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WEEKEND LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A publication of *The Daily Star*



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Elon Musk named 'Person of the Year 2021' by Time Magazine

On December 13, Time Magazine announced the latest entry to their 'Person of the Year' recognition: the billionaire space entrepreneur and CEO at SpaceX and Tesla Inc., Elon Musk. According to Time, Elon Musk exemplarily represented the changing shifts in technology this year and helped people all over the globe with his innovative ideas.

Musk -- who overtook Amazon founder Jeff Bezos this year to become the world's wealthiest person -- wields impact on Earth with his Tesla electric car company and beyond our planet with his SpaceX rockets.

"Musk's rise coincides with broader trends of which he and his fellow technology magnates are part cause and part effect," Time editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal wrote.

Among those trends, Felsenthal listed "the continuing decline of traditional institutions in favour of individuals; government dysfunction that has delivered more power and responsibility to business and chasms of wealth and opportunity.

"Time editors have previously defined the title -- which last year went to President Joe Biden and Vice President

Kamala Harris -- as going to people who "embodied what was important about the year, for better or for worse."

In October, Musk's electric car company's valuation soared above a trillion dollars, and SpaceX has teamed up with US space agency NASA to launch various missions including a test run of protecting Earth from an asteroid.

The brash South African-born 50-year-old has seen his wealth soar during the pandemic to over \$250 billion, according to Forbes' real-time billionaires list. He has also courted controversy with his provocative Twitter feed that can attack, joke and provoke -- including a poll in November asking Twitter whether he should sell a 10% share of his Tesla stock.

Felsenthal noted Musk's provocative vision is accompanied by a persona

that is a "blunt instrument that often seems to revel in division and aggressive mockery as he gives the world access to his id through social media."

Musk has appeared ever-present in American culture in recent years, amassing 66 million Twitter followers and guest-hosting the famed late-night comedy show Saturday Night Live in May. Musk speaks ambitiously about his interest in colonising Mars and plans orbital flights next year as part of SpaceX's planned American return to the Moon.

"The goal overall has been to make life multi-planetary and enable humanity to become a spacefaring civilization," Musk told Time in an interview released with the Person of the Year announcement.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Time to get back in the rat race

As 2021 nears its end, the world-- slowly, but surely--is getting back on its track, despite the recent Omicron scare. But is being back to the old normal the final solution? Why not take lessons from this pandemic and create a more sustainable, beneficial future for work where the rat race won't feel like a rat race anymore? We talk all about it in our feature for this week where we explore how relying on tech has helped us navigate this pandemic and how it can potentially reshape how we view workplaces.

As for the rest, we review The Witcher season 2 on the last page, list out our top smartwatch choices on page 7, explore 2022 tech trends on page 6 and present a road trip travelogue with the Toyota Crown Royal on page 4.

Hope you find this issue a good read. Have a great weekend!

-Zarif Faiaz, Sub-editor

TOGGLE

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NIKE GETS INTO THE METAVERSE; BUYS VIRTUAL SNEAKER FIRM

Nike joined the wave of brands buying into excitement over virtual goods Monday as the sportswear giant announced it has bought RTFKT, a company that makes digital sneakers. RTFKT -- pronounced 'artefact' -- sells digital items in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), virtual assets that are authenticated using the same blockchain technology as cryptocurrencies.

"This acquisition is another step that accelerates Nike's digital transformation and allows us to serve athletes and creators at the intersection of sport, creativity, gaming and culture," said Nike CEO John Donahoe. Nike said the terms of the acquisition

would not be disclosed. But the purchase reflects growing interest from big brands in NFTs.

In May, an NFT of a Gucci handbag sold online for more than the real version would cost. The clamour over virtual goods comes over feverish predictions that the 'metaverse' -- a virtual reality version of the internet -- will eventually replace the web of today. Retail is one sector that could be transformed, with shoppers perhaps eventually donning virtual reality goggles to examine 3D replicas of real clothes. Nike has already opened 'Nikeland', a virtual showroom on gaming platform Roblox,



where visitors can dress their avatars in Nike clothes.

Founded last year, RTFKT seized on a similarity between sneakers and NFTs: both are often coveted as collectable items. In

March, RTFKT reportedly sold 600 pairs of physical sneakers for \$3.1 million -- but the items promoted as having 'real' value were the NFT versions of the sneakers sold with each pair.

