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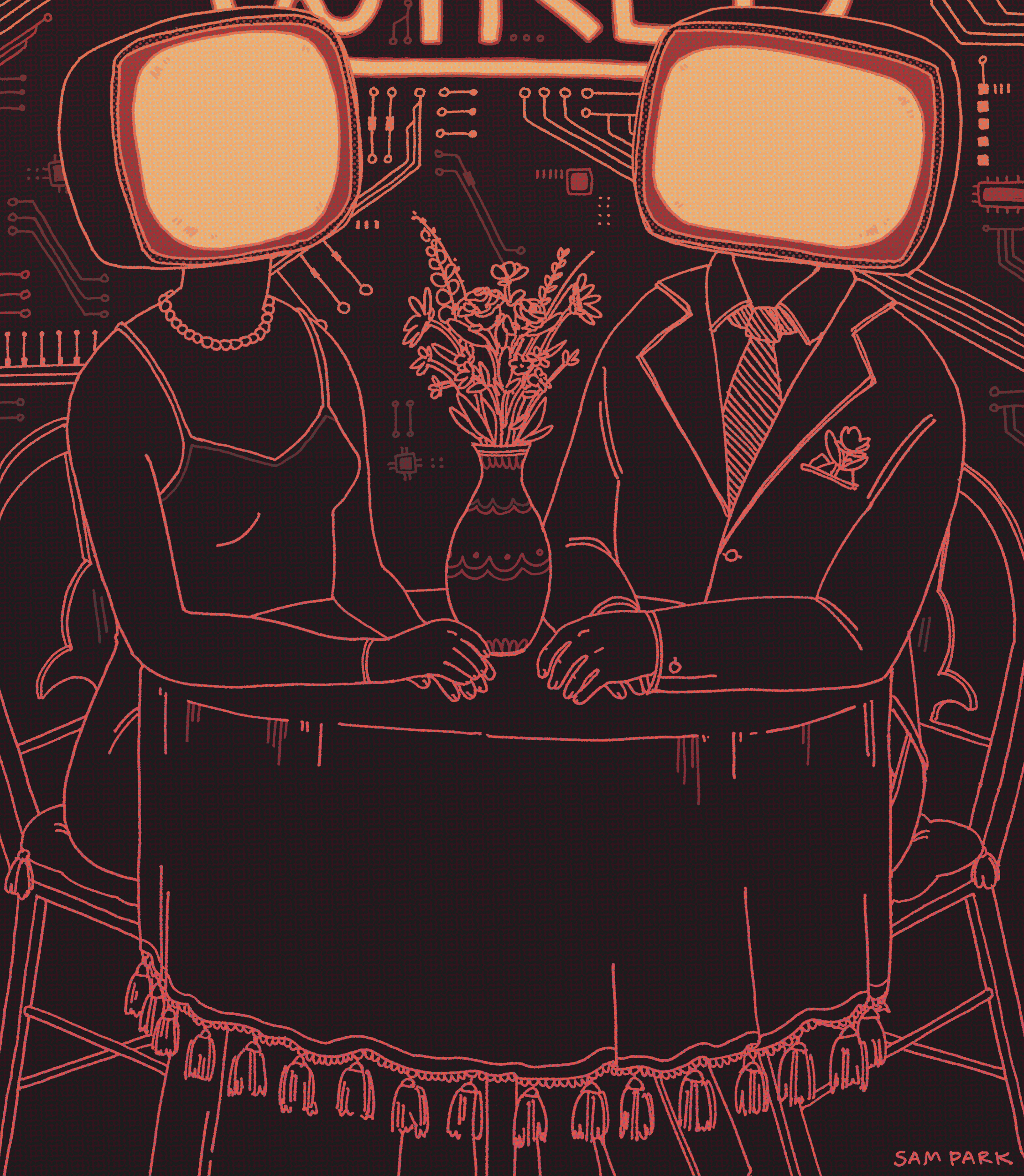
HARVARD

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INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

WIRED



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As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard Independent provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The Independent has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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Harvard University Dining Services Employees Contract Negotiations Remain Unresolved

HUDS workers hope to avoid a strike as contract negotiations over wages and other issues remain unresolved.

By ELLE DU PONT '29

Harvard University Dining Services employees and their union, UNITE HERE Local 26, remain in talks with the University over a new contract. They held two rallies Wednesday, Sept. 16, at 3:15 p.m. and 8 p.m., urging the University to raise wages to match those at other universities in the area, such as MIT and Northeastern.

Because of inflation in the United States, HUDS employees have faced higher rent and food costs, with the Consumer Price Index up 40% over

“He wants Harvard to understand the realities many HUDS workers face.”

the last 10 years. Still, according to several employees, their wages have not kept up with this increase. “I’m so proud to be an employee from Harvard, but at the same time everything is expensive,” Maritza, a Kirkland House HUDS employee, told the “Harvard Independent.”

Some employees have to work overtime or take on a second job to make enough money to provide for their families, Eddie, a Kirkland staff member, explained. Both Eddie and Maritza asked the “Harvard Independent” to use only their first names to protect their privacy. “It’s really tough for all of us. And from what I’m hearing, MIT, Yale, and all these other schools make way more money than us. So we’re behind, and Harvard just doesn’t want to pay,” he added.

Dolores Elías Pérez works in Winthrop Dining Hall and is a member of the contract committee, where he focuses on representing his Spanish-speaking co-workers. “I don’t want to work seven days; I want to work only five days and be able to survive and be comfortable and spend time with my parents and with my family and with my children,” Pérez said. “This is just a small part of my life, but it’s also what I hear from every mother, every father, every child who works at Harvard for what they have to do in order to survive.”

He wants Harvard to understand the realities many HUDS workers face. Two years ago, his father got very sick, and then a year ago, his mother got cancer. “To live here in Boston right now, we have to work seven days, six days, working both nights and evenings, and that means there’s very little time. This has been incredibly difficult this year, because [I] just don’t have the time to share with my mother, and she’s been in the hospital for the past six months,” Pérez shared through a UNITE HERE Local 26 translator.

HUDS workers, alongside UNITE HERE Local 26, started negotiations with Harvard in March, according to Seth Ogilvie, the communications director of UNITE HERE Local 26. However, the union and the University have been unable to reach a compromise, even though their contract expired in June. “The Harvard workers just want a contract on par with MIT. They’re right down the road,” Ogilvie said. “Harvard claims to be the best university in the

world. It’s time for them to show it. They’re not even second or third class to the colleges right around them,” he continued.

Workers at MIT make significantly more, with even dishwashers, one of the lowest-paid positions, making \$33 an hour, Ogilvie explained. At

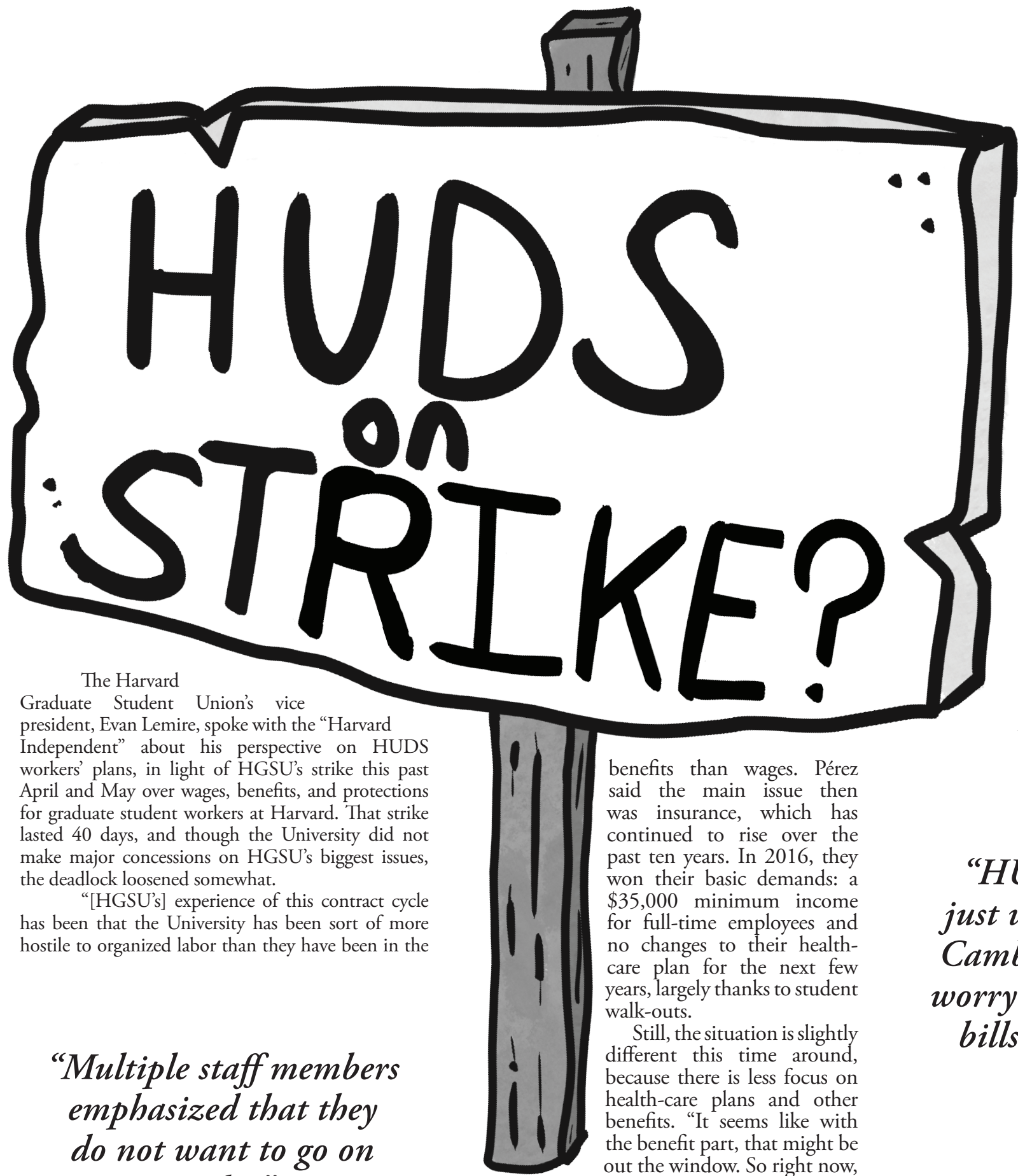
“Harvard Dining Services employees have begun considering a strike in the coming months if Harvard does not respond to their demands,”

Boston University, food service workers earn \$26.86 per hour.

Still, Ogilvie was clear on what the University needs to do. Harvard Dining Services employees have begun considering a strike in the coming months if Harvard does not respond to their demands, Ogilvie explained.

Ogilvie said all HUDS workers are asking the University to match its neighbors’ wages. “MIT has put a pretty easy thing to follow on the table, and if they step up and do what’s right, there’s no possibility of a strike,” he stated. “If they decide that they want to nickel and dime the people that are so crucial to their students’ lives, then the strike might be on the table.”





The Harvard Graduate Student Union's vice president, Evan Lemire, spoke with the "Harvard Independent" about his perspective on HUDS workers' plans, in light of HGSU's strike this past April and May over wages, benefits, and protections for graduate student workers at Harvard. That strike lasted 40 days, and though the University did not make major concessions on HGSU's biggest issues, the deadlock loosened somewhat.

