

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY FEBRUARY 4, 2021, MAGH 21, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



I TOOK THE VOW OF
SILENCE FOR A DAY
PG 3

THE PANDEMIC TO A
GERMAPHOBIC

PG 4



ILLUSTRATION: FAIAZ RAFID

EDITORIAL

Theme issues are cool but so are regular issues. Sure, theme issues get nice pictures. But half the fun of a magazine is flipping through the pages not knowing what you're about to see next.

I personally liked it when, as a nice sort of surprise, my work was published next to a friend's. That was by chance of course, since on the endless list of factors deciding which piece goes where, friendships don't get factored in.

Everything is so cohesive in a theme issue. By design. But in the totally random pile of random articles that come together for a regular issue, articles aligning or complementing others in theme almost feel like the stars are aligning (I'm talking page 4). It's like the issue is coming together on its own and that's always nice to see.

So this Thursday, we give you, just a regular (but still fabulous) issue.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

GAME REVIEW



Genshin Impact

Full marks on soundtrack, animation and characters

PRAKRITO NREE

If you've rage quit while playing gacha games (games where you trade in-game currency to gain random virtual items), *Genshin Impact* is not for you.

Genshin Impact is centered on the Traveler, who gets separated from their twin and dropped into the fantasy land of Teyvat. The story of the game hinges on this Traveler, and focuses on the player and their adventures throughout Teyvat with their flying companion/guide, Paimon (who totally isn't going to end up being the final boss, ha-ha). The catch of *Genshin Impact* lies in the gacha system, in which all the primogems and crystals collected throughout the game by the player are pooled into wishing, so that you can hopefully pull a 5-star character.

My personal experience playing this game has been pretty expected and normal for most new content that circulates the Internet every few months. Most of the personality and hype for certain aspects of the game and its characters are provided by the fans.

First of all, the animation is incredible. The art style is beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. The whole vibe of the game is sold by the amazing soundtrack and it truly does make one feel like they're traversing through unknown lands, adventuring and helping hapless commoners with their errands. The story itself is pretty enticing, split into Archon Quests, World Quests, and Story Quests. These are most interesting if you're the sort of person who's very interested in fantasy

and having cool elemental powers and fulfilling the dreams of your inner *Avatar* fan. And if you're an anime fan, then this is absolute heaven, as this game is a demonic mix of gacha and an RPG.

After a certain point, it does get quite repetitive, especially if you're not as invested in the story itself. From a more "woke" standpoint, the depiction of the Hilichurls is reminiscent of how indigenous people are depicted in the media, many POC characters get the short end of the stick, and the social media team of the game have been known to make some poor decisions in the past.

Other than that, the character upgrades, the artifact farming, and especially the resin system are complicated and ridiculous. The chances of getting a million-dollar lottery ticket are higher than the chances of rolling good stats for artifacts. Not to mention, this is a gacha game, and the possibility of pulling a 5-star character is 0.6 percent. Sounds insane? Because it is!

In summary, play this game at your own risk and if you're willing to get sucked into a nearly two-year-long storyline and spend tons of time farming artifacts and gaining primogems and getting nothing for it except some 4-star weapons at best. But, if you're into banger soundtracks and great animation with fun characters, this is the game for you. May the gacha gods bless you.

Prakrito Nree is a student of Class 9 at Sunnydale School.

I took the vow of silence for a day

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

How important are words to you? With all the noise and chaos around me, I decided to go on silent mode for a day. Here's how it went.

The rule was simple. Don't utter a single word the whole day. My initial plan was to cease all communication which meant no texting, no eye contact, and no gestures but I had to bend the rules a little.

9 AM: I didn't plan to go all cold turkey on this specific day so my family and friends had no prior notice of my act. As soon as I woke up, my hands went straight to autopilot mode and I texted in bed. In consequence, I unintentionally broke the rule of not texting.

10 AM: By this time I let my mom know I was not going to be talking all day. I found myself getting more animated in conveying messages than I would if I had talked. The idea was to communicate as little as possible, ergo I had to do all my tasks by myself avoiding assistance from anyone around me.

12:30 PM: I was going strong as ever. I tried my best to keep away from my phone as much as possible and text only when needed.

3 PM: At around this time I realised that I was thinking a lot. Since one of my senses was diminished the others were heightened. Although I felt the urge to talk back when someone tried to strike up a conversation around me, I managed to suppress that desire.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

5 PM: This is where my progress faltered. I got a call on my cell and without thinking, I picked up and said "Hello." My voice sounded alien to me and just then I handed over the phone to my dad. I was dreading my mistake but my family encouraged me to continue with the task.

