, seriously. They also seem to lack empathy for their teachers,” she shares.

In light of these situations, university student Farhan Rahman, provided some insight as to why he had unfortunately been a part of causing rackets in classes back in his school days. He recalls, “My classmates would not give me attention until I acted like a class clown. These disruptions made the class more interactive and resulted in everyone talking with each other and with me. What altered my perspective was when I actually had a one-on-one interaction with my teacher where I got to hear her side of the story in dealing with me.”

This can then explain why these class disruptions are way more prevalent online. The distance and the interaction through a screen can make the students forget that behind the screens, these teachers are just people who are trying their hardest to make sure their students do not fall behind due to the pandemic. Moreover, the teachers have their own families and children at home to take care of. We must not forget that the virus does not discriminate; many teachers have lost their lives in this pandemic, too.

It is uncertain as to when on-campus classes will resume. So there is no alternative to online education at the moment. To ensure it all goes smoothly, students need to be cooperative. It is important to remember that our teachers are not just entities restricted to the monitors of our computers and acknowledge their difficulties and struggles as well.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

Tasnim Odrika likes pineapple on pizza and is willing to fight anyone who opposes her on this. Reach her at odrika_02@yahoo.com

DREAMS ON HOLD

The Uncertainty in Education Abroad

FARIHA S. KHAN

As the coronavirus crisis unfolds, educational institutions are left disrupted and students stranded. While those starting university this year worry about having to start such an integral part of their lives in mediocre online classes, high school students worry about the hurdles they'll have to face during the admissions process this year and how the pandemic will affect their applications. Students who were once confident about getting that acceptance letter from their dream universities now find themselves grappling with an uncertain time that seems to get worse with every passing day.

As international applicants, one of the biggest challenges that Bangladeshi students are facing is colleges in the US waiving the mandatory SAT requirement for Fall 2021. Although most students are celebrating the cancellation of this dreaded standardised test, what they fail to understand is that it will only adversely affect international students. For the many students relying on merit scholarships to fund higher education in the US, this may serve as a disadvantage. Since the test is designed to assess students' college readiness, colleges will now be put in a tough spot when deciding whether an applicant is a good fit for their community. With such an important part of the admissions process being eliminated, admissions officers will now be placing more emphasis on school transcripts, official examination grades, extra-curricular activities and essays: parts of the application process international students, especially those from Bangladesh, often seem to overlook.

Instead, we place more importance on our board exams, ensuring that the results we get in our HSC, A Levels and other external exams are top-notch. For years, the college admissions process in the US has been praised for being a holistic one, so when the standardised testing part of it is taken out, students who have weak grades in school or lack sufficient extra-curricular activities worry they will not be able to boost their application with a high test score to make it as competitive.

On the other hand, there are those worried about whether universities will be sympathetic when assessing students' school performances. With classes being shifted online, teachers not being able to cater to students' needs and board examinations being cancelled, many find it hard to keep up their grades and wonder how universities will assess their performance. Students that were relying on O/A Level results to spark up their application now find themselves worrying about a grade that is not only out of their hands, but also may not reflect their full potential and wonder whether universities will even consider them as valuable representations of the student.

On the other end of the spectrum, Bangla medium students sit in uncertainty as they wait for announcements regarding their indefinitely postponed HSC examinations. Without these qualifying exams, they wonder whether their dreams of studying abroad will ever become a real-

ity. Although many universities are being lenient about final grades and accepting high school transcripts as final grades, others are not. Because many universities (particularly in the UK) do not recognise HSC as an adequate advanced exam, seniors in Bangla medium schools wonder how the admissions process will look like for them in the wake of the pandemic if they don't get to sit for their exams. Since they are a part of a small minority in the international applicant pool, they worry they may not get the chance to even put up a competitive application to universities.

For many others wanting to take advantage of this summer to boost their extra-curriculars and gain experience through internships, the chances of getting into a good college seems bleak.



