

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE
SHOUT

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WOMEN SHOULD TREAT
EACH OTHER BETTER

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THE TRAGEDY OF
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THE LIVES OF MEDICAL STUDENTS

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

I don't know if it's just me but Dhaka has a way of making you feel hyper-aware of having a body. Whether it's not having enough space to walk through, the distressing levels of air pollution, the unwanted gazes, or even having to sit through hours of traffic with bad posture. The city has a way of making me feel like I do indeed have a body but I wish I didn't.

It's almost as if I can actively feel the harm the city's doing to me on a molecular level. Even a simple rickshaw ride feels like I'm capturing the dust particles in my lungs like a sticky fly trap. Walking through the roads makes me all too aware that I have foot soles and muscles and bones, all the layers being rattled like by the many bumps and craters on the pavement.

Maybe it's just Dhaka or the half-baked knowledge I have from A Level Biology courses, but even my organs are getting tired of being here.

– Fatima Jahan Ena, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES



Star Wars: Andor is probably the best Star Wars product in decades

RAIAN ABEDIN

The history of *Star Wars* as a franchise has been mired in mismanagement and poor creative decisions since Disney's acquisition of its parent company, Lucasfilm. Even with a promising start with *Episode VII - The Force Awakens* and a rather impressive standalone prequel in the shape of *Rogue One*, the narrative of the franchise seemed to be going nowhere.

This was followed by movies and TV shows that have been met with mixed reviews. With the release of TV shows and movies that felt both overwhelming and a little too similar, I, along with many other fans of the franchise, had mostly given up hope of seeing something truly exceptional come out from this period of *Star Wars*.

Andor felt like a completely fresh experience from the get-go. A departure from the over-reliance on fanservice to gain any traction and relying instead on anxiety-inducing storytelling helps *Andor* stand out. The story removes itself almost entirely from the sort of cookie-cutter style of content Disney has gathered a reputation for. Instead, what we get is 12 episodes diving deep into the effects of fascism and how rebellion is born on a grassroots level under an oppressive landscape.

Sometimes, *Andor* does not even feel like a *Star Wars* product, and that's part of the show's strength. It requires nothing from the viewer if you understand the basic idea of *Star Wars*, which is an evil empire vs rebels trying to fight them. Then, *Andor* makes perfect sense. It uses the shiny coat of paint that is the world of *Star Wars* and manages to tell a story of human characters and their reactions to the constantly shift-

ing world around them.

The story primarily focuses on the titular character, Cassian Andor. Reprising his role from *Rogue One*, Diego Luna gives an incredibly layered performance of an everyman with more history and scars than meets the eye. He is introduced as the protagonist who is searching for his sister, running into trouble with galactic police officers on his quest.

One small event leads to another, leading to Andor's escape from his home world. The build-up to the events, as well as the world where the events take place, are breathtaking. Not a single scene feels wasted as we progress from one arc to another and Andor finds himself in conflict against the empire in more ways than one.

In many ways, *Andor* is extremely true to the spirit of *Star Wars* without trying to fill it with pointless fanservice that does not add anything compelling to the story. What little callback there is has been handled with meticulous care and with honest storytelling in mind. Even the antagonists are written to be unique, and yet somehow, they all collectively add something new to the imperialist system the entire galaxy seems to be suppressed by.

The great effort in making sure that the political commentary is imbued deep within the core of this story is at once fascinating and completely out of the left field for a corporation that likes to play it safe like Disney.

And honestly, everyone should give this a watch. Even the non-*Star Wars* fans.

Raian thinks sometimes. But only sometimes. Send him thoughts at IG @raian_is_burning

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A

Lung
vancouver Sleep Clinic

Heal

Tom Odell

In My Blood
Shawn Mendes

Fine On The Outside
Priscilla Ahn

B

We'll Be Alright
RADWIMPS

The Astronaut
Jin

Hand Me Downs
Mac Miller

People (Check On Me)
Libianca

Email us at shoutds@gmail.com
with feedback, comments, and reader
submissions within 500 words.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Women should treat each other better

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

The oldest prejudice in the book is that of women being prone to jealousy, backbiting, and showing covert regression towards each other. Any rational individual would agree that such generalisations can never be representative of an entire group.

However, some women do develop internalised prejudices as they're forced to conform to gender roles and exist alongside unaddressed stereotypes. They subconsciously demean fellow women.

