

A WADHAM SCHOOL STUDENT PUBLICATION

THE QUILL



**BIG NAMES. BIG STORIES.
BIGGER THAN EVER!**



A LIFE OF ACTING AND ADVENTURE
BRIAN BLESSED – ACTOR, EXPLORER
AND NATIONAL TREASURE



**WRITING STORIES
FROM THE
SHADOWS**
DAVID MCCLOSKEY
– AUTHOR AND
FORMER CIA
ANALYST



**HOLLYWOOD, HORROR AND
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JOE DANTE – DIRECTOR,
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**PLUS NEWS, REVIEWS
AND OPINIONS**



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Introduction

As another fantastic school year draws to a close, we're delighted to bring you our biggest and most varied edition of The Quill yet.

Leading this edition are three exclusive interviews with some truly fascinating people. We sit down with legendary actor Brian Blessed, acclaimed filmmaker Joe Dante, and bestselling author and former CIA analyst David McCloskey, each sharing their experiences, careers and advice with our student journalists.

Alongside these special features, you'll discover unforgettable Activity Week adventures, exciting school trips, creative writing, thought-provoking articles and an incredible collection of reviews covering everything from books and games to technology, fashion and much more. Whether you're interested in history, science, sport, gaming or simply looking for your next great read, there's something here for everyone.

This edition is a celebration of the creativity, curiosity and enthusiasm that make Wadham such a special place. Every article has been researched, written and edited by our student journalists, whose hard work, professionalism and passion continue to raise the standard of The Quill with every edition.

As always, we'd like to thank every student, member of staff and the many companies and organisations that have supported us this year. Your generosity and encouragement have helped us create another magazine packed with original stories, honest reviews and inspiring ideas.

We hope you enjoy reading Edition 25 and wish everyone in the Wadham community a wonderful, relaxing and well-deserved summer break.

Peter Hopwood
Editor, The Quill



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SUMMER SUCCESS: CELEBRATING THE BEST OF WADHAM



WADHAM WRITERS SHINE AT THE ILMINSTER LITERARY FESTIVAL

By Anneka Hartley

Congratulations to Charlie-Jane Norris, Elsie Swatridge and Fen Hopkirk, who were all recognised for their outstanding short stories at the Ilminster Literary Festival on 6 June during a special awards ceremony at Monk's Yard, Ilminster.

Charlie-Jane achieved first place in the Key Stage 4 category for her chilling story, *She is a Witch*, inspired by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Elsie was named runner-up in the same category with her gripping story, *Creeping Cold*, while Fen received a Highly Commended award in the Key Stage 3 category for *My Anger*.

The awards were presented by acclaimed children's author Zohra Nabi, whose *Kingdom Over the Sea* series has captivated young readers, alongside local MP Adam Dance.

As one of the competition judges, Zohra praised the exceptionally high standard of the entries. Festival organiser John James revealed that the judging panel described Charlie-Jane's story as a "truly outstanding piece of writing."

A particular honour for Charlie-Jane was having her entire winning story read aloud during the ceremony, while an extract from Elsie's story was also shared with the audience—recognition of the quality and creativity of both pieces.

Each student received a certificate and book token in recognition of their achievement.

Congratulations once again to Charlie-Jane, Elsie and Fen on their fantastic success. We hope this inspires even more students from Years 7–11 to enter next year's competition and showcase their creative writing talents.



She is a Witch by Charlie-Jane Norris

The rooster woke at dawn, dragging me up from my slumber with it. Neil stirred beside me, his breath warm and steady, as though the world beyond our small wooden walls held no threat at all. I envied him for it. Outside, the pale light of Salem crept over the fields, brushing the frost



with gold, and for a moment I believed the day might be a kind and prosperous one.

I wrapped my shawl close and whispered a morning prayer to the lord, though the words felt hollow, as if they were just empty promises. Temptation, I had come to learn, did not arrive as a roar but as a whisper as soft as the wind through the trees,

It was in those woods I first saw her.

My neighbour, Eliza, had always been a questioning kind of strange, maybe even out of the ordinary. Though kind in daylight. That night, I wandered beyond the edge of my land and into the forest's beckoning shadow. The trees loomed tall and close, their branches clawing at the sky like silent witnesses. There, beneath their grasp, she stood, frolicking by flickering candles, her voice a low murmur that seemed to pulse with the very whisper of sins. Symbols scratched at the ground like heavy scars, twisting in shapes I could not understand. I watched as frozen as a statue in a blizzard, as the wind curled and carried the scent of ash and something darker.

She turned.

Her eyes found mine, not startled, but knowing. She moved toward me with urgency, her expression no longer calm but strained, and though long conversations were not had, the meaning was unmistakable. Silence was demanded. Secrecy was survival. My heart thundered so loudly I was sure it would push its way out of its cage. I should have run, should have cried out, but instead I nodded. I promised.

That promise became a chain.

As the days passed by, I could not escape the memory of that forest. Even in the light of day, when the sun smiled across the fields, I felt the shadow creeping at the edge of my vision. I avoided Eliza, yet she was always there, a weight on my chest and mind. Even as I walked the edge of our land and went about my business, I felt watched. As if then and there, my secret would cut its chains and fly free.

Whispers spread like wildfire through Salem. Witches. Trials. Names spoken with fear and caution. Each accusation felt like a tightening noose around my own neck. I saw neighbours turn upon one another, friendships burn into suspicion, and prayers becoming weapons. The village I had known was no longer there, but in its place stood something brittle and cruel.

Then came the breaking.

Men burst through my door before the sun had fully risen. The wood cracked beneath their force, the sound echoing like a crack of thunder. Neil moved to shield me, but he was pushed aside without hesitation, his body collapsing against the floor. I was seized, dragged from my home, my feet scraping the frozen ground as the cold bit into my skin. Then I heard it, the cry rose from the crowd like a curse made flesh.

WITCH!

They hauled me to the meeting house, where judgment sat staring down at me. But judgment wasn't the only thing staring me down; everyone was. I searched for Eliza, but she was nowhere to be seen.

The accusations came flying at me. Accusations of illness, misfortune and even of speaking the devil's tongue. Each sin was placed upon me with unspoken certainty. I denied it, but denial seemed to dissolve in the air before it could take shape.



And always, beneath the chaos, temptation stirred.

Insistent and unrelenting pressed against my thoughts, urging me toward a single act that could shatter the chain I had been bound to. The memory of the forest returned again and again—those candles, those markings, her singing.

That night, alone in the cold cell, I clung to fragments of my former life. The warmth of the hearth. The steady rhythm of Neil's breathing. The fragile peace of ordinary days. Sleep would not come. When I closed my eyes, I saw branches reaching, shadows shifting, and something waiting just beyond sight.

Morning came with iron resolve, and with horses. Their hooves struck the earth with force, a sound that seemed to echo within my chest. I was brought once more before the court, my wrists bound, my strength worn thin.

Then I saw her.

Eliza stood among the accusers. Understanding came swiftly and without mercy. She had spoken first. She had placed my name before theirs to shield her own, offering me in her stead. And just then, something within me broke. Rage and fear surged together. The temptation that had once whispered now roared, filling every corner of my mind. The memory of the forest burned brighter, no longer distant but immediate, alive within me.

The judge's gaze settled upon me, expectant, waiting for surrender.

I felt the weight of every eye in the room, the judgment already decided. My thoughts spiralled, each one leading toward the same inevitable choice. Survival demanded betrayal. Silence demanded sacrifice.

I looked at Eliza. Fear stared back at me. In that moment, I understood the terrible symmetry of it all. She had chosen herself. Now the choice lay before me, stark and unforgiving. I lowered my gaze and held my silence. The answer came shortly after.

Guilty.

The sound of it seemed to echo endlessly, swallowed only by the roar of the crowd. I was led away. Beyond the gallows, the forest stood watching. As the rope was placed around my neck, the air turned sharp and thin. My thoughts fractured, torn between the promise I had made and the life slipping from my grasp. The forest seemed closer now, its shadows stretching, its silence calling. Temptation rose one final time, fierce and consuming, no longer a whisper but a force that demanded to be heard.

And with the forest at my back and the weight of death before me, I screamed, "Eliza! She is a witch!"

Creeping Cold - by Elsie Swatridge

I lean against a tree, the pillars of nature holding my weight as leaves twirl in the wind like a ballerina of Swan lake or the horse of a carousel. They fall gracefully, sleeping in a bed of ice. I look up at my friends, but the reflection of the sun on snow blocks her face from my vision. She wants to play hide and seek, but her words are drowned by the sweet songs of robins and ravens.

I worry about the snow, and it's tendency to twist and turn, disorientating it's victim as they sink and sink further below. She promises she'll find me, but her hands are obscured behind her back and my



hair stays on edge. My warm winter coat hangs on the washing line in the village, but I am much too scared to go retrieve it alone. An unnatural sensation possesses me and I agree to her game, and I see just enough of her face to catch a smile.

"30, 29, 28, 27..." her raspy voice drones on as she counts and counts and counts.

I run into the woods.

20 minutes pass and I've found an adequate bush to conceal me. The rustling picked up with the wind, blowing leaves in my face like hands slapping against skin in a burning rage, all of it is grace for nothing in without the sun. I can see clearly here, the brown bark surrounds me, engulfing me as thick clouds block the sun from getting in. 30 minutes pass, I'm great at hide and seek! The wind whispers as sirens beckon young sailors towards cliffs.

I start to walk now, pillars and pillars and trees and trees pass me by, their spirits calling for me. Their souls scream beneath the crushing weight of the sky. I pass a doe. The doe lays sleeping in eternal serenity, painting pictures of fires, vibrant vermillion within the frozen bed it was lured to. Paper white and stunning scarlets battle in an eternal turf war, the ghoulish glow glazed over it's weary eyes. We eye each other as I pass.

I look back, and seemingly it does too. It looks like me, a little, it's bruises look a lot like mine. It's stance looks a lot like mine when I'm in trouble. We share wounds, but mine are awfully less graceful. It looks young as if abandoned by it's mother. A snowflake rests on it's forehead, just above the gaping hole above it's eyes. It melts, it's delicate decorum melting with the fresh, warm blood.

I walk on. I see the billowing smoke of my village in the distance. It's been hours now. The wispy wind pushes, shoves, punches, kicks, hits the smoke around, stormy and swerving to bend around the blows. I run faster and faster until my ankle gives way and I plunge into the searing cold.

The water freezes around me and the surface ice creeps closer and closer, enveloping me in. Her promise crosses my mind and suddenly she appears. She reaches for me, but her hands are too slippery. She calls out for help but a raven call blocks it out. My only companion, fizzles and fades dissolving into the glowing embers of twilight. She leaves, skyward bound, leaving me here, adrift in time. Here ghoulish glow flickers, retreating to my mind as the cold seeps in, my eyes melting into the ghastly grey circles.

My Anger - by Fen Hopkirk

My anger. I try to push it down. I try to get rid of it but it never truly disappears. No matter how much I hide, the volcano, it could erupt any second. Like a volcano, it hurts. Like a volcano, it leaves scars and marks. My friend. He hurts me. He makes me want to scream. I hide all of his teasing through because no one can see who I truly am. A monster, a beast, a mistake. I run. I run into the woods and drown myself in tears. Why am I like this? The volcano. It slowly rises.

At home is no better. I cry myself to sleep every day and every night. Nightmares leap alive with my demon thoughts. They tell me. Tell me I'm not good enough and I never will be. I push them away though. Ask them in a sad tone in the back of my mind. Then I look in the mirror. My face is stained by all my tears so I wash them away with water. A fake smile spreads across my face. The volcano rises more.

I meet up with my so-called friend at the park. He mocks me with how I look, my voice, laugh, emotion. Laugh it off. Hide. Laugh it off and I do. I only have this. Something is picked up and flung. I



can't. He's there. I take one step backward. Another one. Another. I dodge. I run. The volcano erupts. I cry. No one would care though. I'm not worth being cared about. The volcano rises more. I've had enough. The anger was slow going but it just gets harder. All the mocking and the hurting and the negative thoughts are there once again. I try to keep it all inside me, these are tears of joy. I scream in the morning. My fake smile spreads wide across my face. My hands are stretched out on my freshly cut arms. I guess the volcano erupted.

FUTURE READY: WADHAM STUDENTS STEP INTO THE WORKPLACE

By Beth Church

On 15 June 2026, a group of 30 Year 8 students from Wadham School took part in an exciting work experience day at Screwfix's Yeovil headquarters as part of the Future Ready Programme, delivered by the Somerset Careers Hub.

Throughout the year, the students had already attended a number of Future Ready sessions in school. The visit to Screwfix marked the culmination of the programme, giving them their first opportunity to experience a real workplace.

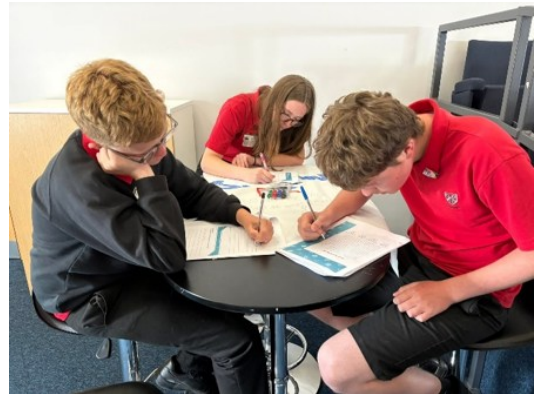
The day began with a visit to the Screwfix store, where students explored the marketing team's mock-up stores and learned how products are displayed to attract customers. They then moved to the company's head office, where representatives from ten different departments spoke about their roles and the wide variety of careers available within the business.

Students were also given a guided tour of all three floors of the headquarters, including the customer service call centre, providing a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at how one of the UK's leading retailers operates.

One of the highlights of the day was hearing from a current Screwfix apprentice, who shared their experiences and

offered valuable advice about starting a career through an apprenticeship. The students also worked in teams on a marketing project, putting their creativity and teamwork skills to the test.

It was an enjoyable and inspiring day that gave everyone a greater understanding of the opportunities available in the world of work. We would like to thank Screwfix for hosting the visit and the Somerset Careers Hub for organising such a fantastic experience.



WADHAM SCHOOL; CREATING SCANDALS, RUMOURS AND LIES

By Ed Swift

We all love a good scandal, and this week we launched a whole book-full of them.

We had a fantastic launch event at Crewkerne Library on June 22, for our latest story anthology publication - *Scandals, Rumours and Lies*. This collection of strange fiction, dark imaginings and cautionary tales is overflowing with tales of betrayal and back-stabbing, surprise twists and unexpected conclusions.

The launch is the culmination of a 10-week fiction writing project undertaken by a very talented group of Year 9 pupils from Wadham School in Somerset.



The evening was a great success and featured author signings, readings from some of the participants, as well as the usual speeches, and was a fitting tribute to the students' hard work.

Huge thanks to Ms Hartley, Mrs George and all the staff at Wadham that supported the event and to all the family and friends that turned out to celebrate these young author's achievement.

Thanks also to our brilliant team of Marvellous Mentors who gave up their time to support the writers; Vicky, Lizzie, Ambs, Valerie, Sandy, Raja, Graham, Rachel and Jackie - we couldn't have done it without you. Our cover illustration was by the very brilliant Yuzhen Cai - you can check out their work via <https://www.instagram.com/yu.zhen.cai/?hl=en>.

Thank you, also, to the staff at Crewkerne Library for hosting the event.



It is a wonderful space. Libraries have always been the petri dishes for ideas and it was great for these young writers to have their work on the same shelves as so many literary figures.



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ENGINEERING A BRIGHTER FUTURE AT NUMATIC

By Laura Andrews

On 23 June, a group of Year 9 students visited local employer Numatic to celebrate International Women in Engineering Day (INWED) and learn more about the exciting opportunities available in the engineering industry. The visit



began with an introduction to the company, its history and the wide variety of careers that help keep the business running. Students discovered that engineering is just one of many career paths within the organisation and gained an insight into the different roles available.

One of the highlights of the day was hearing from two of Numatic's female engineers, who shared their personal journeys into engineering. They explained the different routes into the profession, including further education courses, apprenticeships and university degrees, inspiring students to consider engineering as a future career. The group then moved into the demonstration area, where they enjoyed a hands-on activity, taking apart and rebuilding part of one of Numatic's iconic vacuum cleaners. They also explored the company's demonstration facilities and learned more about the design and engineering behind its products.

The visit was a fantastic way to celebrate International Women in Engineering Day, giving students the opportunity to meet inspiring role models and discover the many exciting possibilities that a career in engineering can offer. A huge thank you to everyone at Numatic, especially the engineers who generously shared their experiences and helped make the day so enjoyable and informative.



A YEAR WITH THE CARNEGIES

By Jack Wood

On This year, I had the pleasure of taking part in Shadowing the Carnegies, a reading programme based around one of the most prestigious children's book awards in the UK.

The Carnegies, organised by CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), were first established in 1936. Their aim is to celebrate outstanding writing for children and young people while encouraging a lifelong love of reading. Shadowing the Carnegies involves reading the shortlisted books, taking part in activities such as creative writing, discussing the stories with other readers and, finally, voting for the book you think deserves to win. This year's shortlist included *Popcorn*, *Wolf Siren*, *Ghostlines*, *Birdie*, *Chronicles of a Lizard Nobody* and many other fantastic books.

My personal favourite was *Popcorn*. Although it didn't win, I thought it was an excellent book. The overall winner was *Wolf Siren*, which was a very deserving choice. On 23 June, we watched the live-streamed Carnegies Awards Ceremony from the Cambridge Theatre in London's West End. It was inspiring to see so many talented authors recognised for their creativity and hard work, and it made me appreciate just how much effort goes into writing a great book.

I would highly recommend taking part in Shadowing the Carnegies to anyone who enjoys reading. It's a brilliant opportunity to discover new books, make new friends who share your interests and perhaps even find a new favourite author. I hope this article inspires someone else to get involved next year. I know I'll certainly be looking forward to seeing which books make the shortlist!



ENGINEERING, ESTIMATING AND EXPERIMENTING: **YEAR 7 TAKE ON THE PHYSICS OLYMPICS**

By Usaal Tahir

On 26 June, a group of Year 7 students proudly represented Wadham School at the Physics Olympics, held at Millfield School in Street. The exciting event brought together students from schools across the region to celebrate science through a series of fun, practical and thought-provoking challenges.

Working in teams of four, our students put their scientific knowledge and problem-solving skills to the test in a variety of hands-on activities. The challenges included designing and building structures using only a limited selection of materials, estimating the distances between planets, completing measuring and balancing investigations, and taking part in a Fermi Quiz, where they used logical thinking and estimation skills to answer real-world physics questions.

Each activity encouraged students to think like scientists and engineers. They were challenged to make predictions, test their ideas, evaluate their results and adapt their approaches when things didn't quite go to plan. The competition highlighted that physics isn't just about equations—it's about creativity, curiosity and finding practical solutions to problems.

Throughout the day, our students demonstrated excellent teamwork, resilience and enthusiasm. They

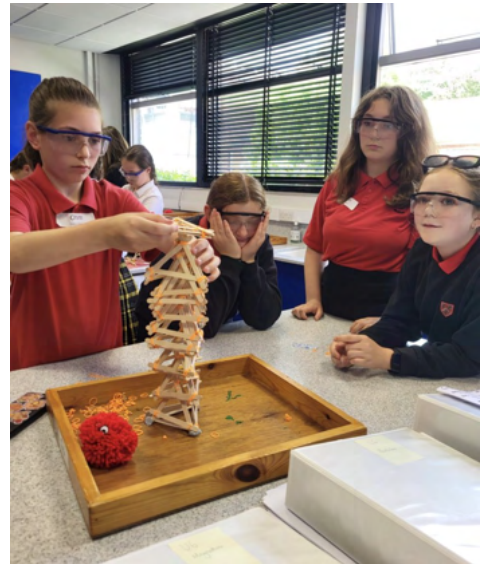


communicated effectively, listened to one another's ideas and worked together to overcome each challenge. Their willingness to persevere, even when faced with difficult tasks, was a real credit to both themselves and the school.

The event also gave students the opportunity to meet like-minded young scientists from other schools, share ideas and experience a friendly competitive atmosphere. It was inspiring to see so many students enjoying science outside the classroom while discovering just how varied and exciting physics can be.

The Physics Olympics provided a fantastic opportunity to apply classroom learning in a real-world setting, helping students to develop valuable skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and confidence. Everyone involved represented Wadham School with great commitment, curiosity and positivity, making it a memorable and rewarding day for all.