On top of that, students now have to worry about whether they will qualify for sufficient financial aid to fund their education while having to pay full tuition. As the pandemic puts people out of jobs and drives businesses towards failure, many students worry if their parents will be able to pay the hefty fees that come with higher education abroad. Since an increasing number of students are likely to apply for financial aid next year, universities brood over whether they will be able to provide sufficient funds to incoming freshmen. And while many students planned to take a gap year to focus on boosting the extra-curricular aspect of their applications, the pandemic now makes them worry about whether they will be able to demonstrate to universities that they utilised the year to grow, learn and gain

experience when there are very limited internship and extra-curricular opportunities at their disposal.

For those that had their stellar applications accepted, the ban on travel poses a significant threat to their study abroad plans. While universities like the University of Southern California are going hybrid, conducting a small portion of their classes in-person and the rest online, others like University College London have plans of fully reopening this fall, with only classes hosting large populations being conducted online. This leaves students worrying about whether respective embassies will issue student visas in time for them to be able to start classes, while students who took gap years last year wonder whether they should run the risk of starting online classes with the threat of not getting a

to contract the deadly virus. Though many are choosing to start their university journey from behind their desks back home to save costs and stay closer to family during this unprecedented time, the drastic time difference stands to not only affect their sleep schedules but also their academics, mental health, and physical well-being.

"I have PCOS and my doctor said that maintaining a healthy sleep schedule is a must for me, but if my classes start at 10 PM and end at 6 AM, how do I manage that?" ponders Fahlia Raushan*, an incoming freshman at UCLA this fall.

As experts warn that social distancing measures may be in place well into 2022, students find themselves wondering whether their university experience will be a joyful one. Orientation week, traditional school events, packed classes and a

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The Gap Year Conundrum

SARAH WASIFA

If future me were to invent time travel, I would certainly come back to redo a lot of things. Maybe not glue myself to the floor, for starters, and definitely do the whole gap year gig differently. Life works in strange ways, and while I could blame my 12-year-old self for setting off the series of events that led to this predicament, there's little a 12-year-old isn't impressed by, and a passage in a certain book seemed to do the trick.

Gap years, contrary to what it is portrayed like in the media, is a consomme of two teaspoons of feeling lost, a pinch of a limbo, and a whole cup of learning how to be an adult, simmered till nice and clear. Real easy on paper, real easy for everything to go wrong.

Why you want to take a gap year is entirely up to you—maybe you need to stop yourself from the inevitable burnout, maybe it's financial, familial, or even wanting to repeat exams. While gap years, as a whole, are looked down upon in our country, they are in no way indicative of ineptness in any field. You aren't falling behind on any race, if there's even a race to begin with. If it's any consolation, tell yourself a productive gap year not only consolidates your university application, but also allows room for personal growth (the keyword here is productive).

Unlike other years, the uncertainty posed by the pandemic in current times has certainly got a lot of people rethinking their college plans, with many deferring their admission in fear of leaving the safety of sanitised, hand-washed homes. Even though gap years are rarely recommended, this year, there might be a lot more people on the same boat as you.