"[HGSU's] experience of this contract cycle has been that the University has been sort of more hostile to organized labor than they have been in the

"Multiple staff members emphasized that they do not want to go on strike."

past," Lemire said. "We want [the HUDS workers] to win the best contract possible. They do such critical work at this university."

Multiple staff members emphasized that they do not want to go on strike. "I'm kind of scared, to be honest with you ... I can't afford it," Eddie said.

"Maybe more than 20% of people don't want to go on strike. But I know that I have to fight for my rights. I don't want to; ... everyone has things, bills like food, everything to pay in the house. Everybody has a different situation, right? But I say, you know what? I have to do it to get something better," Maritza said.

The union will meet at least once more before deciding on a strike, which might come in October, and it will need a majority vote (more than 50%) from the workers in favor of striking, according to Ogilvie.

The strike would be the first HUDS strike since 2016, when it lasted 22 days before the University met the workers' demands. "We had to do what we had to do, and, thank God, if it wasn't for the students' support and a whole bunch of other people, we would have never won," Eddie, who was part of the 2016 strike as well, said.

At the time, Eddie said the workers were focused more on healthcare and

benefits than wages. Pérez said the main issue then was insurance, which has continued to rise over the past ten years. In 2016, they won their basic demands: a \$35,000 minimum income for full-time employees and no changes to their health-care plan for the next few years, largely thanks to student walk-outs.

Still, the situation is slightly different this time around, because there is less focus on health-care plans and other benefits. "It seems like with the benefit part, that might be out the window. So right now,

I guess we're kind of focusing on the money part, one step at a time," Eddie added.

"I think we [were] out there for a month or so, and then they finally came around. From what it looks like now, I think it's gonna be a bigger fight," Eddie said.

Maritza has worked at Harvard for more than 20 years, so she was there during the previous strike as well. She said it also had a large impact on students, since the University cut the menu and sometimes only gave out sandwiches and other food to go.

"From what I know about the last strike that happened in 2016, students complained about, 'Oh, the food got worse. Oh, the people are different.' It's harder to make it to the dining hall, and things like that, which are all very real inconveniences," Luke Tan '28 said.

Still, HUDS workers also saw a lot of student support in 2016. "They show[ed] up to the rallies; they were walking with us on the street. In that time it was amazing how they [were] with us. They [came] into the dining hall, they brought food from here and [brought it] to us," Maritza said, tearing up. "They're so cute. They bought pizza and [brought it] to us."

They remain hopeful that student support will be there this time around as well. Both Eddie and Ogilvie emphasized how critical student and parent support is to getting the University to listen to their demands. Some students, like Tan, have sent out emails telling other students about the upcoming rallies. Other ways to show support include attending rallies, emailing Harvard

administration, and encouraging parents and families to speak up.

"We just hope we don't have to go on strike to make a statement like we did before in the past," Eddie said.

HUDS workers just want to live in Cambridge without worrying about their bills every week, according to Pérez. "Our goal is to make sure that we are heard and that Harvard understands that we really need what we are asking for and what the other universities are making in the area. This is about our lives and what we need to survive," he said. Their campaign is about making sure that the University knows what these workers are worth and appreciates what they do.

"The Harvard experience is what happens in those residence halls, and a lot of that comes

"HUDS workers just want to live in Cambridge without worrying about their bills every week,"

from the workers that ... have more touchstone with students than professors do because they see them every day," Ogilvie said. The goal of the negotiations is to see HUDS workers' value reflected in what they are paid. "These are the people that really make Harvard Harvard, and I think it's time for the administration to realize that."

ELLE DU PONT '29 (EDUPONT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT."

GRAPHICS BY CLARA LAKE '27 & LINDEN MCCARL '28

Dodo Birds in Boston?

A conversation with Dr. Andrew Pask on the company working to bring back some of the world's most iconic extinct animals.

By KALVIN FRANK '28



n GPS: Jurassic Park ... in real life?"

"I Have Something to Say: 'Khaleesi' Is a Bad Name for a De-Extincted Dire Wolf."

Since it was founded in 2021, Colossal Biosciences has found itself in the headlines. The company claims to be "the most prominent name in de-extinction," a practice that seeks to bring back animals that once called habitats around Earth home. Today, people often recognize the dodo bird, the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger), and the moa as animals lost to history—but Colossal sees a future where these animals can return.

"Today, people often recognize the dodo bird, the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger), and the moa as animals lost to history—but Colossal sees a future where these animals can return."

Harvard professor and geneticist Dr. George Church founded the company with entrepreneur Ben Lamm in 2021. Since it started five years ago, the company has reached a valuation of over \$10.3 billion, after its most recent fundraising round. Although the company is based in Dallas, it also operates two labs in Boston—including Church Lab at Harvard—and one at the University of Melbourne.

Amid the growing publicity around the company, the "Harvard Independent" spoke with Colossal's Chief Biology Officer, Dr. Andrew Pask. Pask officially joined the company in 2025 after previously serving in an advisory role. He has dedicated much of his research to the thylacine, publishing the animal's full genome in 2017. Now he oversees global developmental biology strategies across all de-extinction projects.

Even with his role overseeing the company's biological work, Pask spoke specifically about his continued passion for de-extincting the thylacine, a passion that brought him to Colossal. "So we annihilated [the thylacine], and now that entire ecosystem is collapsing. So all the species [in Tasmania] are now moving through various stages of becoming endangered or critically endangered," he explained.

In Tasmania, Australia, over 650 plant and animal species are considered "threatened." Colossal argues that because Tasmania and other parts of Australia lost their "apex predator," the ecosystem's balance has been disrupted. Experts often call this phenomenon "trophic downgrading." Specifically, in regions where the apex predator has been lost, "cascading" negative effects ripple through lower levels of the food chain. In the case of Tasmania, Colossal points to the emergence of Tasmanian devil facial tumor disease as an example of this concept.

"They have emerging strange diseases because you don't have an apex predator. That's really important for maintaining balance in those ecosystems, and so we know that we're going to lose a lot more species if we don't have this [animal] back in its niche," Pask said.

Colossal certainly has made massive inroads into de-extinction. However, roadblocks still exist:

one of the biggest is genome engineering. "We have to be able to edit genomes en masse. We're talking thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of edits that we need to make concurrently, so that we can re-engineer a lot of these really complex genomes that we're trying to rebuild," Pask said. "That's something that George Church has been an absolute pioneer in. So he has been really driving the field of multiplex gene editing."

The other companies in the multiplex gene-editing space are mainly in the pharmaceutical industry. Colossal outlines other companies researching and working in de-extinction; however, other businesses, such as Boyalife and Collectis, pursue de-extinction and work on animals as a division of their companies or as an application of their technologies. George Church and the team at Colossal have been major drivers of this niche of gene editing.

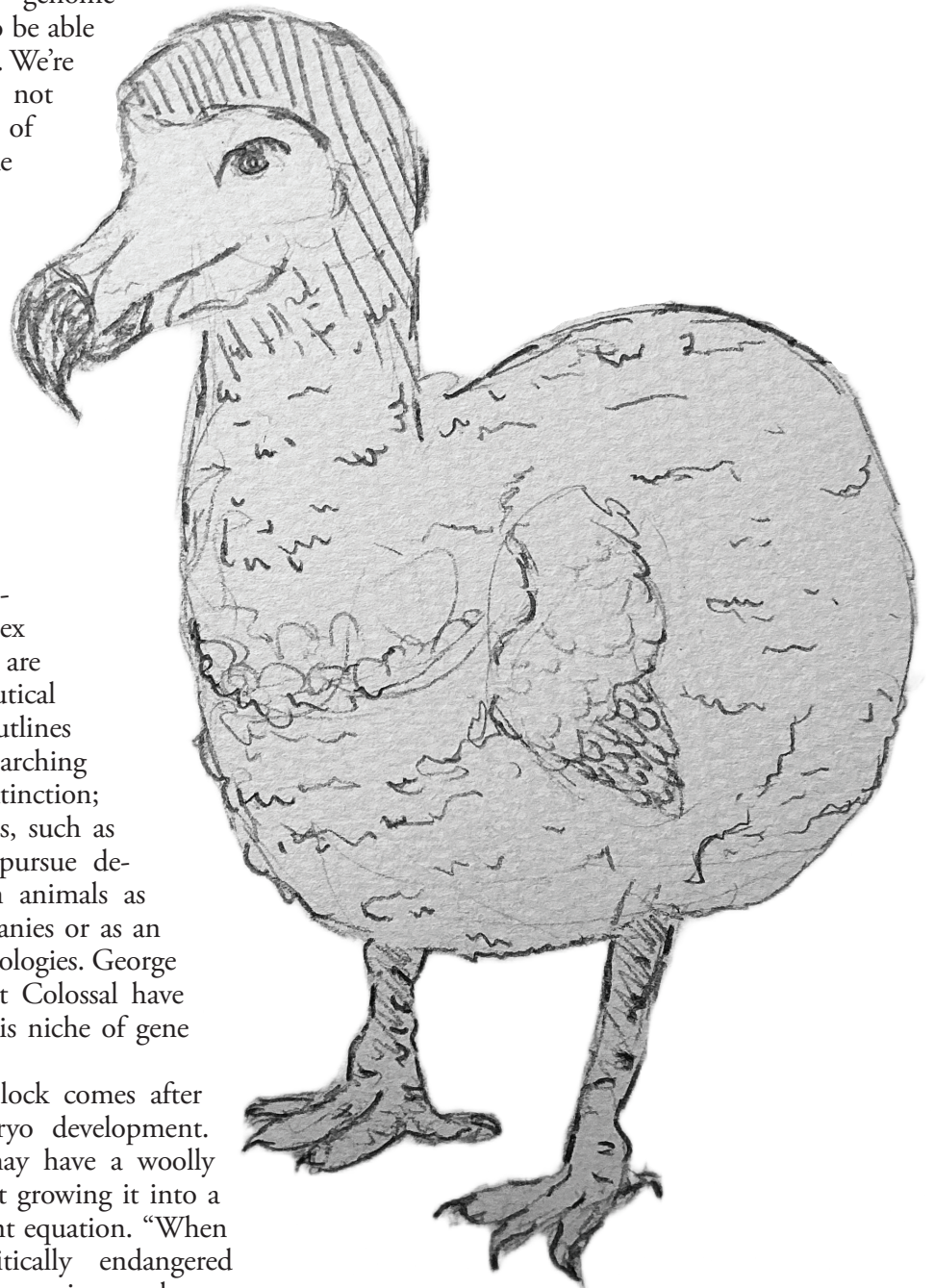
The other roadblock comes after the genetic stage: embryo development. For example, the lab may have a woolly mammoth specimen, but growing it into a living animal is a different equation. "When we're working on critically endangered species, you're not always going to have a

"Colossal identified the cane toad's native habitat in South America and deduced the genetic modification that allows its natural predators to consume it without reacting negatively to the toxin."

good surrogate animal that you can use to generate your particular animal that you want to make," Pask explained.

"And so if we can do artificial wombs, that would be enormously helpful and beneficial for conservation science," he continued. "It's incredibly complex, the way that an embryo develops inside a uterus. Most animals have a very complicated placenta structure that has to really embed into the uterus where it's getting nutrients and blood supply from mum."