Congratulations to everyone who took part for embracing every challenge with such enthusiasm. We hope this will inspire even more students to take part in future STEM events and continue exploring the fascinating world of physics.



WADHAM PROM 2026: AN EVENING TO REMEMBER**By Laura Andrews**

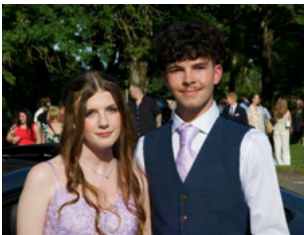
On Friday 26 June, Year 11 celebrated the end of their time at Wadham School in style at the Year 11 Prom, held at The Flying Fish in Ashill.

The evening began at Wadham, where students arrived in an impressive selection of prom vehicles before boarding coaches for the short journey to the



venue. It was a wonderful opportunity for family and friends to admire the students' outfits and celebrate the occasion before the festivities began.

On arrival at The Flying Fish, students were welcomed with a refreshing Caribbean-themed mocktail and presented with colourful flower garlands, setting the tone for a relaxed and enjoyable evening. Friends gathered to chat, dance and celebrate together as they reflected on their time at school and looked ahead to the next stage of their journeys.



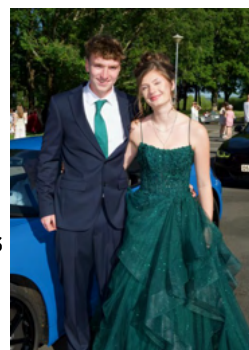
A delicious barbecue feast was served, including burgers, hot dogs and chicken wings, followed by fruit kebabs, doughnuts and ice cream, ensuring there was something for everyone to enjoy.

The beautiful surroundings, friendly atmosphere and attention to detail helped make the evening a truly memorable occasion, providing the perfect way for the Class of 2026 to celebrate the end of their secondary school years.



A huge thank you goes to everyone at The Flying Fish for hosting such a fantastic event, and to Brothers and Sisters Hairdressers for the wonderful support they gave our students as they prepared for their special evening.

Most of all, congratulations to our Year 11 students. Everyone looked fantastic, and we wish the Class of 2026 every success and happiness as they begin the next exciting chapter of their lives.



BRONZE ADVENTURE ON THE QUANTOCKS

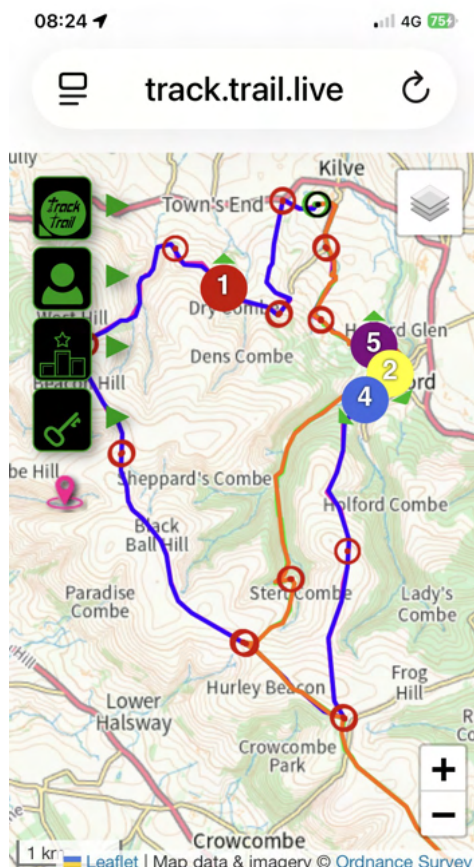
By Bethany Williams

From 26–28 June, a group of Year 9 students took part in their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition, spending the weekend camping at Kilve Court while putting their outdoor skills to the test.

Over the course of the expedition, students hiked across the beautiful Quantock Hills, navigating their way through rolling countryside, fields and small rivers using only maps and compasses. Along the way, they demonstrated teamwork, resilience and determination as they completed the challenges of the Bronze Award.

The expedition also gave students the opportunity to develop valuable life skills. They prepared and cooked their own meals, pitched their tents, and were assessed on their navigation and map-reading abilities throughout the weekend.

Taking part in the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a rewarding experience that encourages independence, confidence and perseverance. Despite the challenges, the weekend was a memorable adventure and an excellent achievement for everyone involved.



FROM CAMPSITE TO CONFIDENCE: ONE STUDENT'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE BRONZE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD EXPEDITION

By Bella Taylor

At the end of June, I took part in the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition at Kilve Court with the rest of my team. The expedition lasted two days and one night and tested our teamwork, navigation and problem-solving skills. Although it was challenging at times, it was an unforgettable experience that helped us grow in confidence and develop valuable life skills.

When we first arrived, one of our first tasks was to put up our tents. I quickly discovered that this was much harder than it looked! I had never pitched a tent before and, unfortunately, neither had the rest of my team. We spent quite a while trying to work out which poles went where before one of the Kilve Court staff came to our rescue. Once our tent was finally standing, we had lunch before learning how to use a Trangia stove. At first it looked strange and confusing, but we soon realised we'd need to master it because it would be our cooking equipment for the weekend.

The Kilve Court staff then challenged us to a Trangia race against the other teams. We had to assemble the stove, light it, boil some water and pack it away again as quickly as possible. Sadly, we didn't win, but it was great fun. To finish the day, we completed a practice walk. It was much shorter than the routes we would tackle over the weekend, but it gave us a chance to get used to the terrain.

On Saturday, our expedition route took us from HawkrIDGE Reservoir back to Kilve Court. We got a little lost at the start but managed to retrace our steps and find the correct route. As part of our team aim, we also recorded the weather throughout the day while continuing to practise our navigation skills.

Sunday's route was the longest and most demanding of the weekend. We completed a large circular walk starting and finishing at Kilve Court. The route included steeper hills and much rockier ground, making it a real challenge. Fortunately, apart from a brief shower, the weather stayed warm and dry. One unexpected highlight was spotting a small snake crossing one of the footpaths. I also found using the map and compass quite difficult at first, but with practice I gradually became more confident.

My favourite moment was reaching the top of the highest hill. The view was incredible, and it was amazing to look back and realise just how far we had walked. By the end of the expedition, my team and I were all incredibly proud of what we had achieved together.

Although I came home with sore feet and a few blisters, taking part in the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award was a fantastic experience. It challenged me, taught me new skills and gave me memories I'll never forget. If you enjoy hiking, camping and a bit of adventure, I would definitely recommend giving DofE a try.



MATHS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM **SOLVING THE SUMS OF SUCCESS**

By Oliver Thompson

On Monday 29 June, nine of us travelled to the University of Exeter to take part in the Axiom Maths Rising Mathematicians Festival. I was really looking forward to the trip because it was a chance to compete against other schools and experience what university life is like.

Although our bus was delayed, we got straight into the day's first activity when we arrived – a maths competition against Honiton School. We worked really well as a team and were in the lead for most of the competition. Unfortunately, we were beaten right at the end, which was disappointing, but everyone gave it their best.

After the competition, we went on a tour of part of the university campus. We didn't get to see all of it because it's so big, but we visited the impressive Physics Building and the sports hall. It was really interesting to see what a university campus looks like, and it made me think about what it might be like to study there one day.

After lunch, we listened to a talk from one of the university professors. They showed us lots of interesting maths tricks, puzzles and games, and afterwards we got the chance to try them out ourselves. It was great fun and showed us that maths can be challenging, creative and enjoyable at the same time.

Overall, I had a brilliant day. Even though we just missed out on winning the competition, I really enjoyed working with my teammates and trying something different. Visiting the university and hearing from a real professor made the day even more memorable, and it was an experience I won't forget.



AXIOM MATHS



ONWARDS WITH HOPE: CELEBRATING GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH

By Sarah Barrett

June is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) History Month, an annual celebration that has taken place since 2008. The month recognises the rich history, culture and contributions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities while helping to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes. This year's theme, "Onwards with Hope," focused on celebrating progress while looking positively towards the future.

As part of this year's celebrations, on 29 June, students Kai, Toya, Alan and Max had the opportunity to interview Rebecca Wilde, a member of the Roma Gypsy community and an inspiring advocate for mental health and equality.

Rebecca is currently training to become a counsellor while also working with young people in schools, supporting their mental health and emotional wellbeing. During the interview, she spoke



about her experiences, the importance of representation and the value of ensuring that every young person feels heard, respected and supported.

Rebecca is also the founder of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Therapists Network, which works to improve access to mental health support for members of the GRT community. Through her work, she campaigns for greater awareness, increased representation and more inclusive mental health services.

The interview gave our students a valuable opportunity to learn more about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and culture from someone with first-hand experience. It encouraged thoughtful discussion about identity, inclusion and the importance of challenging misconceptions, while highlighting the positive difference that individuals like Rebecca are making in their communities.

A huge thank you to Rebecca for taking the time to share her experiences and inspire our students. Her message of resilience, hope and inclusion perfectly reflected this year's theme of "Onwards with Hope."

Here is the interview which Kai, Toya, Alan and Max carried out.

1. Can you tell us a little about yourself and your background?

I identify as a Romany Gypsy and campaign for better mental health support in schools. I founded the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Therapists Network, creating a space where people can talk about their culture, heritage and mental health. I work with young people, supporting their wellbeing, and I also work alongside charities to raise awareness of the support our community needs. Outside of my work, I enjoy creating art, sculpture and collage, often using mental health as the theme.

2. How has your cultural heritage shaped who you are today?

Being a Romany Gypsy has shaped everything I do, especially my work as a therapist. Many people find it difficult to ask for help, and I want to encourage more open conversations about mental health so people know it's okay to seek support.

3. What are some common misconceptions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

There are many misconceptions. One of the biggest is that people think all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are the same, when in fact there are many different groups with their own traditions and histories. For example, Scottish Gypsies and people who live on boats have different cultures. Another common misconception is that we don't value education. That's not true—there has simply been a lack of trust in education for some families.

4. What aspects of your culture are you most proud of?

I'm proud of our strength, resilience and strong sense of family. I'm also proud of our fashion, food, arts and crafts, and our traditions. One tradition I particularly love is that when a baby is born, they are wrapped in their father's shirt and taken into the forest to be introduced to the land.

One saying that means a lot to me is:

"Bury me standing because I have spent my whole life on my knees."

5. What inspired you to become a counsellor?

I saw many people struggling with their mental health, and sometimes those struggles affected



their relationships. I wanted to help my own family and other people in my community. Learning about therapy showed me that I could make a positive difference in people's lives.

6. What do you enjoy most about your work?

I enjoy helping people understand and manage their emotions, whether they're feeling sad, anxious or stressed. I also work with GPs and other professionals to help them better understand the needs of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. A big part of my work is helping to change people's perceptions.

7. What challenges have you faced in your career?

When I went to university, my family advised me not to tell anyone about my culture because they were worried I might experience bullying or discrimination. Once I arrived, I heard people speaking negatively about the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, even though they didn't realise I was part of it. That was very difficult.

8. How have your life experiences influenced the way you support others?

I've learned a great deal through listening to my family and reading about our history. I'd love to write more about our heritage one day because there are very few books written by members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. I also believe our history deserves to be taught in schools.

9. Why are you passionate about mental health in schools?

Through my work in schools, I see many young people struggling with friendships, family life and challenges within their communities. Supporting young people's mental health is incredibly important because everyone deserves to feel listened to and understood.

10. What mental health issues do young people commonly face today?

Many young people experience anxiety. They worry about their future, how to spend their time, what lies ahead and wanting to do their very best. Those pressures can feel overwhelming.

11. What can schools do to create a healthier environment for students?

Schools should celebrate different cultures and help staff understand what those cultures mean to families. For example, in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, when someone dies, family members traditionally stay with the body until the funeral. Understanding customs like these helps create a more inclusive environment.

12. What role do friendships play in supporting good mental health?

Friendships are incredibly important. Supporting each other and knowing someone is there to listen can make a huge difference.

13. What advice would you give to a student who is feeling overwhelmed or anxious?

Feeling anxious is completely normal. The most important thing is to talk to someone you trust because we all have things we need to share. There are also some excellent organisations, such as Kooth and YoungMinds, that offer support and advice for young people.



14. How important is representation for young people from different backgrounds?

It's one of the most important things to me. I spend my life trying to improve representation for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. We now see much better representation in areas such as sport for people of different ethnicities and sexualities. I'd like to see people from our community represented in more professions too.

15. Have your experiences influenced your views on inclusion?

Absolutely. Inclusion is about belonging and feeling accepted. For a long time, I felt I had to hide who I was instead of celebrating my culture. I want young people to know they should be proud of who they are, proud of their families and never feel afraid to be themselves.

16. What can schools do to celebrate cultural diversity more effectively?

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month has been celebrated every June since 2008, but it shouldn't only be recognised for one month each year. Schools should celebrate our culture all year round. I remember seeing a Gypsy flag outside my doctor's surgery once, and something as simple as that made me feel welcomed and included.

17. What changes would you like to see in schools over the next decade?

I'd love to see lessons that teach emotional intelligence—helping young people understand emotions, recognise body language and develop the skills to look after their own mental wellbeing.

18. What message would you most like young people to take away from this interview?

Be proud of who you are. Support your community, be kind to others and remember that kindness can make a real difference. Don't let anyone stop you from being yourself.

19. Is there anything you wish more people understood about mental health?

We shouldn't wait until our mental health becomes a crisis before talking about it. Looking after our emotional wellbeing should be something we do every day, just like looking after our physical health.

20. What gives you hope for the future?

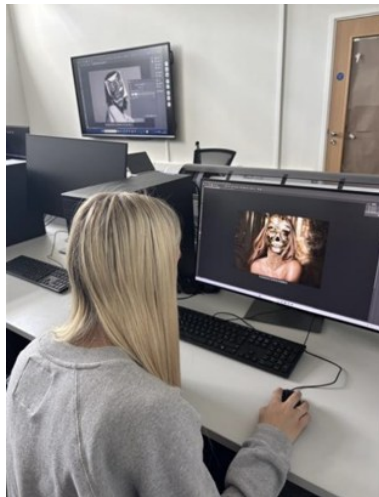
I'm hopeful because we're talking much more openly about mental health than we used to. Research shows that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community often experiences poorer mental health, but conversations like this one are helping to change that. Every discussion helps to break down barriers.

Finally, Rebecca turned the tables and asked us a question...

"What would make your lives easier? What would you like people to understand about your community?"

We said that we would like people—including teachers—to be kind and remember that every person is an individual. We don't want to be judged by stereotypes or "lumped together." Family is incredibly important to us, and we would like more people to understand our traditions, values and way of life.





LOOKING AHEAD: EXPLORING FUTURE PATHWAYS

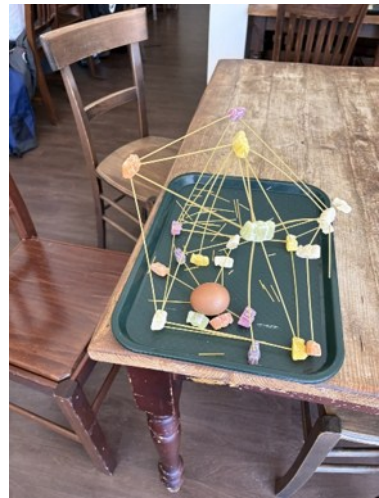
By Beth Church

Students in Years 8 and 10 enjoyed exciting opportunities to explore life beyond school during two inspiring visits to Yeovil College at the beginning of July.

On 1 July, all Year 10 students attended the college's Experience Day, where they sampled a range of vocational courses and gained an insight into further education.

Throughout the day, students chose between two and four different subject areas, giving them the chance to experience the wide variety of courses available.

Activities included creating dental moulds in Dentistry, learning hairstyling techniques in Hairdressing, changing tyres in Automotive Engineering, and using professional make-up techniques to



create realistic bruises and cuts in Hair and Media Make-up. These hands-on sessions gave students a valuable insight into potential career paths and encouraged them to begin thinking about their post-16 options.

The experience has already inspired many students to attend upcoming open evenings at local colleges and sixth forms as they begin making important decisions about their futures.

The following day, Year 8 students visited Yeovil College for the My Futures Day event. They took part in a variety of practical workshops, making full use of the college's excellent facilities.



Students tried their hand at bricklaying, prepared food in the professional kitchens, explored the college's modern sports centre and produced some impressive artwork.

Both visits were enjoyable and informative, giving students a glimpse of the exciting opportunities that await them after school and helping them to think more confidently about their future education and career choices.



CASTAWAY CLASSROOM BEING STRANDED WITH SCIENCE!

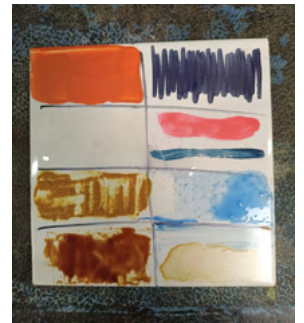
By Laura Andrews

On 1 July, 8RS2 put their scientific thinking to the test by taking on an exciting Desert Island Challenge in Science.

Working from a set of instructions, students created their own toothpaste using natural ingredients, including eggshells, coconut oil and mint. The challenge encouraged them to think creatively about how everyday essentials could be made using only materials they might find in nature.

Once their toothpaste was complete, the class tested their mixtures on tiles coated with a variety of different substances to see how effective they were at cleaning. The experiment sparked plenty of discussion as students compared their results, made observations and considered why some mixtures worked better than others.

The activity was a fantastic opportunity to develop practical scientific skills while encouraging



WILD ABOUT WILDLIFE

By Beth Church

On 3 July, a small group of Year 8 and Year 9 students completed their final curriculum enrichment visit to the

RSPCA West Hatch Centre, bringing to a close a series of four engaging morning sessions. Over the course of the programme, students explored a range of topics designed to enhance their learning while gaining a greater understanding of animal welfare and the important work carried out by the RSPCA.

The final session focused on British wildlife, teaching students how they can help protect local wildlife and what to do if they discover an injured or sick animal. Alongside the practical advice, students also took part in a selection of fun arts and crafts activities. Throughout the programme, students enjoyed a unique behind-the-scenes insight into the work of the RSPCA.

Highlights included visiting the cattery, meeting the rescued baby seals and creating snuffle rugs to take home for their own pets. The visits provided a fantastic opportunity for students to learn about animal care, conservation and responsible pet ownership, while inspiring a greater appreciation for the work of one of the UK's leading animal welfare charities.



YEAR 7 POETRY COMPETITION: CELEBRATING CREATIVITY AND CONFIDENCE

By Anneka Hartley and Annabel Whitcombe

On Tuesday July 7th, selected Year 7s showed off their hard work and excellent presentation skills in their year group poetry performance competition. To get this far, they had already memorised poems and won their class competitions. Particular highlights included some lively group performances of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* that

included a lot of slaying of the 'frumious bandersnatch,' as well as some heartfelt renditions of *Nothing Gold Can Stay* by Robert Frost and *Hope is a Thing with Feathers* by Emily Dickinson. The winning individual performance, however, was a technically perfect and tonally impressive performance of *The Point* by Kae Tempest, presented by Poppy Organ.



Taking the level of challenge up a notch, the English department collaborated with MFL so that we had a section of the competition for French and German poems. Most competitors favoured the German poems, by Berthold Brecht and Heinrich Heine. The judges Mrs Osborne and Mrs George were very impressed with the winners' pronunciation, as well as their effort in learning these difficult poems.

Congratulations to everyone who took part - this was a really positive and fun way to end the term, and show off your learning! We intend to continue and expand the competition for Year 7 and Year 8 next year.

A TRIP TO THE SPACE: A TASTE OF PERFORMING ARTS

By Ava Davenport

On Thursday 9th July, a group of students from school visited The SPACE, a college specialising in performing arts, where we took part in a physical theatre workshop and watched their production of *Chicago*.



During the workshop, we joined a dance class and learned some of the choreography from one of the musical numbers in the show. It was great fun creating our own little movements, and the cast members were there throughout to help and encourage us. We also took part in an acting session, where we worked in groups to read and perform sections of the script from *Chicago*.

The cast, who were all students at the college, were incredibly welcoming and friendly. They answered our questions during a Q&A with the main cast, giving us an insight into what it is like to study performing arts and be part of a production like this.