6:30 PM: After that little hiccup, things got more real. I was more determined to finish this without any more obstacles. For some reason, I felt emotionally exhausted. My mind was going a million miles an hour. I was afraid that I was going to think out loud.

8 PM: Eating helps. It certainly does. Subconsciously I was forcing my jaws shut which resulted in a weird tightness around my mouth. Chewing helped ease the tension a little.

10:30 PM: I got used to not speaking but it still wasn't fun.

12 AM: All my effort built up to this very moment. It was the last stretch of my journey and I couldn't be more excited to get my speech back. So, I talked. Not because I had to but I wanted to.

Here's my takeaway. Words are definitely important. When you are stripped of the privilege of something, you understand how much value it holds. Through this experiment, I realised that listening is important too. Sometimes it's necessary to avoid indulging in topics that won't do you any good. While it was very hard to keep up, the task calmed my mind and helped me think about what's going on with myself and around me.

Would I do it again? Maybe. But from now on I'll celebrate silence more meaningfully.

The F in Farnaz stands for "Farnaz can't write a blurb". Reach her at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com

Give Constructive Criticism, *Constructively*

ANUSHA MOURSHED

In the age of social media, when platforms exist to voice any and all opinions, almost everyone's a critic.

With a sky rocketing number of talent groups showcasing all sorts of skills starting from dance, music, and poetry to even embroidery, quilting and voice impressions, the boundary is endless. However, with such massive exposure also comes huge waves of judgements – both positive and negative.

Going through the enormous province that is the social media feed, it is often observed that even the most extraordinary displays of art sometimes receive dissenting remarks. These judgements, although usually directed as an insult, are often passed in the name of "constructive criticism", a term that is so overused that it seems to have lost its meaning somewhere along the line.

Aside from the obvious confidence shattering effect, these comments are not only hurtful but also not helpful at all. If you genuinely wish to give effective feedback so someone can refine their craft, there are other beneficent ways to do so without it coming off as disrespect. To understand how, let us first comprehend what constructive criticism really is.

To put it simply, it is a thoughtful way of providing effective feedback that may include both positive and negative comments with good reasons so that one can improve their skills. It is meant to be specific and presented in a friendly



manner, entirely with the intention to help bring progress.

Before making any comments, you must first question your own intentions.

Ask yourself why you feel the need to share your criticism. If the answer is because you truly want to help, present your opinions with the attitude

you would like to be approached with yourself, if you were in their shoes. Being thoughtful of the little things can bring about much more productive results than careless, hurtful words.

Rather than blunt statements declaring a piece of content laughable or worthless, it is considerate to start with whatever positive side you can find and then making your way up to specific improvements. When giving feedback it is also essential to remember that you must comment on the craft and not the person. Remarks on physical appearance or any personal subject does not fall under constructive criticism. You must only focus on behaviour that can be changed. Besides, it may also be insightful to be open to the other person's perspective as well since art is often subjective.

Coming to the other side of the spectrum, it is also the creator's responsibility to be open to feedback. More often than not, many people also fail to understand the point of constructive criticism and misinterpret it as hate. It is vital to accept that there is always room for improvement and if someone is respectfully presenting their observation, you can always welcome it for your own benefit. There is no reason to cower at the mention of your shortcomings and take it as an insult because we all have our shortcomings.

Anusha often has a lot on her plate. Send her memes and motivation at anusha.mourshed11@gmail.com

Breaking Down OCD, Once and For All

RASHA JAMEEL

When news of the coronavirus outbreak first broke, I did what everyone else at the time was doing: spreading awareness on social media out of a sense of responsibility as a global citizen.

I reposted official statements on the exponentially rising numbers of those infected and affected, and economic and social forecasts. I didn't realise for a very long time the toll the statistics were taking on me, on my mental health, and more specifically, on my OCD.

Before you roll your eyes at the mention of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD, since you may not think it's really a disease, read on for a testimony from someone who has OCD.

OCD can be identified as an anxiety disorder, characterised primarily by anxiety-producing obsessions and anxiety-reducing compulsions. Think of it as a junkie chasing a high, only as a circle without a beginning. The compulsions of an OCD-ridden person can feel akin to a junkie's abnormally high tolerance levels for drugs, with the obsessions bearing a similarity to their desperate craving for a high. OCD works as both the insatiable beast and the nearest available prey. A snake incessantly chasing its own tail, an ouroboros from Hell, which knows no rest.