Every girl gets judged for the way she carries herself, and sadly, a lot of it often comes from other women. Women in gender biased environments get gas-lighted into believing that other women wield their femininity and physical appearance to impress the male gaze, often unknowingly.

This is how internalised sexism manifests itself.

Women begin underestimating each other. They become henchmen of the patriarchy, holding women over the same impossible standards they themselves are expected to meet. Some women gradually develop biases wherein it seems only fair to them that their female predecessors stumble upon disparaging roadblocks and figure their way across steep learning curves without a helping hand, the same way they did.

Yet when a woman takes control of her situation, tries to be assertive, or decides to be openly opinionated, there is always scrutiny from fellow females, pointing out how she's being too "bossy" or unladylike.

On one hand, headstrong women tend to doubt the ambition and capabilities of women who choose traditionally "feminine" responsibilities over paid careers. I have witnessed female family members accuse women of being self-centred and callous to their "intrinsic" responsibilities if they prioritise their profession over domesticity.

Women have entombed each other within a conundrum of critique about what they should ideally mould themselves to be like.

Research by British anthropologist and psychologist Robin Dunbar shows that women form intense female friendships. They prefer sharing intimacies through conversations. Several citations found that individual personalities and regular emotional reciprocity influence female friendships very strongly.

So, it's harder for girls to cope with fallouts in friendship. Women put more weight on emotional fidelity. They may maintain "cliques" for example, might not readily accept outsiders into their close knitted circles. Thus, they end up harshly judging, ostracising, or being mean to fellow females while trying to gate-keep their connections.

When women actively endorse the "I'm-not-like-other-girls" rhetoric, are they not trying to validate themselves by invalidating fellow women whom they consider to be "inferior" to them? They end up further consolidating the absurdity that feminine women cannot compete and find success working with other genders unless they privilege masculinity.

Women need to be tolerant of the diversity of feminine identities and shun inclinations if tying expression to a women's moral compass. They also need to celebrate each other's successes. Discriminatory constructs have more power over us if we can't maintain solidarity within ourselves. Even when competing for limited opportunities, women have to work to further their own prospects, while helping out fellow women every step of the way. Most importantly, they must possess the integrity to openly confront each other about disagreements.

It's not about who can one-up the patriarchy first. It's about finding how we can defeat it together even if it pits us against each other.

Reference:

1. Dunbar, R. (2021). *Friends: Understanding the power of Our Most Important Relationships*

Send Nuzha much-needed validations at nuzhaoishee1256504@gmail.com

BookTok is propagating pseudo-feminism

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Book sales are rising after a long period of stagnation and a possible cause for this seems may be an influx of readers from TikTok's reading corner – BookTok. While this can seem like a cause for elation, there lies a problem in the type of books that are being popularised by BookTok. Under the guise of being feminist, these books, a large number of which are of the romance genre, are propagating pseudo-feminist ideas.

It is safe to say that BookTok single-handedly shot Colleen Hoover's books – particularly *It Ends With Us* – to success. On the surface, it seems to be a book about a woman regaining control over her own life after realising she is the victim of abuse. However, the underlying tone of the novel suggests an almost sympathetic approach to the perpetrator.

We see him being provided with a traumatic background to justify his actions and make readers sympathise with him. He is repeatedly shown as regretting his actions and beating himself up over it, further establishing the idea that his actions are done without intent even though there is a lot of evidence to suggest otherwise. There is even something of a redemption arc for him at the end.

Yes, bad people do bad things because they have issues of their own. But what Colleen Hoover does is romanticise his trauma to explain the actions of an abuser, something that the victim seems to resonate with.

Many BookTok romance books use trauma and bad childhoods in this way to make abusers appear more humane. These books strengthen an idea, particularly amongst young girls, that it is okay to be abused if the person has a reason for their abuse.

There also appears to be a repeating theme in BookTok's choice for fantasy books. Series like *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (ACOTAR) and *The Folk of Air* are presented as having strong female characters. However, BookTok's definition of what a strong woman is seems to be deeply reliant on her being physically strong. Any other form of strength is barely counted.

The heroines in these books can be vulnerable but they can never be weak. Failure to be tough is almost synonymous to being a failure. However, despite these heroines' abilities, their male love interests are likely to be superior. Even though the heroine is undeniably strong, there will come a situation where she will be the damsel in distress and the hero will save her. To call these portrayals as being feminist would be blatantly hypocritical.