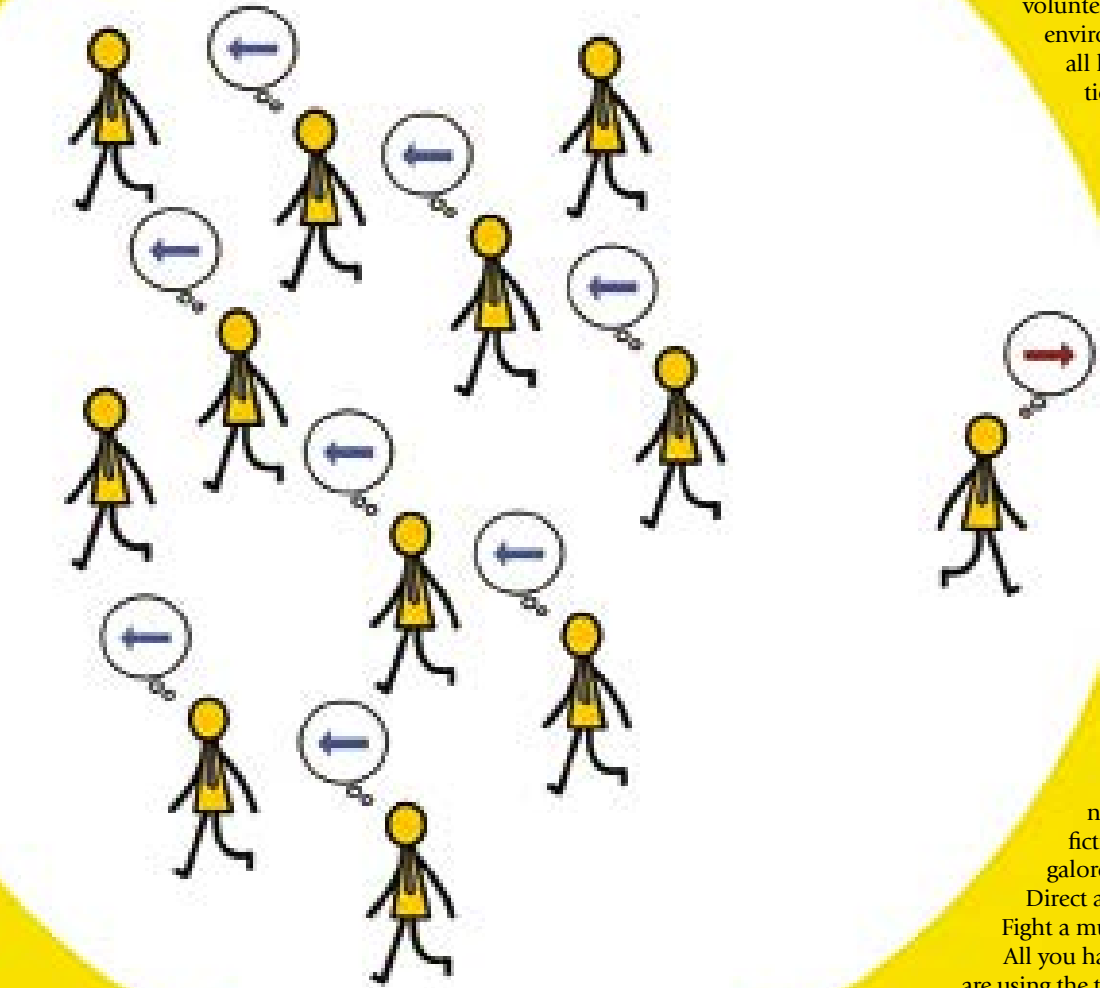
While you might have had this in mind for quite a while, nothing can prepare your parents for what seems like a summer vacation stretched beyond limit, that is, if you forget to tell them like I did. And there are valid reasons for them to be worried. Anywhere you look up, gap years will include one of three things: travel, working, or volunteering. Unlike our international peers, for us, gap years aren't itineraries detailing trips to Nepal, or volunteering to save Peruvian rainforests. While the very definition details working, few institutions in Bangladesh offer jobs to people straight out of high school. As for travelling, you're lucky if "Ammu, travel korbo" earns you anything other than a

*Names have been changed for privacy.

Fariha enjoys binge-watching movies in the dark vicinity of her bedroom. Strike up a conversation with her at fariha.safa@gmail.com

trip to the kitchen for fresh, locally sourced *thanda pani*.

know at Crimson Cup. Days spent doing nothing



No matter what you've planned, your parents may not take this lightly. Try to catch them in a good mood. Tell them something good first, even though good news is scarce at times like this. Childhood memories always work. Maybe make them some tea (my fallback plan included a small bag packed with clothes and necessities, and a good pair of running shoes).

Given the current run of events, your chances of getting them to agree are either astronomical, or on the other side of zero. Chances are, they're facing the classic Bengali dilemma: what will people say? Lay out your reasons on the table; be transparent. Tone down the drama and speak your mind. They will come round.