Most people diagnosed with OCD tend to wash their hands a lot. While it's a common symptom, reasons for doing so can differ. I wash my hands

in an effort to peel off imperfections. It calms me, despite not being a healthy coping mechanism. During the coronavirus outbreak, I convinced myself that I should wash my hands even more so as to wash away the virus molecules along with the imperfections. Two birds with one stone. The frequency at which I scrubbed my

hands rose exponentially with the rising numbers of infections. It wasn't until my skin began to dry out to the point of me developing a nasty rash that I came to my senses.

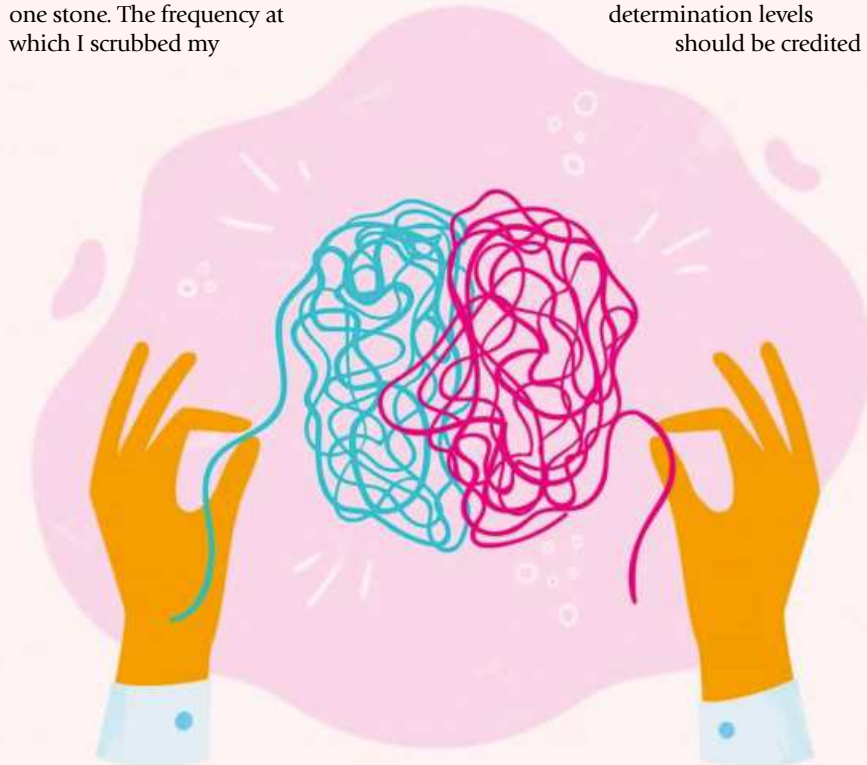
Sometime back, a teacher said my excellent organisational skills and strong determination levels should be credited

to my OCD. It took every ounce of the resolution I possessed to not yell at him for being so unabashedly ignorant about a mental health disorder. My OCD doesn't help me get my life in order, it helps to wreck it instead.

Leaving aside the frequent hand-washing factor, OCD symptoms can vary from person to person. Mine involve nightmarish thoughts of mindless overconsumption and an inexplicable demand for physical equality throughout my body. I associate the idea of overconsumption with gluttony and remind myself that I must not contribute to it, so I refrain from eating and purge whenever I eat. When I'm nervous, both my hands need to feel sweaty and clammy the same way. If I injure a body part, say one of my elbows, I require my other elbow to feel just as painful. So no, no flawless organization happening there.

Please understand, there is a major difference between being a perfectionist and actually having OCD. One is a state of mind, the other is a disease. It'd be nice if everyone's attitude towards people suffering from OCD and other mental health disorders, was more empathetic rather than sceptical.

Rasha Jameel is an overzealous Ravenclaw who often draws inspiration from mundane things such as memes. Send her your memespinal thoughts at rasha.jameel@outlook.com



THE PANDEMIC TO A GERMAPHOBE

BUSHRA ZAMAN

Have you ever wondered how life during a pandemic is for germaphobes?

You may think an easy answer is that germaphobes, such as myself, have adapted by being careful and cleaning more vigorously than before – but there is more to it than that. We have thought of the prevention of impending doom after infection by a germ so frequently, that some of us already have formed plans to keep things clean in case an emergency such as a pandemic occurs.

What may look like out-of-control cleaning, is actually a very structured, well-thought, "supposedly" fool-proof procedure being carried out, "supposedly" being on account of the presence of variables that are ignorant humans.

We may use social distancing as an excuse to steer clear of people, but pandemic or not at least one person will manage to sneeze and spray spit directly on your face. This tends to happen when your hand is occupied, preventing you from covering your face, such as when opening a door or going up a staircase. I'm trying to go upstairs, but not all the way up to heaven, thanks. Elevators are worse; I cannot distinguish whether the wheezing I'm hearing is from someone who is ill or from myself on account of the panic attack I'm having after noticing how dirty the elevator buttons are.