Then there exists this trope of men who love hard and cannot bear their love interest being hurt. The male characters from the ACOTAR series suffer from this fault. For the sake of protecting the heroine, they try to control their lives, using love as an excuse. This promotes co-dependency and controlling behaviour, saying it is fine for women to have little agency as long as it is for their safety.

It is understandable that what someone likes to read is their own choice and content creators should not have moral responsibilities over what to recommend. However, the type of audience that is consuming BookTok content are young impressionable teenagers who, as a result, often end up idolising problematic characters, thus perpetuating false ideas of feminism.

Zaima is a struggling student, a failed guitarist and a poet in need of better poetic ideas. Send her your sympathies at zaima2004adrta@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

The lives of medical students

THE DEFINITIVE **YOUTH** MAGAZINE
SHOOT

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

Being a doctor grants you the privilege of helping fellow human beings. As rewarding and respectable as the medical profession is, the pathway to becoming a doctor is trying and tedious. University admissions in Bangladesh is a story of ruthless competition. The medical admission test may just be the most competitive of them all.

To obtain a seat in any medical college, private or public, you must pass the admission test. In 2022, 139,742 students sat for the medical admission exam. Candidates who ranked within the first 4000 or so places gained a seat in a public medical college. The exam itself consists of 100 multiple-choice questions, with a duration of one hour. Thus, to attempt each question,

one would get roughly half a minute. Each incorrect answer deducts 1.25 marks. Five different subject areas consisting of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English, and General Knowledge are tested.

However, the competitive nature of the exam does not make it impossible to crack. Planning ahead helps. The first step is to be absolutely sure that medicine is the goal. A long-term preparation process is made easier with genuine passion.

Abid Bhuiyan, a 4th-year student at Dhaka Medical College (DMC), shared how he set his goal early.

“In class 9, I decided that I wanted to know more about my body. I did some research on the question patterns for medical college admission test. Till HSC, I emphasised more on biology and also touched on the other subject areas tested in the admission test,” he said.

After HSC, Abid joined a coaching centre to help with time management and the pressure of the exam.

The journey of preparing for the same test looks very different for two groups of students in Bangladesh, with it being more challenging for English medium students. Since a different syllabus is taught at O and A Levels, the NCTB structure is completely new territory, all to be crammed in very little time.

Khondkar Rashkih Tasnim went to Schoластика before enrolling at Mugda Medical College. Currently a third-year student, she revealed that delving into the admission test as an English medium student served as a reality check.

“Most of us in English medium schools get infected with a certain sense of pride. But admission tests reveal that we are a minority, and we have to study the national curriculum syllabus within just a few months,” she said.

Then again, challenging does not mean impossible. Rashkih reaffirmed that the key is starting early.

“My preparation started in class 11. An

alumnus of my school tutored me at his home alongside two other medical students. Major preparation started after my A Levels. I used a technique of active recall, where I would learn a topic and blurt the information from memory on paper. I joined the exam batch of two coaching centres as well,” she added.

While the ability to go abroad for higher studies is coveted by many Bangladeshi students, benefits exclusive to medical colleges in Bangladesh bring in an unexpected number of foreign students each year. One such student is Tanvin Dola, a Bangladeshi-American who grew up and underwent schooling in Florida, but moved to Bangladesh to study medicine at Sir Salimullah Medical College under the non-SAARC quota.

“In America, I would first have to get an undergraduate degree before enrolling at medical school, then graduate with a lot of debt. To come to Bangladesh, I didn’t have to sit for any admission test, as there are very few applicants under the non-SAARC quota. I do have to pay a tuition fee of USD 5000 per year. Even so, it is much cheaper than what I would have to pay in America,” she said.

Even though the admission system in Bangladesh comes with its fair share of limitations, there is one aspect that Rashkih appreciates.

“In Bangladesh, they don’t care about your background. Admission into a public medical college does not depend on my parents’ income. Money is a big factor in determining which institutions you get accepted to abroad. Here, I’m studying alongside students from many diverse backgrounds but we all have two things in common, we want to become doctors, and we aced the admission exam,” she said.

Dola appreciates the number of chances Bangladesh gives you. “The five years in Bangladesh were hard. Competing with the memorisation abilities of the brilliant and dedicated Bangladeshi students took

three steps.