The applications of creating an artificial womb go far beyond the realm of de-extinction and endangered animals. "Things like preterm birth are a big issue that we have in humans—and the outcomes for those babies that are born very prematurely [are]



not great," Pask shared. "If we could improve how we would be able to put those babies, not into a humidity crib, but into an artificial womb to continue their development, there's a lot of applications that you could have for that particular technology."

Different birth methods exist across animal species; most of the projects on Colossal's website that would require artificial gestation fall into three types: placental mammals, marsupials, and oviparous species. First, placental mammals would utilize an artificial womb, which, as Pask discussed, often requires long development periods. Second, marsupials would also use an artificial womb; however, because their gestation period can be as short as two weeks (before moving to a pouch), the artificial wombing process may be easier. Last are egg-bearing species, for which Colossal announced a breakthrough on May 19, 2026, when they successfully hatched 26 healthy chickens.

Despite the benefits Colossal claims for its technologies, many critics still ask why the company receives such significant funding as today's animals move towards extinction. In 2017, when Church's lab announced its ability to de-extinct the woolly mammoth, David Schulz in the "Science Journal" pushed back on the plan.

"The cost of caring for a population of resurrected mammoths, for instance, should be similar to the cost of caring for the endangered Asian elephant," Schulz wrote. "The approach completely ignores the large up-front cost of developing and using the genetic and biological technologies to actually resurrect the species."

Pask questioned why focusing on endangered versus extinct animals needed to be a choice. “This is not an either-or. This is an and situation,” he said. “The work that we do for de-extinction science is building new tools that

“While many large-scale projects have five- to 10-year timelines, Pask said others with closer relatives will come sooner.”

we need to save those species on the brink of extinction, and we’ve never had the funding and the critical mass to develop those tools before.”

Pask continued by giving an example of how their biological work on extinct marsupials has supported efforts with endangered ones today. Pask spoke specifically about their efforts to save the endangered northern quoll, a small marsupial about the size of a large rat. “We developed really refined technologies for genome engineering in marsupials,” he said. “That’s something that we need to do to rebuild the genome of [the thylacine], but an immediate conservation application of that is with the northern quolls. So that is a species of marsupial that is one of our most critically endangered.”

“But when we look at why they’re dying, they’re dying because [humans] introduced a pest species called the cane toad into Australia. It’s a toxic toad species. Our animals have no defense against them. They eat the toad, and [animals such as the northern quoll] just die.”

Colossal identified the cane toad’s native habitat in South America and deduced the genetic modification that allows its natural predators to consume it without reacting negatively to the toxin. “It turns out it’s one single nucleotide in a three-gigabase—a three billion base pair—genome that you need to change to give that animal then cane toad toxin resistance,”

he continued. “It’s a single edit that we can make to save a species, and that’s a tool that we wouldn’t have had if we weren’t working on de-extinction science.”

Colossal Biosciences has multiple well-publicized plans, but many do not include a specific timeline. Pask uses the familiar thylacine to show what Colossal’s de-extinction future could look like. “The closest living relative to the Tasmanian tiger has about four and a half million differences in its genome to the Tasmanian tiger genome,” he explained. “We’re predicting it would take around 10 years to make all of those edits. But that technology is improving all the time, so we’re working on ways of really scaling that up.”

Pask also brings up the woolly mammoth as a case on the other end of the spectrum; it has a less complicated genome, but the development is much more challenging. “Asian elephant[s] and Mammoth[s] are actually really closely related. In fact, the Asian elephant is more closely related to mammoths than it is to African elephants, which is a mind-blowing statistic, right?” he asked. “Gestating a mammoth takes 22 months. You’ve got to have a herd of elephants that you can transfer embryos into. We don’t understand an enormous amount of reproductive biology in elephants.”

While many large-scale projects have five- to 10-year timelines, Pask said others with closer relatives will come sooner. Pask explained that projects such as the dire wolf and the bluebuck require far less genome editing and could be born through surrogacy with closely related animals.

Smaller projects like the dire wolf, Pask explained, are more of a proof of concept for other work than projects slated for release into the wild. “We’ve got the three dire wolves at the moment, but the real application of that technology was for red wolves, so they’re the most critically endangered wolf population in the world from North America, and we knew that they were really struggling with genetic diversity,” Pask explained. “This was a way of conserving red wolves and developing new technology for canidae species that had never been developed before.”

Colossal Biosciences is certainly on the radar of geneticists, biologists, and investors alike. Meanwhile, for students at Harvard, it may be just another lab on campus making huge inroads into a scientific field they have never heard of. “Harvard has been a massive innovator. George’s lab, like I was

saying before, in multiplex genome engineering, in large-scale DNA synthesis,” said Pask.

However, for Jurassic Park fans, there is no hope for a dinosaur-filled future.

“I love Jurassic Park, but there’s no DNA left in dinosaur bones, so it just doesn’t last that long,” Pask explained. “Well, they’re all fossils anyway, right? But there’s no DNA there, so there’s no way to use this technology to de-extinct a dinosaur, unfortunately.”

Despite Pask’s explanation that there is no future for dinosaur de-extinction, the team

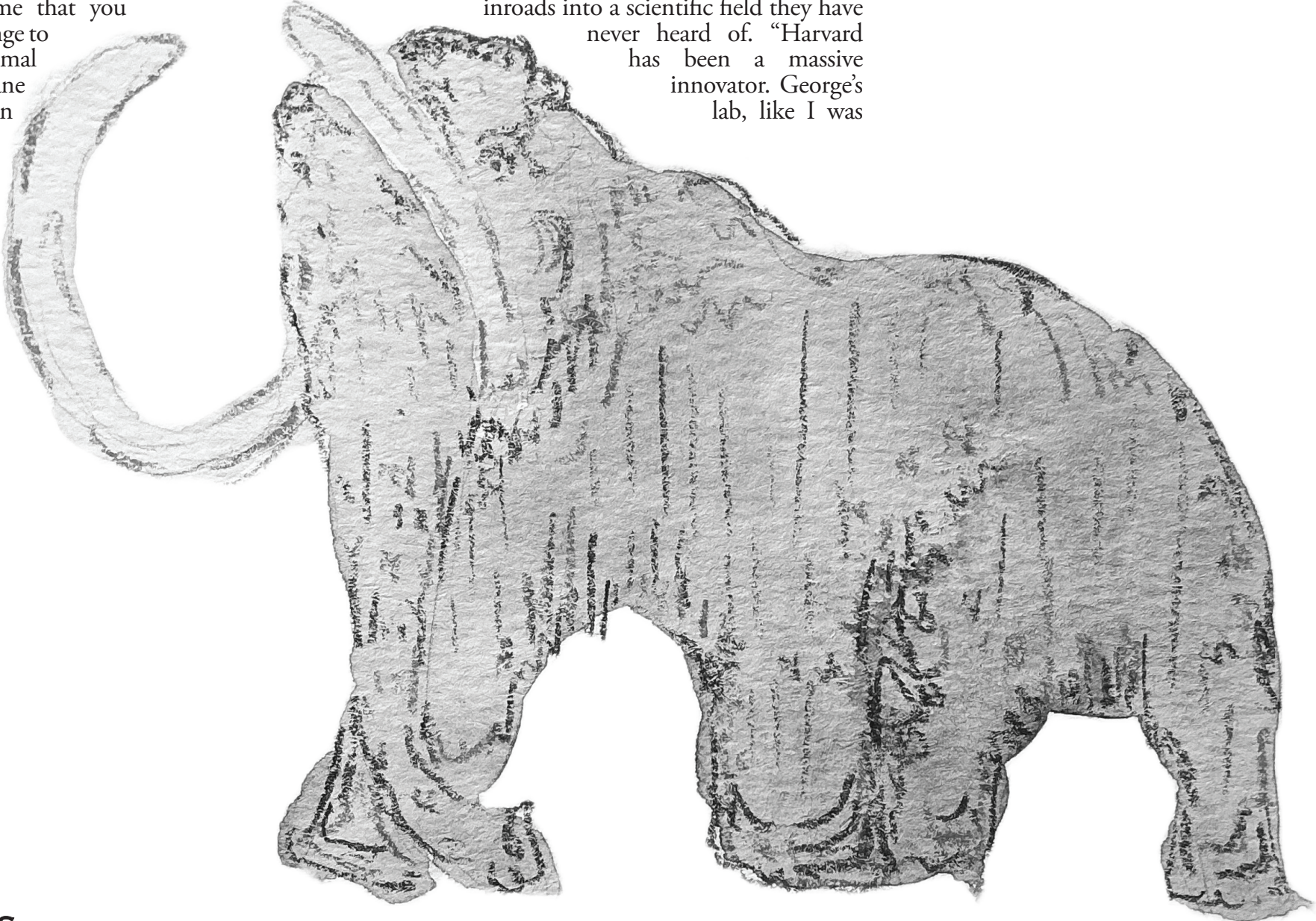
“However, for Jurassic Park fans, there is no hope for a dinosaur-filled future.”

at Colossal believes there is a future in which the millions of passenger pigeons that once populated the Midwest will fly again, where woolly mammoths can bring life back to the parts of the Arctic that are losing permafrost; a future where humans can “[right] an anthropogenically induced wrong.”

For a burgeoning company, Pask is interested in recruiting young talent. “I think it’s an incredible place for students,” he said. “Whether you’re in the life sciences, whether you’re in computational biology, whether you’re in physics, all of these things are being covered. Engineering, all of these things, are critical to us building these platforms.”

KALVIN FRANK ’28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EXCITED ABOUT COLOSSAL’S FUTURE.

GRAPHICS BY JAMES FOSS ’29



FORUM

It'll Pass

I want you to show me.

By NOAH BASDEN '29

A priest and a worshiper, not of the Christian faith but of the priest himself, sit beside each other in silence at a nondescript bus shelter in the middle

of the night. The worshiper has an interesting name: Fleabag—an odd thing to call a child. (I doubt it is her real name.) The silence is interrupted. She says, “You know, the worst thing is”—she pauses—“I fucking love you.” She pauses again, this time not for effect. Her sheepish smile disappears, and her glossy eyes meet his in an embrace of sorts. How eyes can embrace, I do not know, but in this moment they just do.

“I love you,” she says again, more sincere this time. She really means it. His mouth moves to speak, and those smile lines return, perhaps out of embarrassment. How could she be so naïve as to think her love would move a man of the cloth? “No, let’s leave that out there just for a second on its own,” she says. “I love you.” His hand takes hers, though this time not as a priest to a parishioner. Their fingers interlock, and between blinks he says, “It’ll pass.”

Crushing.

Their eyes dart toward each other and then, just as quickly, look away as if holding a stare would be too much to bear. A man wrestling with his faith. A woman wrestling with her

hopes and dreams on principle. Nevertheless, he walked.

Love is many things, though I, at 20, am not too well versed in its complexities. However, to me, love is difficult; it is painful, filled with concessions and

soul is. So, if you don’t love her soul, but just love her body, then don’t get married.” I can tell you right now that you will be hard-pressed to find a woman who loves a man’s soul more than my grandmother does, and that is the beauty of love.

Twelve years following his passing, it is as if she falls in love with him again every time she visits.

I imagine that she does not feel a cold headstone when her hands rest upon the granite. Instead, she feels her husband’s warm hand.