Dirt removal has never been this hard. My life has morphed into a never-ending handwash commercial, so cleaning products are precious to me right

now. If I loan you sanitizer willingly, it is the purest act of love I can offer to you from over three feet away. However, this love is highly conditional and subject to change. Don't be surprised by the death stares sent over a mask when you lose someone else's sanitizer.

Basic survival requirements such as eating food, drinking water, and using the bathroom while outside, is similar to being in a survival TV show – hunting to find a clean bathroom, guarding this resource with your life, and secretly bottling clean water.

Lastly, due to worries about being heard properly, people feel the need to take their masks off when speaking. But you can be heard clearly through a mask, and if not, can always speak a little louder than usual. The only difference with the mask off is that the risk of spit hitting my face is high. I understand feeling suffocated with a mask on is an issue, but breathing difficulties can also be caused after being infected due to not wearing a mask.

The purpose of this article is not a rant, but to hopefully increase awareness regarding the maintenance of proper safety procedures in the middle of the pandemic. Your actions can have detrimental consequences on others' lives, as well as causing inconvenience to germaphobes who may have otherwise been very resourceful acquaintances in a pandemic.

Okay, maybe this was a slight rant.

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushrazaman31@yahoo.com



ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

STREAMING NOW

SHAHRUKH IKHTEAR

When I first started streaming, I had a swathe of misconceptions that held me back from producing content on a regular basis. If you're an aspirant streamer, I'm here to guide you through what truly matters in the world of being video game streaming.

Bear in mind, this is not an in-depth guide. This article will outline a general direction for you to follow to truly succeed in the world of streaming.

THE SETUP

There are a plethora of streaming apps and programs to choose from. The most popular ones are Streamlabs and OBS Studio. I recommend using Streamlabs for beginners since it is much easier to add Overlays and Alerts to your streams.

Once you've picked an app, really take the time to understand how to set up a scene. Always use Game Capture as a source for your core gameplay as it will allow you to play on fullscreen, thus reducing input lag. Also, make separate sources for your audio and apply Filters on them. Do not use the preset configuration for your microphone audio. You need to learn how to use audio filters as well. There are multiple YouTube tutorials outlining how to do so.

Make sure you run the streaming app in Admin Mode and always close unnecessary background processes when you're streaming.

Once you have all your scenes and sources ready, you'll need to set the output parameters. On Streamlabs, it's simply labelled "Output" in the Settings Tab. Here, you should go for Software (x264) if you do not have a 2000 series or 3000 series Nvidia GPU. If you do, go for Hardware (Nvenc New), it'll save your

than your upload speed in Kilobits. This will allow you some buffer room in case your upload speed drops for some reason. Set your Preset to Quality or Performance depending on your PC.

Let's move on to Video. You want to set your Base Canvas Resolution to 1080p and your output to either 720p or 1080p depending on your hardware. If you have relatively low-spec hardware, just go with 720p. 1080p is the highest for most platforms so it's the best you can get. Lanczos is the best Downscale Filter in Video but if your PC can't keep up, just go with a lower option.

Speaking of hardware, contrary to popular belief, you do not need a high-powered PC with an audiophile-grade microphone attached to a top-of-the-line interface to start streaming. Gear helps, but the core content is what attracts viewers to your channel.

That being said, there are still a few fundamentals you need to nail in order to produce quality live streams.

Firstly, your audio is quintessential in immersing the viewer into your content. You can have the crispiest image quality but if your audio sounds like it's being played through an 80s radio set, no one will have a good experience. It is paramount to have a decent microphone. USB condenser microphones can be found for around BDT 4000 to BDT 7000 and they do the job really well. Also, don't forget the Filters! They really do elevate your sound game and you should definitely spend some time learning about this.

A webcam is good to have but not necessary. If you can, try to go for grade A cameras. If you don't, your gameplay will look smooth but your camera feed will be laggy, creating a dissonance in the minds of your viewers that you do not want.