The pathway to getting an MBBS degree is divided into four phases, the end of each phase marked by a professional exam. An interesting characteristic of medical colleges is the “item”, which is an oral exam usually taken every single day up until the 4th year. You have to pass all the items to be eligible for a “card” or term exam, and pass 3 term exams and a ward final exam (held third year onwards) to be eligible for professional exams. Passing all four professional exams grants you the MBBS degree.

The fact that all professional exams are conducted by one of four central authorities (depending on the geographical location of a medical college) makes the negative implications surrounding private medical colleges unreasonable. Public and private medical colleges each have their pros and cons, which should be considered to decide which is the right fit for someone.

Bishal Rashid, a student of Uttara Adhunik Medical College, shared how his private medical college benefits him, “In private colleges, exams are taken more regularly and rigorously. A possible reason behind this is that private colleges have more liability to us for the tuition fees and also to the governing body. My friends from public colleges often talk about how items are not taken regularly, but card and term exams do happen, so they have to cram.”

According to Bishal, social implications result in an inferiority complex and lack of morale amongst students from private medical colleges.

Studying a difficult subject like medicine demands that other aspects of life, like accommodation, are well taken care of. When asked about the state of the halls in public medical colleges, Abid shared that conditions are being improved.

“When I first came to DMC, I was assigned to one large room with 12 people,

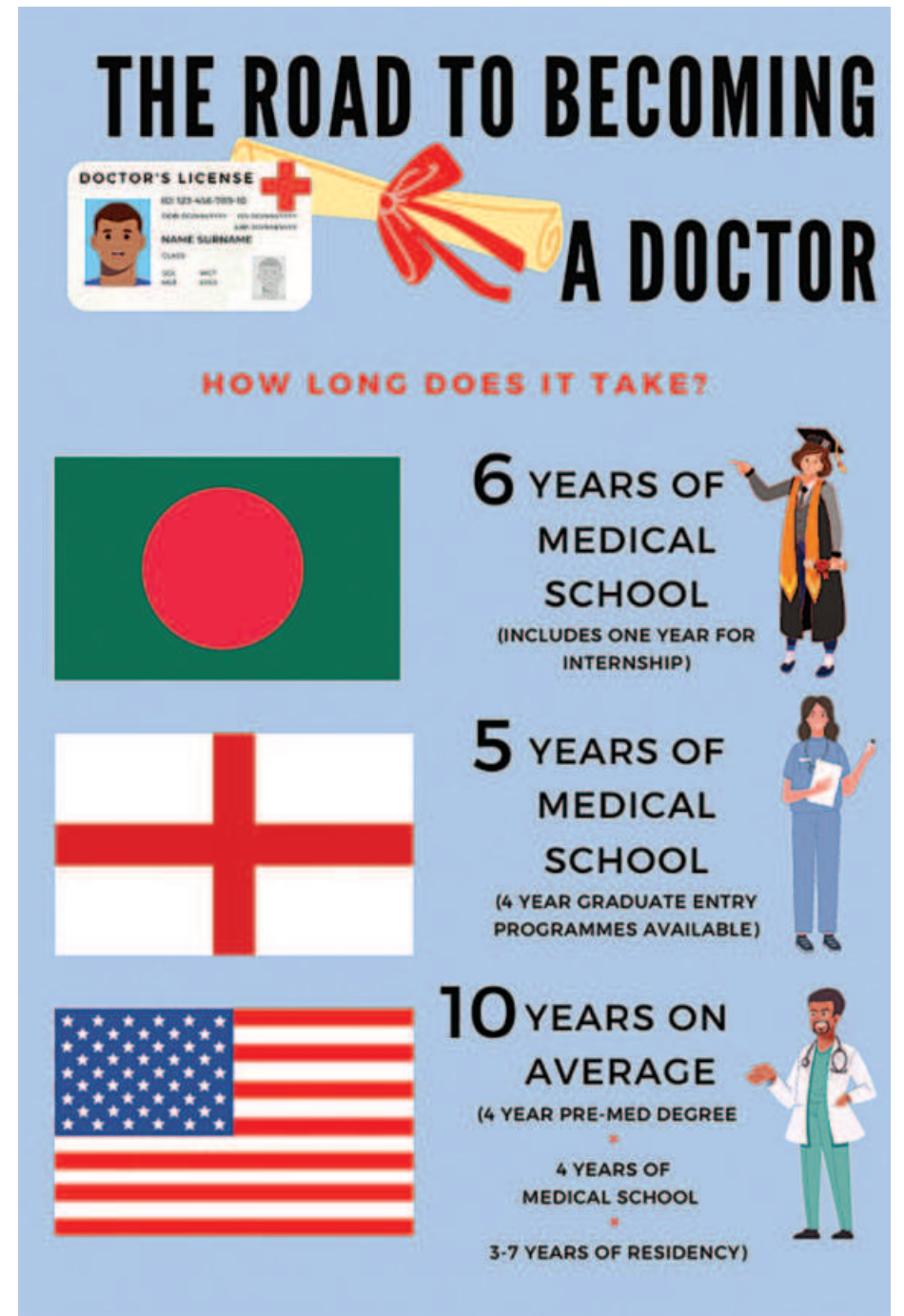


adjustment. However, you can take as long as you need and can afford to pass. Unless you sign yourself out, you won’t be expelled from medical college,” she said.

Dola is now back in America. When asked about whether her degree from Bangladesh puts her at a disadvantage, she shared that in America, the USMLE, which is the licensing exam to practise in America, is incorporated into the medical school curriculum. Dola has to take a couple of years to prepare and sit for the

which was upsetting. But two months in, 6 people could move to a different room. As we become more senior, we are assigned to less crowded rooms. Currently, there’s four of us and it’s pretty comfortable. The location of my campus is also nice, with nature and greenery.”

According to Abid, the government has acknowledged the poor conditions of medical halls and is renovating them. The newer medical colleges have been built with nicer halls and facilities.



DESIGN: AAQIB HASIB

However, the state of the medical college hospital wards warrants rapid improvement.

“Due to the wards not being able to accommodate the sheer number of patients we receive, it is impossible to properly attend to each patient and maintain proper hygiene. The cramped conditions do not foster a good learning environment,” shared Abid.