The show itself was amazing to watch. The cast were incredibly talented, and the singing, dancing and acting were all outstanding. As someone who is already a fan of musical theatre, it was inspiring to see the opportunities that a college like The SPACE can provide and to experience the hard work and creativity that goes into a performance. Overall, it was an incredible day. The workshop was great fun, the musical was fantastic, and it was a brilliant experience to share with friends. I'm really grateful that I had the chance to visit The SPACE and see what a future in performing arts could look like.



RWNYC 2026: RINGING, RIVALRY AND RESILIENCE**By Evan Pearce**

A group of seven young bell ringers from Somerset, including myself, recently took part in the Ringing World National Youth Contest (RWNYC) 2026, representing the Bath and Wells Diocese. The competition, which has been running since 2011, brings together young bell ringers from across England and Wales. This year, the contest took place at a number of churches around Nottingham, with teams competing by performing different styles of bell ringing, including methods and call changes.



Each team is given between five and ten minutes to perform their chosen piece. The Bath and Wells team performed the method 'Bob Doubles'. While bell ringing can be difficult to explain, in simple terms, methods involve the bells changing their order according to a set pattern, creating a complex and carefully planned sequence. Unfortunately, our result was not quite what we had hoped for. Competing against 16 other teams in our category, we finished in last place — and not just any last place, but the lowest score in the history of the competition! However, we decided to focus on the positives and kept our spirits high.

After all, there is one advantage to making history: at least we'll be remembered! Next year's competition will be held in Guildford, giving us plenty of time to practise, improve and hopefully climb the rankings. A win would certainly be nice!

TAKING TO THE SKIES WITH THE AIR CADETS**By Evan Lock**

I have been in the Ilminster Air Training Corps since the end of last year and was recently given the opportunity to fly in a Grob Tutor training aircraft.

I woke up at 5:15 a.m. and set off for Boscombe Down Air Base. To start my training, I watched an instruction video and was taught how to evacuate the plane safely, including diving out and releasing my parachute! I was then fitted with a flight suit and helmet before boarding the two-seater aircraft.

In the cockpit, the canopy closed while the pilot carried out pre-flight checks and spoke to the control tower through the radios in our helmets. We then taxied onto the runway and took off. The take-off felt smooth, but the climb was much faster than I expected.

Once we were above the clouds, the pilot explained the controls before letting me take over. The joystick was very responsive, and when I banked the plane I could see everything below.

The pilot then demonstrated some aerobatics, including flying straight up before cutting the engine. The climb produced strong G-forces, but on the way down it felt completely weightless.

Finally, we flew over Stonehenge, giving me the chance to take lots of pictures before circling the runway and landing. As I climbed out onto the wing, I realised just how hot it had become inside the plane.

It was an amazing experience that I'll never forget, and I hope to have many more opportunities like this with the Air Cadets.



FROM THE FIELD TO THE FINISH LINE: WADHAM SPORTS ROUNDUP!

SPORTS DAY 2026: A STORY OF SUCCESS

By Laura Manning

Sports Day 2026 proved to be one of the highlights of the summer term, bringing together students and staff for a day filled with competition, teamwork and plenty of memorable moments.

Despite the soaring temperatures, spirits remained high from start to finish, with competitors embracing every challenge and spectators creating a fantastic atmosphere around the track and field.

The welcome addition of the ice cream shack proved to be a popular feature throughout the day,

helping everyone stay cool in the



summer sunshine.

The day featured a packed programme of track and field events, giving students the opportunity to showcase their athletic abilities in everything from sprints and middle-distance races to relays, jumps and throwing events.



Whether students were competing for personal bests, valuable House points or simply challenging themselves to try something new, every event was met with determination, enthusiasm and a desire to give their very best.

One of the standout features of the day was the exceptional House spirit on display. From the very first race to the final event, students cheered on their teammates with endless enthusiasm, celebrating every success and encouraging one another regardless of the result.

It was wonderful to see all year groups coming together, creating an atmosphere that reflected the



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very best of Wadham School. The friendly rivalry between the Houses added to the excitement while always remaining respectful and supportive.

The effort and attitude shown by every participant were equally impressive. Students demonstrated resilience, commitment and perseverance throughout the day, refusing to let the heat or the demands of the competition dampen their enthusiasm.

Every competitor should be proud of the determination they showed, whether they stood on the podium, achieved a personal best or simply stepped outside their comfort zone by taking part.

The standard of competition was exceptionally high, with numerous track records being broken over the course of the day. These outstanding performances reflected the dedication and hard work that many students have put into developing their sporting talents throughout the year.

The full list of new school records, together with a gallery

of photographs from the day, will be displayed in the PE department from September 2026, celebrating these fantastic achievements.



Sports Day was about far more than winning races. It highlighted the qualities that make great sportspeople: teamwork, resilience, respect and determination.

Students supported one another through moments of triumph and disappointment alike, reminding us that taking part, encouraging others and showing good sportsmanship are just as important as crossing the finish line first.

A huge thank you goes to the PE department and all the staff who worked so hard behind the scenes to organise the event, officiate the competitions and ensure everything ran smoothly. Their enthusiasm and encouragement helped create a safe, enjoyable and successful day for everyone

involved.

Congratulations to every student who took part. You represented yourselves, your Houses and Wadham School with pride, demonstrating not only your sporting ability but also the values of teamwork, respect and perseverance that make our school community so special.

The final House standings will be revealed during the end-of-term awards assemblies. Good luck to all four Houses!



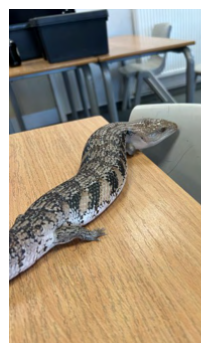
Wadham School Activity Week 2026

As the final week of the Summer term arrived, Wadham students swapped the usual classroom routine for a fantastic range of activities, trips and experiences. It was the perfect way to celebrate the end of a busy year and create some memorable moments before the summer holidays began. Here are some of the highlights.

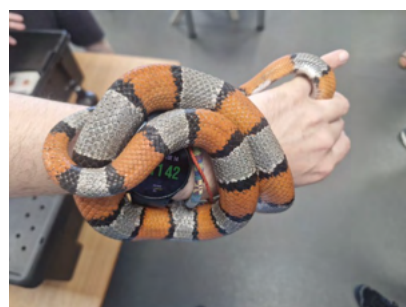


Crafty things with Miss Coombs and Mrs Pawling

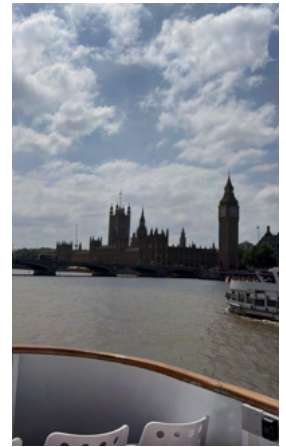
Close animal encounters with Fangs and Feathers



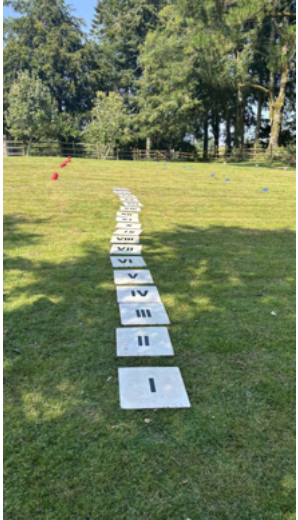
Bowling and cinema trip



London - visiting
the big city



Hooke Court activities and mud run - I hear it's great for the skin!



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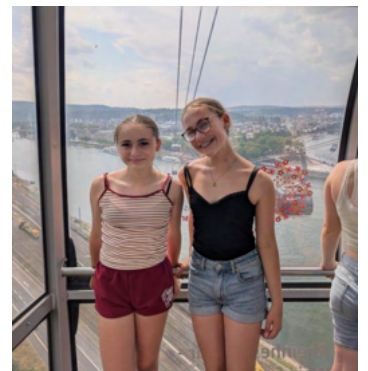
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The Germany trip was a fantastic opportunity for students to experience a new culture, explore historic landmarks and create memories with friends. Highlights included exploring the beautiful town of Boppard, visiting the impressive Deutsches Eck, discovering castles and forts, and travelling across the Rhine by cable car. The group also enjoyed an exciting day at Phantasialand, where thrilling rides, laughter and a few very wet moments on the log flume made it a trip to remember!



INTERVIEW

KEEP ADVENTURING!

BRIAN BLESSED ON

ACTING, EVEREST,

MARS AND WHY

THE GREATEST

DANGER IN LIFE IS

NOT TAKING

ANY RISKS!

**Foreword by Peter Hopwood and
interview by Poppy Spurway**

Brian Blessed is one of Britain's most recognisable actors. With a career spanning more than six decades, he has appeared in countless stage productions, television dramas and films, becoming famous for unforgettable roles in Flash Gordon, I, Claudius, Blackadder and many more.

But Brian is much more than an actor. He is an adventurer, mountaineer, explorer, author and passionate champion of the arts. Whether climbing mountains, training with Russian cosmonauts or inspiring audiences with his unmistakable voice and boundless enthusiasm, he has always embraced life with extraordinary energy.

In this exclusive interview with The Quill, Brian reflects on his remarkable career, shares stories of working alongside acting legends, explains why the arts matter more than ever, and offers heartfelt advice to young people hoping to follow their dreams. Along the way, he talks about Everest, Mars, Patrick Stewart, Kenneth Branagh—and why the greatest danger in life is not taking the adventure.

1. How did you first begin your acting career, and what originally inspired you to pursue acting?

I was lucky, as the son of a Yorkshire coal miner, that there was a thriving and inspirational youth theatre where I lived. I actually went there with Patrick Stewart, a lifelong friend. We would get to as much theatre as we could, so passionate were we for the arts! I think there were more avenues open to working-class lads like ourselves in those days.

I then studied at the Bristol Old Vic as soon as I was old enough to get through the doors. I was in heaven. Bliss.

**2. What has been your favourite or most enjoyable project to work on, and what made it so**

special for you?

One of my very first film roles was in *The Trojan Women*, directed by Michael Cacoyannis. He responded to my very 'un-English', shall we say, energy. I worked alongside legends such as Katharine Hepburn, with whom I formed a strong bond, Vanessa Redgrave, Geneviève Bujold and Irene Papas. When I was cast, I nearly floated off the ground with happiness and stayed in that dream throughout the extraordinary experience. To walk amongst the greats—what a privilege.

**3. Which role have you found the most interesting or challenging to play, and what made it stand out?**

Though it is difficult to choose a favourite role from so many great experiences, Augustus in *I, Claudius* was a standout. The role spanned many years, seeing him from his prime to old age, a great acting gift. To hold my eyes open in death for four minutes as the credits rolled, with the camera on my face, is something I'm very proud of. It was a rich role, full of humour, fury, tenderness and heartbreak.

4. Who has been your favourite actor to work alongside, and what made that partnership memorable?

My favourite actor—and director—to work with has been Sir Kenneth Branagh. We worked together at the RSC and on many films since. I don't know anyone so dedicated to the arts and to creating work for the industry. These days we have more of a father-and-son relationship, and we help each other with our projects.

**5. Are there any roles or projects you would still love to take on, and why?**

I have always wanted to play the great cricketer W. G. Grace. There's always time—I'm only turning 90 this year! I'd also love to take on Professor Challenger in *The Lost World*. I've always wanted to record a radio production of that great tale.

6. What do you enjoy most about acting as a profession, and why does it continue to inspire you?

I think acting is the bravest profession in the world. Every actor puts themselves forward to be scrutinised—their face, their voice, their body, their very soul. They suffer rejection, criticism and heartbreak, then get up and do it all again. As Stanislavski rightly said, 'You must love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art.'

**7. With so many modern films and TV shows using CGI and digital effects, what do you think has been lost or gained?**

I'm not against progress—I enjoy seeing what can be achieved these days. It excites me. You simply have to use it in the right way. If it is hollow spectacle, we feel nothing. If it is used to expand on



something true and inventive, the sky's the limit.

8. Why do you think audiences keep returning to classic stories and revival productions?

The classics touch something universal. It feels right to hold hands with the past, learn from it and see that we are not so changed. They ring a deep bell that resonates within us.

9. What do you think the future of theatre and live performance looks like?

Neglect the arts at your peril! We need them. It is easy to become downhearted when one sees the struggles, but I firmly believe we will win through. It is an area where AI will find it difficult to get a grip, because we will always respond to the need to share something human.

10. What do you think today's streaming era means for actors starting out now compared to when you began?

I know very little about streaming—in fact, I have no clue how to do it. I still watch DVDs! The arts have always changed, and I suppose we must change with them. But this is not really my arena.

11. What is the best advice you would give to young people interested in acting?

If your heart tells you that you must do it, then you must do it. I always say, 'An actor works who works.' Read, work on your fitness, your voice, read some more, watch everything and find your passion.

12. What has been the most valuable lesson you've learned throughout your career?

Never lose sight of who you are. Be your unique self. Say YES! to life and to opportunity. Don't let the b*st*rds grind you down.

13. You've had many extraordinary experiences—what was the hardest part of climbing Mount Everest, and what do you remember most about it?

The hardest part is making the choice to turn back when every instinct tells you to keep going, perhaps making your wife a widow and your child fatherless. Having said that, I believe the greatest danger in life is not to take the adventure. Without adventure, I begin to die.

14. You also trained for space travel—what was that experience like, and what did you take away from it?

Training for space with the cosmonauts was the experience of a lifetime, but gruelling. The centrifugal device was hell on earth. But I will climb Olympus Mons one day!

15. Do you have any upcoming acting roles or projects you can tell us about?

Speaking of Mars, I am working with two extraordinary men to put together an exhibition of space travel. It blends science



*Time to
think about...*



...TAKING A TRIP BACK IN TIME

By Peter Hopwood

Featuring spectacular views, wizard lizards, Whitney Houston, Google Translate and the most hotly disputed UNO rules in Andalucía.

When my Dad announced that, to celebrate his 80th birthday, he wanted to take his three grown-up children on a week's walking holiday through the Sierra de Aracena in southern Spain, none of us quite knew what to expect.

It wasn't a gift that we organised for him. It was his gift to us.

For one week, my two sisters and I—now all in our late forties and early fifties—left behind our everyday lives. Partners stayed at home. Children carried on without us. Work emails went unanswered. The endless cycle of school runs, jobs, shopping lists and responsibilities was put on pause.

Instead, we became what we had always been before any of those things existed: three siblings spending time with their dad.

Our route wound through the beautiful Sierra de Aracena, beginning in Aracena before taking us to Fuenteheridos, Galaroza, Almonaster la Real and finally Cortegana. Every day brought another walk through cork oak forests, chestnut groves, quiet valleys and whitewashed villages, with spectacular views stretching across the Andalusian countryside. Around almost every corner there seemed to be another view that demanded we stop, catch our breath and simply take it all in.

A walking holiday has a rhythm to it unlike any other time away. There were no distractions, no schedules to rush towards and no pressure to fill every silence. Conversations simply happened. Stories were told, memories were shared and laughter arrived unexpectedly.

One of the best ideas of the week came from my sister Kate, who packed a small Bluetooth speaker. It blasted out the soundtrack to our adventure. As we walked beneath trees or climbed another hillside, we were accompanied by everything from classic rock to 80s favourites and songs that instantly transported us back to childhood holidays in France with the same cassette tape on repeat.





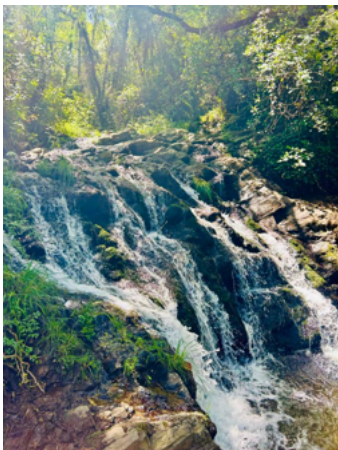
Before long, certain tracks became forever linked with particular stretches of the walk, and hearing them now immediately takes me back to the Spanish sunshine. However, after hearing Whitney Houston's *Step by Step* several times a day for a week, I think we're probably all happy to give it a well-earned rest.

The countryside itself was alive. Lizards darted across the paths, basked on warm rocks and disappeared into dry stone walls. This naturally prompted my running joke of the week: could they really be described as "wizard lizards", or did they first need a pointy hat and a wand to qualify? Much to everyone else's despair, this question resurfaced almost daily and never received a satisfactory answer.



The slower pace of walking meant we noticed everything around us. Streams and ponds were teeming with frogs, dragonflies and countless insects, while birdsong echoed through the valleys and forests. It was impossible not to

appreciate how much wildlife surrounds you when you're travelling at walking pace rather than speeding past in a car.



Each day's walk had its own reward. After hours beneath the Andalusian sun, there was no greater sight than spotting a village bar in the distance. Somehow, the promise of a cold drink made tired legs find one last burst of energy. That first icy glass, enjoyed in the shade after another successful day's walking, felt like one of life's great luxuries.

Evenings brought another adventure as we sat down for dinner. Armed with Google Translate, we attempted to decipher menus and discover exactly what we'd ordered. Sometimes the translations were reassuring; sometimes they simply created more questions. Either way, dinner became another opportunity to laugh together.

Spain also challenged some of our culinary expectations. Soft drinks appeared to exist in a refreshingly uncomplicated world where the options were essentially full-fat Coca-Cola or Fanta. If you were hoping for a diet version, you were generally out of luck. And whenever we searched for crisps, the shelves seemed to contain one universal answer: Lay's. Apparently Spain had settled the crisp debate long ago.

If the walks filled our days, UNO filled our evenings. With the warmth lingering long after sunset, we'd gather around a table outside a bar for "just one game", which inevitably became several hours of competition, laughter and increasingly heated debate. The cards themselves were almost secondary to the discussions they provoked.



Whose turn was it? Could you really play that card now? Did a Draw Two cancel another Draw Two? Were we following the official rules or the version that someone had inherited from years of playing around their own family kitchen table? Every household, it seemed, had developed its own interpretation of UNO over the years, and each of us was absolutely convinced that ours was the correct one.

Eventually Kate reached the end of her patience. After what felt like the hundredth interruption to explain whose go it was, whether a Reverse counted in a two-player situation, why one particular special card apparently couldn't be played, and whether somebody's family rules from home could possibly apply in rural Andalucía, she finally informed the rest of us that we would be playing one set of rules, regardless of what happened in our respective households. The rest of us, naturally, continued questioning them.

Those evenings summed up the entire holiday. There was laughter, gentle bickering, mock outrage, accusations of cheating, dramatic celebrations after unlikely victories and enough rule discussions to keep the makers of UNO occupied for years. The arguments were never really arguments; they were simply another excuse to laugh, and I suspect none of us will ever play the game again without thinking of warm Spanish evenings.

Watching Dad embrace the adventure at 80 was perhaps the greatest privilege of the week. He hadn't organised the holiday to prove anything. He simply wanted to spend time with his children. Looking across at him striding along another woodland path, still curious about what lay around the next bend, it struck me that growing older doesn't necessarily mean growing old.

As the week came to an end, I realised we hadn't simply celebrated a birthday. We had celebrated family. For a few precious days we stopped being parents, partners, professionals and household organisers. We became three siblings once again. For a week, the years quietly disappeared, walking alongside our dad much as we had done decades earlier - only with slightly creakier knees, a greater appreciation for comfortable shoes and a stronger desire to locate the nearest cold drink.

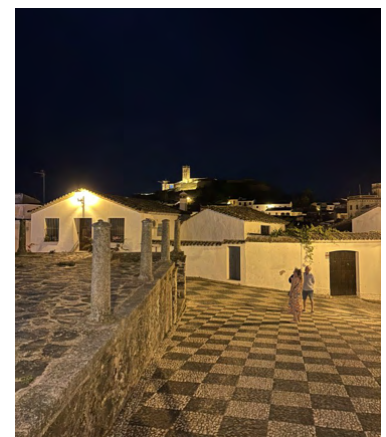
The mountains, forests and villages of the Sierra de Aracena were unforgettable, but they weren't the real destination. The real journey happened between the four of us. Looking back now, I suspect that was Dad's plan all along.

Sometimes the greatest gift a parent can give their grown-up children isn't something wrapped in paper. Sometimes it's simply the chance to spend time together - to walk, to laugh, to argue over the rules of UNO, and to remember who you were before life became so busy.

It's a birthday celebration none of us will ever forget.

So Dad, thank you.

p.s. What's the plan for the big 90 and do I need to start training yet?