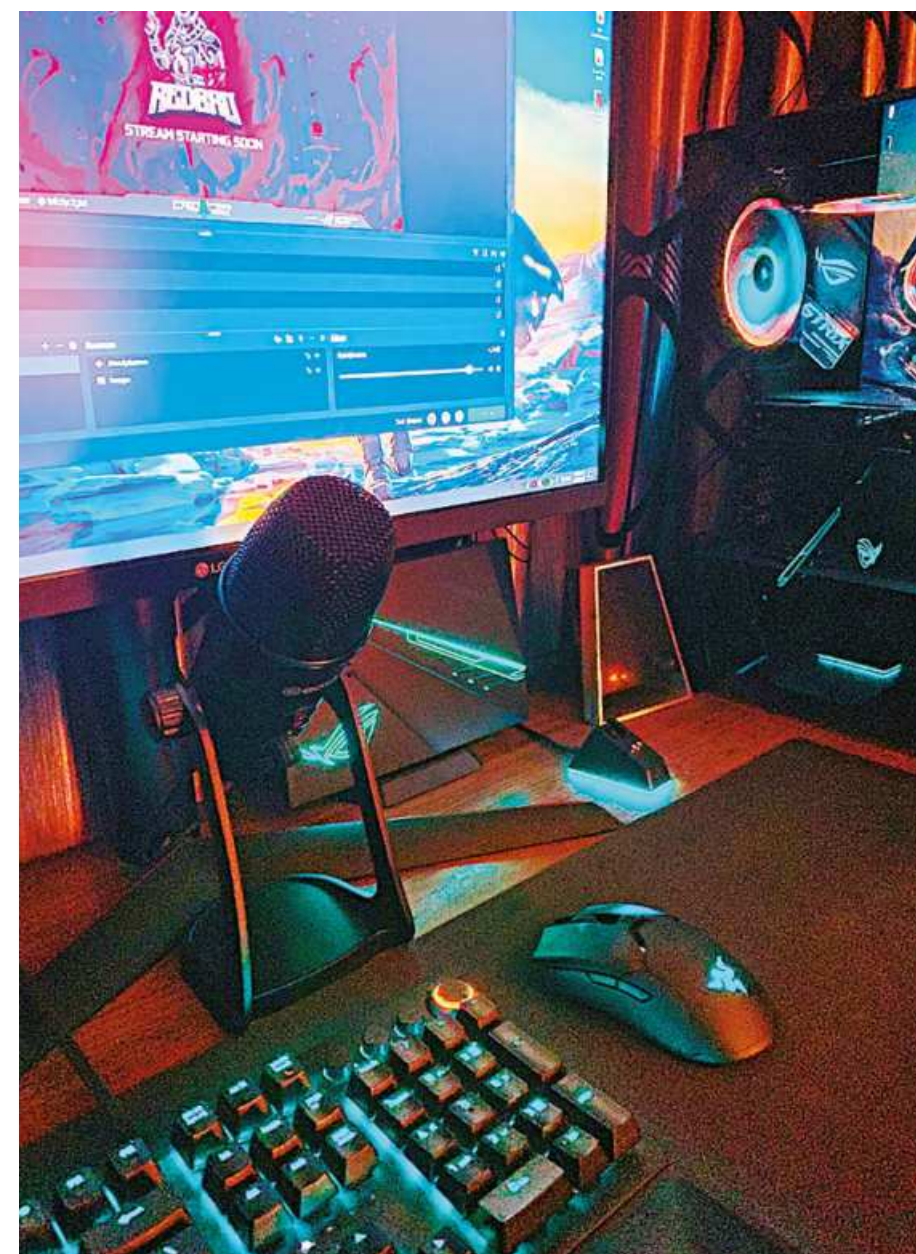


PHOTO: SHAHRUKH IKHTEAR

THE PLATFORM

Now that you have your setup ready, it's time to choose a platform to begin your streaming conquest. For Bangladeshis, I would definitely recommend Facebook as you will gain access to a large local audience who are hungry for quality video game streams. Twitch is great but it's not the best for building an audience at all. On Facebook, you can build a solid community through engagement, content production, and of course, streaming. This you can then snowball to other platforms by transferring them to content that you produce exclusively for certain platforms. This can be your YouTube or Twitch channel.

Make sure you use relevant groups for your gaming streams but do not spam! I see so many people just dumping their stream links with absolutely no description. Try to make sure that your stream aligns with the group you're posting it to. No one will watch you if you post a *Valorant* stream in a *League of Legends* group.

THE PERSONALITY

This section will be a little more personal. When you're streaming you have to put yourself in the mindset of producing your own live TV show, and just like any other show, you need to give your viewers value in order to draw them in. What kind of streamer do you want to be? Do you want

to be informative and educative? Do you want to be an entertainer? Or do you just want to talk to people? These burning questions need to be answered before you hit that "Go Live" button.

Interaction is key for sustaining viewers. Engaging them by asking questions, reading comments and actually making a conversation flow, and calling out names of people who share or like your streams is a great starting point. You should also talk frequently as nothing is more boring than silent gameplay. Be respectful to your viewers but deal with haters firmly.