It is a given that medicine will come with an intense academic workload, which may imply that only academically oriented people are capable of succeeding. However, it is evident from my conversations with medical students that being completely consumed by studies is unsustainable in the long run. To preserve your mental health, it is important to make an active effort to maintain a work-life balance.

The most important exams in medical college are the four professional exams. The different types of testing conducted in these exams disprove the popular belief that memorisation skills guarantee success as a medical student. The tests are written, viva, OSPE (Objective Structured Practical Examination), and practical. For viva, you need to be able to speak fluently and confidently under pressure. OSPE is an interesting type of testing with stations, you get 2 minutes in each to identify a specimen and/or answer a question. Passing the professional exams requires

you to know the content to the point of being able to apply it, and attend to a patient. Passing your professional exams grants you the MBBS degree and makes you a doctor, so the challenge matches the stakes at play.

After passing the final professional exam, students go on to work as intern doctors for a year. However, the salary for this position has remained unchanged at BDT 15,000 for many years.

“The amount offered is not appropriate for the hard work you did to gain admission, the hard work you did for 5 years to become qualified for the position, and the hard work you do working as an intern doctor,” commented Bishal.

Abid added that throughout the internship period, you are required to spend a segment of time working in every department. Given that you had no income source for five years, the salary offered is not enough compared to the inflated prices of basic necessities.

Pursuing medicine is a decision that should be carefully made, with a meticulous assessment of your motivations. The right motivations, often something more than yourself, are what prove most helpful in enduring decades of strenuous physical and mental labour that the pathway demands.

Contact Amrin for details of lesser-known interesting work at amrinrafa@gmail.com

The ghosts called lost friends

NOUSHIN NURI

We lose friends. Often, not to something as grand as death or disaster, but to subtler things like misunderstandings and misbehaviour. Things the two people could not agree on. Something that seemed agonisingly wrong to one but the other never understood why.

When we remember these lost friends, memory comes in layers. But the first layer generally comes unexpectedly – like a mirror flashing right in front of your face. A specific mirror in the specific place where you and your dear friend once took a selfie. Now, you see only yourself there. But for a fleeting moment, you saw that lost friend too, posing beside you. As they say, ghosts get caught in the mirror.