The warm hand that guided her dancing around the Noncommissioned Officers Club before both their hands were full with two babies. The same hand she held as they watched their children get married, and the hand that held their grandchildren some 50-odd years after they first held her own.

It must be beautiful to be that in love. So, with that, I return to Fleabag. I initially posited that the priest was either incredibly strong or stupid to walk away from what he knew was real love. Thinking about it now, I can only surmise that he is incredibly stupid. A love like that will not pass and may only come once in a person’s lifetime.

“It must be beautiful to be that in love.”

Consternation will pass, doubt will pass; everything but love will pass and, in the grand scheme of things, whittle itself down into nothing. A life without love is a life left unsatisfied, and so, this is all to say: if you are offered love—true, genuine love—in your life, take it. It will be imperfect; it may suck for a while, but take it because it is “as beautiful as a crucifix,” and if it passes, it may never come back again. Choose love if you choose anything in this life, and you will be eternally grateful that you did—that much I do know.

NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES FORUM FOR THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY SAGE WILEY '29

“For nearly thirteen years, she has loved a man who can no longer love her back, and still, her love has never diminished.”

heart. You could almost write a book about it or a multi-award-winning comedy-drama television series—either works.

They make some quick jokes. He gets up to leave but pauses and looks back. “I love you, too,” he says, as a single tear runs down his face. “Okay,” he adds, and turns to go. I imagine she had more to say—words to try to convince him to take off his collar, renounce his faith, and live her hopes and dreams—but she remains silent.

“It’ll pass.” Hard words to hear at any point in one’s life; I imagine, even more so after pouring out your heart at a dreary bus shelter in the middle of the night. “It’ll pass,” he said, and in doing so, he not only denied his love for her, but also her love for him. It takes an incredibly strong man—stronger than I could ever be—or an incredibly stupid one to walk away from his

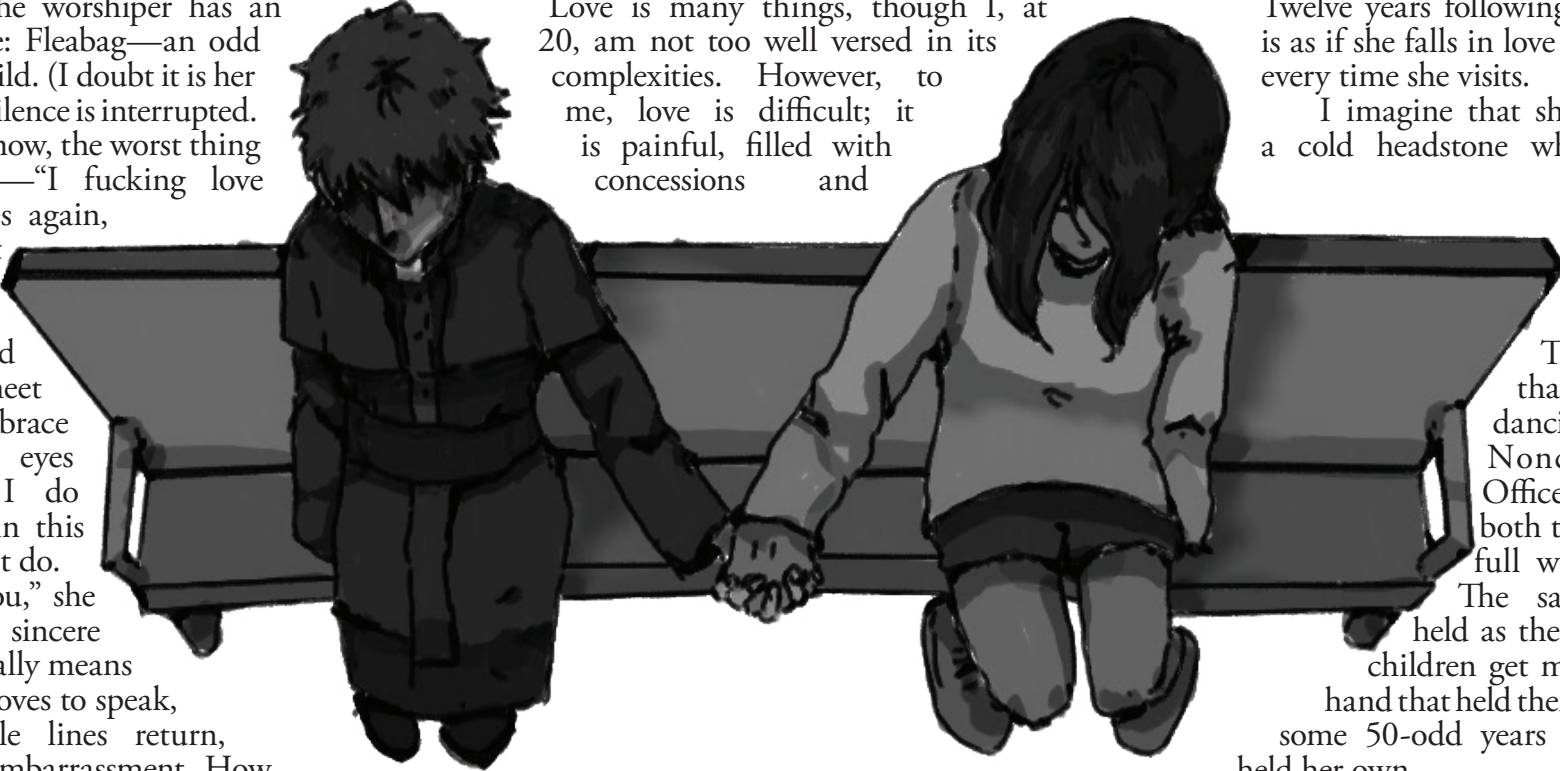
compromises. It is exhausting, but it is rare and beautiful in its existence. I was reminded of love’s beauty while listening to Matt Fradd’s “Pints with Aquinas” podcast. That particular episode’s guest was Boston College professor Peter Kreeft, who spoke about love and the loss of his wife of 63 years, Maria Antoinette Kreeft. Kreeft said, “The last view I had of my wife, about an hour after she died, I fell in love with her again. Here is a wasted, emaciated, wrinkled, suffering body. It’s as beautiful as a crucifix. Because that body ain’t gonna last, but the soul is. So, if you don’t love her soul, but just love her body, then don’t get married.”

“As beautiful as a crucifix.” A love that surrenders all. But let us embody Fleabag’s suggestion: to “leave that out there just for a second on its own.” Kreeft’s words tugged at my heartstrings not only because he described his love for his wife so eloquently, but also because they reminded me of my own life.

I’ve never been able to find language like Kreeft’s to describe the love I have for other people or the love I see in the relationships around me, but I have seen the love he is talking about in action. In particular, in the relationship my father’s mother has with her husband, in spite of the fact that he passed away over a decade ago. For nearly thirteen years, she has loved a man who can no longer love her back, and still, her love has never diminished.

The Sacramento Valley National Cemetery is a serene place. Even the birds do not chirp their usual tunes, perhaps out of respect for the veterans buried beneath their ground or, more likely, because of the distinct lack of trees surrounding the cemetery. Regardless, my grandfather lies in Section Five. “A Patriot to God, Family, and Country,” his headstone reads; truer words could not be said of the man he was.

At 88, my grandmother’s hands are usually shakier than most people’s, but when we visit grandpa, they are completely calm. They reach up to her lips, then rest on his headstone. “I love you, Richard,” she says, her eyes welling up with tears—ours well with hers. It is like Kreeft said: “[the] body ain’t gonna last, but the

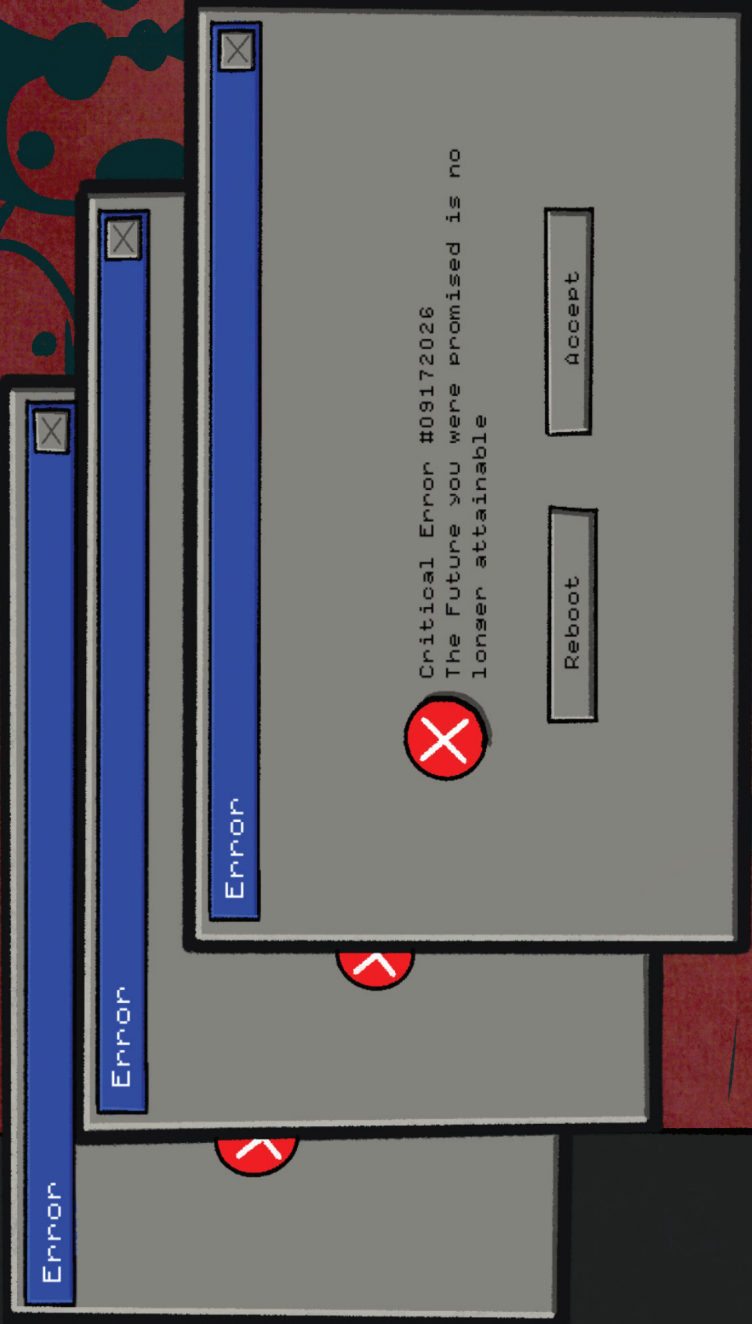




File

To Do:

- Indy Layout
- Finish Centerfold
- Pset
- Pset
- Pset
- Look for internship
- Pset
- Reading
- Pset





Rage Against the Machine

The intergenerational struggle between man and technology.

By MEGAN LEGAULT '28

It was a Thursday afternoon. Perhaps the only cold thing that day was the bead of sweat tracing the groove of my spine as I tried to position a worn-down copy of “1984” to shield my face from the sun. New Mexico’s swelteringly hot summer afternoons, such as this one, are practically unbearable. Even the ice-cold drink I had brought to the poolside had begun to sweat from the outside in, droplets of water falling from the glass as its contents surrendered to an unsatisfying lukewarm temperature. Unbearable, and yet, I could spend an eternity just like this.