The road ahead as a streamer is arduous. You will need to consistently keep producing content in order to be successful. Every big streamer you know now started off with zero viewers and you will be no different. It will take time for you, or anyone, to build a community.

So go out there and grace the world with your presence! They might not realise it now but consistency will ensure that one day, you stand with the biggest names in the business!

Shahrukh Ikhtear is an avid gamer who seldom gets time to play nowadays owing to his adventures in the mystical forests of adulthood. Help him in his search for true work-life balance at shahrukh.ikhtear@gmail.com



ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

The Illusion of Success

I

One of the first things we're exposed to in school is competition. We first visit competition in the guise of grades. Grades soon become a part of our lives. Sometimes it's good results in an exam. Sometimes it's victory in sport or group activity. The outcome of these grades is one of the first things that gets engraved into our genetic coding: success. It's this success that we chase for the rest of our lives. It's this metric we're measured against.

Success is defined as an accomplishment we achieve and show to others. At the beginning of the year, we may have made a resolution to lose weight. The moment we achieve this target we want to "share" with others in social media. Our news feed is full of successful people sharing their success stories.

Our news feed is full of two other types of posts. First, posts of advertisements that induce you to learn an activity in seven days and be successful. You become encouraged to enrol in a course and get a certificate. Then there is the group of all successful celebrities in our lives.

We see how successful Djokovic, Nadal and Federer are. We see our own hero, Shakib Al Hasan, maintaining the number one spot of all-rounder year after year.

We see all these successful people and "look up in the sky". We ask ourselves: "Is it a bird, is it a plane, no it's Superman!". Success truly isn't what it is. Even Superman is very mortal and down to earth than we would like to think.



II

Success is an iceberg. What we see is far from the reality. The part of the iceberg we see is the success part. A big chunk of ice floating on the sea. We become enthralled. There's always more to the picture than meets the eye. We seldom see the hard work, the effort and the dedication that lies beneath the iceberg. We don't see the good habits one needs to boost their mental muscles to stick to a task.

What we may fail to see is the series of failures and disappointments under the iceberg. Success is the outcome only. The series of failures and disappointments is the process that lead to the success.

III

Matthew Syed is a British journalist, author, broadcaster and also a table tennis player. In his first book *Bounce*, in 2010, he writes, "When we witness extraordinary feats... we are witnessing the end product of a process measured in years. What's invisible to us... is the countless hours of practice that have gone into the making of the virtuoso performance." The most successful people, people we call a genius, didn't become so in our eyes over-night. Success wasn't gifted to them on a silver platter. Success required years of "insane commitment" to reach the face of the iceberg we see.

Michael Jordan is one of the most successful basketball players ever. He summed up why failure is the pillar of success, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

IV

Success is two-fold. First to endure the pain to stand up. And then to endure more pain to keep standing up. In the end, success is doing something you love. You're happy doing what you are. That's the reward of success. Even if nobody acknowledges, you're happy with yourself. That's what counts more.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Handmade Jewellery

Creative Feat of Small Businesses

AAHIR MRITTIKA

Online handmade jewellery shops have always existed, and there's been a surge recently. Their styles range from painted wooden pendants to anime-inspired chokers, and often come with pricing that young people can look into.

To understand what goes on behind the production process, I talked to some of the creators.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Starting off, production generally takes 3 to 4 hours and varies depending on the designs. The creator of @artsydaisybd is an A Level student who makes quirky pieces with polymer clay and acrylic paint and scrolls through Pinterest for pop culture references. While the creator of @caragach_ is another university student and creator from Chittagong who's been working since 2019, looks at local influences like rickshaw art and folk art on *nakshi kantha*.

THE RAW MATERIALS

Everyone I have talked to is a student, and faced the common hassles of sourcing materials and inconveniences during deliv-

ering the goods. Polymer clay is imported, and other materials like ribbons can be bought locally. It's better to do your own research regarding accessing as it's risky for small businesses to disclose their particular sources. Being a student also points to a lack of income needed to establish a business.

THE CHALLENGES

The creator of @caragach_ says they have dealt with customers changing their minds post ordering. Small businesses have a smaller rate of output and focus on creating specific pieces that are hard to sell if an order is cancelled. The cost of buying materials and the hours lost harm the owner more than it would a larger business that mass-produces uniform pieces. Unfortunately, this remains a frequent problem and some creators therefore choose to rely on advanced payments.