Their ghosts sit with us at the tables we used to dine in together. The moon makes us remember conversations we had under it. Perhaps, those words still hover in the wind, distillate into fog, and evaporate into mist.

Memories condense into dark clouds, too. All the times they were wrong, they wronged, and didn't feel sorry. Times when apologies were made but not accepted. The times you discovered the circuitous lanes of their betrayals. The awful things they did. And the cruel twists of fate that left you not in speaking terms anymore.

Some memories morph into a question mark. We ask ourselves if we were right in pushing them away or letting go. Maybe it is not possible to ever have the right answers. Hence, we avoid the question altogether, saying, "We were just friends, after all."

But "just friends" might be what we mourn the most. The simplicity and light-heartedness our friendships started with. When expectations were low and disappointments rare. Is it unusual to wish that the friendship never reached the depth it eventually did? Is it abnormal to want to evade the weight that ultimately brought it down?

At some point, maybe we just grew tired. Tired of resolving conflicts. Tired of carrying the weight of our deep emotions. And when feelings become too much to be accommodated into the narrow space of practicality, we chose not to feel at all. But it's not as if choice had ever dictated the heart.

So, when paths collide and eyes meet, do we smile at them? Perhaps we do, almost as a reflex action. The muscles in our faces are not yet adept at holding grudges. The gap, comprised of years of separation, closes in an instant. But for an instant only. Reason kicks in like thunder and summons back the black clouds of all the things that were wrong.

We don't stop to greet. We walk on, on our own. After a while, we even get better at it. But this walking alone might just be an illusion. Because we reach the mirror again and spot the ghost.

Noushin Nuri is an early bird fighting the world to maintain her sleep schedule. Reach her at noushin2411@gmail.com



PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**



ILLUSTRATION: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

The tragedy of online friends

NISHAT SHAWRIN

Young people today are no strangers to the sweaty palms, the nervous giggles, or the fear of judgement when it comes to meeting online friends for the first time. While it is golden to have online friendships reach the real world, many connections that transpire online never leave the dark backdrop of our inbox, but rather fizzle out quietly until the eventual ghosting.

Yes, finding cyber humanoids to geek out about the next manga release has never been easier. But crossing the bridge to discover friends in them is an Olympian feat.

I remember logging into my socials to find curated playlists, hilarious typos of a friend asking how I have been coping from exams, voice messages from my hopelessly romantic friend gushing about their "soulmate for life". The brutal banter and the quick make-ups, the shady jokes, and the truest confessions. All my friends that live inside message alerts have not seen any less than the friends I have made in real life. Yet so many have been lost to time, with the exception of a few still stubbornly lingering.

There is an ease in being our most sincere in the shelter of our screens, making brief connections on the internet. They say there is a limit to how many people you'll remember from your life, but I wonder how online friendships can endure if their existence is reliant on digital data. Replace the old ones with the new, the ghosts with the notifications – the mantra for surviving online.

Repeating this cycle enough times can dilute our sensitivity and affect our natural human tendency to connect. We can all recall instances of being called out by our parents, or even by ourselves, for being unusually indifferent to emotions that deserved our attention and care. So, in these modern times, what is the cure for this internet-induced malady?

One solution could be that we remain mindful of forming friendships while consciously coming to terms with the volatile nature of online interactions. This can allow us to deal with separations with grace in the hope that detachment becomes less painful and our brain does not risk manifesting unhealthy coping mechanisms under the guise of apathy.

I will admit that I am just as silly as the next person to completely bare my soul in one-shot conversations after midnight and move on rather easily when time came. Maybe that is the way we are coded now, to retain the connections until we can and let go when we have to. The debate about whether this "rip off that band-aid, it's okay to forget Lovely Jaamilah you met on a Facebook group of wild knitters" approach is healthy will outlast generations and when it comes down to it, it really all depends on our decisions.

I will not assume the voice of a one-hundred-and-seventy-two-year-old man sitting under an even older tree and advise you against selling your soul online for brief warmth. But I will ask you to take care of yourself and your friends and make the tragedy into a worthwhile one, one that does not kill your fragile emotions but instead prepares you for better things. Make 'em count!