INTERVIEW

SECRETS, SPIES AND STORYTELLING: FORMER CIA ANALYST DAVID MCCLOSKEY REVEALS WHAT INTELLIGENCE WORK IS REALLY LIKE.

1. When you were at school, did you already have an interest in international affairs and history, or did that develop later?

It's always been there, though I'm not sure when it started. Some of my earliest reading memories are perusing the history section of my local bookstore with my father.

2. Was there a particular moment, person, or experience that first sparked your interest in intelligence and geopolitics?

This happened randomly – I was at uni and a CIA recruiter showed up in my International Relations 101 class. After his pitch, I was hooked.

3. What subjects or skills turned out to be most valuable when you eventually joined the CIA?

The skill of writing clearly, efficiently, and analytically.

4. At what point did you realise you wanted to work in intelligence, and what attracted you to that career?

I realized I wanted to do it right at the pitch – though of course I couldn't be sure! Turned out my instinct was correct.

Foreword by Peter Hopwood and interview by Harry Willmott

Few people can say they have worked at the heart of international intelligence before becoming a bestselling novelist. David McCloskey can.

Before turning to writing full-time, David spent years as a CIA analyst, specialising in the Middle East and some of the world's most complex geopolitical challenges. That experience now provides the foundation for his acclaimed espionage thrillers, including *Damascus Station*, *Moscow X* and his latest bestseller, *The Persian*.

In this exclusive interview with The Quill, David reflects on the school subjects that shaped his career, the realities of working in intelligence, and why the world's biggest security challenges are often misunderstood. He also shares his thoughts on China, artificial intelligence, the future of espionage, and how his real-life experiences influence the gripping stories he writes.

Whether you're fascinated by history, politics, current affairs or simply enjoy a great spy novel, David's insights offer a rare glimpse into a world that is far less like the movies than most people imagine.



5. Looking back at your CIA career, what lesson has stayed with you the longest?

Get off the X

6. What's the most common misconception people have about intelligence agencies and intelligence analysts?

The single biggest misconception is that intelligence officers are 'Superhero Spies' who dress smartly, carry guns, and frequently get into car chases. This is entirely false.



7. What did your experience focusing on Syria teach you about how conflicts are misunderstood by outsiders?

The Syrian civil war showed me how countries can fall apart, and how outsiders are free to theorize about how such conflicts may be ended without consequence. Since we can afford to be wrong, we can gin up any number of wild scenarios for how a disaster might be turned into a triumph.

8. What's something you learned from intelligence work that permanently changed the way you see the world?

Watching Syria in those years showed me how people who previously lived side by side can turn into vicious enemies – how entire nations and societies can fall apart in extreme violence.

9. When you look back at analysts you most respected, what separated the exceptional ones from the merely competent?

The exceptional ones were obsessive, willing to be contrarian, and dedicated craftsmen and women.

10. How do intelligence analysts avoid falling victim to their own assumptions and biases?

This is hard, because the biases spring from the way our brains work, and that's hard to change. The way we correct this is following structured analytic exercises to break / challenge the biases, things like Team A/Team B exercise, Analyses of Competing Hypotheses, Key Assumptions Checks, and the like.

11. What patterns do you see recurring in major intelligence failures?

They tend to be structural and systemic. Failures of analysis and those cognitive biases, of course, but also managerial and organizational. Failures should have a thousand fathers, same as success.

12. What's the most valuable lesson intelligence professionals can teach business leaders and policymakers?

How to deal with ambiguity, fragmentary information, and risk management. Also this: how governments and security professionals the world over actually work.



13. Which geopolitical risk do you think policymakers understand least well today?

The implications of the technologization of life (synthetic biology) and intelligence (AI).

14. What geopolitical development do you think most experts are underestimating right now?

Same as above!

15. Which country or region do you think Western commentators systematically misunderstand, and why?

China. Which is not such a great thing because it's our most important geopolitical rival.

16. What have you changed your mind about in geopolitics over the last five years?

The plans and intentions of the Chinese state. I'd previously viewed Beijing as a competitor and now see it as a rival keen to remake the international system.

17. Which parts of intelligence work are most vulnerable to AI, and which parts will remain fundamentally human?

AI will upend and reshape analysis, all the back room functions, targeting...the list goes on and on. What it will not change is the demand for human sources with access to other important humans. This information is harder to get, but still extraordinarily valuable and will always be part of the business as long as humans run countries and companies.

18. How do you balance realism with storytelling when writing espionage fiction?

The storytelling takes precedent, but I try to blend in as much authenticity as possible, largely in service of the characters.

19. Are there aspects of intelligence work that are difficult to portray accurately in novels because readers simply wouldn't believe them?

The fact that much of it is quite boring! Which would make for boring reading.

20. If you were briefing a group of students entering a world of increasing geopolitical competition and uncertainty, what would you tell them to pay attention to over the next decade?

Synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, and the declining marginal cost of violence and chaos.

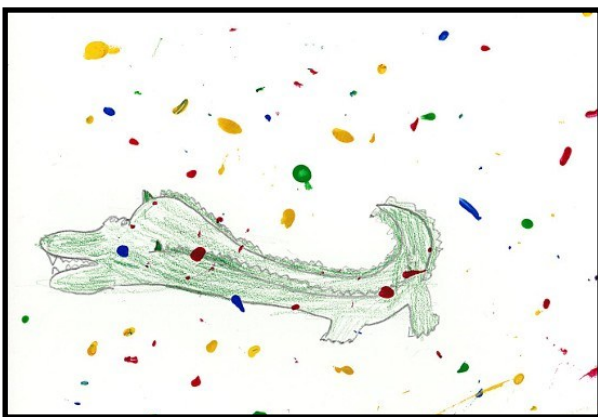
David McCloskey's latest bestseller, *The Persian*, is just out in paperback and is reviewed in this edition. His next, *London Station* - which asks What if the CIA and MI6 began spying on each other? - will be published as a hardback in October.



Primary Voices — Big Impact!

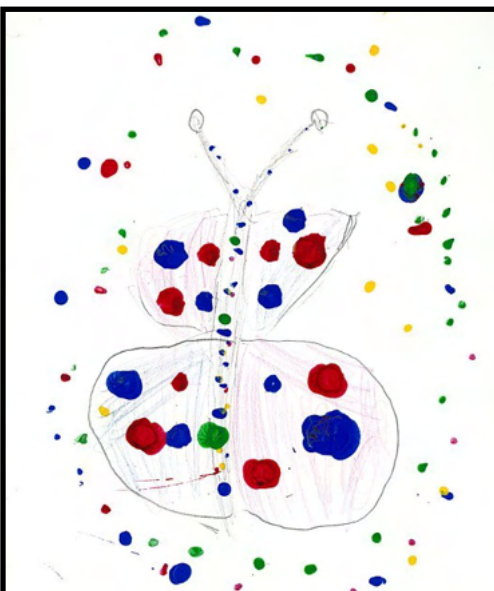
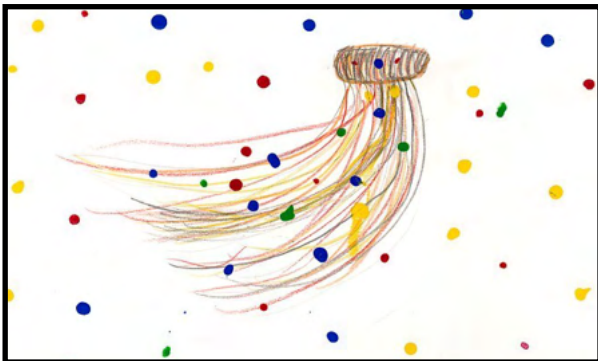
As part of an exciting new initiative for *The Quill*, we have been reaching out to our local primary and feeder schools to invite them to contribute to our student magazine. This project aims to strengthen links within our wider community by celebrating the creativity, learning and achievements of younger students alongside our own.

Through articles, artwork, stories and classroom projects, we hope to create a shared space where different schools can connect, collaborate and inspire one another. I am delighted to showcase and celebrate the incredible work students have produced as part of this partnership. We hope you enjoy exploring what they have created and sharing in their success.



56 things in an old owl's nest

*One dark rain streaked night,
Two brown, striped feathers from birds unknown
to this world,
Three unused, brass keys,
Four ancient coins from however long ago,
Five thread spiders' webs,
Six gusts of strong wind,
Seven five board pieces carved out of an old oak,
Eight handfuls of bronze rain,
Nine whispers of words heard to none,
Ten toes who knows what,
One silver speckled egg, a wonder from inside.*



Toy Review

This toy, made by blue brix, is a LEGO type of toy.

It is fun to build and a great thing to play and fiddle with I enjoyed it so much it was so fun!

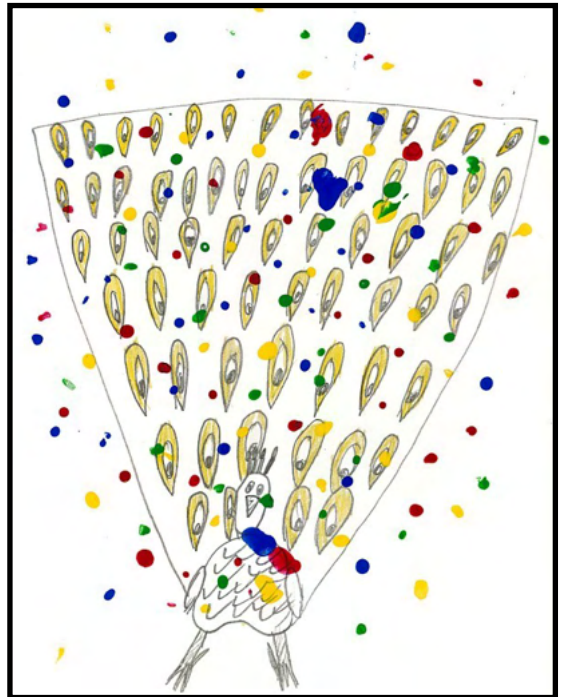
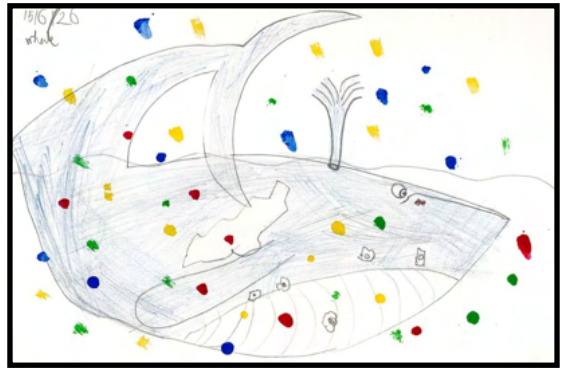


WORLD CUP WORD SEARCH

A	R	G	E	N	T	I	N	A	H	J	F
A	D	S	E	N	E	G	A	L	G	T	R
Z	R	M	O	R	O	C	C	O	D	R	A
X	K	E	P	U	S	A	S	P	A	I	N
Q	N	Y	N	T	Y	J	M	J	K	M	C
W	S	J	L	G	K	K	O	Y	M	E	E
S	F	K	A	E	L	U	K	M	G	X	M
A	D	G	H	P	L	A	O	L	F	I	L
C	N	R	E	I	A	T	N	T	E	C	K
V	O	M	Z	Z	Q	N	I	D	Y	O	T
L	Y	A	U	A	L	G	E	R	I	A	A
S	R	D	F	T	X	R	K	Y	H	F	O
B	E	L	G	I	U	M	Q	L	J	R	P

- ❖ Argentina
- ❖ Brazil
- ❖ USA
- ❖ Mexico
- ❖ England
- ❖ Belgium

- ❖ France
- ❖ Algeria
- ❖ Morocco
- ❖ Spain
- ❖ Senegal



My mini Lego Cat Pet Day Review



What I found whilst doing this brick set (Nanoblocks) was once you got past the second level it was actually quite fun. I would recommend it to anyone who gets bored (everyone) as it fills time

and is very enjoyable. I liked it because with the spare pieces you can fix missing bits even if they aren't the same.

What I also like about the spare pieces is you can explore what to build in your own world without anyone telling you what to do, and you can make your own things.



It is really good for testing patience especially the first two steps as you balance them on the surface and stick things on top of them. It is also great because you don't really know what you are building until you get to the neck and collar of your build and by then it can really come to life.

It's a fun activity for you and someone else in your family as there is always one bit that you can find tricky. The way it fits in is so satisfying and it is a wonderful feeling when you put in the last piece. This was enjoyed by me and I hope it will be enjoyed by many others after myself.





Pet Day – micro building bricks

My review on pet day micro building blocks is that it was a little bit fun but annoying because it was fiddley and the pieces were tiny. When I was finished, I was so proud of my self and it looks amazing although it was stressful!

This Lego is very stressful and it takes up a lot of your patience. Even though you can get very annoyed it is worth it when it is finished. I do not recommend this Lego 2 stars.

I recommend this lego set if you have a lot of patience but you do get a crick in your neck!



MERRIOTT
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thank you to Nicky Taylor for helping collate these pieces for the magazine. We hope to see more in the autumn edition.



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IT'S SHOWTIME

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE: TWO SHOWS, TWO STORIES, ONE PASSION FOR THEATRE

By Phoebe Swain

Nell the Musical 2026

At the end of June, I was lucky enough to be involved in a brand-new production of Nell the Musical.

This exciting project has been in development since the early 1990s, and it was incredible to finally see it brought to life in the beautiful grounds of Charlton House.

I played the role of Young Nell, who grows up in a bawdy house alongside her terrifying mother, Ma Gwyn.

Nell also has a best friend called Mary-Ann, who sadly loses her life during the Great Fire of London.

One of my favourite moments in the show was performing my solo, "My Pretty New Hat". This takes place after Nell is pushed in front of the King's entourage. When King Charles II's hat is knocked out of place, Nell laughs at the funny sight. The King finds her honesty amusing and rewards her by giving her the hat.

The show also featured some fantastic ensemble numbers, including "Theatre Life" and "The Great Fire", which brought energy and excitement to the performance.

I have absolutely loved being part of this brand-new production and seeing it develop from an idea into a full musical. I am really excited to see where it goes next — who knows, maybe a Nell the Musical tour could be on the cards!



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Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat 2026

At the beginning of July, I performed in a production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the Warehouse Theatre in Ilminster. Several other students from school were also involved, which made the experience even more enjoyable.



I played one of the Narrators, helping to tell the story alongside Joseph. This musical was full of colour,

energy and incredible costumes. One of my favourite costumes came during the song "Go, Go, Go Joseph", where we were dressed in 1960s-inspired outfits that really brought the number to life.

Unlike many musicals, Joseph contains very little spoken dialogue, meaning the story is told almost entirely through songs. This was a real challenge, especially because it required a lot from our voices, but it was also a brilliant experience.

My favourite number in the show was "Jacob and Sons", as it is the opening song where the audience is introduced to all of the characters and the story begins. My second favourite was "Go, Go, Go Joseph", because it starts slowly before building into a burst of energy and excitement.

I have been part of this theatre group for four years now, and I have loved every moment. I have no plans to leave anytime

soon and I am already looking forward to our next production!



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INTERVIEW

THE MAN BEHIND THE GREMLINS: HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR JOE DANTE ON FILMMAKING, CREATIVITY AND WHY THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS SIMPLY TO MAKE MOVIES.

It's Hi, I'm Joe Dante, and I'm here to answer some questions that you guys apparently have made up for me. I didn't plan on doing all the questions because that's a lot of questions, but I have a couple that I can address. And the first one is:

1. What first made you want to become a film director.

Well, I didn't really want to become a film director. I wanted to be a cartoonist, so I went to art school, where they told me that cartooning wasn't an art and that I should take film instead. This was the '60s, when there were about 40 students and two 16mm cameras. Everybody had to make a student film, and they were all done in the last week, with everybody fighting each other for the cameras.

Most of the time, though, I didn't do any of that. I went to the movies because I was in Philadelphia, and there were grindhouse theatres all over Market Street running triple bills of movies from the '30s onwards.

I spent all my money—and all my time—at the movies. It turned out that was probably the best preparation for what I was actually going to end up doing.

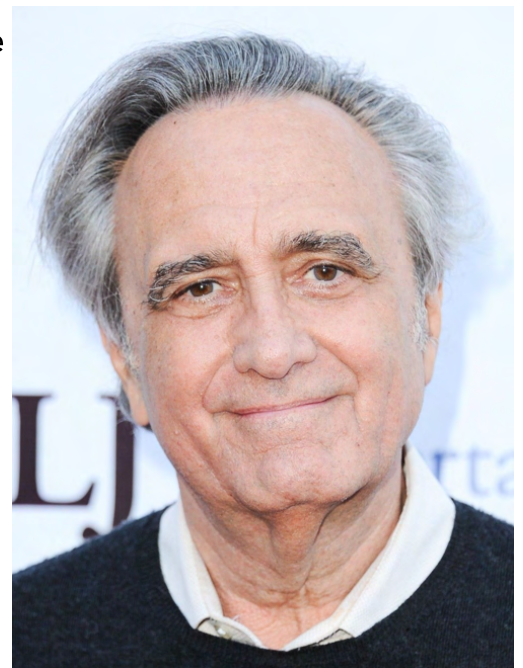
Foreword by Peter Hopwood and interview by Paige Hicks

What does it take to become a Hollywood director? According to Joe Dante, it starts with a love of storytelling, a willingness to learn, and perhaps a little bit of luck.

Best known as the director of classics including *Gremlins*, *The 'Burbs*, *Small Soldiers* and *The Howling*, Joe has spent decades creating films that blend comedy, horror and fantasy in unforgettable ways. His unique style has inspired generations of filmmakers and movie fans alike.

In this exclusive interview with The Quill, Joe looks back on his unexpected journey into filmmaking, explains why collaboration is at the heart of every great film, and reveals which of his movies is the most personal to him. He also offers some refreshingly honest advice for anyone dreaming of a career behind the camera.

Whether you're hoping to become a filmmaker or simply love great movies, Joe's stories provide a fascinating glimpse into the creative world of Hollywood—complete with one final surprise involving a rather convincing dog!





2. What part of directing do you enjoy the most, and what part do you find most challenging?

Well, I started as an editor, so I had a leg up. When you start as an editor and you're shooting things on film, you realise you don't have to shoot things that you're not going to use.

Editors are generally pretty solitary. They work alone, and at the wrap party nobody recognises them!

But I found I really enjoyed the idea of being on a set and getting all this input from the various people who were working with me and for me, and who contributed immensely to what I was doing by having ideas that I had never actually entertained. So the collaborative aspect of the medium is one of the things that made it most exciting for me.

3. Your films often blend comedy, horror, fantasy, and satire. What attracts you to mixing genres in this

Well, that's because life is a mixed genre. All the great horror movies have comedy scenes in them to take away from the scares. I was weaned early on directors like James Whale and movies that were taking the mickey out of the things they were trying to be scary about.

I think horror movies are essentially absurd, and you have to overlook a lot of absurdity to buy into them. If you don't put the comedy in there, people are going to find it in the wrong places. So it always seemed to me that the two genres went hand in hand.



4. Which of your film feels the most personal to you?

Well, they're all personal, but I guess the one that's most personal is *Matinee*, which is about the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I was the same age as the protagonist of the movie during that time, and there's a lot of me in that film. There's a lot of me in the art direction, the set decoration and the props.

A lot of that stuff is personal to me. I tried to make people realise how scary it was to be a kid in 1962 when we thought the world was going to end—because we really did think the world was going to end. That's a scary idea in itself, but it's also absurd, as I said.

They're all personal, and they all have a lot of my personality in them, but that's the one that's the most overtly autobiographical.

5. And last question: What advice would you give to young filmmakers starting out?

Find another line of work... because it's hard!



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It's hard to break into the movies. It was hard when I was starting, and back then we didn't have the ability to make a movie on our phones, which you guys have. If you're really serious about doing this, I think you have to work with your friends. Make short films. Get them into festivals. Get people to see them, and cross-pollinate with a lot of other people you know.

It's not really about trying to find a backer or getting your picture distributed. You can put it on YouTube for free if you want people to see your work. Mostly, it's about the experience of actually making the movie and learning the things you only learn when you make something.

It doesn't matter if you make five short films that nobody sees. At the end of that time, you're going to have learned a lot of stuff that you wouldn't have learned if you hadn't made those shorts.

So my advice would be to use whatever is available to you—in terms of cameras, friends, editing software—and just go out and do stuff.

Perfect. That's all I got.

By the way, this is not a real dog. He's animatronic. We are in Hollywood after all.