More on challenges, the creator of @clayomatic, who runs the increasingly popular shop with intricate clay ornaments, says, "Customers will often bargain, without acknowledging the effort that goes into details. This isn't the case with foreign



COURTESY: CLAYOMATIC

markets where similar products are priced double and more." While this is true for complicated bits of jewellery, most of them are extremely affordable, so you need not worry about them being out of your price range!

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

This is objectively important for societal and environmental reasons, so I asked the

creators themselves about some of the ways consumers can support them alongside making purchases. As the creator of @artsydaisybd puts it, leaving a positive review or just sharing their posts can be greatly helpful. Since they don't generate huge revenues, it's tough to invest in advertising. Recommending them to a friend can be beneficial for them to grow and overcome the algorithms of social media platforms.

Lastly, if you're reading this as a potential creator, you're asked to listen to your customers and not give up! When I talked about inspiration, @caragach_'s artist explained how they've only come this far because of their mother, who finds them that one small bead they're searching for and advises them on what looks best. The pieces are often made with a lot of care and love, tailored for you. It's never just about monetary support, but also helping these artists hold on to their crafts. So if you want the demon slayer earrings or an artistic mala - you know where to look!

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

FABLE FACTORY

TONIGHT'S DANCE

AZMIN AZRAN

The night calls out with blaring horns,
 Trucks and buses and uncompromising
 scorns,
 A woman's tears heard from the balcony
 upstairs,
 Everyone wants to judge, but no one
 really cares,
 Then there's me, taking it all in at once,
 As the haze of smoke tightens, in to-
 night's dance.

The night is quiet and loud as well,
 In between barks and meows and tink-
 er-
 bell,
 It's pitch black outside, almost. Nah, not

really,
 The lights of the nights are needed, to
 think freely,
 Then there's me, in my head shaped
 prison,
 As the haze of smoke tightens, dissipating
 reason.

The night is dumb, and not fun any more,
 No one *feels* rich, and everyone is poor,
 My haze of smoke is tight enough, I need
 to go sleep,
 Did what I say to her make me seem like
 a creep?
 [expletive]

Reach out to me at azminazran@gmail.com

In Quest of Lost Melody

NUJHAT ASLAM

I remember walking with you
 While my feet glided lazily
 Past your dark silhouette.
 An indecision lurking in,
 Shall I hold your hands or not?
 To see if it's cold like your heart.

I remember your warmth
 As I rolled in my sleep,
 Embracing you in my arms.
 Your breathless back
 Against my shivering arms,
 Glad you weren't gone.

I remember the rain poured
 As your fingers traced past

The strings of your guitar.
 And I stared at the sky
 It was dark like your voice,
 Like a black and white canvas

I remember locking my eyes
 On a bright summer morn
 With your crimson-amber ones.
 And your raven black hair,
 As they brushed my temple
 When you whispered me a song.

I remember the tune
 As I held it most dear,
 Way I held your precious arms.
 As the endless abyss proceeds,
 My days are all lost in agony
 In quest of your lost melody.



FEAR

RIFAH TASNIA

She looks so at peace when she's asleep.
 Hair sprawled across the pillow, lips slightly
 pursed, brows unfurrowed. She always
 sleeps straight and, on her back, like a dead
 body in a morgue. The night lamp on her
 bedside table illuminated her face, giving
 her pale skin a golden hue but also making
 the dark circles under her eyes more prom-
 inent. She shivered, like her unconscious
 mind knew that I was near, standing beside
 her. I gently sat on the side of her bed, and
 softly grazed her cheek with the back of my
 hand leaving goosebumps in my wake. My
 hand traveled, from the curve of her jaw,
 down the length of her throat and gently
 settled on where her heart is supposed to
 be. She opened her eyes in panic, gasping
 for air. I slowly removed my hand and
 stood up, making my way to the chair in
 the corner of her room. It's always fun to
 watch the show from here.

I could feel all her emotions, the fear, the
 panic. I could read all her thoughts which
 brought me here in the first place. She sat
 upright with a hand over her heart, like she
 feared it would jump right out considering
 it was beating so hard and fast. She tried to
 control her breathing.

Inhale. Exhale.

It was something her therapist suggest-
 ed, but the violent thuds of her heartbeat
 ringing in her ears and the shooting pain
 in her chest was quite intense. She opened
 the drawer on her bedside table with shaky
 hands grabbing her anxiety pills. She
 popped two at once, because she knew
 I was adamant on not leaving her alone
 these days. But the thing she always forgets
 is, no matter what, she can never get rid of
 me. I live inside her head.

The writer is a first year student at North South University.