Nishat Shawrin is being reckless online, send best at: shawrin.nishat2004@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

THE PLAINSBURN RESIDENCE

RAFID KHANDAKER

During my time as a butler at the Plainsburn Residence, I had witnessed no shortage of peculiar occurrences. Nocturnal cries from the nearby forest to bloody hoofprints showing up around the estate, strange phenomena were commonplace to the point where they could no longer be explained through worldly logic. Yet, none of it could have prepared me for what I witnessed that cursed night of the winter solstice – an event that would cause even the most skeptical man to be rendered petrified.

The Plainsburn Residence had sat at the edge of a huge forest for generations, acting as its steward and protector. The manor was old, but well kept, with shiny windows overlooking pristinely maintained gardens on all sides.

The head of the house was Lady Eleanor Plainsburn, widow of the late Lord Franco Plainsburn, who lived alongside their ten children. The Plainsburn family were known for their wealth, wit, and striking emerald eyes, and were beloved by all townsfolk.

I had been hired by the Plainsburns only months before that horrible night. Ms. Linda Glendale, who was the chief housekeeper, was also hired along with me. She was a rather eccentric woman and I heard whispers she had been expelled from her previous lodging on account of some unspeakable deeds, though I was never a man to pay heed to baseless rumors.

The first few weeks went smoothly, with the occasional nightly animal cries giving me the heebie-jeebies but nothing a grown man couldn't handle.

We were treated very well, especially by Lady Eleanor, who took a particular liking to Linda and would spend much of her leisure chatting with her. Their relationship seemed more akin to friendship than that of employer-employee, to the jealousy of the other, more veteran staff members.

However, these peaceful times were not to last, and as time went on, certain peculiarities started occurring in the house and its surroundings. Some servants complained about hearing incessant footsteps around the house late at night. Others said they heard strange cries from the forest, while I was the unfortunate discoverer of bloody hoofprints – likely that of a goat. This was unsettling, as there were no goats on the property.

All while this was happening, Linda started acting strange – much more than usual. She was always in a jittery mood, suspicious of everyone, as if in a state of constant paranoia. Inevitably, rumors started spreading around the house – rumors that she was the cause behind the strange phenomena.

Some said she was a witch preparing for the winter solstice, others claimed she was a demoness who wanted to sacrifice Lady Eleanor. I considered myself a man of logic. I didn't buy into such nonsense, but deemed the situation strange enough that I would wait for the winter solstice

and investigate the matter myself. I did not let any of the other residents know of my plans, because to me, all of them were suspects, and I didn't want a target on my back. So, I devised my plan in secrecy, and awaited the winter solstice, which was coming in three days, in equal parts dread and intrigue.

As the fated solstice night came, it was finally time to put my plan into action, and find the mystery suspect behind the strange events. I had found a perfect hiding spot, a cabinet in the kitchen, with clear view of the main entrance and the dining hall, where most of the hoofprints on the ground floor were found.

I gathered my courage and hid inside the cabinet and waited for whatever mysterious entity that might appear before me. For an hour or so, the only horrors I experienced were the claustrophobia of imprisonment and the onslaught of fatigue. But as I waited, those familiar peculiarities started happening again – first strange cries from the woods. And then, footsteps. From the corner of my eye, I saw black, bloody hooves enter my line of sight. Only it was no goat, but attached to a body upright.

My heart sank – I could feel my muscles stiffen and blood congeal. As the figure moved forward, I started to make out its shape and features. A disgusting thing, a horror not of this world, an abomination only the depths of Hell could conjure up.

It had devilish wings protruding from its back like a bat, and horns of a bull.

It had the body of a woman, dressed in nothing but a skull around her neck and bones around her hips. My mind struggled to believe what my eyes beheld, yet the all-consuming terror left no room for doubt. I was now certain that the rumours were indeed correct. Linda was a demoness, and she was standing in front of me.

She didn't notice me. She was too busy carrying a lifeless body behind her. I dared not imagine who it could be. However, to my shock, the body bore a striking resemblance to the human form of the demoness. It was Linda herself. Dazed at the sight of such inexplicable horror, I had to restrain myself from calling out her name. If Linda was dead, who was the demoness?

These questions raced through my mind as I watched the slender, hellish figure drag Linda outside into the forest at inhumane speed. But that is not the memory which haunts me still. That is not the sight that made me run from the manor that night and never return. As the demoness went to close the door, I caught a glimpse of her eyes – dazzling emeralds shining in the darkness of the night, and behind her tens more glowing brightly from the distant forest.