Five summers had elapsed since I had first read “1984.” Five years of relationships, both loved and lost. Five years of lessons, both lived and learned. In the five years between fifteen and twenty, I am

“Over half of Americans are not only being told how to think but, more importantly, do not know how to question it.”

both still her, the girl I was, and someone entirely new. Moments of reflection were prompted by the annotations I had littered the text with the last time I had visited its pages. You see, this was not just any copy of “1984”—it was mine. And it had once been hers.

As a physical object, the book records the past. The barcode, which clearly proclaimed that the book was the property of Las Cruces Public Schools Library, was merely a deception. The cover, indented with chew marks from my Belgian Malinois, Duke, and torn from being carelessly thrown into my backpack, showed this book was no longer public property. No, a reckless fifteen-year-old bookworm had purloined it.

The changes I noticed between myself and fifteen-year-old me were subtle at first. I still annotate texts much the same way, despite the “formal” training of the Harvard English department—an intuitive strike of a pen on a page when something resonates. By this philosophy, I can only infer that the passages I left unmarked but would now underline were not untouched because of a lack of training, but because they were not relevant to who I was then. Partly because I had not yet truly entered society—I was fifteen. But also because, in the last five years, the world has evolved faster than I can keep up.

I returned to “1984” after reading an article about how some authors are drawing parallels between the novel and our current political state, saying that it “feels closer to real life than ever before.” The article’s subtitle raises what I think is a valuable question: “Is [2026] the new ‘1984?’”

The five authors who tackled the question had impressions not much different from my own. Most were revisiting the text for the first time since high school. For some of the

authors, high school was decades ago. Yet a common thread emerged in our impressions upon revisiting it. Overall, we agree that the totalitarian society criticized in Orwell’s dystopia once seemed distant, but today it feels too close to home.

While the article largely focused on censorship, each of us identified undeniable parallels between the text and our contemporary world. Political tension, censorship, surveillance, and a populace susceptible to manipulation—all themes that seem to leap off the novel’s pages.

“DOUBLETHINK means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them,” Orwell wrote. Perhaps a modern application of doublethink is that, despite being the most connected society in history thanks to the internet, we still exist in a paradox: divisiveness prevails over unity despite how digitally linked we appear.

In our current political landscape, book bans move through local and national legislatures, restricting what we can read—“1984” is among those on the list. Cancel culture increasingly dictates who and what is socially “acceptable.” At the same time, an article in “The Atlantic” equated the current literacy crisis to a second burning of the Library of Alexandria. This is fitting, given that the National Literacy Institute found in 2024 that 21% of adults in the United States are illiterate and 54% have a literacy level below a 6th-grade level. A well-rounded education equips citizens to question the systems of power that govern. To put this in perspective, over half of

devising to our experience of division is to forcibly close the gaps that exist between us. But what happens when the collateral offered is our capacity for individuality?

I have been given the label of “Luddite”—which I wear as a badge of honor—for my outward disdain of AI. During the Industrial Revolution, the Luddites were a movement of textile workers who destroyed machinery, breaking into factories in the middle of the night to protest the replacement of skilled laborers. The term’s resurgence today suggests an underlying intergenerational struggle between society and technological advancement.

While I have not personally been involved in the destruction of an AI data center (...yet), I tend to align with the sentiment the movement captures: emerging technology often pushes society toward a dangerous end, one that places efficiency and profit above all else.

The implications of this shift extend beyond what we can quantify as market value. By limiting craft

“Intentionality is crucial to preserving some of the most tangible parts of our individuality.”

in all its forms, we compromise cognition. Each of us becomes a cog in a well-oiled, technology-dependent machine. Stifling individuality of thought is not only tolerated as a means to rectify social division, but actively normalized under the guise of “advancement.”

We are in the midst of a cultural shift toward efficiency. In this context, intentionality is crucial to preserving some of the most tangible parts of our individuality.

Sure, beyond its benefits to development, technology has its place. It lets my grandpa and me connect over our shared

love of ’70s rock and western music. But our engagement with the physical world and the active role we take in shaping society ultimately define our humanity.

The scratches on a vinyl nestled within my grandpa’s robust collection reveal, decades later, what his favorites were. The oily finger marks along the edges of a family photograph tell me how cherished a relative I never met was. Maybe someday, my keen ability to ruin a favorite book with ballpoint scribbles and the chew marks of a childhood pet will give my grandchild insight into who I am.

These marks record something fundamental that, above all else, cannot be sacrificed: who we are and what we love.

MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES FORUM FOR THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY CAMERON BERNIER '29

ARTS

A Song You Didn't Ask For

Discovery, by human design.

By ROHAN TYAGI '29

Con Thursday, Sept. 10, a WHRB 95.3 FM DJ played a song that fellow radio member Shahmeer Baqir '29 had never heard before. By the next day, he had listened to it twenty times.

For most modern listeners, finding a new song means opening Spotify and letting the

platform's algorithm do the work. Tools like Discover Weekly, Release Radar, AI DJ, personalized mixes, and a web of tailored recommendations promise to predict what we might like before we press play. This past July, Spotify introduced a beta feature that lets users literally talk to the app about what they want to hear, from requesting unfamiliar artists to narrowing playlists by genre or mood.

"I'll basically just pick a country off the top of my head and do a bit of a deep dive into what's happening in the scene there."

-Shahmeer Baqir '29

Over time, Spotify has become remarkably good at knowing what its listeners like. The company uses billions of behavioral signals, including listening history, to create an increasingly detailed picture of each user's taste. In March, Spotify introduced Taste Profile, which lets users see and directly shape the profile the company has built around their listening habits.

Yet, in an age of convenience, a more organic way to discover music can be found on Harvard's campus.

Baqir is a member of WHRB's Record Hospital, which plays genres like underground punk and indie rock, and co-directs its Jazz department. For his radio shows, he finds music in several places: Instagram, friends' recommendations, and occasionally a self-directed rabbit hole.

"I'll basically just pick a country off the top of my head and do a bit of a deep dive into what's happening in the scene there," he said.

Algorithms can still play a role. After he has built half a set, Baqir occasionally puts it into Spotify and looks at the platform's recommendations. Still, he does not consider the algorithm the foundation of his radio programming.

"I think there's just a lot more information and a lot more intentionality built into it," he said of human DJs.

That distinction is increasingly relevant as Spotify moves beyond simply recommending existing music. At its May 2026 Investor Day, the company described its future as a shift from "curation and recommendation into an era of generation," driven

by what it calls a Large Taste Model trained on the aforementioned behavioral signals.

The appeal is immediately apparent. There is too much music in the world for anyone to sort through alone. Recommendation systems on streaming platforms can sift through enormous catalogs and narrow them down to a manageable number of possibilities. Since its launch, Spotify says that Discover Weekly has generated more than 100 billion streams, while Release Radar reaches roughly nine million weekly listeners.

However, narrowing the scope of possibilities also narrows the potential for discovery. A recommendation system begins with what it knows about you, while a human DJ can begin somewhere else entirely.

Liya Naod '29, WHRB's live show director and a member of Record Hospital, finds much of her music through Spotify and Instagram. The latter has become particularly useful for following Boston's underground music scene, where flyers and show announcements circulate online before bringing listeners together in person.

For Naod, just seeing the same band's name repeatedly can be enough to create curiosity. "It gives a band a lot of name recognition when you see the same band's name on a lot of different flyers," she said.

Naod also sees a difference in what happens when a DJ begins assembling music.

"I think a human DJ can recognize a lot of cohesion in ways that algorithms can't necessarily create," she said. A set can be built around an obscure subgenre or a connection between songs that exists solely because the DJ notices it, a judgment that is hard to reduce to listening data.

"I would prefer to get recommendations from friends," she said.

Her approach points to a limitation that researchers have identified in recommendation algorithms. Personalization can improve recommendation accuracy while making music diversity harder to maintain, creating a potential "filter bubble" in music exploration.

"I think a human DJ can recognize a lot of cohesion in ways that algorithms can't necessarily create."

-Liya Naod '29

Spotify acknowledges that recommendations cannot be built solely on popularity or established habits. The app's human editors curate playlists such as New Music Friday and Fresh Finds, with more than 30 editors working on Fresh Finds alone.

Record Hospital takes this philosophy of resisting popularity seriously by deliberately expanding their discovery efforts. According to Baqir, "there's a listener cap on the music that we can play on air, so we don't play any artists with above 100,000 listeners." The restriction forces DJs to search for music not yet validated by mass popularity.

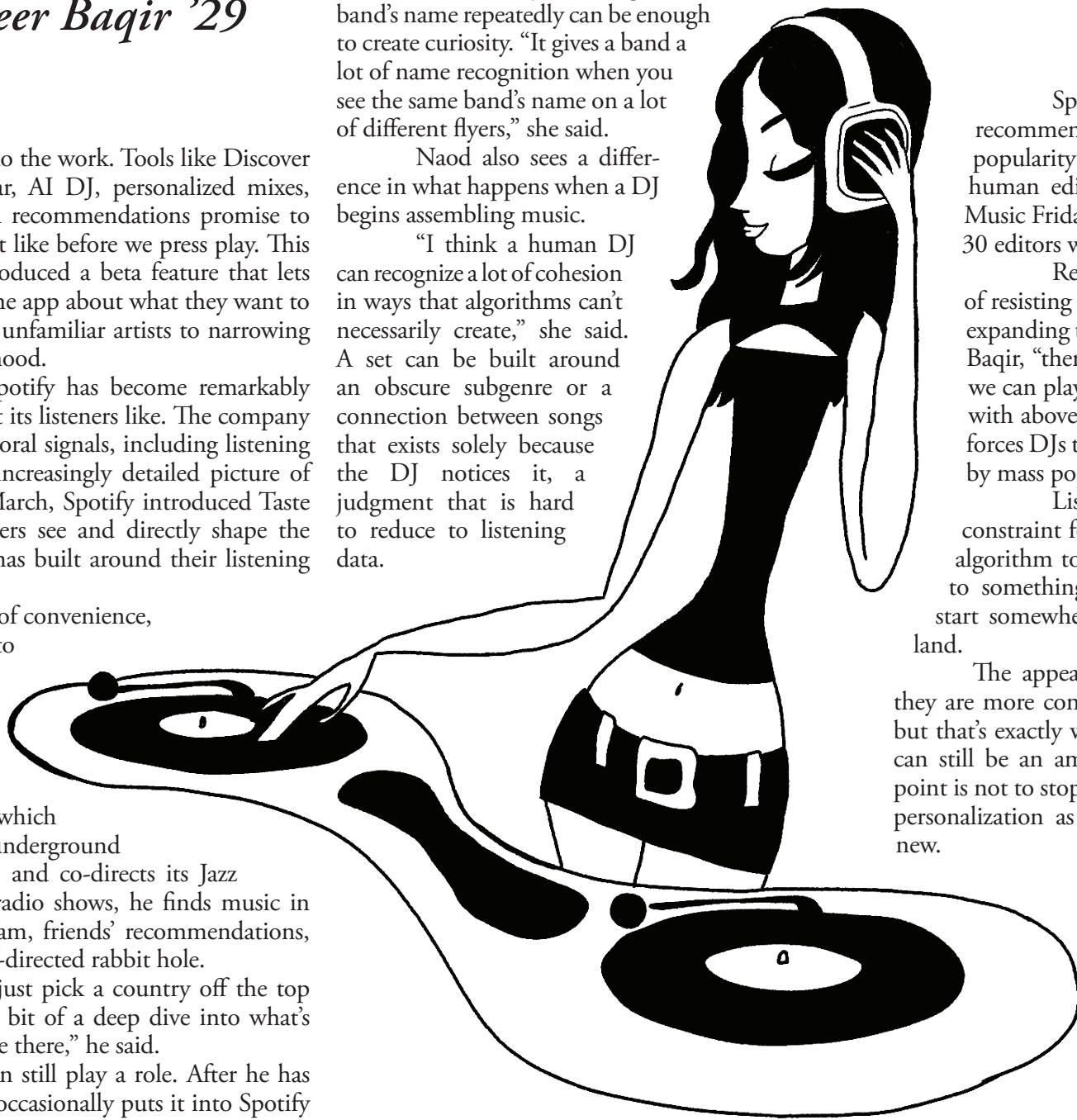
Listeners can create the same kind of constraint for themselves. Instead of asking an algorithm to narrow thousands of songs down to something they like, they can deliberately start somewhere unfamiliar and see where they land.