"We're excited to grow our brand which was fully formed in the metaverse," RTFKT co-founder Benoit Pagotto said in a statement released by Nike. NFTs have generated huge interest over the past year, with enthusiasts predicting they will become a widespread form of ownership. Sceptics say the concept is over-hyped, with some NFTs changing hands for hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars.

Quality enhancement in higher education needs to be ensured to create better opportunities

JINAT JAHAN KHAN

Higher education globally has been going through dramatic changes in the last decade and that is no different in Bangladesh. A much wider demographic of people now have access to further education, and greater international collaboration has brought a more diverse perspective to education, particularly higher education. At the same time, there are many concerns over teaching and assessment methods. Moreover, in the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought challenges to the way in which higher education institutes in Bangladesh and around the world need to put more focus on the quality of education for the students.

The Daily Star, in collaboration with the British Council, has recently launched an exclusive series of LIVE webinars. On 12 December 2021, the very first session titled 'Importance of quality enhancement in the Higher Education Sector focusing on teaching and learning: Bangladesh perspective' was hosted by David Maynard, Director, English and Education, British Council Bangladesh.

"The prime barrier is the insufficient resources or assets to ensure the quality of higher education in public universities. There is a tendency to spend less public money on public universities. If we had sufficient assets such as labs, libraries, internet facilities, and logistics support like computers and laptops, we could have produced good quality graduates and secured their employability", said Dr Sabita Rezwana Rahman, Professor, Department of Microbiology, and

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Importance of quality enhancement in the Higher Education Sector focusing on teaching and learning: Bangladesh perspective

Dr. Sabita Rezwana Rahman
Professor, Department of Microbiology & Director, Centre of Excellence on Teaching and Learning, University of Dhaka.

Dr. Masuma Habib
Professor, Graduate Training Institute, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202

Dr. Mohammad Tareque
Associate Professor & Director Centre of Excellence on Teaching and Learning, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

Host
David Maynard
Director English and Education

Director, Centre of Excellence on Teaching and Learning, University of Dhaka.

Dr Mohammad Tareque, Associate Professor and Director, Centre of Excellence on Teaching and Learning, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, said, "We need to broaden our definition

of quality. We mainly consider doing research as a factor of showing that quality education has been ensured. But the most important aspect of quality education is that it should serve the social needs. Factors like employability and sustainable development also have

to be added to our definition of quality. And strategies need to be reorganised according to it."

On the other hand, Dr Masuma Habib, Professor, Graduate Training Institute, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh shared that one of the main barriers on the way of providing quality education is the absence of training institutes for the university teachers in her perspective. "There are no training institutes for our tertiary level education providers, which shows our failure to realise that university academicians do need formal training on pedagogy. Even though some short-term training sessions on pedagogical procedures for limited participants are arranged, these are not enough to serve quality higher education for all."

Dr Mohammad Tareque also mentioned blended learning in the education sector. He said, "Due to the pandemic, we are now more dependent on blended learning. It is not only about the hybrid of online and offline classes. However, it also refers to new pedagogical changes, the introduction of new curriculum and courses, and visionary changes regarding the educational aspects."

"We are producing more and more graduates without ensuring jobs for them. I think we should focus on hands-on training as per the market demand. There needs to be a linkage between industries and universities to understand what types of skills firms or industries want from the students, and how and with what educational institutes may help their students", said Dr Sabita Rezwana Rahman.

Rethinking workplaces

FROM PAGE 5

Nonetheless, the pandemic has altered people's perspectives of business, learning and the workplace. The evaluation of employees' contributions for the betterment of the companies is constantly evolving. It was and still continues to be a dark time for many, especially those who could not use

tech for their benefit. There are certain tech companies who earned millions of dollars, whereas many unfortunately lost their jobs.

These changes are expected to leave a lasting impact on the way people plan on moving forward. Prospective future workers, upon understanding that tech is the future of workplaces where the

working dynamic is forever changing, are trying to learn more about it so that they can be prepared to use technological tools if time demands it again.

Since companies are interested in reaping the benefits of integrating tech in workplaces with noticeable shifts in company cultures, they are expecting

technological competency from their future employees. It is tech that is helping job-seekers prepare better for the upcoming days. So, experts suggest we can hope to see a higher surge in people engaging in accentuating the soft skills needed for virtual working and sharpening their tech-related skills for the future of workplaces.