Rafid is busy dozing off every chance he gets. Wake him up by sending a notification at rafidkhandaker@gmail.com.

Harry Potter and the Chokehold of Capitalism

The moral minefield of *Hogwarts Legacy*

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

When *Hogwarts Legacy* was announced, I had all but shunned the *Harry Potter* franchise entirely on account of J. K. Rowling's problematic, albeit very publicly displayed, opinions. However, I did end up buying the game when it was released earlier this year. The switch in gears may be brushed off as selective activism, but I believe the controversy behind *Hogwarts Legacy* deserves closer inspection.

The release of *Hogwarts Legacy* was possibly one of the most controversial events in the gaming industry in recent years. People belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, as well as allies, raised their opinions about how the game should be boycotted as Rowling has actively gained a reputation for being transphobic. In this instance, separating the art from the artist falls short, as her problematic worldview certainly leaks into the franchise as well, as is displayed by the antisemitic underpinnings of the goblins in the *Harry Potter* universe, and the racist names given to her characters, like Cho Chang. The main goal of the mass boycotting movement is to cut off an additional stream of revenue from Rowling's income, thus mitigating her efforts to pass anti-trans legislation in the UK.

However, the boycott movement has taken a massive turn on Twitter, as people have started harassing video game streamers and reviewers for simply playing the game. They may not share the same ideology as Rowling, but are being met with a slew of verbal assault and allega-

tions of being transphobic. Consequently, this may have the opposite effect of what the boycotters intended, as people may end up shunning the struggles of the marginalised communities amidst the harassment.

The other side of the discourse addresses issues with the boycott movement and cancel-culture as a whole.

While boycotting the game on a personal level is valid, people have also raised the argument that the developers who worked for the game may not have the luxury to simply tap out of production because of Rowling's beliefs. Employees under Portkey Games have even publicly stood in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community and said that they do not share Rowling's opinions. Therefore, it can be argued that boycotting the game would mean the fruits of the developers' labour will be virtually for nothing. Furthermore, unwarranted attacks on the developers, streamers, and reviewers for simply doing their jobs does more harm than good.

That being said, there is, of course a problematic side to this argument as well.

People have been buying several copies of the game themselves just to anger the members of the marginalised community who have been in favour of the boycott movement. Additionally, individuals have also been supporting Rowling's opinions and furthering the oppression of such communities.

Amidst all the controversy lies a grey area of people who just want to play the game, which includes myself. After purchasing *Hogwarts Legacy*, I stepped into it

with a moral quandary every time.

Nevertheless, for the sake of honesty, I've had a great time playing it so far.

The environment and ambience of the wizarding world has been masterfully created, leading to an immersive experience that evokes a childlike wonder in me every time. Another plus point for the game is its attempts at inclusivity. The playable character is referred to using they/them pronouns, there is an openly trans character in the game's universe, and the racially diverse cast of characters are not ignorantly named. *Hogwarts Legacy* is probably the closest fans of the franchise will get to enjoying the *Harry Potter* universe without Rowling's world-views tainting it.

But then again, the real world doesn't cease to exist the second I, a person who is not a part of the community under attack, shut down the game. No matter what, *Hogwarts Legacy* is still the intellectual property of someone who is actively against marginalised communities.

So, where does that leave the argu-

ment?

After viewing both sides and their respective extremes, it all somehow boils down to the same core – there is no ethical consumption under capitalism.

People can choose to continue boycotting while educating individuals who want to play the game. Alternatively, people can choose to engage in discourse as to why *Hogwarts Legacy* players are not transphobic by default. Some people can also choose to harass players of the game, and others can harass members of the boycott movement. But the fact remains that all this benefits Rowling through marketing and engagement, and unfortunately, does not affect the revenue streams of one of the richest persons on the planet. Anything and everything somehow still benefit the rich, no matter our attempts at thwarting it.

However, just because ethical consumption under capitalism may be a unicorn, does not mean we should let go of our own code of ethics. The controversy surrounding *Hogwarts Legacy* has been an exercise in choosing which fights are more worthwhile to pick without losing sight of the fact that the whole world may not be familiar with the situation. While some may choose to play the game as a form of escapism through nostalgia, it does not mean that all morals should go out the window. There is still room to educate and make informed choices of our own volition.

Fatima Jahan Ena is a sub-editor at SHOUT, The Daily Star.