The appeal of those experiences is not that they are more convenient—they are less efficient—but that's exactly why they can feel different. Spotify can still be an amazing tool for discovery, and the point is not to stop using the app; it is to stop treating personalization as the only way to find something new.

Pick a country and search for its music. Follow a local venue on Instagram. Ask a friend what they have been listening to recently. Walk into a record store without a plan. Turn on a radio station and stay for a song you would not have chosen yourself. The best recommendation might be the one you could not have predicted.

ROHAN TYAGI '29 (ROHANTYAGI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STUMBLED ACROSS TUAREG ROCK MUSIC WHILE WRITING THIS PIECE—HE IS A FAN.

GRAPHIC BY LINDEN MCCARL '28



For Marwa Sahak '29, another member of Record Hospital, this is a real challenge. Sahak hosts "Mideast Emo," a show focused on rock and metal music from the Middle East, a niche requiring her to search beyond obvious recommendations.

"To find rock music from the Middle East has been really hard," Sahak said. She searches social media and asks friends from different countries for recommendations.

Harvard Coffee Recs from a Gas Station Coffee Connoisseur

The complete list no one asked for.

By KALVIN FRANK '28

I am a coffee lover. Most people who say this go on to tell you the aromatic reasons why coffee is amazing, what beans they prefer, the specific grinding method, the brewing technique—yeah, sorry, that’s not me. Let me restart. I love coffee, but honestly it all tastes the same. For most coffee lovers, Harvard is a gold mine of delightful chains and local shops to choose from. Not for me. I am pretty hard-pressed to find a place that will sell me my go-to order: large, hot, black, no cream, no sugar—for less than \$2.

I do enjoy a well-made cup, but it has a specific purpose in my life: to wake me up after an inevitably incomplete night’s rest. This adds an important stipulation: cost. Nine times out of 10, a dining hall provides that cup of coffee for free—

“I do enjoy a well-made cup, but it has a specific purpose in my life: to wake me up after an inevitably incomplete night’s rest.”

cheap, delicious, and effective. Unfortunately for me, when I am far from a dining hall or meeting up with a friend, I sometimes end up buying a \$5 cup from one of these shops. For those who similarly struggle and are unafflicted by taste—I am going to leak my (top secret) rankings.

1. Buckminster’s

If I really have to buy a midday coffee, the best money to spend is naturally not mine. If you looked at my Board PLUS spending, you would probably find that 80% of it goes here. Its location in the Laboratory for Integrated Science and Engineering, right outside the Science Complex, makes it convenient for almost all my classes.

2. Dunkin’

My easy second is Dunkin’. It’s probably the cheapest place on this list, and the coffee always hits. Added benefit: my credit card gives me a monthly Dunkin’ credit.

3. Capital One Café

Sometimes this place randomly has free coffees. As you may have noticed, the top three spots in this ranking are almost entirely about price—because, again, they all taste the same.

4. Flour

Ok, I will include some non-price reasons (but also because the rest are just all expensive places, so I gotta rank them somehow). I appreciate that it is a Boston-based company, and the founder, Joanne Chang ’91, is a Harvard alum.

5. Tatte

The only time I have ever purchased coffee here was with my family (so I didn’t pay). My mom loved the coffee, and I thought it tasted like coffee—but it is still a mandatory stop when my parents visit.

6. Blank Street

Only New Yorkers and California natives go here—hence it is expensive and, in my opinion, performative.

7. Pavement

Middle-tier coffee place; good location, expensive coffee. Good spot to meet people not from Harvard. Also has good bagels.

8. Peet’s Coffee

This is the stuff they serve at the Science and Engineering Complex; why would I spend my own money here? Side note: I still have not found this place; I think my freshman-year proctor recommended it to me. I got lost and ended up in Grendel’s—my bad.

9. Bluestone Lane

I did not know this place was a coffee shop until I researched it for this article. I felt kinda bad leaving this off—might delete later. My roommate said, “best interior, great date spot.” Although that is enticing, I will probably still never attend before graduation.

10. Blue Bottle

Performative. Overpriced. My pickleball partner said his ex goes here. No other explanation is needed.

11. Clover

BRING CHICK-FIL-A BACK TO THE SCIENCE CENTER.

[Honorable Mention] Adams D-Hall Disappearing French Vanilla

If you know, you know. A beautiful concoction of unspecified-source beans, with an incredibly artificial vanilla flavor. Last semester, Adams sent me on a hunt to obtain only the finest beans from El Salvador for this blend. Unfortunately, it seems I have failed, as the coffee has become elusive in the dining hall.

[Honorable Mention] Pierce Hall \$1.25 Vending Machine

\$1.25 away from perfection.

What better way to end this article than to remind everyone of all the great things I could buy with the \$5 I saved by not going to one of these shops to purchase a coffee: I could buy a bedazzler to decorate my d-hall mug; under-eye masks to hide the bags that staying up late writing this article gave me; a cheap frother to froth the non-existent milk in my coffee. You get the point: every day when I walk to class, I might crave a coffee, but this is the internal math I do to support my savings.

You might think I fall under the “broke, frugal college student” stereotype, but honestly I do spend money on things that matter to me. Today, I was hungry, so I bought myself some chips at CVS.

“You might think I fall under the “broke, frugal college student” stereotype, but honestly I do spend money on things that matter to me.”

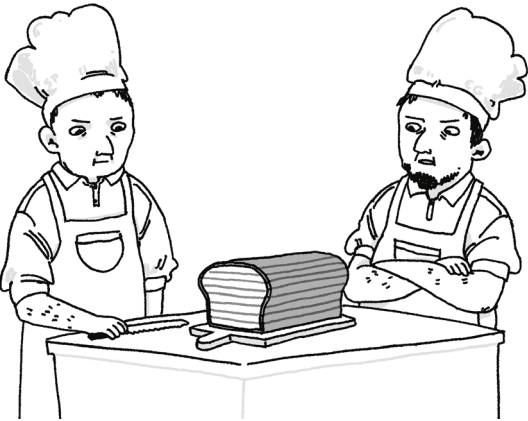
Plenty of experts and articles, in some ways, support my point with the “Don’t buy the latte. Invest the money” mentality. But that’s not really the argument I am trying to make. If coffee shops are your thing and bring you joy, I think there is nothing better to spend your money on. They don’t bring me joy... honestly, they bring me rage. So I will stick to the d-halls and buy as little coffee as possible.

KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) APOLOGIZES TO ANYONE WHO MAY FREQUENT THESE PLACES.

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29

Sliced Bread

By ELLIE GUO '29 & SAM PARK '29



“I think we need to workshop this one.”

A History of Comics

The story of the medium and history's implications for modern perceptions.

By ELLIE GUO '29

To probably no one's surprise, I was a massive bookworm growing up. I credit my parents with taking me to the library every weekend and patiently listening when I read books aloud to them.

They also gave me a love for comics. Alongside traditional novels, I read the pre-teen series "Percy Jackson," "The Adventures of Tintin," and Japanese manga. I remember my dad buying "The New Yorker Encyclopedia of Cartoons," two heavy tomes I spent hours paging through, wondering when I would finally understand the jokes I didn't get yet.

My enthusiasm for comics is far from unique; many aficionados are far more dedicated to collecting and discussing comic books. "Tintin" has

necessarily broader), allowing tight-knit communities to form around the same story.

The power of visual cues is often underestimated, but the effects are lasting—for example, after watching a movie adaptation of a book, one automatically starts envisioning the associated actor's face when returning to the text.

The next step in the comic's evolution is much more familiar to the modern reader: the political cartoon. With Enlightenment ideals of free speech and new engraving methods, artists began combining text and imagery to satirize and comment on society. Political cartoons emerged in Britain in the 1720s, but they caught fire in Britain's American colonies during a time when everyone wanted to criticize everything—the American Revolution.

American students should be familiar with these satirical cartoons in their history textbooks: "Join, or Die," Benjamin Franklin's image of a segmented snake urging colonists to unite, or Thomas Nast's Republican Elephant and Democrat Donkey imagery.

The first "true" comic, as we know it, appeared in Glasgow in 1825, with many familiar elements that would go on to define the medium. The "Glasgow Looking Glass" used speech bubbles and is thought to have christened the phrase "To be continued..."

At the turn of the 20th century, the medium boomed as comic illustrators began targeting young audiences. "The Adventures of Tintin," already established as my favorite comic series, was published in Belgian newspapers starting in 1929 and features a teenage boy reporter dedicated to uncovering mysteries through the press. The comics are full of action and iconic characters: Tintin's sarcastic dog Snowy, the perpetually drunk Captain Haddock, and Tintin himself are all distinctive elements of the series.

American comic artists also caught wind of the new, hilarious format. "'The New Yorker' expects to be distinguished for its illustrations, which will include caricatures, sketches, cartoons and humorous and satirical drawings in keeping with its purpose," Harold Ross wrote in 1925 when he founded the publication.

Though its cartoons were rooted in political satire, "The New Yorker" illustrators also satirized human nature and daily life, often in sexually charged or darkly humorous ways.

A few years later, "Superman" established the superhero comic genre, which has persisted in global pop culture since its 1938 debut.

Here, attitudes toward comics as a medium show obvious tension. From the early through mid-20th century, they were simultaneously pushed as brightly colored entertainment for teens and as illustrations on par with serious journalism.

It would be a disservice to the genre to fail to discuss comics in the Eastern Hemisphere. Manga, a Japanese form of comics, has gained widespread popularity worldwide in recent years. The history of illustrative mediums in Japan is also tied to religion, as the first widespread pictures were created by a Buddhist monk in the 12th and 13th

centuries. As Europeans came into contact with Japan, so did their artistic techniques, including the political cartoon. From then on until World War II, Japanese manga heavily featured political themes, especially nationalist ones, as well as inspirations from traditional folklore.

Japan's defeat in the war led to a decrease in militaristic imagery, especially with the influence of manga artist Osamu Tezuka, who was inspired by American Disney movies and superhero comics. This movement helped the genre become the world's best-selling comic format in the 21st century, surpassing the American-born Marvel Comics.