Getting into journalism

Have you thought about writing for a living, being a reporter, working on a newspaper or magazine?

Would you like to be the next host of 'Match of the Day', 'Newsnight' or 'The One Show'?

Journalism is the key to all of these.

If you want to get involved in the next edition of the Quill:

- Message Mr Hopwood on Teams
- Come and see Mr Hopwood in B23
- Email Mr Hopwood – Phopwood@wadhamschool.co.uk



History Matters

THE STRANGE CASE OF MILUNKA SAVIC

By Jonathan Margetts

Upon her death, Milunka Savic was the most decorated female soldier in history. Pretty amazing, right? Well, like a lot of tales in history, her story has more than a few twists and actually begins with her gaining notoriety as somebody else entirely.

She became a heroine of the First World War, but not before serving in the Balkan War of 1912 which is where she proved herself on the battlefield as a competent fighter. The problem was that she absolutely shouldn't have been serving in the military.



Born in Serbia, she grew up in a farming family when the Balkan Wars began. Her brother was contacted by the Serbian authorities who wanted to recruit him, but he was a sickly and weak young man who simply wasn't well enough to fight. However, the law at the time meant that you couldn't turn down a conscription request without good reason, and the excuse of "my brother is a bit poorly" probably wouldn't cut it with the Serbian government at this time. Instead, she did the only thing that she could think of: she joined the army in the place of her brother under the false name of Milun Savic. Cutting her hair short, she was never found out during the first year of her military career.

Then, during the Battle of Bregalnica, she was injured when she led a charge towards enemy lines. It was here that medical staff discovered that she was in fact a woman. They had a problem, though: she was a legitimately valuable asset to the war effort. Doctrine stated that a woman could not serve on the front line, so her commanding officers offered her a role in the army in the nursing sector. She declined, stating that she enjoyed fighting, that she was good at it, and that she would be wasted patching up wounds. By this point, she had been mixing it up on the frontline for 13 months. Going against centuries of tradition, the officers relented, and she was officially recognised as a member of the Serbian army. It was during the First World War, though, that she would become a legend.



She served in the 2nd Iron Infantry Regiment, the most respected unit in the Serbian army. By now, everybody with a gun knew that she was a woman, and not a single one of her underlings or commanding officers had anything to say other than "jolly good, keep killing the enemy". Fighting on the Serbian front, she once charged an enemy position and captured 114 soldiers at gunpoint, probably because none of them could quite believe that a woman who was barely 5 foot tall had survived their barrage in the first place.



For this, she was awarded the Order of the Star of Karadorde with Swords, the Serbian equivalent of Victoria Cross and the highest medal a soldier could be awarded. During the Kosovo offensive, she was shot in the head and spent less than a day in the medical bay before bandaging herself up and getting back out to the battlefield. She suffered no lasting effects to having an actual bullet embed himself in her skull.

She was known by her comrades as "The Grenadier Sniper", because she had the uncanny ability to throw a grenade into the smallest of gaps to immobilise enemy positions. During the Battle of Crna Bend, she captured 20 Bulgarian soldiers armed with nothing but two grenades and the Serbia Flag which she proudly waved as she ran into enemy fire. Her heroics were so iconic that she was already awarded medals by Great Britain and France for her help in their own war efforts.

After the war, she was rewarded for her efforts by being shunned by Serbia and living the remainder of her life in poverty. She worked mostly as a cleaner, using what little money she made to take care of local orphans. During her lifetime, she adopted and raised over 30 Serbian children, which seems like a daunting task but was probably a relative doddle compared to infiltrating enemy bunkers with nothing but a flag pole.



Nowadays, Milunka is celebrated in her native country as a true war heroine, and heavy metal band Sabaton released the song, *Lady of the Dark*, to commemorate her efforts.

Furthermore, there are also clear signs of inspiration in the Disney movie *Mulan*, which combined an ancient legend with the actual story of this enigmatic war maiden. I can't imagine Milunka breaking out into song like the titular character, but I wouldn't put it past her!

And that, my friends, is the story of how a young woman impersonated her ill brother and ended up becoming one of the most important figures in Serbian history.



Been There. Done That: Trips, Tickets & Takes



COWS, CACTI AND CRITICS: A DAY AT THE BATH & WEST SHOW

By Evelynnn Summers

The Bath & West Show in Shepton Mallet was an unforgettable experience, with something exciting to discover around every corner. From animals and artwork to food, plants and emergency services, the show had a huge variety of attractions that made it a brilliant day out.

One of my favourite parts of the show was seeing the horses and cows. As someone who loves animals, it was amazing to see so many different breeds and learn more about them. Watching the horse events was especially exciting, as it was incredible to see the skill, teamwork and training involved.

Another highlight was the train that travelled around the showground. This was a great way to explore the event, as it allowed you to see everything from a completely different perspective. It was a relaxing way to take in the sights and make sure you didn't miss any of the amazing displays.

Some of the most breathtaking exhibits were the art gallery and the plant collections. The artwork on display was beautiful, with so many creative and impressive pieces to admire. The plant exhibits were equally fascinating, especially the cacti, Venus flytraps and pitcher plants. Some of the plants were enormous and looked almost unbelievable, making them one of the most memorable parts of the day.

The food hall was another favourite area. It was a great experience being able to sample different foods and feel like a food critic for the day — although luckily without having to write any harsh comments! There were so many different flavours to try, and it was a great place to discover new foods.

The emergency services display was also really interesting. It was fascinating to learn more about what firefighters do during their working days, as well as finding out about the role of the police and the procedures they follow. It gave a real insight into the important work they do to keep people safe.

Overall, the Bath & West Show was a fantastic experience filled with animals, creativity, learning and fun. It was a day where there was something for everyone to enjoy, and I would definitely recommend it to anyone who has never been before. I hope even more people get the chance to visit in the future!



THE ACTIVITY DOME: SMASHING THE COMPETITION IN WESTON-SUPER-MARE

By Florence Richardson

If you are looking for an activity packed with excitement, The Activity Dome in Weston-super-Mare has something for everyone.

From axe throwing and archery to laser quest and the famous rage room, there are plenty of ways to challenge yourself and have fun with friends.

During our visit, we decided to take on two of the most exciting activities: the rage room and laser quest.

First up was the rage room — and it was exactly as chaotic as it sounds! Before entering, we had a safety briefing and were given all the protective equipment needed, including overalls, goggles, gloves and hard hats. We were also reminded of one very important rule: do not hit each other (no matter how tempting it might be!)

Once inside, it was time to choose our weapons. I went for a lump hammer and was then let loose on a room full of objects waiting to be destroyed. TVs, plates, bottles, cups and other items quickly became piles of broken pieces. Fifteen minutes of smashing, crashing and china flying everywhere made it an incredibly satisfying experience and a brilliant way to let out some energy.

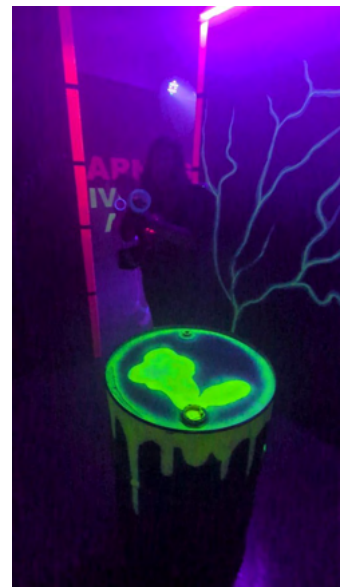
After releasing our inner destruction experts, we headed upstairs for laser quest. We began by choosing our names from a huge selection of Disney and movie character options before getting another safety briefing and being equipped with our laser packs.

The laser quest arena was fantastic, with a smoky maze, hidden areas and impressive lighting effects creating a brilliant atmosphere. Although the session only lasted 15 minutes, it was more than enough time for everyone to become competitive and start battling to get the highest score. The competition was intense, and I am already looking forward to defending my laser tag title on our next visit!

The Activity Dome also has a well-stocked snack bar offering hot food, including pizzas and nachos, which is perfect after all the excitement.

Overall, we had an amazing time. The staff were friendly, helpful and made sure everyone had a great experience. Whether you want to test your aim, release some energy or simply have a fun day out with friends, The Activity Dome is definitely worth a visit.

Rating: 10/10



ROLLING THROUGH HISTORY: A DAY AT TANKFEST 2026

By Henry Hopwood

When I visited Tankfest 2026 at The Tank Museum in Bovington, I had an amazing experience. For anyone interested in history, engineering or military technology, it is a truly unforgettable event. The chance to see generations of armoured vehicles gathered together in one place was incredible, and it was fascinating to see how tanks have developed over time.

I visited Tankfest with my Grandpa, and it was something we both absolutely loved. Sharing the experience with him made the day even more special, as we were able to explore the displays together, talk about the vehicles and appreciate the incredible amount of history behind each machine.

One of the best parts of Tankfest was being able to see how different armoured vehicles changed the way battles were fought. It was fascinating to see how design, technology and tactics developed throughout the 20th century. Each tank had its own story to tell, from the people who designed and built them to the crews who operated them in some of the most challenging situations in history.

By far my favourite part of the day was the late Second World War reenactment. It was exciting, dramatic and felt incredibly realistic. The noise of the engines, the movement of the vehicles and the atmosphere created by the event made it feel like we had been transported back in time. It was a brilliant way to experience history rather than just read about it.



The event was also a great reminder of the passion and dedication of the people who make Tankfest possible. I really appreciate all of the staff, volunteers and enthusiasts who spend their own time preparing vehicles, organising displays and helping to create such an incredible experience for visitors.

Overall, I would highly recommend Tankfest to anyone with an interest in 20th-century history, not just people who are passionate about armoured vehicles. Whether you are interested in engineering, warfare, history or simply want to see something extraordinary, Tankfest offers a unique opportunity to get closer to the past and see history brought to life.

Rating: 10/10



What's worth a read?

The Hollow and the Haunted by Camilla Raines (Titan Books)

By Abigail MacKay

The Hollow and the Haunted by Camilla Raines is a captivating YA fantasy with themes of Gothic Romance and Magical Mystery. The story follows Miles Warren, a teenage Psychic who is destined to join the family business. When Miles starts seeing visions of the murder of Gabriel Hawthorne (his sworn enemy), he is forced into helping him. Both boys unravel many secrets that are held between their two families whilst trying to change Gabriel's future. While the novel contains strong character development it is slightly anti-climactic near the end but then ramps in tension ready for Book 2.

The characters felt particularly well-developed; for example, the protagonist, Miles Warren, begins the novel as an anxious, closeted teen trying to help his family with their business and survive his last year at High School but develops throughout the novel into a more confident young man.

You can see this during the scene where he stands up to his parents. Gabriel Hawthorne is the opposite to Miles, being rude, snobbish and closed off but seems to soften and reveal more of his true self by the end of the novel which can be seen through the way he cares for his younger brother.

Throughout the novel, the plot was well paced, with teasers of parts of the story later to come; these came in the form of the visions the Miles receives about Gabriel. These draw the reader in to read more of the Novel and makes the reader really understand the frustration and anxiety felt by the characters over not having the answers to stop Gabriel's death.

However at the end of this book, the story is slightly anticlimactic and hasn't finished meaning you will need to read Book 2. Readers who enjoy following characters throughout a series of books will particularly enjoy this but readers who prefer to read one book and have the story end there will find this frustrating.

In conclusion, *The Hollow and the Haunted* is an engaging gothic fantasy novel that excels in its character depth, and well paced plot, though it falters due to its the story not finishing within the one book. I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy romantic, magical and mysterious stories that have strong relatable characters. I am eager to read Book 2 of this 2 part series.



We Ride Titans by Tres Dean (Vault Comics)

By Aiden Bazley

Giant robots, Killer Kaiju and a family of pilots. We ride titans was an amazing graphic novel. The art was stunning and the colours were perfect. This graphic novel blew over my expectations. The story was tense. The design of the mechs shows the creativity of Sebastián Píriz (the illustrator) and Dee Cuniffe (the colourist).

Overall this graphic novel gets a nine out of ten with some amazing plot twists. Tres Dean really made a simple idea of giant robots fighting giant aliens into a masterpiece.

A must read for those who like kaiju or giant robots.



The Boys of Tommen* by Chloe Walsh (Piatkus Ltd)*By Eliza Sugar**

The Boys of Tommen book series by Chloe Walsh is a romance fiction set in County Cork, Ireland and follows the lives of students at a prestigious private school, focussing heavily on rugby, friends, family drama and first love.

I found these books to be addicting, emotional and intense. They include mature themes such as trauma, family issues and addiction.

I aimed to read more this year so planned on only reading the 1st book of the series but after finishing, I instantly bought the 2nd. I'm now on the last one she's published so far which is number 6. Although the books seem daunting due to their size, you will not want to put the books down and you won't even realise the time going by as you read these immense stories.

This saga is perfect for mature teens and young adults as it has a lot of emotional depth to keep you interested. They are the best books I've ever read and I strongly suggest you read them if you desire to get into reading.

***Treading Water* by Rowan Frewin (Marginal Publishing House)****By Ewelina Hartnell**

Treading Water is an emotional and relatable story about a teenage girl struggling to balance the pressures of life.

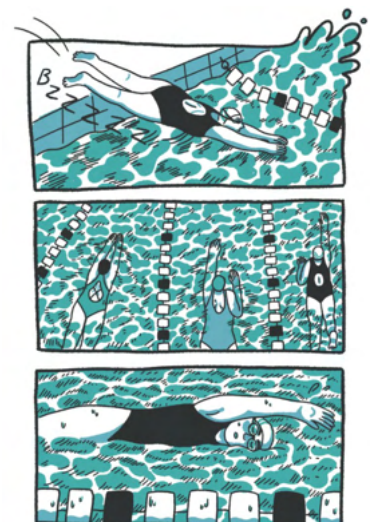
With her GCSE exams approaching, intense swimming training, and growing confusion about her gender identity, she becomes overwhelmed, exhausted, and stressed. As the pressure builds and she starts sleeping less, accidents and difficulties begin to happen, showing how important mental health and self-care are.

Throughout these challenges, the support of her mother and a new friend helps her realise that she does not have to face everything alone. This book deals with important topics such as stress, identity, friendship, family support, and mental health in a sensitive and realistic way. The characters are believable, and many teenagers may relate to the pressures and emotions described in the story.

I enjoyed how the author showed both the struggles and the importance of having supportive people around you. The story is thoughtful and touching, encouraging readers to be kinder to themselves and others.

Rating: (4/5)

I would recommend this book to teenagers and young adults, especially those who enjoy realistic fiction that explores personal challenges, friendships, and discovering who you are.



***The Red Roses: Behind the Scenes with the England Women's Rugby Team* by Jessica Hayden (Arena Sport)**

By Grace Lock

As someone who has always admired the England Women's Rugby Team, I was really excited to read *The Red Roses: Behind the Scenes with the England Women's Rugby Team* by Jessica Hayden.

It is an inspiring and informative book that gives readers a fascinating insight into one of the most successful teams in world sport.

The book explores the history of women's rugby, explaining how the sport developed from its early beginnings in the late nineteenth century through to the modern professional era. It highlights the many challenges women faced in gaining recognition, not only as rugby players but as female athletes competing in a sport that was traditionally dominated by men.

One of the most interesting parts of the book is how it follows the incredible journey of the Red Roses. It explains how the team went from struggling to win matches to becoming one of the most dominant sides in world rugby. Their achievements are remarkable, including three Rugby World Cup victories, numerous Six Nations titles and an incredible winning streak that demonstrated just how far the team has come.

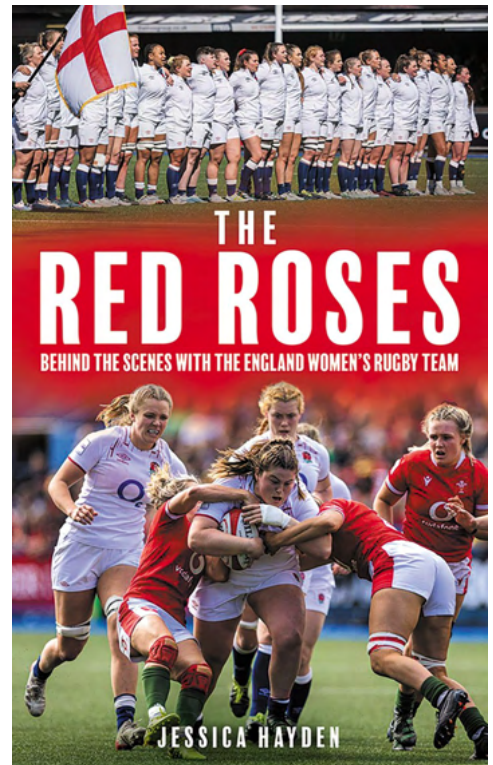
Jessica Hayden combines the facts and statistics with personal stories from the players themselves, making the book feel much more than a history of the team. She takes readers behind the scenes to discover the hard work, sacrifices and determination needed to compete at the very highest level. The chapters about the transition to professionalism in 2019 were particularly interesting, showing how becoming the world's first fully professional women's rugby team transformed both their performances and the sport itself.

The book is also beautifully presented. The bold cover immediately catches your attention, and throughout the book there are photographs of the players in action, singing the national anthem, training together and spending time as a team away from the pitch. These images, alongside the players' own quotes, help bring their stories to life and give readers a real sense of what it means to represent England.

What I enjoyed most was how inspiring the book is. It isn't just about winning matches or lifting trophies; it is about resilience, teamwork, dedication and never giving up. Reading about the commitment and sacrifices made by the players has made me admire them even more and reinforced the importance of working hard to achieve your goals.

Overall, *The Red Roses* is an excellent read for rugby fans, sports enthusiasts or anyone interested in inspiring true stories. Whether you already follow women's rugby or are completely new to the sport, this book offers a fascinating look at the people behind one of England's greatest sporting teams.

Rating: 10/10



Star Wars How Not to Get Eaten by Ewoks and Other Galactic Survival Skills by Christian Blauvelt (DK Books)

By Hollie Difford

If you've ever wondered how you would survive in the Star Wars galaxy, then this is the book for you! *Star Wars: How Not to Get Eaten by Ewoks and Other Galactic Survival Skills* is a 128-page guide packed with humour, fascinating facts and practical (if slightly unusual!) survival advice.

Although the title suggests the book is only about avoiding hungry Ewoks, it covers much more than that. Readers will discover how to survive the scorching heat of Tatooine, escape an exploding Death Star, and deal with countless other dangers found across the galaxy. Alongside the introduction, index and acknowledgements, the book is divided into nine sections covering a huge range of survival topics.

One of my favourite quotes is:

"This is a book that tells you the odds. And honestly, the odds aren't good."

This perfectly sums up the book's style. It immediately makes you realise just how dangerous life in the Star Wars universe could be, while also setting the humorous tone that continues throughout.

Another memorable quote says:

"You will likely meet your doom via the endless perils that await among the stars."

This reminds readers that there is far more to fear than just Ewoks! From dangerous planets to deadly creatures and galactic criminals, there are hazards everywhere.

The author also includes witty comments such as:

"That would have been a valid choice—foolish, but valid."

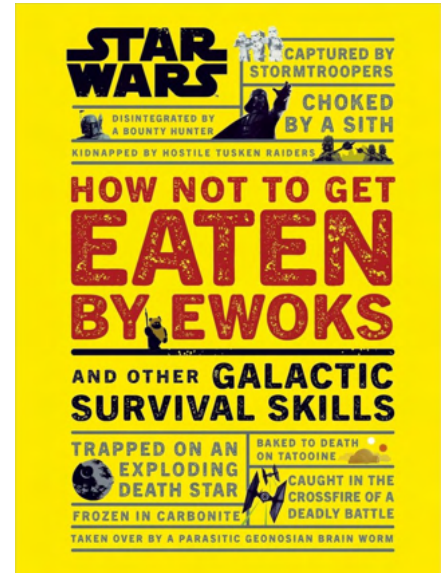
Moments like this add plenty of humour and make the book feel as though an experienced guide is talking directly to the reader. The writing is entertaining throughout and never feels like a boring instruction manual.

The book is packed with colourful photographs from the films alongside detailed illustrations, making every page interesting to look at. It covers a surprisingly wide range of topics, including survival clothing, shelters, travelling safely across the galaxy, surviving in war zones, deadly predators, smugglers, alien languages, religions, crime, gambling, medical emergencies and even where to find help if things go wrong.