It is very easy for your mental health to deteriorate in the span of this year. The switch from the sheer chaos of HSC or A Levels to a stasis can give quite the whiplash, and falling into the pit of procrastination is easier than finding someone you

aren't exactly brain food, after all. Your friends may be moving abroad, making new friends in their new places, and there is an overwhelming sense of being left behind.

Coming back to books and studying after these 12 months with the same enthusiasm as before might be hard enough even without the stress of levelling up into college.

Even above all that, the excruciating wait for the admissions decisions is not really something to look forward to. Especially not when you're locked inside your own home, alternating between worrying and Netflix. Definitely not worth the stress.

Let's say you're taking a gap year, or have slipped unknowingly into one. Walking out of your exams, you will definitely want a break, but treating your gap year as a yearlong break could prove to be problematic in the long run.

If you're someone with many faceted

interests, a gap year is the perfect time to try your hand at everything. Depending on the availability, while a job may be on or off the table, internships may be an option. Check if your school hires fresh graduates as intern teachers, or if possible, ask your teachers to help in your hunt. Non-profit organisations, volunteering, or getting involved in environmental, social campaigns all look good on an application, and you'll be getting the benefit of the whole experience.

Take the time to rack up skills that will prove to be assets to you. If research is more your thing, online research programmes are best bet you got; some even offer college credit. A friend of mine took Intro to Psychology and Python on Coursera, another learned Python on MIT-OCW. As for volunteering, virtual volunteering—tutoring, writing letters, petitions, social campaigns—can safely and effectively allow you to do good. You could even become an entrepreneur. You could become a fictioneer on the platforms galore, maybe even start a blog. Direct a short film. Build a rocket. Fight a mummy.

All you have to do is make sure you are using the time you have constructively.

While the main stigma surrounding gap years is that it is a whole year wasted on things that aren't "valuable", you will benefit from seeing it as a time to work on yourself, taking a step back and considering what you want. Weigh the academic, social and mental health benefits as well as the invisible backpack of little lessons to learn, or in this case, teach yourself. Even if you don't want to take a gap year, at the very least, consider the value it might add to you. At the end of the day, it's a choice you're making for you. It is really easy for you to get the idea that this year is going to be hard and that it would seem like forever, but honestly, time flies. It is, in the end, just one year. When you're ready to write the next chapter of your life, you'll be ready. Fingers crossed.

Maybe I should have listened to myself and made them tea.

Sarah Wasifa sees life as a math equation: problematic, perhaps with a solution, and maybe sometimes with a sign to tear off a page and start over again. Help her find 'y' at sarahwuf77@gmail.com