As in Western comics, subgenres in the Japanese comic industry also carry different reputations. The distinction between "shonen" (roughly translated as "young boy") and "shojo" ("young girl") has led publishers to deemphasize female stories: shojo stories are often seen as frivolous because they typically focus on romance or coming-of-age plotlines—even though they also show complex interpersonal relationships.

Though many still dismiss comics as a juvenile genre, the combination of text and visual art can often tell a story more powerfully than either medium alone. "Maus" by Art Spiegelman is an autobiographical graphic novel about his experiences as the son of a Holocaust survivor. The medium allowed him to use animal heads as a visual allegory for different groups of people without ascribing human facial features. "Maus" was introduced as a comic in 1972 and published in book format in 1986, eventually winning a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. The recognition "Maus" received helped legitimize the graphic novel in the eyes of the public and academics, allowing future comic artists to tell their stories using this hybrid medium.

Comics and related media that combine text and imagery have roots in efforts to mitigate illiteracy, which may explain some of their stigma and perceived inferiority. Nonetheless, artists continued to use and expand the medium for many different uses. A picture paints a thousand words, but a picture combined with a thousand words conveys more detail and emotion than either one alone ever could.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS THE SAME BREED OF DOG AS TINTIN'S DOG AND ALMOST NAMED HER MILOU.

GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28

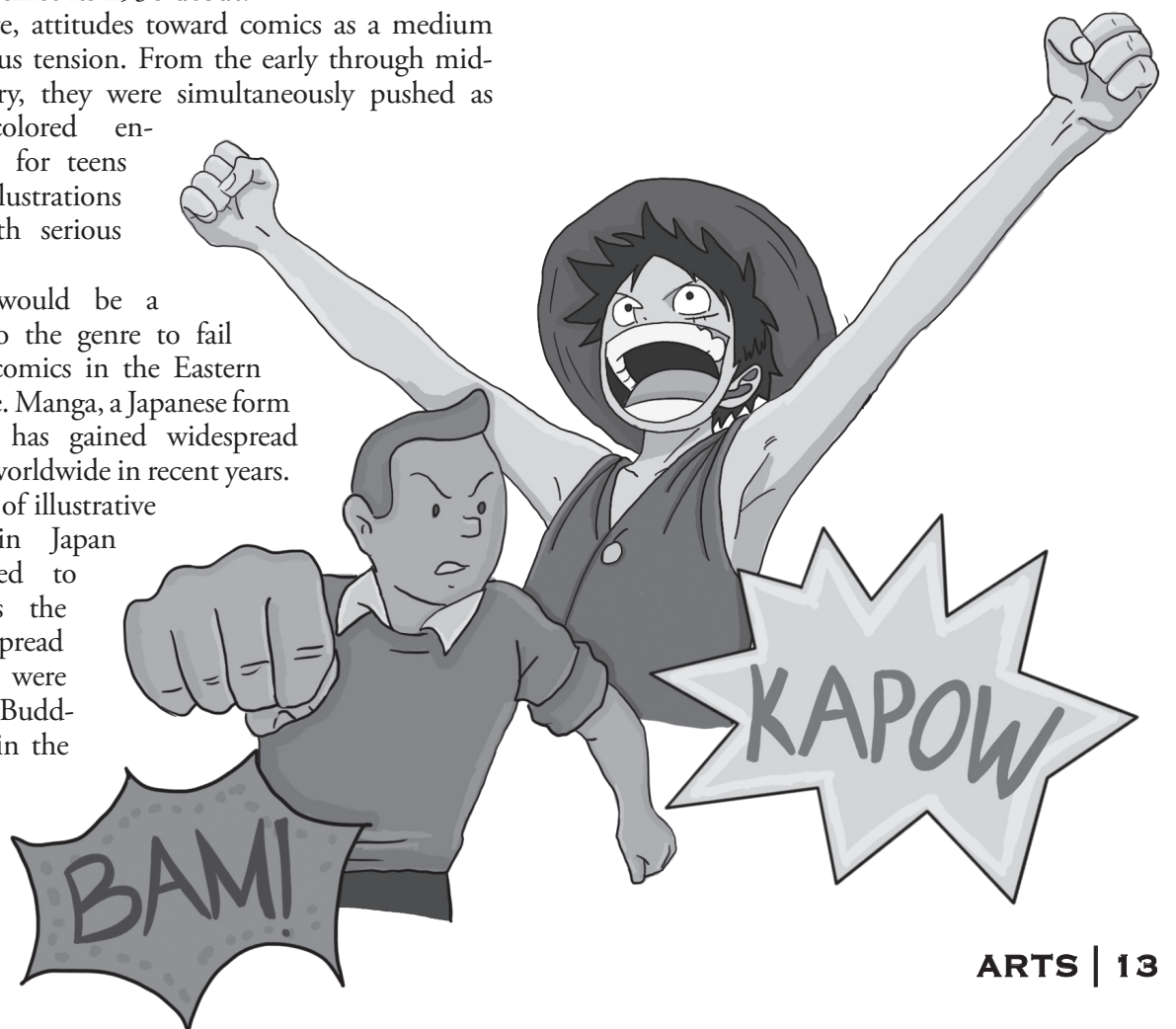
had relatively low popularity in the United States, so I never had much reason—or company—to expand beyond rereading my favorite issues.

At my local library, kids would always swarm to check out classic graphic novels like "Big Nate" or "The Baby-Sitters Club." This often disappointed my elementary school teachers, who chastised my classmates for reading graphic novels during silent reading time and said it didn't count as "actual reading." Reading comics is seemingly more fun and accessible to readers of all ages. This connotation—purely for entertainment, lacking serious content save for the occasional wry societal observation here and there—stems from the genre's history.

The first large-scale combination of pictures and words was—unsurprisingly for the Western world—the Bible. In the 1830s, London mass-printed "The Pictorial Bible." Though illustrated Bibles had existed since the 15th century, none were as thorough as this version, which featured a picture accompanying almost every major scene; the number of illustrations leaped from around 30 to hundreds. Woodblock carvings, which required a huge initial investment in artists, accompanied biblical verses, but advances in printing technology let printers reproduce them quickly.

The goal of such a labor-intensive yet inexpensive Bible was to reach the largely illiterate masses of the time. Though literacy increased significantly in the next hundred years, only about half of England could read at the end of the 19th century. Even for literate Christians, a widely distributed pictorial Bible would have solidified iconography, characters, and settings in the common imagination.

Though the concept of a "comic" had not been invented yet, this biblical form foreshadows the reasons comics and graphic novels became so popular and pervasive as storytelling methods. They not only help readers understand a work's core scenes and themes but also create cohesive interpretations. In turn, this makes discussion smoother (though not



SPORTS

Weekly Sports Preview: September 17-24

Your weekly what-to-watch in Harvard athletics.

By LUCY DUNCAN '28

Football is back! But that's not the only thing happening in Harvard athletics this week. Look out for exciting season openers from tennis to cross country, and cheer on returning field sports as they close out non-conference play.

Field Hockey (3–1)

After a tough home loss to the University of Massachusetts Amherst last Friday, the Crimson field hockey team is back on the road for their Friday 4 p.m. Ivy League opener against Dartmouth. The Crimson have historically dominated this matchup—they have not lost to Dartmouth since 2013 (knock on wood), and their most recent match ended in a 7–0 shutout. The team has shown its strongest defense so far this season, so the matchup will test Harvard's defense against Dartmouth's offense.

On Sunday, field hockey will return to Cambridge to face Northeastern. While the series is close overall, with Harvard holding a 10–11 record since 2002, the Crimson have won their last six meetings. Expect returners Second Team National Field Hockey Coaches Association All-American Sage Piekarski '27 and First Team Northeast All-Region honoree Tilly Butterworth '28 to lead Harvard's offense.

Women's Volleyball (6–0)

This weekend, the Malkin Athletic Center will host the Harvard Invitational tournament, where women's volleyball will play two matches. On Friday at 6 p.m., Harvard will face Providence College for just the third time ever. Though both previous meetups in 2012 and 2023 ended in victories for the Crimson, both teams have experienced a near-total turnover since they last met. Veteran players like Ali Farquhar '27, who has posted career-highs in attacks and blocks this season, will be critical in securing a third consecutive win against an unfamiliar opponent.

On Sunday at 4 p.m., the Crimson will then play Sacred Heart. Another rare matchup, these two teams have not met since 2019. With Harvard holding a 3–2 series advantage and two completely new rosters, this game will give Harvard a chance to fine-tune its systems as it looks to extend its undefeated record. As the last game before Ivy League play begins, this will be a critical confidence builder as the Crimson look to secure their first Ivy League Tournament berth since 2023. Look out for libero Jordan Shelor '30, who has already recorded several aces early in her career—notably, four at Northeastern.

Men's Tennis

This weekend, men's tennis will open their season with their annual Chowderfest home invitational tournament. After finishing as the Ivy League runner-up in each of the past two seasons, Harvard is looking to reclaim contention in conference play. This tournament, running from Friday to Sunday, will bring together teams from across the country, showcase new talent, and give returning players a chance to get back into the swing of things.

Saturday also marks the beginning of the men's Intercollegiate Tennis Association's All-American Championships in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Two Harvard athletes have been named as automatic qualifiers for the singles main draw. Nationally ranked No. 25 Rohan Murali '27 and returning Ivy League Rookie of the Year Nathan Blokhin '29 will be part of the prestigious main draw, while fans can expect Harvard's athletes in the pre-qualifying and qualifying draws to be announced in the next few days.

Women's Tennis

Like the men's team, the women's tennis team will compete in the ITA All-American Championship beginning Saturday. Two Harvard athletes have qualified for the tournament's main draw in Cary, North Carolina. Last year's program leader in both singles and doubles wins, Kavya Karra '27 will compete in the doubles main draw alongside partner Stephanie Yakoff '27, who finished the year as the only nationally ranked Ivy League singles player. Yakoff, who achieved a career-best national singles ranking of No. 49 last year, has also qualified for the singles main draw. Look out for these two powerhouses over the next week of competition as they kick off their senior season.

Football

Football is back this weekend, with the Crimson traveling to Durham, New Hampshire, to face the University of New Hampshire in their season opener. Saturday at 1 p.m. will mark just the eighth meeting between the two teams. Their last matchup, in 2024, was the first since 1939—and the first time in the series' history that the Wildcats scored a touchdown against Harvard. The 28–23 result in 2024 suggests another closely contested matchup. With the graduation of all-time touchdown pass leader Jaden Craig '26, who will spend his final NCAA-eligible season at Texas Christian University, Dante Torres '27 will likely start at quarterback this season. This season opener will be one to watch, as fans can witness Torres' first test as the Crimson's starting quarterback.

Cross Country

On Saturday, the Crimson cross country squad will split its roster between two different away meets: the Indiana State Invite and Dartmouth Invite, with rosters for each to be announced soon. These early-season meets will give fans a chance to see which athletes emerge as team leaders ahead of the

Ivy Heptagonal Championships in October. Keep an eye on Brady Mullen '29, whose fifth-place finish in the men's 6k at the beginning of the month helped Harvard place fifth at the Providence Friar Invitational.