The cover is bright and eye-catching, featuring not only the main title but also teasers for some of the other survival situations covered inside. The blurb on the back uses rhetorical questions to draw readers in and makes you want to discover whether you really could survive in a galaxy far, far away.

Whether you're a lifelong Star Wars fan or simply enjoy humorous reference books, this is a fun and informative read. It combines detailed information with comedy, making it both entertaining and surprisingly educational.

Rating: 9/10



Wolf Siren by Beth O'Brien (Harper Collins Children Books)**By Isabel Clark**

Wolf Siren is a retelling of Little Red Riding Hood but it's NOTHING like the fairy tale we read. It's way darker and more interesting. Beth O'Brien makes the woods feel scary but also kind of magical, and you actually feel how much Red misses her grandma. The best part is the twist where Wilson betrays Red. I did NOT see that coming at all and I had to put the book down for a second.

What I really liked is how Beth O'Brien writes the characters. You can tell exactly how the villagers hate the woods and how Red feels all wistful and lonely. The ending is really nice too and wraps everything. Every page made me want to read more.

Beth O'Brien actually won BOTH Carnegies — like the main medal AND the shadowing one — that was insane. She deserves it because she took a story we all know and made it feel brand new with plot twists and characters that feel real.

**Definitely Maybe: The Birth, Death and Resurrection of Oasis by Andy Bollen (Polygon Books)****By Jonathan Broome**

Andy Bollen was at King Tut's that fateful spring night. When the planets aligned, the stars shone and five cocky lads from Manchester impressed Alan McGee enough to earn an instant contract that changed British music forever.

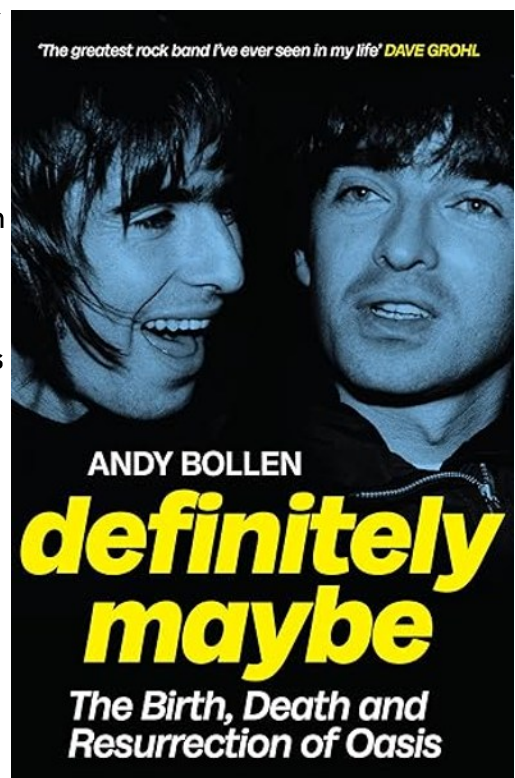
Bollen's position to document the foundational days of Oasis is just about right, close enough to be accurate and insightful yet distant enough to be free of agenda and bias.

His recounting of Indie scene before it crossed over to the mainstream is poignant and powerful, making me yearn to experience those times for myself. It offers insight into why the ground was so fertile for Oasis to explode as they did and capture the zeitgeist of a generation.

The book does well to remind us of the band's true punk rock credentials, a fact easy to forget in light of their broad appeal. Drunk football hooligans bellowing out Wonderwall at karaoke should not diminish the credibility Oasis hold, the legacy of those first few albums is much greater than that.

However, at times it does feel like Bollen is stretching out content. He retells some events, including the night at Tut's several times, I'm not sure the repetition offers enough fresh perspective to warrant repeated inclusion and feels a lot like filler. (Ironically the book is thus a little bloated and indulgent like Oasis' later records!)

Still, 'Definity Maybe' is a vicariously enjoyable ride through the early days of Britain's last, truly great, Rock and Roll Stars.



Betwixt: A Horror Manga Anthology* (Viz Comics)*By Maggie Singleton**

Betwixt is an interesting manga that people will notice because of the way it tells a story and what it looks like. *Betwixt* is not like books because you read it from both ends and the two stories meet in the middle. This is a cool idea because the title *Betwixt* says it all. You are right in the middle of two different views and you get to see what is going on from both sides before you get to the end.

The pictures in *Betwixt* are very good at creating a feeling of mystery and emotion. The characters in *Betwixt* seem real because they are trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. The story does not just have guys and bad guys. It shows you what different people think and it makes you think about what is going on and why the characters do what they do. One thing that makes *Betwixt* really special is how the way it is put together is part of the story. When you read it from both ends it is like the book is saying that you need to look at things from sides to really understand them. When the two stories finally come together the ending is nice because you have seen the story, from both sides. At first the way *Betwixt* is set up might seem a weird.. It is actually one of the things that makes it so memorable. If you like stories that have a lot of meaning and are told in a way then you will probably like *Betwixt* because it combines the way it looks with what it is saying.

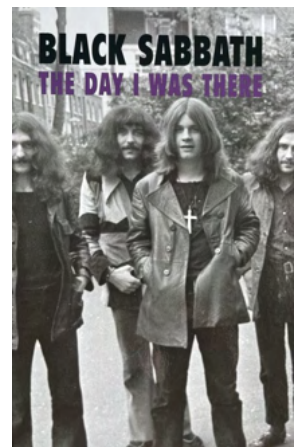
Overall *Betwixt* is an imaginative and engaging manga that uses its unique setup to talk about identity and perspective and being stuck between different worlds. It is a book that's fun to read and also makes you think. So it is definitely worth reading *Betwixt*.

***Black Sabbath: The Day I Was There* by Richard Houghton (Spenwood Books)****By Oliver Newbury**

Richard Houghton's *Black Sabbath: The Day I Was There* is an immersive, chronological oral history that ditches the traditional rock-biography format to deliver a mosaic of first-hand memories from the fans, roadies, and musicians who witnessed the birth of heavy metal.

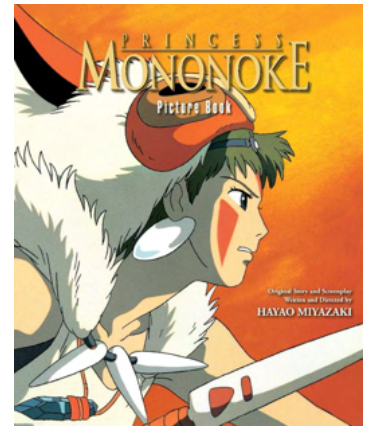
By focusing on the gritty reality of the crowd rather than backstage drama, the book brilliantly captures the physical and sonic shockwaves of Tony Iommi's driving, downtuned riffs, the manic energy of a young Ozzy Osbourne, and the post-war, blue-collar subculture of the UK Midlands that embraced them.

Enhanced by rare memorabilia like vintage gig tickets and fan photographs, it functions as an authentic emotional time machine; however, because it relies on hundreds of everyday perspectives, the book can become repetitive and occasionally unreliable with historical dates. Ultimately, while it doesn't replace a traditional, fact-checked biography, it serves as an essential, deeply democratic companion piece that vividly illustrates not just how Black Sabbath conquered the world, but exactly what it felt like to be rattled by their music in a sweaty club before they became legends.

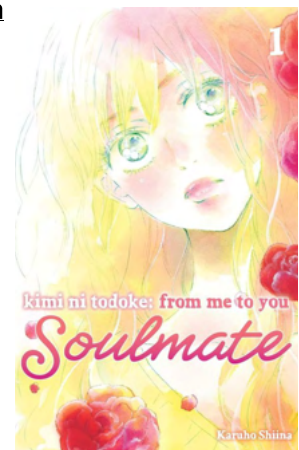


Princess Mononoke Picture Book* by Hayao Miyazaki (Viz Comics)*By Isabel Toralbo**

Princess Mononoke was Miyazaki's first step to making Studio Ghibli and an international success. This 1997 cult is an ode to the nature of humans, intrinsically linked to the nature of the world surrounding them. The story follows Ashitaka, an Emishi prince, becoming entangled in the conflict between Irontown, a settlement that deforested the area in order to mine iron, and the forest, who is home to gods that aim to protect it. Like many other Ghibli products, its strength is found in the ability to portray the complexity of humans, and it succeeds at it with immense dedication to the craft. This picture book is not a replacement to the original work but is a valuable collection of some of the most important frames in the movie, as well as an excellent alternative for those that don't want to commit to the whole 2 hours and want the option to revisit key moments. Overall, it's a great collectible for experienced Ghibli fans as well as a gentle introduction to the world of Ghibli.

***Kimi ni Todoke: From Me to You: Soulmate, Vol. 1: Volume 1* by Karuho Shiina (Viz Comics)****By Erin Kent**

Kimi ni Todoke: From Me to You – Soulmate is a heartwarming romance manga written and illustrated by Karuho Shiina. As a spin-off of the original *Kimi ni Todoke* series, it begins after Sawako and Kazehaya have already become a couple, allowing readers to explore their relationship in even more depth. The main character, Sawako, is kind-hearted, thoughtful and a little awkward. She often overthinks situations and cares deeply about the people around her. As the story progresses, she gradually becomes more confident, making her character feel realistic and easy to relate to. She's impossible not to like—you can't help but want to see her succeed, and at times I just wanted to jump into the pages and give her a hug!



Her boyfriend, Shouta Kazehaya, is friendly, outgoing and popular, but unlike many characters in romance stories, he never comes across as arrogant. He was the first person to befriend Sawako and genuinely wants her to feel happy and comfortable. Although he sometimes jumps to conclusions instead of simply asking questions, his actions always come from a place of kindness, making him a very likeable character as well. One of my favourite things about this manga is the relationship between Sawako and Shouta. Rather than being full of unnecessary drama, their relationship is gentle, supportive and believable. They make each other feel safe, creating lots of sweet moments, but it never becomes boring because they are still learning about one another and growing together as a couple.

The artwork is another highlight. Karuho Shiina's soft, delicate style perfectly matches the story. The fine lines, gentle shading and light colouring almost look like watercolour paintings, giving every page a calm and comforting feel. The artwork reflects the warmth of the characters and makes the emotional moments even more effective. Overall, I absolutely loved the story, the artwork and the characters. It feels different from many other romance manga because it focuses on kindness, trust and personal growth rather than constant conflict. If you're looking for a wholesome, heartfelt romance, I would definitely recommend giving *Kimi ni Todoke: From Me to You – Soulmate* a read. Rating: 10/10



The Persian* by David McCloskey (Swift Press)*By Peter Hopwood**

David McCloskey has quickly established himself as one of the most authentic voices in modern espionage fiction, and *The Persian* demonstrates exactly why. Drawing on his experience as a former CIA analyst, McCloskey creates a thriller that feels intelligent, believable and incredibly relevant to today's world.

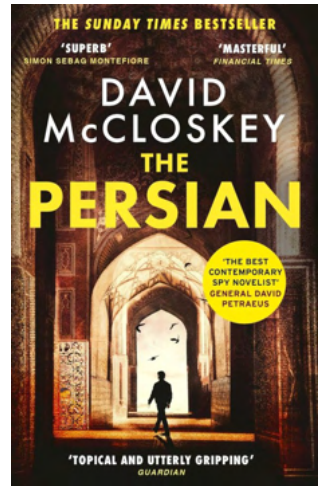
The novel follows an intricate web of spies, intelligence officers and political figures as events unfold across the Middle East and beyond. Rather than relying on explosive action scenes every few pages, *The Persian* builds suspense through carefully planned operations, shifting loyalties and the constant uncertainty of who can really be trusted.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its realism. McCloskey doesn't simplify international politics or intelligence work. Instead, he invites readers into a world where decisions are rarely straightforward, information is often incomplete, and even experienced operatives struggle to predict what will happen next. This makes the novel feel authentic while also encouraging readers to think critically about global affairs.

The characters are another highlight. They are complex, believable and rarely fit neatly into the categories of hero or villain. Their motivations are shaped by duty, personal history and difficult moral choices, making them feel like real people rather than action-film stereotypes.

Although *The Persian* is undoubtedly a spy thriller, it also explores themes of loyalty, identity, power and the consequences of political decisions. Readers interested in history, current affairs or international relations will find plenty to think about alongside the suspense.

The writing is confident and atmospheric. McCloskey has a talent for creating tension without rushing the story, allowing each chapter to build naturally towards the next revelation. At times, the large cast of characters and the geopolitical detail require careful attention, but readers who stick with the novel are rewarded with an absorbing and satisfying story. Overall, *The Persian* is a sophisticated thriller that stands out from many others in the genre. It offers excitement without sacrificing realism and demonstrates how intelligence work often depends more on patience, analysis and judgement than dramatic action.

***The Set Up: The Lost Classic* by the Author of *The Wild Party* by Joseph Moncure March (Korero Press)****By Peter Hopwood**

The Set-Up is a unique and exciting story about boxing, told entirely through poetry. The rhythmic style makes every page feel fast-paced and intense, almost like you're watching a boxing match unfold. Although boxing is at the heart of the story, it also explores the main character Pansy's personal struggles, relationships and the darker side of the world around him. One of the highlights of this edition is the artwork by Erik Kriek. The illustrations bring the story to life, making it easier to follow and adding even more atmosphere to the action. The poetic style takes a little getting used to, but once you find the rhythm, it's a gripping and rewarding read. If you're looking for something different that combines action, drama and brilliant artwork, *The Set-Up* is well worth picking up.



FROM CART TO CRITIQUE: WADHAM SCHOOL CONSUMER REVIEWS



SOMETHING FOR THE ...BRICK BUILDERS

Ice Bloom Penguin (IAMBRICKS)

Reviewed by Ella Priddle

This set, ice bloom penguin, is a set manufactured by the company I Am Brick. It contains 604 pieces and has a recommended age of 8 and above. This set currently retails at £27. The packaging for this set contains bright colours which makes it eye-catching to a builder. On the box, the set itself looks intricate and convinced me to start building. When I opened the box carefully, the pieces were grouped together and packed in bags based on when they were needed in the set instructions which made an easier way to search for different pieces. This also allowed for pieces to be opened at a time to prevent loss of pieces when building.

When I started to build the set, I found out that some of the pieces were difficult to compare to what was in the instructions which made it difficult to make sure I was using the correct colours. However, the pieces were easily attachable and allowed it to be sturdy at any point in the building process. When building the flowers on the penguin, it became difficult to keep all of the pieces on the build and preventing it from breaking. During this time, the building process became very repetitive and delicate to keep the build in place. This build took me around 3-5 hours to complete due to the complexity.

The completed build stands out alongside some of my previous build in my collection. It also clearly shows the intricate details clearly from a distance.

Overall, this set is a nice way to relax and keep yourself busy and entertained during the summer and helpful staying indoors due to high temperatures. However, this set can be difficult for young builders as I can become delicate and complex in various places. I would rate this build a 7/10.

Get ready to dive into our honest take on some of the coolest products around! From LEGO-style sets and board games to handheld video games, clothes, toys and toiletries, we've tried them all. We'll tell you what's worth your cash, what's fun, and what might not live up to the hype—straight from our perspective, no filters.



Pirates Bay Market (IAMBRICKS)**Reviewed by the Manning Family**

After building 'Together by the Water's Edge' in the previous Quill, we decided to continue the nautical theme by taking on 'Pirates Bay Market' from iamBrick. This 856-piece set offers a colourful and detailed pirate-themed market scene that stands out from more traditional brick-building models.

One of the first things we noticed was that, unlike our previous iamBrick build, this set included a printed instruction manual. This made the building process much more straightforward and accessible, especially when working alongside my eight-year-old son. The set was also well packaged, with the pieces divided into numbered bags, allowing us to build the model one section at a time without feeling overwhelmed.



Building together was great fun. There were a few stages that were a little fiddly, but overcoming these challenges made the finished sections even more satisfying. As the market slowly came together, we kept discovering new details hidden throughout the model. From the market stalls to the pirate-themed accessories, the clever design really brings the scene to life and makes it enjoyable to build as well as display.

Unfortunately, with the excitement of the FIFA World Cup—and another LEGO football project on the go—we haven't quite finished the build yet! Even so, we've enjoyed every stage so far and are looking forward to seeing the completed Pirates Bay Market take pride of place on our LEGO display shelf. Overall, this is a fun, detailed and rewarding build that offers something a little different from the usual sets. We'd happily recommend it to anyone who enjoys custom brick builds, pirate themes or display models packed with character.

Pros

- ☐ Clear printed instruction manual
- ☐ Excellent packaging with numbered bags
- ☐ Packed with clever details and character
- ☐ Fun family build with a fantastic display model

Cons

- ☐ A few sections can be a little fiddly to assemble

Rating: 9.5/10

A wonderfully detailed pirate-themed build that's as enjoyable to construct as it is to display.

About IAMBRICK

iambrick is an imaginative and healing creative brand dedicated to the design and production of trendy toys and building blocks. They embrace

the brand DNA of "I am brick, together we create," where each "brick" represents a spark of creativity and connection. Their mission is to use building blocks as a medium to spread positive energy and rediscover the pure beauty of creation. Every iambrick piece helps build an inspiring world — one that blends innovation, joy, and quality. When they say "Together We Create," it reflects not only the joy of building with our community but also the shared spirit of imagination and creativity that unites us all. For more details go to <https://iambrickimb.com/>

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Huryra Sports Car (Nifeliz)**Reviewed by Milo McGhee**

If you're looking for a detailed supercar model without paying premium prices, the Nifeliz Huryra is an excellent alternative to official LEGO Technic sets. It offers an impressive building experience, realistic mechanical features and a stunning finished model, all at a fraction of the cost.

One of the biggest strengths of this set is its value for money. With well over a thousand pieces, it provides a challenging and rewarding build that feels comparable to much more expensive models. The finished car is packed with realistic features, including working steering, independent suspension, moving engine pistons and a functioning gearbox, making it a fascinating project for anyone who enjoys engineering or motorsport.

Once completed, the Huryra is a fantastic display model. The chassis feels sturdy, the bodywork is full of detail and the finished car looks impressive on a shelf or desk. It is definitely a model you'll want to show off once you've finished building it.

The set isn't perfect, however. Some of the stickers can be difficult to apply because the adhesive isn't always the best, and a few are slightly awkward to line up correctly. The brick quality is generally very good, but some pieces fit either a little too tightly or a little too loosely compared with official LEGO bricks. This occasionally meant parts came apart during the build, which could be frustrating.

The instructions are mostly easy to follow, although there are a few stages where clearer diagrams or extra viewing angles would have been helpful. Because of this, I think the set is better suited to more experienced builders who enjoy a challenge.

Pros

- ☐ Excellent value for money
- ☐ Realistic mechanical features, including steering and suspension
- ☐ Detailed and rewarding build
- ☐ Impressive display model

Cons

- ☐ Sticker quality could be improved
- ☐ Some pieces fit too tightly or too loosely
- ☐ A few instruction steps can be difficult to follow

Rating: 9/10

For anyone who enjoys building detailed sports cars, the Nifeliz Huryra is a brilliant choice. It offers an engaging building experience and an eye-catching finished model, proving that you don't have to spend a fortune to enjoy a premium-looking brick-built supercar.



Chinese Garden (Nifeliz)**Reviewed by Ewelina Hartnell**

I chose the Nifeliz Chinese Garden set because I have always loved the peaceful beauty of traditional Chinese gardens. From the moment I saw it, the delicate architecture, colourful plants and calm atmosphere immediately caught my attention. This set brings a sense of tranquillity into the home and makes a stunning display piece once completed. The finished model captures the elegance of a traditional Chinese garden, with lots of small details that make it enjoyable to look at long after the building is finished.



The build itself was a very enjoyable experience. The instructions were easy to follow, and putting the pieces together felt relaxing from beginning to end. Although there are many small details, the build never felt frustrating, and seeing the garden slowly come together was very rewarding. There were two small issues during the build. Firstly, one piece included in the set was incorrect, although thankfully it did not affect the final model. Secondly, one piece arrived broken, but I was able to work around it and continue building without any major problems.

The only thing to be aware of is that some of the pieces are extremely small and need to be placed carefully into tight spaces. This means younger builders may find it slightly challenging, but for experienced LEGO fans, it adds to the enjoyment and detail of the set. Overall, the Nifeliz Chinese Garden is a beautiful and relaxing build that creates an impressive display model. It would make a fantastic addition to any LEGO lover's collection, especially for those who enjoy detailed architectural sets.