A Plebeian's Guide to Dark Academia

ADHORA AHMED

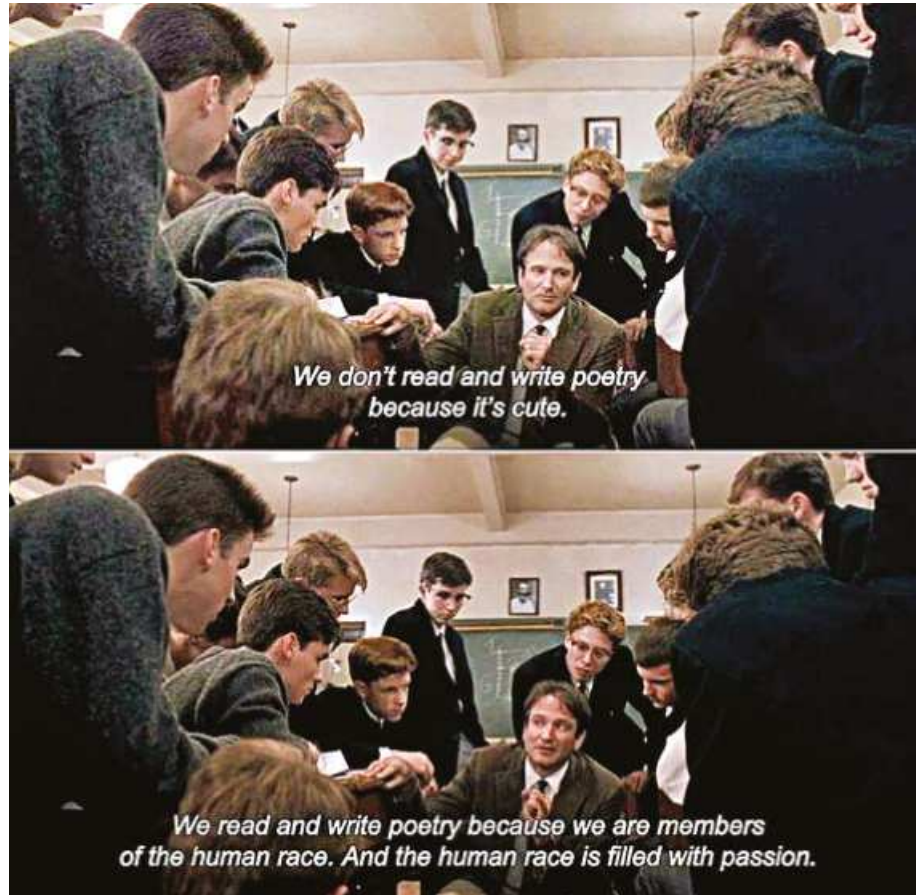
For a person who has never consciously adhered to any subculture, I sure like learning about them. One subculture that has recently captivated my attention is “dark academia”. The name may sound like it has something to do with a cult of Faust-like individuals learning about the occult, but it’s not that dark.

THEMES

Dark academia is about the idealisation of everything intellectual and scholarly: the smell of old books, candlelit libraries, classical music, fountain pens—that sort of thing. A typical dark academia fan is obsessed with classic literature and philosophy, everything from Greco-Roman scholars to modern English masterpieces. Their soul is full of wanderlust for knowledge, tormented by existential dread at times. Due to this blend of romanticism and existentialism, *Urban Dictionary* characterises a fan as “essentially a knowledgeable, vintage emo”. Above all, they have an intense passion for learning; not the nerdy aspiration to get good grades but to seek emotional fulfillment through knowledge.

STYLE

Like any other aesthetic, fashion and activities make dark academia stand out to outsiders. It is associated with dark and earthy colour schemes, with enthusiasts finding inspiration from the wardrobe of a vintage prep school student: sweater vests, dress pants, Oxford shoes and overcoats being common clothing items. Among



dark academia circles, the movie *Dead Poets Society* and Donna Tartt’s novel *The Secret History* are a few common points of reference. When it comes to their favourite haunts, fans prefer libraries, bookstores,

coffee shops and museums.

DRAWBACKS

This aesthetic seems quaint for its old-fashioned way of intellectual pursuit. However, dark academia is a bit too Eurocentric for

an aspiring enthusiast in this part of the world. Imagine wearing tweed coats in this climate; I can’t either. While there’s nothing wrong with idolising the English Romantic poets, seminal works from non-Western authors often go overlooked and are rarely discussed.

Moreover, this aesthetic predominantly consists of literature nerds. Although I can identify with that aspect to some extent, it leaves out people who are interested in other disciplines, e.g. STEM and business. If you haven’t read literary classics or know much about Greco-Roman mythology, you might feel out of place.

Some dark academia fans are aware of the lack of diversity within the aesthetic, hence they are attempting to make way for inclusion by promoting books about a broad range of subjects from writers all around the world.

HOW TO EMBRACE DARK ACADEMIA

As mentioned before, being a fan in Bangladesh is difficult, at least on the outside. With this pandemic, I can’t even suggest loitering around Nilkhet. Don’t be disheartened that you can’t wear preppy clothes all year round. If you’re a massive bookworm and are passionate about learning, then congratulations, you’ve already captured the spirit. Transform your room into a mini library. Keep a journal where you gush over the new things you’ve learned. Last but not least, stay curious.

Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

About The *Someone Else Has It Worse* Card

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

When eighteen-year-old Tanha*, who has been struggling with anxiety disorder for a long time, opened up about her condition to a friend, she received with some sympathy this response: *At least this is just mental health. [Insert a name] has it way worse with her physical health problems.*

The mentioned anecdote is just not limited to Tanha and her friend or to that particular incident. A lot of time we hear people consoling someone by reasoning that someone else has it worse and so you should just stay content with our lives. Parents, peers and even teachers at times use this card in various situations without assessing whether it’s doing any good or not.

EVERYONE MATTERS

There’s really no time to remind anybody who is in some sort of difficulty that someone else, somewhere in the world, has it worse. We are all part of a society where the diversity ranges from one’s background to sensitive personal issues. Not everyone is going to have the same problems or have the same level of problems either. Just like in a class, someone is going to ace while someone is going to fail miserably. That doesn’t mean that the one who topped in the class but could not require their expected grades should be shamed if they feel awful about it just because someone else failed. Similarly, if a person is going through a difficult



phase in life because of their mental health issues can’t be in any way consoled by means of others’ distress that might seem comparatively worse to you. Though most of the time people don’t mean any harm by it and often mistake it as something that the victim can take strength from, but if anything, using this card is only belittling someone’s pain and makes them feel terrible for feeling sorry for themselves in the first

place. And that is no form of consolation and does nothing but make a person feel even more insignificant. Treating everyone’s problems as substantial is one sort of equality too.

SO WHAT TO DO

Real compassion comes in from valuing and having the mentality to try to understand everyone’s situations. If your friend is upset about something, try to listen to them. If your child seems distraught about a certain problem, do not treat it as trivial. If someone feels unproductive and is disconcerted by it, tell them that it’s absolutely okay and try to get them the help they need. Especially in these unprecedented times, we should be caring about everyone’s well-being. Dragging another’s condition to alleviate a person’s problem is unnecessary and ebbs the said person’s interest to further share anything with you. Rather, treating everyone with love and making them feel at home when they open up about something is way better.

Because at the end of the day, when we are sharing something with anyone, we don’t want an instant solution, all that we crave for is support, love and validation.

**Name of the individual has been changed.*

You can reach out to the author at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com

FABLE FACTORY

OLOKKHI

AAHIR MRITTIKA

Spilled tea over expensive emerald tablecloths,
Lost earrings and rough hands,
Tripping over nothing,
Laughing like the storm,
This daughter flies around the house.
Thunder crackles each time she touches the ground.
Not the sun or the joyous tunes of harmonica
Or the sweet Bengali mangoes of summer
Compare with her eyes.
Eyes of brown:
Like the cinnamon, a secret spice,
A little sweet, a little bitter.
This is the child with clouds for a soul,
This is the child who brings tears to her home.
Like a fish that can not swim, or a sour orange,
The daughter is not a wife.
Not a person, not enough,
Not a mother, we shall call her monster.
Claws for hands,
Everything she touches turns black
As poison drools down her nails,
Blankets everything in sticky pitch-black tragedy.

Aahir Mrittika likes to believe she's a Mohammadpur local, but she's actually a nerd. Catch her studying at mrittikaahir@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS



ILLUSTRATION: NAFISA AFSARA CHOWDHURY

You, my favourite things

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

You're a work of fine art.
Though a few strokes are notched
Some colours seem blotched,
But drawn with a dotting heart.
You're poetry at its best.
Two of the lines don't rhyme
Losing track from time to time.
Yet dripping with spirit and zest.
You're a movie on a school night.
Bold, stirring yet stress relieving
3.30 am and you're sleep-thieving.
You make me feel just right.
You're the book I'm reading next.
Capturing my restless thoughts
Thrilled, with my stomach in knots.
Oh wizard, you've got me hexed.