Women's Soccer (5–2–1)

On Sunday at 1 p.m., women's soccer will close out their non-conference play with a home game against the University of Connecticut. Harvard trails the University of Connecticut in the all-time series, with a record of 7–26–1, but the last two meetings in 2019 and 2023 ended in victories for the Crimson. The University of Connecticut's roster is missing some notable names; meanwhile, Harvard is breaking in a new group of goalkeepers. None of the four goalkeepers played a minute for Harvard before this season, with early-season minutes going primarily to newcomer Olivia Busby '30 and University of Georgia transfer Nicole Bidun '29. Tune in to watch the pair settle into their roles before entering Ivy League play next week.

Whether on the field or on the court, at home or away, Harvard athletics has plenty to watch this week. As seniors begin their final season and first-years find their footing with new teams, tune in to support your favorite Crimson sports this week!

LUCY DUNCAN '28 (LDUNCAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES SPORTS FOR THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT."

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28



Buckets of Cash

The rise of sports betting, the illusion of fair play, and the casual dehumanization of fans and players.

By HAFEEZAT GHAFAR '29

n May 14, 2018, the United States Supreme Court struck down the 1992 Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, which had previously established a federal ban on sports gambling. PASPA formerly restricted sports gambling to Nevada and a few states that had applied for exemptions before the act was passed. The Court's ruling, known as *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*, was immediately followed by widespread state-level legalization for recreational sports betting.

Eight years later, 39 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., have legalized some form of sports betting. In 2025, the sports betting industry generated a record \$16.96 billion in revenue, an 11% increase from 2024. Even more shocking, U.S. sports betting and online gaming industries collectively spent \$3.9 billion on marketing in 2025, placing gambling among the top five advertising categories on American television.

The rise of sports betting threatens the integrity, community, and human connection of sports, as profit supersedes connection and competition. Athletic organizations routinely uncover

“The rise of sports betting threatens the integrity, community, and human connection of sports, as profit supersedes connection and competition.”

betting scandals, indicating that the United States must re-evaluate its approach to sports betting and implement new policies, or sports will lose America's trust.

Although sports betting is broadly legal, professional athletic leagues have implemented regulations barring their own players, staff, and close associates from placing bets or altering their behavior in response to bets. For instance, the National Collegiate Athletic Association enforces a strict ban that prevents student-athletes, coaches, and athletic staff from betting on any sport the NCAA sponsors at any level. The NCAA uses a multi-tiered approach

across collegiate sportsbooks, betting sites, and law enforcement to prevent and detect integrity concerns. Players themselves are monitored for behavior that indicates betting, including checking phones during the game or flaunting large amounts of cash on social media.

However, history has routinely shown that where there is money to be made, there are rules to be broken. For instance, before the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, millions of Americans, crime syndicates, and business owners systematically broke the law by manufacturing, smuggling, and selling alcohol. Prohibition was a significant failure because although manufacturing and selling alcohol was illegal, consuming it was not. Americans exploited this loophole, while organized crime and widespread corruption flourished as a result. A similar pattern appears in sports betting, where illegal activity persists.

In 2024, the National Basketball Association banned Toronto Raptors player Jontay Porter for disclosing sensitive information to bettors, altering his performance in at least one game, and betting on NBA games. Porter earned \$21,965 in net winnings from 13 personal bets on NBA games through an associate's account. NBA commissioner Adam Silver affirmed his intent to uphold the “integrity of the competition” despite egregious violations of the NBA's gambling policy. Evidently, the NBA wants to protect the fan experience and the values on which the organization was founded. However, a troubling question arises when you compare Porter's betting earnings to the \$2,809,727 he made during his professional career. If professional accolades and large salaries are not enough to deter athletes from violating sports-betting rules, what is?

Regardless, such scandals are becoming more common.

In 2025, the NCAA revoked the eligibility of six players across several college institutions after an investigation found the student-athletes guilty of sports-betting violations. In June 2026, former NBA players Malik Beasley and Ed Davis were charged in connection with gambling schemes involving in-game performance.

Although players and staff sign contracts to follow the league's rules, face internal investigations, and receive league-specific punishments, sports betting cases often enter federal territory, highlighting the lengths individuals will go to violate restrictions. Match-fixing, contract fraud, and extortion fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which also has a specialized unit called the Crime and Corruption in Sport and Gaming program to investigate sports gambling. The Department of Justice also handles arrests and criminal indictments. While robust enforcement is good, prevention should be the ultimate goal.

Beyond violating laws, these cases threaten the drama of fair competition in sports. Sports games are exhilarating precisely because the outcome cannot be predicted. Major upsets and wins are central to being a fan. When fans cannot trust that a fall, missed basket, or failed play is genuine, the reciprocal trust between fan and team is violated. Fans lose faith at every level: players, teams, and entire organizations.

America is already in a trust crisis. At the economic, political, and social levels, trust is becoming increasingly scarce. Low public confidence in the government to act appropriately is leaking into other areas of public life, including sports. For instance, NBC found that 70% of Americans believe that betting “lessens the integrity of the game.” The United Nations also states that sports corruption erodes public trust and diminishes engagement and support. At their core, sports inspire deep loyalty and dedication. Fans can spend their entire lives committed to one team. When trust is violated, fans' sense of community is shaken, and the social fabric of camaraderie is torn.

Although sports organizations want to project an image of fair play, they also reap the financial rewards of encouraging betting. For example, although the NBA has strict consequences for athletes who bet, the organization made upwards of \$160 million from sports betting. The issue with betting can be compared to a devilish bargain: these organizations can profit from betting while accepting the risk of scandals and rule violations. However troubling this may seem,

“When trust is violated, fans' sense of community is shaken, and the social fabric of camaraderie is torn.”

athletic organizations do not seem likely to reject this money anytime soon. This is especially worrying because it affects fans, who are both victimized by the misconduct and play a role in the bargain itself.

Experts have argued that more than losing trust, athletic organizations can eventually lose entire fanbases. Passionate fans morph into fervent bettors, with less interest in sports itself than in gambling. For these viewers, there is no difference between watching American basketball and Chinese ping-pong as long as they make money. This trend is already apparent.

For instance, the NCAA has found that the rise in betting has adversely exposed young players to increased social and psychological abuse from frustrated bettors. In fact, the organization has launched its “Draw the Line” campaign to educate student-athletes about the risks of sports betting and combat online harassment and abuse from angry bettors. With the surveillance of modern-day sports, in which every movement of a player's performance can be scrutinized, athletes, whether new to the sport or seasoned veterans, must navigate increasingly complex environments.

Sports betting implicates fans, who come to see players not as dedicated athletes but as sources of income. Sports become a spectacle of dehumanization with decreased passion and connection.

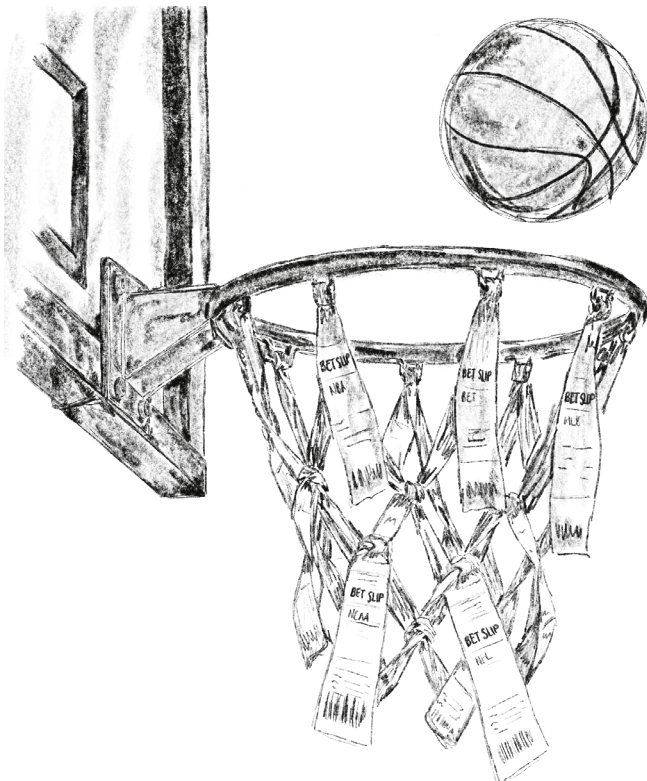
Beyond prosecuting individual players, the federal government and athletic organizations must reevaluate their relationship with sports betting platforms to ensure the sport and its players remain the top priority. Can the NBA tout the spirit of strict guidelines while partnering with sports betting platforms DraftKings and FanDuel? Can the federal government rely on enforcement alone when history has shown otherwise? Similar questions will only increase as the sports betting industry grows.

As sports betting becomes more prevalent in the United States, fandom is changing. Therefore, how American society approaches what it means to watch and support a sport must also change.

If increased corruption and online abuse are the price of sports betting, the cost to social health and shared identity is too high.

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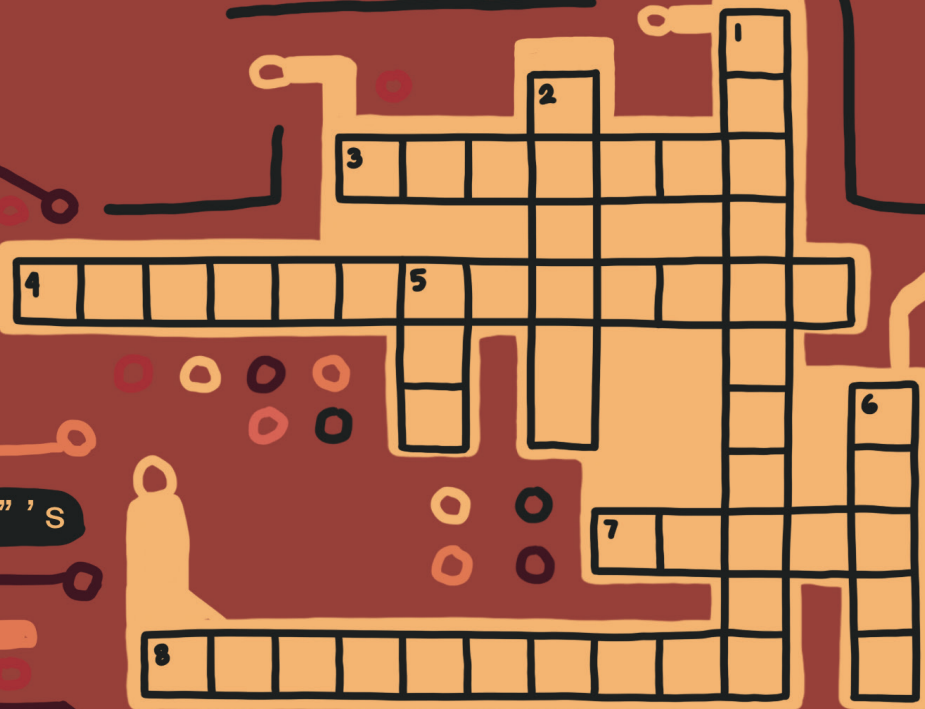
ON THE GRID

ACROSS

- 3. microsoft’s ai companion
- 4. tech hub of california
- 7. samuel lee of “single’s inferno”’s career, abbr.
- 8. jobless

DOWN

- 1. primary circuit component of a pc
- 2. something made of two parts?
- 5. classification for bored ape and cryptopunk pieces
- 6. primary apple macbook processor before 2021



Rania Jones
Mia Park Tavares