Pros

- ☐ Easy-to-follow instructions
- ☐ Beautiful and detailed design
- ☐ Relaxing and enjoyable building experience
- ☐ Excellent display piece

Cons

- ☐ One incorrect piece included
- ☐ One broken piece included
- ☐ Some very small pieces may be tricky for younger builders

Rating: 9.5/10

A beautiful set with only a minor issue involving one incorrect piece.

Mini Dinosaur Fossils (Nifeliz) - Triceratops**Reviewed by Jack Barclay**

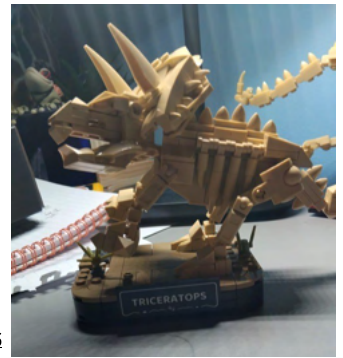
It was in a nicely presented box. The pieces of the triceratops were all in easy to open packets. The instructions were easy to read and follow. It takes around an hour to complete.

Overall, the build was easy. However, there were some difficulties with the back hip joints. I really enjoyed making this set. In my opinion, the base looks amazing. The back feet are



put on first and are really secure. You can move the dinosaurs into different positions.

Overall, my favourite part was its frill, it is very detailed. This set is most definitely a display set. There is no age range on the box, but I would recommend it for 10+.



Mini Dinosaur Fossils (Nifeliz) - Tyrannosaurus Rex

Reviewed by Matthew Hodder

This is a Lego Inspired piece by a Company called Nifelitz. The box contained 340 pieces and easy to follow instructions. It took me about 20 minutes to complete. It was fun to build and had some pieces I had never seen before, the jaw could open and close, the tail moved



and it also had movable limbs. I like the fact it also came with a stand that made it look like it was in a museum. The only thing I wasn't sure of is the way that the legs came off of the body quite easily when not on the stand; this could be due to the mechanisms used; they only pop in, and the neck does not move that freely. Overall I thought it was an amazing build and it was good fun making it. I would give this build a rating of 10/10 and would recommend it for ages 8 plus.

Mini Dinosaur Fossils (Nifeliz) - Stegosaurus

Reviewed by Oliver Hodder

This was a Lego Style build of a Stegosaurus Skeleton. The box was very sturdy compared to some of the Lego boxes I've opened up in the past, and the finished item looks exactly like the picture on the box. The instructions were clearly written showing what pieces you needed and where to put them. I found this to be quite a fun and easy build with only 256 pieces and no stickers to put on. The pieces were easy and quick to put together as it only took me about 20-30 minutes to complete the build from start to finish.

The finished Stegosaurus looks very realistic and is able to be put into different positions thanks to its movable parts, which makes it easy to play with. It also comes with a base for it to stand on for display purposes which makes it more versatile. I personally like this piece and would like to see it in different sizes. The finished piece measures 9" L X 4" H X 2" W. It would be an ideal build for any dinosaur enthusiast. I would rate this build 10/10 as this piece looked and felt sturdier than some Lego sets I've had and built, very good value for money.



Mini Dinosaur Fossils (Nifeliz) - Velociraptor**Reviewed by Lewis Taverner**

This LEGO Velociraptor is a clean and creative display model that captures the dinosaur's iconic hunting stance. The tan colour scheme gives it a fossil-like appearance, making it look more like a museum exhibit than a movie-inspired figure.

**Pros**

- **Excellent pose:** The raised body, extended arms, and lifted tail create a dynamic sense of movement.
- **Detailed head:** The brick-built head has a recognizable raptor profile with an articulated jaw that adds personality.
- **Nicely segmented tail:** The tail is flexible and well-proportioned, helping balance the overall design.
- **Display stand:** The nameplate and small vegetation details make it look like a professional museum display.

Cons

- **Leg proportions:** The legs appear slightly long and straight, making the raptor look taller than expected.
- **Limited articulation:** While the neck, jaw, and limbs have some movement, the overall posing options are somewhat restricted.
- **Arms could be bulkier:** The forearms are a bit thin compared to the rest of the body.

Build Quality

The model uses clever building techniques, particularly around the neck, shoulders, and head. Connections appear solid, and the display stand provides good stability. The use of hinged plates and small Technic elements adds functionality without sacrificing aesthetics.

Overall

This is an impressive custom LEGO Velociraptor that balances accuracy with simplicity. It's an attractive display piece that would fit well alongside LEGO dinosaur collections or museum-style MOCs. With a few tweaks to the legs and forearms, it could look even more realistic.

Final Score: 9/10

Nifeliz is a building block company that produces creative, LEGO-compatible construction sets designed for both display and hands-on building enjoyment. For our school magazine, Nifeliz kindly supplied sets for review, giving students the opportunity to explore and evaluate their products firsthand.

Their range includes detailed models such as vehicles, animals, and botanical displays, all focused on interesting building techniques and visually impressive final designs. More information about the company and their products can be found on their official website: <https://www.nifeliz.com/>.

Overall, Nifeliz offers thoughtfully designed sets that provide an engaging and rewarding building experience, making them a great option for hobby builders looking for something a little different.



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R-1 Mantaray (Brickwith)**Reviewed by Luke Hodnett**

The Mantaray is a unique sci-fi brick-building set made up of 456 pieces. Its striking black and red colour scheme immediately caught my eye, giving the finished model a powerful and slightly menacing appearance. Although the recommended age is around 8+, I think anyone with a bit of building experience will enjoy it. If you're new to brick-building, I'd probably suggest starting with an easier set first.

One thing I noticed straight away was that the set didn't come in a traditional box or include a printed instruction booklet. Instead, the instructions were provided digitally. Once printed, they were clear and easy to follow, just like official LEGO instructions. I couldn't wait to get started, and thankfully all the pieces were included, even though there weren't any spares.



The build itself was enjoyable, although finding the correct pieces could sometimes be tricky because so many of them were black. Once everything came together, however, the finished model looked fantastic. It is full of detail and really captures the appearance of a futuristic flying manta ray. I particularly liked the design of the model. The four cannons on each wing and the bold colour combination make it look ready for battle. Although it isn't based on anything from a film or TV series, it feels like something that could fly straight out of a science-fiction universe. You can even place a minifigure inside the cockpit, which adds to the display value.

There were a few downsides. The wings and cannons can be quite fragile, and the tail sometimes comes loose if too much pressure is applied. The display stand also doesn't fit as securely as I would have liked, which makes posing the model a little frustrating. Because both sides of the build are identical, some sections also become a bit repetitive.

Despite these issues, the Mantaray has plenty of positives. The level of detail is excellent, the design is original and it really stands out amongst my other models. Best of all, there are no stickers, with all of the detail created using the bricks themselves.

Overall, I think the Mantaray offers great value for money and is an excellent choice for anyone who enjoys science-fiction or unusual display models. It may not be the strongest model structurally, but its unique design more than makes up for it.

Brickwith is a building-block parts and set platform that provides LEGO-compatible elements and creative construction kits for hobby builders and designers. The company, which developed from the Webrick platform, focuses on offering a wide range of individual parts as well as designer-led sets, allowing users to build custom models or complete detailed projects.

brickwith

For our school magazine, Brickwith kindly supplied items for review, giving students the opportunity to explore their products first-hand. Their focus on organisation, design detail, and build quality makes their sets particularly appealing to experienced builders who enjoy more complex projects.

More information can be found on their official website: <https://www.brickwith.com/en>



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De Havilland DH-98 Mosquito brick plane model - (COBI)

By Jake Wetherall

The As someone who enjoys building military models, I was excited to build the COBI De Havilland DH.98 Mosquito. Overall, I really enjoyed the experience, although there were a few challenges along the way.

The model itself is very detailed, and I liked that it was more challenging than some other brick-building sets. It made me think more carefully about each stage of the build, and it was really satisfying to see the finished aircraft come together. Although it took me a few days to complete, the final result was definitely worth the effort.



The bricks are excellent quality and feel almost identical to LEGO pieces. They fit together well and create a sturdy model that looks fantastic once finished. I also liked that the set includes a display stand, allowing the Mosquito to be shown off properly once it is complete. Unfortunately, there were a couple of downsides. I found the instructions a little difficult to follow, so I often had to rely on the pictures rather than the written guide. There were also a few pieces missing from my set. Luckily, I had some spare bricks from previous builds, but I still couldn't replace everything, meaning a few small sections had to be left unfinished. Despite these issues, I still really enjoyed building the Mosquito and would happily build another COBI aircraft in the future—although I might choose a slightly smaller model next time!

Pros

- ☐ Excellent brick quality
- ☐ Detailed and rewarding build
- ☐ Includes a display stand
- ☐ Great model for aviation and history fans

Cons

- ☐ Instructions can be difficult to follow
- ☐ A few pieces were missing from the set

Rating: ☐☐☐☐☐ (4/5)

With clearer instructions and all the correct pieces included, this would easily have been a five-star build.

BrickTanks is a UK-based retailer specialising in military-themed brick model kits, accessories, and display sets. They focus on high-quality construction kits that appeal to both collectors and hobby builders who are interested in armoured vehicles and historical or modern military models.



Their range includes detailed tank models and related builds designed to offer a rewarding and engaging building experience. The kits are aimed at builders who enjoy more complex projects, with finished models that work well as display pieces due to their level of detail and accuracy.

A big thank you to BrickTanks for providing us with the Challenger 2 model tank used in our review. Their support made it possible for us to build and evaluate this impressive set, and we really appreciate the opportunity to feature it. Be sure to check out their website at www.bricktanks.co.uk to explore their full range of models and support the companies that help make these reviews possible.



SOMETHING FOR THE...FASHION FANS

Squiddie Hoodies

Reviewed by Evie
Hopwood

When I first saw the Pink Squiddy Hoodie, I loved the colour because it is bright, fun and different from normal hoodies. But the best thing about this hoodie is that it is not just something to wear — it actually helps me feel calm and comfortable.

The hoodie is really soft and cosy, which makes it perfect for relaxing in. My favourite part is the squishy cuffs on the sleeves. They are really satisfying to squeeze and they help me when I need something to focus on or when I am feeling overwhelmed. I like having something that I can use quietly while I am sitting, reading or watching TV.

I also really like how the hoodie feels when I wear it. It feels comforting and almost like a big hug, which helps me feel safe and relaxed. The hood is nice and cosy, and the pockets are great for keeping my hands warm.

The design is really cool because it looks fun but is also practical. The pink colour makes it stand out, and I like wearing something that feels like it shows my personality.

The only downside is that it can feel a little warm because it is such a thick and cosy hoodie. Also, because it is so comfortable, I never really want to take it off!

Overall, I really love my Squiddy Hoodie. It is comfortable, fun and helps me feel calmer when I need it. I think it would be great for anyone who likes cosy clothes or finds having something to fidget with helpful.

Rating: 10/10

A hoodie that is not just comfy — it helps me feel happy and calm too.



Reviewed by Jake Wetherall and Hannah Osborne (Parent)

When I first tried the Essential Squiddy Hoodie, I instantly loved how comfortable it was. It feels really soft and cosy, and it has quickly become one of my favourite things to wear.

My favourite feature is the squishy sections in the sleeves near the wrists. They are really satisfying to squeeze and help me when I feel stressed or overwhelmed because they give me something quiet to focus on. I also love the thumb holes because they make the hoodie feel even more comfortable, and the extra pockets are really useful too.

The hoodie is made from thick material, which makes it feel like a really good-quality product. It keeps me warm and has a weighted feeling, which I really like because it feels similar to having a cosy weighted blanket around me.

One of the best things about the Squiddy Hoodie is that all of these features are hidden. When I wear it out, it looks like a normal hoodie, but it secretly



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has extra features that help me feel comfortable when I need them. I love that it is practical but still looks cool.

Parents Review:

As a parent, I couldn't be happier with the Squiddy Hoodie. My child genuinely enjoys wearing it, and the built-in squishies are a fantastic idea. They provide a helpful way to stay calm and focused when things feel overwhelming.

The weighted material is another brilliant feature. It feels soft, comfortable and supportive while still being practical enough to wear every day. The hoodie has also washed really well and has kept its softness and quality. Because the material is thick, it does take a little longer to dry, but this is expected from such a cosy and well-made hoodie. Although it is more expensive than a normal hoodie, I think it is worth considering because it combines several features into one product — a comfortable hoodie, a fidget tool and a cosy weighted feeling all together.

Overall, the Essential Squiddy Hoodie has been fantastic. It is comfortable, practical and has made a real difference to how my child feels when wearing it. Rating: 10/10

A hoodie that looks normal on the outside but provides comfort when you need it most.

A huge thank you to Squiddy for supplying us with their fantastic hoodies to review. Squiddy is a company that has created something different from ordinary clothing. Their aim is to combine comfort, creativity and clever design by creating hoodies that are not only stylish but also provide extra comfort through built-in sensory features.

Their signature feature is the Squiddy Squishy — soft, hidden squishy sections built into the sleeves of their hoodies. These allow wearers to have something discreet to squeeze and interact with whenever they need a little extra comfort or something to focus on.

Many Squiddy hoodies also include a weighted material, creating a cosy, comforting feeling while still looking like a normal everyday hoodie. This means the extra features are subtle and practical, allowing people to enjoy the benefits without needing to carry separate sensory items with them.

For more information go to <https://squiddy.store/>



Video Games 'Street Fighter' T-Shirt (OceanDust)

Reviewed by Henry Hopwood

As a huge fan of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, I absolutely love this hoodie. It is one of my favourite games of all time and my favourite Zelda game, so being able to wear something that shows my interest in the game makes it even more special.

The best feature of the hoodie is definitely the amazing design on the back. It really stands out and captures the style and atmosphere of Twilight Princess, making it a great piece of clothing for any fan of the game.

The hoodie itself is incredibly comfortable and cosy. It feels snug



without being too tight and the oversized style makes it comfortable to wear while gaming, relaxing or just going out. The size feels just right — not too big and not too small — which makes it a great everyday hoodie.

Overall, I think this is a really cool piece of clothing and a must-have for any Legend of Zelda fan. It looks great, feels comfortable and lets me show off one of my favourite games.

Rating: 10/10

Inspired by the worlds of classic video games, comics, and anime, OceanDust is a brand built around nostalgia, creativity, and adventure.

Their mission is to bring the magic of vintage pop culture back to life through stylish, wearable designs that celebrate the joy of discovery and imagination. OceanDust aims to create a community where fans can connect through shared memories while also celebrating creativity and self-expression in the present.

The brand describes itself as “a celebration of the past, a tribute to the timeless, and a call to adventure,” encouraging people to rediscover the excitement of classic gaming and comics while embracing new experiences along the way. We would also like to say a huge thank you to OceanDust for kindly supplying the items featured in this review.

Their support is greatly appreciated and helps support projects like The Quill. If you'd like to support the companies that support student journalism and creativity, make sure to visit www.oceandust.co and explore their latest collections.



Scarface Football Shirt (Red Molotov)

Reviewed by Jack Anstey

Ever wanted a football shirt that actually stands out instead of looking like everyone else's? Most kits you see are either the same big teams or really plain designs, so finding something different isn't that easy. That's where this Scarface-inspired football shirt from RedMolotov comes in.

When I first saw the shirt, it immediately caught my attention. The black-and-white split design is really bold and makes it look unique straight away. It almost looks like a real football kit, but with a creative twist based on the film. Small details like “Montana 80” on the back and the fake sponsors add to that idea and make it feel more thought-out than just a basic graphic tee. Overall, first impressions were very positive it definitely lives up to what you see online.

In terms of fit and comfort, the shirt feels similar to a normal football jersey. It's made from lightweight polyester, so it's breathable and easy to wear for long periods. The sizing is mostly true to size, although it might feel slightly tight depending on how you like your fit. It doesn't feel restrictive at all, so you could wear it casually or even for light sports without any issues as I



recently wore it to football training and can confirm it is comfortable and gives you breathing room. On the skin, it feels smooth, but not super soft like cotton it's more what you'd expect from a standard sports shirt.

The style is probably the strongest part of this shirt. The black-and-white colour split is clean and eye-catching, and it actually looks like something you'd feel confident wearing out. It matches the photos online really well, which is always a good sign. However, it's definitely more of a fashion piece than something you'd wear in a serious match. It's designed to look good rather than perform at a high level. Looking at the quality, it's solid but not amazing. The fabric is slightly thin but seems durable enough, and because the design is built into the material, it shouldn't crack or peel over time. The stitching looks decent, and the embroidered badge is a nice touch that makes it feel more premium than cheaper novelty shirts. Still, it doesn't quite match the quality of official football kits.

There are a lot of positives to this shirt. It's unique, stylish, and comfortable, and it offers good value compared to more expensive kits. It's also versatile you could wear it casually, at school, or just when going out. On the other hand, there are a few downsides. The fit might not be perfect for everyone, and the material isn't as high quality as top tier jerseys. Also, it's not really designed for serious sports performance. Overall, this shirt would suit students who like football fashion but want something different from the usual team kits. It's especially good for people who enjoy bold designs or want a statement piece in their wardrobe.

To sum up, the Scarface football shirt is a creative and stylish option that stands out for all the right reasons. While it's not perfect, it delivers where it matters most design and originality. I would recommend it if you're looking for something eye catching and a bit different.

Final Rating: 8.5/10

Hunger Games Football Shirt (Red Molotov)

Reviewed by Olivia Donahue

The hunger games jersey fits really well but it's true to size and it's very fashionable. It's made out of a silky material so it's a very breathable, perfect for going running. I really recommend getting these because they just look pretty cool and I absolutely love it. It's quite fashionable to wear anywhere.



A huge thank you to RedMolotov for supplying The Quill with products to review. RedMolotov creates unique clothing and gifts featuring original designs inspired by films, music, comedy, science and popular culture. The company focuses on producing high-quality, ethically sourced products, with designs that aim to make people laugh, think and show off their interests.



From creative T-shirts and clothing to mugs and other gifts, RedMolotov offers something for everyone — especially those who enjoy designs that are a little different from the ordinary. Their products combine comfort, creativity and a sense of humour, making them perfect for anyone who wants to wear something that reflects their personality. Find out more at: www.redmolotov.com



Flying Fat Sheep Stationery Collection (Sweet Cafe Theme)

Reviewed by Lily Norton

What the Item Is and Who It Is Aimed At

This is a coordinated curation of items from the independent UK brand Flying Fat Sheep, centered around their signature cozy character aesthetic.

The lineup of items consisted of the Sweet Cafe Adventure Notebook, a Story Themed Acrylic Ruler (Seaside Adventure variant), multiple premium die-cut sticker packs (including the Bubble Tea Dream and Fairy Tale Magic Strawberry Frog designs), dual minimalist white gel pens, and a themed Dream Gummy charm bag packaging.

It is tailor-made for students, bullet-journaling hobbyists, and collectors of the pastel "kawaii" aesthetic who prioritize unique, artist-designed merchandise over generic mass-produced stationery.

What I Liked About It

- **Stunning Original Character Art:** The artwork is the standout feature. The printing on the notebook cover is crisp, with no blurriness, showcasing vibrant pastel tones and sweet cafe-themed motifs. The colors on the stickers are deeply saturated, matching the digital mockups perfectly.

- **Premium, Heavy-Duty Materials:** The notebook features a robust hardcover casing and 100 plain ivory pages. The paper is notably smooth and heavy enough to handle everyday gel pens, fine-liners, and mild highlighters without ghosting or bleeding through to the other side.

The large die-cut stickers are made of thick, durable vinyl rather than cheap paper. They feature a smooth matte finish that resists fingerprint smudges and light splashes. The 15cm ruler is made of a dense, thick acrylic resin with rounded, smooth corners, making it feel substantial in the hand rather than flimsy.

- **Cohesive Unboxing Experience:** Every element—down to the small individual character flake stickers and the faux candy-bag charm packaging—shares a beautifully matched color palette. It feels incredibly premium, like opening a curated subscription box.

Anything That Could Be Improved

- **Pen Ink Capacity & Body Grip:** The included minimalist white gel pens write with a crisp, skip-free fine line. However, because the pen bodies are very slim and lack a rubberized grip, they can cause some finger fatigue during long writing sessions. Additionally, the ink reservoirs are standard-sized, meaning they will deplete quickly if used for heavy daily lecture notes.

- **Elastic Band Tension on Hardcover:** The pink elastic closure band built into the notebook is highly secure, ensuring your pages don't flare open in a backpack. However, because the tension is quite tight, it can slightly indentation-mark or crease the very edges of the back board over time if you



snap it into place too quickly.

• **Ruler Measuring Orientation:** The acrylic ruler features a slightly raised lining edge which is fantastic for drawing straight lines without ink smearing beneath it. However, the graphics are printed directly up to the edge, which can occasionally make it slightly tricky to align the exact millimeter marks on dark or busy paper backgrounds.

Final Score

• 9 / 10 (An absolute dream for journaling enthusiasts who value independent artist quality).

A huge thank you to Flying Fat Sheep for supplying The Quill with products to review.

Flying Fat Sheep is an independent UK creative brand built around a lovable collection of original animated sheep characters and their friends. Through artwork, storytelling, gifts and collectables, the company aims to encourage creativity, kindness, friendship and positive values for children and families.

Their products combine practical items with imaginative designs, creating stationery, gifts and accessories that feel unique and personal. From colourful notebooks and stickers to character-themed collectables, Flying Fat Sheep brings a fun and creative style to everyday items.

What makes Flying Fat Sheep stand out is the care and personality behind each design. Rather than mass-produced products, their creations are inspired by original characters and artwork, making each item feel special.

You can explore more of their designs through their Etsy shop: www.etsy.com/shop/FlyingFatSheep.

Readers can also use the discount code LOVEFLYINGFATSHEEP when shopping in the Etsy store.



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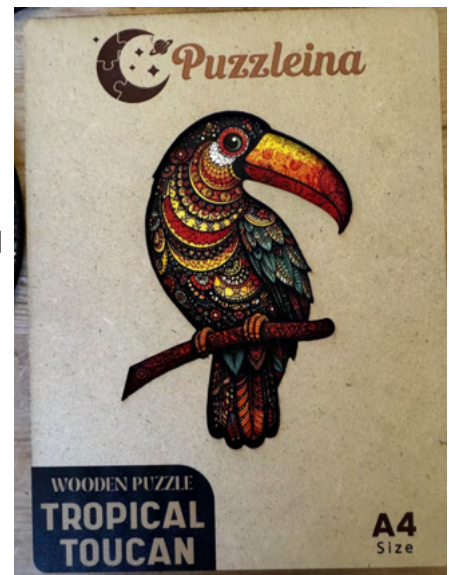
SOMETHING FOR THE...THINKERS

Tropical Toucan
wooden puzzle by
Puzzleina

By Simon O'Nions

I'm a bit of a traditionalist when it comes to puzzles, Jigsaws should be cardboard and 'Wasjig', and they should only come out at Christmas as an excuse not to talk to each other but to complete a picture that has no relevance to anyone. So I surprised myself a little when I saw this 'puzzle' and decided to give it a go. I thought that the children (9 and 11) would find it amusing at least because both of them love Toucans!

The excitement was certainly there as the cellophane was ripped to shreds to remove it, and it didn't disappoint. Wooden pieces were a novelty, not flimsy like the cardboard counterparts, thick and nicely painted. We are a family who always starts with the edges and corners, this puzzle made that very difficult as there are no corners and the edges are sometimes just 'floating'. Not all the pieces have bits on them that slot into other pieces, this added to the challenge. My eldest's interest waned somewhat but the youngest, not easy to deviate from a path once on it, sat there for a good half hour finding linking pieces and shouting when she did.



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Evening passed and morning came.... I came down stairs to find said daughter engrossed in the puzzle. She had completed nearly half by now, so I did the right thing, helped her with a few pieces and then left her to it. She was hooked now, so I dare not get in the way of progress. However, I did spend a cheeky 15 minutes after she had gone to bed that evening completing a few more sections. When I came down the next morning, joy had descended, the puzzle was finished and the Toucan looked very good indeed.



As a deviation from traditional Wasgij's this was certainly a good alternative. The tactile pieces added a dimension to the event and the design was sometimes difficult to figure out (this is a good thing where puzzles are concerned!). The only down side for me was it was too small at 200 pieces. The actual size of the finished piece was about A4 as indicated on the box, but I would like to have a challenge of a 1000 pieces as this was completed too quickly and not enough arguments were had over why the dinner hadn't been cooked or the dishes not washed.

Thank you Quill for the opportunity to sit, rest and be challenged in a different way for 5 minutes.

By Agnes O'Nions

It had six animals that fit into the middle of the puzzle. I thought that the puzzle was good because it had loads of tiny wooden pieces and most puzzles are plastic or cardboard. It was also challenging and a bit hard. I didn't like that when you put the animals in when you put another bit in it the puzzle separates where you put it. I liked the patterns on it and the ruffles.

Blazing Fox wooden puzzle by Puzzleina

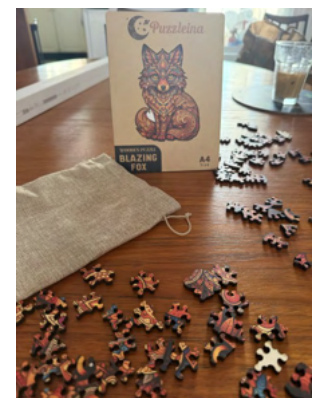
By Jessica Curtis

If you love puzzles, animals or creative designs, the Blazing Fox Wooden Puzzle from Puzzleina is definitely worth a look. This beautiful wooden puzzle features a sitting fox with vibrant fiery colours and eye-catching patterns, making it just as enjoyable to display as it is to build.

One of my favourite things about this puzzle is the amazing detail. The pieces are not just ordinary shapes — some have been cut into adorable designs including trees, birds, acorns, a little deer and many more surprises. These small details make the puzzle feel much more special and exciting as you build it.

The wooden pieces are thick and sturdy, which makes them feel like they are built to last and less likely to break compared to thinner puzzles. The set also comes with a handy storage bag, which is really useful because it means you can keep all the pieces together and avoid losing any.

Another great feature is the stand built into the back of the lid. This means that once you have finished, you can display the puzzle proudly, but it also helps while building because you can look up and see the picture clearly. The stand feels strong and can be positioned in different ways, making it practical as well as clever. Overall, I really enjoyed building the Blazing Fox Wooden Puzzle. It is colourful, creative and different from a normal jigsaw puzzle. I would recommend it to anyone who enjoys puzzles, loves foxes or simply wants a fun activity to spend time on.



There is something special about puzzles — they challenge your brain, test your patience and give you that satisfying feeling when everything finally comes together. Puzzleina celebrates this by creating and sharing puzzles designed to entertain, challenge and inspire puzzle lovers of all ages.

Whether you enjoy solving problems, discovering new challenges or simply taking some time away from screens, puzzles are a brilliant way to relax while keeping your mind active. Puzzleina offers a variety of designs that encourage creativity, concentration and curiosity.

We would like to thank Puzzleina for being part of *The Quill* and helping us discover products that provide a different kind of challenge and enjoyment. Find out more at: www.puzzleina.co.uk



SOMETHING FOR THE...TRENDSETTERS

Lyonsleaf Zinc & Calendula Cream, Beauty Balm and Charcoal Face Mask

By Chloe Wetherall



I have been using the Lyonsleaf Zinc & Calendula Cream, Beauty Balm and Charcoal Face Mask for around five weeks, and I have genuinely noticed a positive difference in my skin.

The Zinc & Calendula Cream has been brilliant for calming irritated areas, while the Beauty Balm leaves my skin feeling soft, smooth and hydrated. The Charcoal Face Mask gives my skin a really clean and refreshed feeling afterwards. All three products feel high quality, with lovely textures that make them enjoyable to use.

One of the things I really like about Lyonsleaf is that their products are made using 100% natural botanical ingredients. They do not use water in their balms, which means they can avoid the need for artificial emulsifiers and chemical preservatives. This makes the products feel much more natural compared to many other skincare brands.

I also love that Lyonsleaf is a family-run business based on a farm in the Mendip Hills in Somerset. Their products are designed to be gentle and suitable for sensitive skin, which shows that they have really thought about the people using them.

The only small issue I had was with the face mask. I didn't read the instructions properly and didn't realise it came as a powder, so when I opened it, I accidentally made a bit of a mess! However, that was completely my own mistake and not a problem with the product.

Overall, I have been really impressed with the Lyonsleaf range. The products feel natural, work well and are made by a local company with a clear focus on quality. I would definitely buy these products again.



Lyonsleaf Natural Skincare Range**By Sarah Baker**

As someone who is always interested in testing out the latest skincare and beauty products, I was excited to try the Lyonsleaf natural skincare range. With its colourful packaging, reusable cotton bag and a focus on natural ingredients, the brand immediately stood out.

The products I tried were the Beauty Balm, Charcoal Face Mask and Zinc & Calendula Cream, also included was an 100% Cotton Muslin Face Cloth. I found that each product offered something unique, especially in terms of its botanical ingredients and natural scents. I was pleasantly surprised that there was no compromise on quality, with products being both effective and environmentally friendly.

100% Natural Beauty Balm

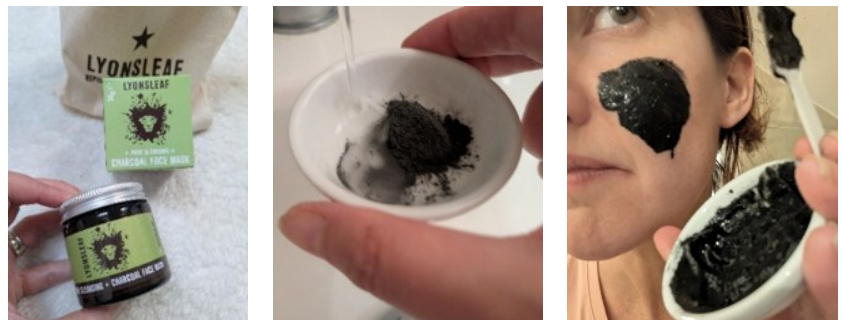
The product I tried first and enjoyed most was the 100% Natural Beauty Balm. This multi-purpose balm can be used as a cleanser, moisturiser and make-up remover, making it perfect if you prefer a simple skincare routine. The balm has a rich, luxurious texture and a calming scent created by ingredients such as beeswax, hemp seed oil and aromatic essential oils.



A small amount applied directly to my face over a day's make-up helped dissolve cosmetics, for easy removal. I found that it was silky smooth and melted effortlessly into my skin. The muslin face cloth came in handy, soaked in warm water to then cleanse and remove the balm and make-up residue. This left my face feeling soft and nourished without feeling greasy. If you enjoy skincare products that feel comforting, natural and have an enticing botanical scent, I would definitely recommend this Beauty Balm.

Pore Cleansing Charcoal Face Mask

Activated charcoal is known for helping to draw out impurities and excess oil, which makes this mask especially appealing if you experience occasional breakouts or oily skin. The mask had an earthy fragrance that gave it a real spa-like feel.



It doesn't come ready to use but only required a small amount of preparation. Just a few little scoops of this powdery product with some water was enough to make a small batch of paste, enough to cover the face. You'll need your own cosmetic dish or mud-mask bowl and spatula (or a non-staining container and teaspoon). After using it, my skin felt refreshed, clean and noticeably smoother. It also felt gentle enough not to leave my skin feeling dry or tight afterwards.

However, the mask was a little stubborn to remove once dried. I also used the cloth provided (with warm water). This wasn't the best idea though, because it left charcoal stains which were challenging to hand-wash from the muslin cloth afterwards.

100% Natural Zinc & Calendula Cream

This Cream was probably the biggest surprise. Calendula is widely recognised for its soothing and

calming properties, while zinc helps to protect and support the skin. The cream was smooth and had a firm texture upon application, but once on warm skin spread out evenly and comfortably, with a subtle herbal scent and a rich texture that worked well on dry and irritated areas. I found it especially useful for calming redness, particularly as I am prone to eczema. It left my skin feeling soft and protected.



100% Cotton Muslin Face Cloth

The Muslin cloth makes a real difference when used with the Beauty Balm. The soft organic cotton fabric provided gentle exfoliation, helping to remove cleanser and dead skin cells without irritating my skin. It also felt much more luxurious than using disposable wipes. It can be washed and reused, making it a more sustainable option. It's important to mention, that when hand washed, there was some stubborn staining from the charcoal mask and eye makeup on it. I would not recommend using the cloth to remove the charcoal face mask. This was rectified by popping it in a normal 30°C machine wash with detergent, which I would suggest as regular practice for also removing any bacteria which could build up on the cloth.



Overall, I found the Lyonsleaf skincare range to be an enjoyable and effective 'pampering' experience. What made the Lyonsleaf range particularly appealing and enjoyable to use, was the combination of environmentally friendly and eye-catching packaging, with the high-end botanical ingredients and comforting herbal fragrances. Each product felt thoughtfully designed and encouraged a slower, more mindful approach to skincare. Although natural skincare products can sometimes be more expensive than high street alternatives, the quality of the ingredients and the versatility of the products justify the cost. This selection of products are from the 'Teenage Skin Care Bundle' priced at £39.99 at lyonsleaf.co.uk

If you're looking for skincare that is natural, sustainable and full of character, I would highly recommend giving these products a try. Rating: (4/5)

My Thoughts: 'A beautifully presented skincare range that combines natural ingredients, botanical scents and sustainable values to create a skincare experience that feels both effective and indulgent.'

Not all skincare is created in a laboratory. Nestled in the beautiful Mendip Hills in Somerset, Lyonsleaf takes a different approach, producing award-winning skincare made with 100% natural botanical ingredients and a commitment to keeping products as simple and gentle as possible.

Instead of relying on artificial preservatives and unnecessary additives, Lyonsleaf creates skincare using carefully selected plant-based ingredients, with many products specially developed for people with sensitive or easily irritated skin. Their philosophy is simple: let nature do the hard work. As a proud independent Somerset business, Lyonsleaf has built a reputation for producing high-quality natural skincare while remaining true to its values of sustainability, quality and honesty.

A huge thank you to Lyonsleaf for supporting The Quill and giving our students the opportunity to review their wonderful products. Find out more at: www.lyonsleaf.co.uk



SOMETHING FOR THE...GAMERS

Custom Nintendo Gameboy
(Console Revive)

By Milo McGhee

Sometimes the best gaming experiences are the simplest ones. This retro handheld brings back the charm of classic portable gaming, offering a chance to experience old favourites in a way that feels wonderfully nostalgic.

The first thing you notice is the black-and-white screen. While it may seem basic compared to the bright, colourful displays of modern handheld consoles, it gives the device an authentic old-school feel that perfectly matches the games it was designed to play.

So far, I have spent most of my time playing Super Mario Land, and it has been a brilliant experience. The controls feel responsive, the buttons are comfortable, and the game runs smoothly. It is the kind of device that is easy to pick up for a quick five-minute gaming session but enjoyable enough to keep playing for much longer.

The build quality is impressive, with the handheld feeling sturdy and well made. The battery life has also been reliable, allowing for several gaming sessions before needing to be charged.

One of the biggest strengths of this device is the feeling of nostalgia it creates. Playing classic games on a handheld that captures the style of the original consoles is a reminder of why these games remain so enjoyable decades later.

However, this is a device aimed at retro fans rather than modern gamers. The black-and-white screen will not appeal to everyone, and the range of games available is much more limited compared to today's handheld consoles.

Overall Rating: 8.5/10

If you enjoy retro gaming or want to experience classics like Super Mario Land, this handheld is a fantastic little time machine. It may not have all the features of modern consoles, but sometimes going back to basics is exactly what makes gaming so much fun.



A huge thank you to Console Revive for supporting our reviews and helping us explore the world of retro gaming. Their support has allowed us to test and feature some amazing gaming products while also learning more about classic consoles and gaming history.

Console Revive is a UK-based retro gaming brand focused on bringing classic consoles back to life with a modern upgrade. They specialise in high quality custom shells, accessories, and upgrades for consoles such as the Game Boy, Nintendo GameCube, and PlayStation. From restored handhelds with bright IPS screens to rare accessories ready to plug in and use, their products are designed for both collectors and everyday gamers. What makes Console Revive stand out is how they combine nostalgia with modern quality and performance. Their goal is to preserve the golden era of gaming while making classic consoles feel fresh and enjoyable again for modern players.

Be sure to scan the QR code included alongside our review or visit the official Console Revive website at www.consolerevive.com to explore their products.



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Trimui Smart Pro S Retro Handheld Game Console (MechDIY)**By Wyatt Titterrell and Seth Middleditch**

The TrimUI Smart Pro S Retro Handheld Game Console is a great little device for anyone who enjoys classic gaming. It is lightweight, easy to hold and has lots of different games available through its many emulators, meaning you can play games from a variety of older consoles all in one place.

One of the best things about this console is how easy it is to use. The controls feel comfortable, and the console does not feel cheap despite being small and portable. The overall quality is really good, and it feels like it has been made to last. It is also the perfect size to take with you, whether that is on a long bus journey, a plane journey or even a summer holiday. It would be a great way to pass the time while travelling or relaxing after a busy day.

The amount of games available is one of the biggest advantages. With lots of different emulators, there is plenty of choice, so you can experience games from different generations. The graphics are what you would expect from older games, but they still look really good considering the type of console it is. The sound quality is also surprisingly good and adds to the retro gaming experience.

There are a few things that could be improved. A touchscreen would make it easier to navigate around the menus, and the menu system itself could be made simpler. It would also be useful if the buttons could automatically match the controls for each game. These are only small problems though and do not stop the console from being fun to use.

Overall, we think the TrimUI Smart Pro S is a really enjoyable handheld console. It is portable, has loads of games and is great for anyone who likes retro gaming. I would especially recommend it for travelling because it is small enough to pack easily but provides hours of entertainment.



Some companies create products you use every day; others create products that help you discover a new hobby.

Mechdiy falls into the second category, combining technology, creativity and gaming to create products for people who love to explore what is possible.

A big thank you to Mechdiy for giving The Quill the opportunity to try out their products. Specialising in retro gaming devices, electronic projects and technology accessories, Mechdiy helps bring classic experiences into the modern world. Their handheld consoles allow gamers to enjoy favourite retro games wherever they are, while their wider range of products encourages curiosity and creativity.

Whether you are a dedicated gamer, a technology enthusiast or someone who simply enjoys trying something new, Mechdiy offers products designed to entertain, inspire and encourage exploration.

Discover more at: www.mechdiy.com



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The Anbernic RG35XX H Console (Gogamegeek)**By Logan Fowler**

The Anbernic RG35XX H is a handheld gaming console with comfortable joystick controls and responsive buttons. Although both joysticks are positioned on the lower part of the console, which can make it slightly uncomfortable to hold for long periods, the buttons have a nice feel and are easy to press.

The shoulder and trigger buttons are placed close together, allowing for quick inputs during gameplay. However, this can sometimes lead to accidentally pressing both buttons at the same time. To improve comfort, the console comes with 3D-printed slip-on handles that make it easier to hold while gaming.

One of the console's strongest features is its battery life. When I left the device on a low battery percentage, it still held a charge several days later. Even while gaming on a low battery, it continued to run for around an hour before needing to be recharged.

The RG35XX H has 8.76 GB of storage and can be charged using a DC charging cable. It features a 3.5-inch screen that provides a good display indoors, although it can be difficult to see in direct sunlight. The console includes between 20 and 27 emulators, depending on whether you access Game Rooms or RA Game. Each emulator contains anywhere from a few games to over 470 titles. Generally, newer systems have fewer available games. Some games appear sideways on the screen, which is still playable but not ideal for a comfortable gaming experience.

The game library ranges from classic systems such as the NES and Game Boy Color to more advanced platforms like the PlayStation 1 and Nintendo DS. There is a wide variety of game genres available, including dungeon crawlers and sports games. The graphics on most games are good, and all the games I tested loaded successfully, although some took a little time to start. I even tested more demanding titles such as Tekken 6, which performed well.

Because there are so many games available, it can take some time to find the ones you enjoy most. Overall, I think the Anbernic RG35XX H is a great console for travelling. At a price of £57.99, it offers good value for money and is an affordable option for anyone interested in retro gaming.



A big thank you to GoGameGeek for supporting The Quill and supplying us with products to review. For gamers who love discovering new technology, GoGameGeek is an online store specialising in gaming devices, handheld consoles, accessories and electronics. Their aim is to bring together the latest gaming gadgets with products that help people enjoy their favourite games in new and exciting ways.

One of their biggest areas of interest is retro gaming, with a wide range of handheld consoles that allow players to experience classic games wherever they go. Whether you are a fan of older games or looking for a portable way to enjoy gaming, GoGameGeek offers products designed for both nostalgia and convenience. Alongside handheld consoles, the company also supplies gaming accessories and technology products for people who enjoy exploring the latest gadgets. Find out more at: www.gogamegeek.com