Hidden behind the ancient curtains

SHOUNAK REZA

Someone told me the music went on even after the fall of the very last curtain, the end of the very last act. The young violinist played away, hidden behind the ancient curtains and the many Corinthian columns. His soft brown eyes noticed nothing. The storms outside were of little importance to him. He played and played and played and took no notice of me, of the words that flew past him and into my heart, of the flowers that remained on the abandoned stage, untouched, unnoticed.

I could not ask him to come away—the storm was raging on. I wondered what he was waiting for. It had been years since the curtain fell, years since I hugged him goodbye, years since I was told how he waltzed and waltzed to the tune of nothingness before losing himself in the middle of oblivion.

I had been asked to not try interrupting him—the music couldn't stop, it needed to go on. They said he remembered nothing of the years we had spent with him. He paid no heed to the memories that now reside else-



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

where, far, far away from his heart.

Fourteen years ago, on the fourteenth of July, we had watched a flight of pigeons as a hazel-eyed artist painted us on the rooftop of a homely art gallery by Dhanmondi Lake. I would aimlessly walk the streets of Dhanmondi exactly three

years later, looking for a melody long gone, a trace of the moonlight that had once engulfed bamboo mats and freshly brewed tea, the pigeons, the gallery...

Perhaps I was stupid enough to expect a sequel.

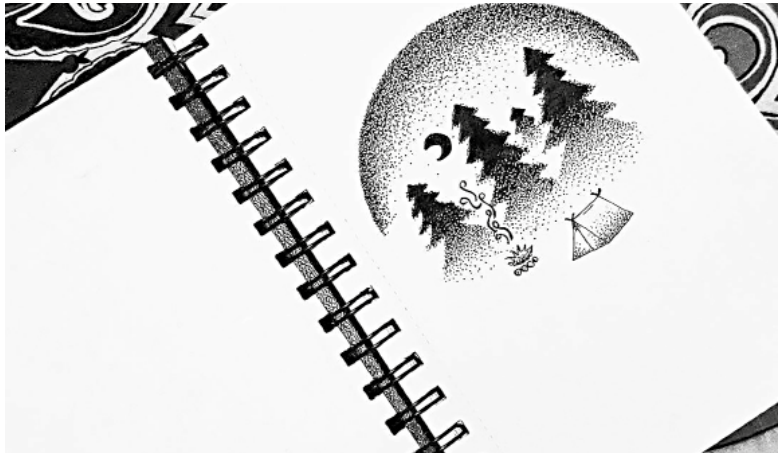


PHOTO: SOHAIL ANWAR

OH, TO HAVE AN ARTISTIC FRIEND

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

Have you ever found yourself sitting in your friend's room, observing a canvas filled with colours with no idea as to how you should react? Ever found yourself sitting before a stack of pages attempting to form an opinion you don't have on a topic you may not necessarily care about? Sit through a movie with the director staring straight at you observing your reaction to every scene?

Welcome to the life of the artist's friend.

Here's a list of things you have to put up with when you decide to befriend an artist.

You have different ideas of fun

Making plans with your friend on the weekend may just vary when it comes to some of your artist friends. When presented with the choice of a theme park and a gallery, sometimes it could most definitely be the latter. Your friend's ideal idea of fun might be being cooped up in their rooms and coming up with their next masterpiece whereas yours might just be dinner or a movie.

Random outbursts of inspiration

Most artists get their ideas from personal experiences and sometimes you're part of those stories. More than once, there's a chance your friend has looked at you with that wild look in their eyes and said, "I think I'm going to write about this" after which they most definitely will proceed to explain the idea. So, good luck.

Mundane things have new meaning

Watching a movie or listening to a song sometimes should mean just that. But your artist friend will be blown away by something you just don't see. Before you know it, a much deeper and intricate meaning has been lifted from it and it's now a big representation of something you honestly couldn't care less about.

Unqualified critiquing

As I mentioned earlier, you often find yourself critiquing work you have no qualification or interest in. Be it writing, art, movies, music or the many other forms of art, you're often called upon to review their work and then come up with constructive criticism.