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Road trip diary with TOYOTA CROWN ROYAL

AHBAAR MILKY

Most customers purchasing a reconditioned car from Japan usually miss out on what could have been the greatest road trip with their new car. On the last weekend of November, when I got wind of a Toyota Crown Royal pre-ordered by Nippon Auto Trading, with the help of Shift's old friend Zaheer from Nippon Auto Trading, we set about to receive the Royal.

With tickets purchased the night prior, our 7 AM trip to Chittagong presented itself in the form of a non-AC Shyamoli Paribahan bus ride. We were shuttled from the bus counter at Kalabagan to Kamalapur Bus Stand, where we finally boarded at 8:45 AM.

With empty roads ahead, we made swift progress, reaching our halfway stop at Hotel Noorjahan at Cumilla by 11 AM on the dot. What once was a dreamy mirage for weary travellers on the Dhaka-Cumilla Highway now lies as a shell of its former glory. But if you choose to travel with Greenline or any other fancy coach, be sure to stop at Highway Inn - the latest mirage for weary travellers.

Set to stop at Highway Inn on our way back, we resumed our last leg of the trip to the port city of Chittagong, blitzing through the 250 odd kilometres in just under 6 hours as we crossed the city gate at 2 PM. Upon landing at Dampara Bus Stand at GEC More, we rendezvoused with our friend in Chittagong who acted as our local tour guide for the day.

We were determined as ever to go to Highway Inn, but not before collecting the Japanese royalty. We called for an Uber from Chittagong Stadium to Port Car Shed, which arrived within a minute and was cheaper than expected, but I'd like to think we got lucky.

By 4 PM, we reached our final stop, the Chittagong Port Car Shed, where our friend got in touch with his contact and within a few minutes, we caught a glimpse of a pearl white Toyota. The



gates of the port shed opened and welcomed us to a lucky customer's 2016 Toyota Crown Royal Saloon G.

Sold in Japan only, the Crown gives European rivals a run for their leather-wrapped interior's money, with soft-close, lounge-like rear seats with automated shutter blinds, reclinable seats with AC vents, cooled seats, the party piece and swing AC

vents at the front.

Barely able to contain our excitement, we gave a final inspection of all the buttons and features while we checked and raised the tire pressure for our journey back to Dhaka. It must have been our lucky day as we found a full tank of pure Japanese unleaded octane, courtesy of the previous owner in Japan.

We stopped at the freshly paved Port Link Road just above Potenga with

bid adieu to our friend after a quick caffeine refill as we started for Dhaka by sundown as we only had one thing in our mind - khichuri from Highway Inn.

Sometimes, all you need is good music and good company on a trip accompanied by swinging AC vents in a Toyota Crown to really humble yourself and appreciate the finer things in life. We simply wafted in style and comfort as the hybrid system allowed us to do 25 KMPL to Highway Inn.

We reluctantly resumed our road trip back to Dhaka. By 11 AM, we were on Mayor Hanif Flyover, on our way to the concrete jungle, and just like that, we made a round trip to Dhaka-Chittagong with plenty of sightseeing and memories created in under 14 hours.

I had never wanted a time machine more that night, to rewind the clock back to 24 hours and relive the day once more. Thus, I come to the conclusion of my travelogue with one piece of advice: the best way to frantically explore Chittagong is to opt for a road trip, the next time you or a close friend buys a car from Japan!



quite possibly the most glorious view of the many scattered ships drifting at sea, which bore striking resemblance to the marine drive road in Cox's Bazar.

The sky burst into a colour pallet of orange mixed with purple as the sun was engulfed by the horizon, leaving us speechless as I frantically pressed my trusty camera to capture the sunset as everyone savoured the moment. We

PHOTOS: AHBAAR MILKY



Rethinking workplaces

How reliance on tech helped us reshape post-pandemic work culture

REHENUMA RAYSA

During the pandemic, workplaces went through major transformations where many companies, businesses, and individuals ditched the traditional workplaces and took work to home, giving rise to the most significant 'work from home' scenario.

Tech played a pivotal role during the lockdown as many embraced remote technologies to work efficiently and effectively. Fast forward to the present, in a somewhat vaccinated world, when many remote workers take a journey back to their previous workplaces, tech is aiding them now as well.

Hybrid work plan

People have resorted to choosing what suits them well after exploring the alternatives to regular workplaces. The tech giants such as Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Apple, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Spotify, Quora, Amazon and Dropbox to mention a few are reluctant to ask for the return of all of their employees at the office after the lockdown. These global companies have acknowledged the numerous benefits of working from home during the pandemic, and are allowing the majority of their employees to relocate or work from home. They are to work

remotely for an indefinite period in the wake of the Omicron variant, unless their work requires specialised physical presence.

The Covid-19 panic is still gripping the world. While the world is not yet completely safe from the virus, advantages like less commute time, flexible work hours, and convenient working environments urge employees to opt for the newer option of remote working. Workplace software keeps supporting accelerated productivity and office operations by being incorporated into the post-pandemic working situations. There are, however, some people who can not let go of the perks of in-person working in fear of missing out on socialising with colleagues or having trouble adjusting to the new 'norm'.

In the post-pandemic era, even though many are going back to their original working arrangements, tech is still helping people choose what is feasible for them. This in turn promotes the hybrid work model, where proper implementation of tech ensures that employees can experience the best of both work environments while eliminating the impediments of each option.

Readjusting to traditional workplaces
A safe workspace and strict hygiene

measures are given top priority in post-pandemic workplaces so that employees are comfortable going back to work. To ensure their employees remain safe in their respective workplaces, companies have begun integrating touchless tech. Face recognition or other touch-free biometric verifications are replacing customary ID checking methods. Robots are being used to clean up shared devices or surfaces of the workspaces. AR tech helps maintain a connected network system between employees. Tech is here not just for the practical advantages it provides, but also for strengthening communal unity.

Even now, traditional workplaces need to be safe, healthy and sufficiently distanced. Smart offices, buildings with automated functionalities or contactless facilities, are growing in popularity. Wearable technology is also receiving significant recognition for seamless social distancing, along with digital payment methods. Post-pandemic workplaces are adapting to the digital shift of smart technologies. Although such use of technological advancements is still less common in specifically Bangladesh, many do hope these tech-enabled options will be put to use here as well.

On the other hand, there are individuals who are concerned with our seemingly over-reliance on tech. Many employers, despite being willing, cannot fully accept the newer demands of smart offices or a fully AI-integrated workplace. It is a shift many are finding hard to adjust to or even comprehend as they are afraid tech might take over their place when the employment opportunities are already scarce. Many still remain worried about the ever-present concern of personal data privacy.

Preparation for the future

The pandemic has brought forward a new era of technological revolution. We are becoming more competent with technology thanks to our pandemic experiences. The pandemic brought a shift where we utilised tech like never before and tech was the means of staying safe and connected with loved ones while also keeping ourselves productive during long lockdowns. Tech also helped many maintain their livelihood despite their physical workplaces being closed down for almost over a year. Moving into the post-pandemic era, we have come to truly appreciate the values and capabilities of technology more robustly.

SEE PAGE 3 COL 1



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

Meatless meat, Web 3.0 and Big Tech battles: Tech trends we look forward to in 2022

After a year that made the terms WFH (work from home) and metaverse instantly recognisable for many people, there are a new set of technological trends headed this way for 2022. Here's a selection of how technology may change lives in the coming year:

Meatless meat

Meat alternatives have become common in an increasing number of US households, thanks in part to Beyond Meat and Impossible Food plant-based products that come far closer to the texture and flavour of red meat. As the products have improved and the prices edged downward, demand has been boosted by concern about the environment: raising animals for food is responsible for a whopping 14.5 per cent of human-linked greenhouse gas emissions, according to UN data. The global market for plant-based meats is expected to be worth \$35 billion in 2027 -- up from \$13.5 billion in 2020, thanks in part to expansion beyond the United States, according to a report from Research and Markets.

"2022 will be the crowning year of food made from plant-based proteins," said David Bchiri, president of US consulting firm Fabernovel. "The products are mature and good. They're going to become mainstream."

Web 3.0 and crypto

The internet's first phase was the creation of websites and blogs, which allowed the emergence of companies

like Yahoo, eBay, or Amazon. The next iteration was Web 2.0, defined by social media and user-generated content on sites like Facebook and YouTube. These platforms "get the money and control it, they let you on their platform," summarised Benedict Evans, an independent analyst specializing in Silicon Valley. So, is Web 3.0 coming?

"2022 will be the crowning year of food made from plant-based proteins," said David Bchiri, president of US consulting firm Fabernovel. "The products are mature and good. They're going to become mainstream."

In this iteration, "users, creators and developers would have stakes and votes" in a platform in much the way cooperative works,

Evans said on his "Another Podcast." "Such a revolutionary step could be made possible by blockchain technology, where computer programs

run on networks of thousands or millions of computers. So far, blockchain has enabled the rise of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, and more recently, the unique digital objects such as drawings or animations called NFTs. "We talk a lot about decentralized finance, but I think that in 2022 we will see more localized use cases, which will enter everyday life," said Bchiri of consulting firm Fabernovel.

As highly-volatile digital monies like bitcoin have hit record high values in 2021, a huge range of players has gotten into the game including versions launched by the cities of Miami and New York.

Ransomware, everywhere

The spike toward record ransomware attacks and data leaks in 2021 looks likely to spill over into the coming year. Cyber-extortion heists break into a victim's network to encrypt data, then demand a ransom, typically paid via cryptocurrency in exchange to unlock it. A confluence of factors has fueled the trend, including the booming value of cryptocurrencies, victims' willingness to pay and the difficulty authorities have in catching attackers. Cybersecurity company SonicWall wrote in late October: "With 495 million ransomware attacks logged by the company this year to date, 2021 will be the most costly and dangerous year on record."

"When I think about 2022, the thing that's top of mind for me and for my

colleagues continues to be ransomware. It's simply too lucrative," wrote Sandra Joyce, executive vice president and head of global intelligence at cybersecurity firm Mandiant.

Big Tech regulation?

It's difficult to say if 2022 is the year Big Tech will finally be hit with significant new rules, but a series of regulatory and legal threats launched in 2021 will provoke major battles. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission's antitrust lawsuit against Facebook represents a genuine threat to the social media giant, though a court has already dismissed the case once. More lawsuits and a federal investigation -- and maybe even finally new laws -- are possible in the wake of the damning whistleblower leaks showing Facebook executives knew its sites could cause harm. Some critics say the firm's major push into realizing the metaverse -- a virtual reality version of the internet -- is an effort to change the subject after years of criticism.

Apple dodged a bullet in 2021 when a US federal court said Fortnite maker Epic Games failed to show the iPhone giant held an illegal monopoly, but the firm was still ordered to loosen control over its App Store. Both sides have appealed. New regulations may come sooner in the EU as it pushes through new laws, such as the Digital Services Act which would create much stricter oversight of harmful and illegal content on platforms like Facebook.

Our top picks for smartwatches under TK 5500

REHENUMA RAYSA

In recent times, smartwatches have revolutionised the electronic gadget industry and acquired significant popularity, and the craze is only rising further. People are drawn to smartwatches for their most distinctive features: GPS tracking capability, fitness monitoring, notification alerts, being able to listen to music, user-friendly interfaces, voice command and other customisable options that can enhance diversity and convenience in the users' lives.

Smartwatch companies are coming up with options to meet vast demands; making smartwatches available across a range of prices. If you are on a strict budget, we have got you covered as today we enlist our top picks for budget-friendly recent models of fairly and adequately impressive smartwatches that will not require you to be in a 'splurging mood'.



XIAOMI HAYLOU SOLAR LS05

This metal body smartwatch is waterproof (IP68), includes 12 different sport modes and has a 1.28 inch round TFT high-resolution screen. It features the Realtek RTL8762C chip with a battery capacity of 340mAh.

You can get your hands on this one (or this one on your hands) with a budget of TK 1900.



AMAZEFIT BIP U PRO SMART WATCH GLOBAL VERSION

If you are willing to save up a little more money and not go overboard by sacrificing a few features and have comparatively an overall good smartwatch, then you can take a look at this water-resistant smartwatch, which features 60+ sports modes with high-precision built-in GPS, magnetic charging option, IP68 water resistance rating, and a couple of handy sensors. It is priced at TK 5199.

ONEPLUS SMART FITNESS BAND

OnePlus's first venture into the fitness band arena weighs only 22.6g with its removable strap. Its lightweight yet stylish modern design will certainly give you a comfortable day-to-day experience.

The pricing of this particular band is around TK 2800.



SAMSUNG GALAXY FIT E

The Korean Brand Samsung has packed this smartwatch with a compact minimalistic design, so you do not even feel it on your wrist. Its automatic detection of your daily activities makes it a perfect choice to spend money on it without much hesitation as it is made to stand the test of time.

You can own this sturdy smartwatch filled with many useful options by spending TK 3700.

REALME RMA161

Realme RMA161 is around TK 4100. Its popularity is due to its battery life which claims to be of service for 9 days straight with a single full charge session. You can also expect to get a 3.5 cm (1.4 inches) screen to help you with 14 sport modes and a real-time heart rate and oxygen level monitor.



A few honourable mentions for some other budget-friendly smartwatches that offer the basic as well as some premium features under BDT 5500 are Lenovo S2 Dual Strap Smartwatch (BDT 1690), Xiaomi IMILAB KW66 Smart Watch (BDT 2699), Mibro Lite Smart Watch AMOLED

SCREEN with SpO2 (BDT 3799), Xiaomi Mi Watch Lite Smart Band (BDT 4599), Xiaomi SmartWatch Lite Global Version (BDT 5499).

You can consider these as alternatives to the mentioned ones.

There are so many smartwatches

launched by various companies that are curated keeping every personality in mind which are available for you to try on. You should choose and invest your money in the one that is suitable for your needs according to your lifestyle.

The Witcher's Season 2 is worth tossing a coin

TASNUVA KINNORI

Since its release in 2019, Netflix's *The Witcher* has been a treat for long-time fans and newcomers alike. Taking the streaming platform by storm, the series successfully builds upon the already impressive popularity of Andrzej Sapkowski's book series and CD Projekt Red's video game trilogy.

Higher expectations preceded the show's second season, given the wild success of season 1 and the prequel animated film. The Netflix continuation of Geralt's tale delivers on those expectations in spades. Overcoming the previous season's weaknesses in terms of confusing timeline-hopping and poor CGI and props, the latest season offers a more linear look into the show's primary characters - Geralt, Ciri and Yennefer, without shying away from exploring other intriguing plot threads. Minor spoilers ahead as we review the latest season.

As Season 1 draws its curtains with the destined meeting of Geralt and Ciri, Season 2 picks up right where the audience was previously left with the white-haired duo. The growth of both

the characters since then is what drives the story forward in Season 2. While the portrayal of Geralt by Henry Cavill is characteristically brilliant, the show shines even brighter through Freya Allan's



stunning performance as Ciri.

From the singed battlefields of Sodden to the icy mountains at Kaer Morhen, the burgeoning father-daughter dynamics are always a delight to watch - seeing the witcher transform from gruff monster slayer to protective mentor while the fearful princess grows ever more determined to protect herself and others. But character growth wasn't limited only to the destined father and daughter

this season, with Yennefer, Fringilla and surprisingly Cahir getting their own self-discovery arcs.

While the now powerless Yennefer finds a long road ahead of her, running from captor to captor and forging unusual alliances, everyone's favourite bard returns like a lover scorned with his new hit single (penned keeping a certain witcher in mind). Like the previous season, Joey Batey provides much needed comic relief to the more slow-burn pacing of season 2, though fans might be left wanting from the scarcity of Jaskier over the first six episodes.

Keeping up the balance between palace intrigue and classic Witcher-style monster-slaying isn't something Season 2 falls short on either. The fights this season provide plenty of adrenaline rush pitting Geralt against Leshens, Basilisks, Mages and of course humans. While some may prefer the brutally balletic action from last season's clash with Renfri, Henry Cavill doesn't falter in his execution of this season's slow-motion, close-up brawl sequences either.

Although the second season exceeds the first in terms of better sets, props and CGI (that seem straight out of the game) and adding layers to characters and their plot threads, it does lose momentum at certain

points. The first season created quite the climactic build-up to the Witcher and his Child Surprise finally finding each other, but this season severely underplays the fated meeting of Geralt, Yennefer and Ciri, an intertwining of destiny that has been teased since the very last dialogue of Season 1.

With a greater focus on expanding and fleshing out the world of *The Witcher*, the story sometimes sidelines the titular character, though that comes in exchange for a deeper dive into the Continent's politics, Nilfgaard's true intentions in the North, the origin of the Witchers, the prophecy of the Elder Blood and even a first look at the enigmatic Wild Hunt.

The lack of another earworm-worthy tune, more of Jaskier's charms and iconic Witcher bath scenes aside, the latest chapter in Geralt's tale doesn't fail to thrill. With plenty of easter eggs from *Nightmare of the Wolf*, the return of characters from Sapkowski's books (Nivellen from *The Last Wish* and Rience from *Blood of Elves*) and Netflix's own twists to keep even long-time fans and readers at the edge of their seats, Season 2 of *The Witcher* well deserves a tossed coin.



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