The Double Standards in Beauty Standards

ADHORA AHMED

Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, someone said a long time ago. According to this proverb, beauty is subjective; what looks beautiful to one might not appeal to another. Yet, when it comes to beauty in terms of physical appearance, is it really subjective? Aren't we consciously or subconsciously influenced by certain standards when we think about beauty on the outside?

These beauty standards are not set according to a certain individual's personal taste. They reflect trends visible in mainstream media, slowly setting an ideal of what a man or a woman should look like, or at least *try* to look like. Thus, expectations are created, based on which we judge whether someone is beautiful or not.

However, some of these expectations – superficial as they are – are not universal. In some cases, what is perfectly fine for men is unacceptable for women with no good reason, and vice versa. Let's look at some of these standards.

Body and Facial Hair

All human bodies grow hair, unless you have alopecia universalis (Google it). The most coveted body hair is the one that grows on our heads, but as for the rest of the body, beauty standards diverge drastically between the two sexes.

For men, body hair is a symbol of manliness, especially in some areas like the torso and the face. Although in some settings a clean shaven face is preferred, men don't have to worry much about the hair on their bodies, as long as it grows on the desired stretch of skin.

For women, it's a completely different story. Movies, TV shows and glossy fashion magazines give one the illusion that women are born without a single hair follicle, except those responsible for hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. Even the models in hair removal cream commercials don't have any body hair! These commercials always make me wonder what so-called imperfections they want to remove from their already smooth, flawless skin.

A cursory glance at one's arms and legs is enough to debunk the myth that women don't have body hair. Yet, many women go through great lengths to regulate or eradicate the growth of body hair, spending a significant amount of time and money to wax, shave or laser the undesirable hair away. Hair is allowed to grow in certain places like the eyebrows, but that too is carefully monitored by regular threading, lest the two arches become too unruly or even worse, join in the middle to form a unibrow.

This is not to say that I'm condemning women who get rid of their body and facial hair. After all, it depends on personal preference. However, we need to question the stigma surrounding something as natural as body hair. In certain medical conditions like PCOS and severe hirsutism, a woman might have excessive body hair. But, hair in itself doesn't threaten one's health. Therefore, there's no reason to be afraid of hair on female bodies.

Makeup and Skincare

It's not far from the truth to say that most people like to look presentable. Even if not always, we like to look nice and try to leave a good impression on others. In addition, since skin is an important organ of our



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bodies, we take various measures to tend to it. We groom ourselves to various degrees, but it is also safe to say that women tend to put more effort into their preening than men do.

A discussion on the grooming patterns of women is incomplete without the mention of makeup. A dash of colours on one's face can do wonders to enhance their facial features, and therefore rule the world outside. Makeup can boost self-confidence because its sole purpose is to make you look good, within limits of course. For these reasons, makeup is an indispensable part of our daily routine. So is skincare. We bathe ourselves with creams, face masks and other substances I can't name so that our skin remains its best self.

All this is good and counts as important self-care, but would I be wrong in saying that in our society, a woman's physical appearance overshadows her other qualities? And, as a result of which, women are pressured into devoting a little too much attention to their outer beauty than is sometimes necessary?

In a Vox video titled "Is Beauty Culture

Hurting Us?" several women are shown going through their elaborate skincare and makeup routines while they share their insecurities about their appearances. It shows how even the most inconsequential comment, such as pointing out a wrinkle, can trigger anxiety in women, sometimes leading them to invest in expensive procedures just to hide these insecurities, like getting eyelash extensions.

The video also mentions how less is expected of men to make themselves presentable. As long as a man maintains his hygiene and wears clean clothes, he's good to go. However, we would be wrong to assume that the insecurities so many women share about their faces completely bypass men. They too have skin, thus they too have blemishes, scars and pimples. Yet, according to some unwritten rule of conventional masculinity, men are discouraged from paying too much attention to their outer appearance, since it's a so-called womanly thing. Therefore, they are often excluded from self-care practices. Most skincare products are marketed towards women instead of all genders. Most men don't

even know that there are makeup lines that cater especially to men, with products like concealers, contour and foundation.

Thus, there is a very noticeable imbalance between how men and women are supposed to groom themselves according to beauty standards. Women are expected to rely too much on their outer beauty to determine their self-worth, and men are expected to do the opposite – not care about their outer beauty at all. In order to get rid of these stigmas, we need to talk less about women's physical appearances because that's just a tiny fraction of their personalities, and we should normalise men boosting their self-confidence by taking care of their faces and skins.

Most importantly, we should do away with these mostly nonsensical ideals, because it is more important to cultivate our inner beauty to build a better society that doesn't judge people based on beauty standards.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com