"So, what do you think?" They'll ask, with a mix of wonder and fear in their eyes.

And every time you try you can only come up with, "Nice."

Constant reassurance

More times than you can count, you've gotten a phone call from a rather defeated voice asking whether they are really on the right path. Whether their dream is too unrealistic.

The path of an artist in a tough one. You, the friend of the artist, know this better than many may fully give you credit for.

Why? Because you're the one constantly supporting your friend's dream, shielding them from the pressure of the world and the disapproving comments from people deeming these dreams as "childish" or "immature".

While it can get hard and rather frustrating, artist friends have you to thank. You don't know how much they value your opinion no matter how unqualified you may be. Your support is what has them chasing what makes them happy. Whether they make it or not will always be a gamble but they'll never regret not trying.

So, on behalf of all the artists to all of their friends — thank you!

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com

SOME LIKE IT HOT

All about red hot chillies and peppers

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

"Mama, jhal ta ektu beshi diyen!" — A sentence we all must have heard while munching on the already spicy *fuchka* on our plates. Or maybe you can't handle spice too well, like yours truly. No matter which team you are on, you will admit that smouldering our mouths in heat is a feat on its own.

The painful yet delightful sensation of chillies make us crave more. But why do we partake in this self-inflicted culinary torture even after being aware of the agonising bathroom breaks at the end of the day? The answer to that is *capsaicin*.

Capsaicin is the chemical compound found in peppers which impart the sensation of burning in your mouth by attaching itself to the pain-receptors on your tongue. These heat-receptors, or TrpV1 for the smart ones, activate when your body is exposed to high temperatures. Compounds like capsaicin and piperine send false alarms to the brain, tricking it into thinking that your body is literally ON FIRE. The brain combats this presumed danger by releasing neurotransmitters called endorphins which ward off the pain and perpetuate pleasure. Sweating is the body's natural way of cooling down, which is why we leak from our eyes and nose after we finish off a fiery feast.

The itch for devouring spicy food is not natural but acquired. Research says that spice tolerance does not depend on genetics rather your affinity towards hot foods. Your body learns to associate with this *culinary masochism* or in other words, *hedonic reversal*.

People have been using spices since forever and when we talk "spices" we dive into the eclectic world of culinary magic. Traditionally, spices were used in the warmer climates of the world. Bacteria breed in warm, humid temperatures and interestingly spices have antimicrobial

properties. Chillies such as Naga peppers, ghost peppers and jalapeño not only possess the ability to quench the thirst of human heat-seekers but also make food safer to eat.

As much as these thrill-seekers love innocuously putting their lives in danger, the daunting task of chomping on chillies relies heavily on the circumstances and desire. The buzz that spicy food gives us is similar to a drug high. Our heart rates go up, sweat mists around our mouth while our tongue douses in molten lava. Adrenaline starts pumping and we experience an endorphin rush. We get similar effects from riding a rollercoaster or running a marathon but you don't see someone diving into a sweltering hot curry straight from the stove. Snacking on a smouldering treat simulates putting ourselves in danger without causing any actual potential jeopardy.

Most viral things on the internet grab attention because we find sincere and unguarded emotions fascinating. We are wired to enjoy risqué, over-the-top behaviours because the more the shock value, the more we're glued to the screens. Shows like *Hot Ones* and *Heat Seekers* have originated based solely on piquant platters.

And who doesn't like seeing celebrities crying out in pain from scalding their mouths with spicy food? We empathise over the social bonding from shared pain. These food challenges transfix our gaze and makes us eager to know the limit of how far they can go. *Schadenfreude*—as sinister the word sounds—is the pleasure we derive from seeing someone's misfortunes. Extreme food challenges have been circulating forever and considering our obsession with spicy food, these don't seem to stop any time soon.

Farnaz Fawad Hasan considers herself to be the fifth member of the Try Guys. Send her stuff to try at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com



PHOTO: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD