



# the Reckoner

of Marc Garneau C.I.

NOVEMBER 2022



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# NEWS BOARD

A board to keep the student body informed about their school and local community.

## Student Leaders Assemble: MGCI's First Student Leadership Day

by STEPHIE LIU

A crowd of over fifty students, consisting of club presidents, vice presidents, homeform representatives, and other student leaders, stood outside the library at Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute on 12 October, each waiting patient-

ly for their turn to enter before the morning bell rang. These students attended the first MGCI leadership training day, organized by the Student Activities Council advisors, Ms. McCalla and Ms. Yamashita.

The Student Leadership Day was

an all day event organized to give students a chance to improve their leadership skills, explore social justice and equity topics, and identify ways they can be more welcoming and inclusive of their peers. "I think it was important for all the student



Photograph: Jaime Yamashita



leaders to be able to gather together in person for the first time and learn about ways to be more effective leaders at the school and reflect on ways that they can ensure that what they're doing is inclusive of all students," said Ms. McCalla.

To kick-start the event, guest speakers from One Voice One Team (OVOT), a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering youth, were invited to speak to the students and host interactive activities targeted towards building leadership skills. To break the ice, OVOT introduced short team building exercises where students worked together in different groups to complete challenges like creating the letter H using their bodies, and organizing themselves by birth month in silence. "It was a lot of fun," said Enoch He, the co-president of MGCI Physics Club. "The activities were really engaging, and we got to collaborate with several other leaders."

Students were split into teams, each assigned to one of the OVOT leaders and participated in a variety of small group activities. The first activity was a pattern-guessing challenge, where team members had to guess the correct sequence.

After successfully decoding the sequence, the OVOT leaders held group discussions offering students the chance to speak about their leadership experiences and role models, as well as holding a short lesson about how to achieve excellence, with the help of the acronym SWOLE—self-respect, working hard, overcoming adversity, and leading by example. Students

shared about why they chose to be a leader, and talked about the four types of leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, *laissez-faire*, and transformational.

Each team moved to a different station and regrouped with other teams for the next series of timed activities. Students were challenged to complete tasks such as solving riddles and creating chants about a topic they were passionate about. "It was honestly a chance to have a laugh. Our group did a free-style rap about how the state of the environment makes us sad. My friend beatboxed, and we all just relaxed," said Dua Qidwai, CodeHers president.

As OVOT wrapped up their session, a check out form was shared and students had the opportunity to give feedback on the activities.

During the next portion of the leadership training, students headed back to their seats as Josue Tario, one of the student equity program advisors for the Toronto District School Board, began a presentation about social justice and equity. During this interactive discussion, students brainstormed different strategies when facing an issue of racism. A few points mentioned were to interject the conversation and call out the person on the spot, informing someone, ignoring the situation, or privately discussing with the person regarding the situation. Paromita Roy, SAC President, said, "I think it was an informational session. I got to hear the different perspectives from our club leaders."

After the presentation concluded, students were dismissed for

lunch, and returned an hour later to continue the second half of the training.

Student leaders then signed a leadership code of conduct where they committed themselves to being respectful, kind, and inclusive. Homeroom representatives committed to their role in participating in homeroom activities, demonstrating enthusiasm and support for all student lead initiatives and SAC at MGCI.

Students were then given a feedback form to fill out regarding their experience of the day. They were also asked to fill out a personal tracker where all leaders were to list two major goals for the year, one being leadership-related and other equity, steps they would take to reach their goals, and resources they needed.

After the conclusion of the final activity, all student leaders were dismissed, though homeform representatives and SAC members were asked to stay back.

The team discussed planning for Wellness Wednesdays—special days when Period B classes are longer, giving an opportunity for students to participate in wellness activities. The first Wellness Wednesday took place on 26 October.

When Ms. Yamashita was asked about how the training day went, she said, "I thought the day turned out pretty well. Students were participating, working together and talking. And students were already asking when the next day would be." A second leadership training date is to be scheduled during the start of the second semester. ■

# Connecting with Clubs at MGCI Clubs Fair

by ANNE LIU

On 5 October, students competed in a forensics scavenger hunt to investigate a murder with HOSA, watched Principal Di Felice enjoy playing poker with Poker Club, and decorated cookies with Biology Club. These were all activities organized by student leaders at the MGCI Clubs Fair, which helped to spread awareness of clubs and give students a chance to get involved. A total of over forty clubs were present, including, but not limited to, Health and Awareness Club, Eco Team, Robotics, Photography Club, and Singing Club.

Students explored a variety of clubs and organizations, learned about their purpose, meeting dates, and events throughout the year. Through engaging in interactive activities and buying food from clubs, students had a lunch period to remember.

A week prior to the event, many clubs shared information about

their activities through posters around the school, social media posts, and shared short messages over the announcements. Student leaders also created poster boards to showcase their club community, competitions, and awards, to be displayed during the Fair.

During the Clubs Fair lunch, students ran around the school trying to visit as many club booths as possible. The majority of clubs were presented in the cafeteria and the library, but many were also in classrooms and the Galleria, allowing students to walk all around the school to find activities to do.

The clubs committee also offered a sweet incentive for students to explore a variety of clubs. At the beginning of the Fair, students received a bingo sheet with club names in each square. They brought their sheet to each club they visited and had club leaders sign off. The idea was that the first twenty-four people that

visited every booth and presented their filled sheet to a Student Activities Council (SAC) member would receive candy.

During the Fair, several clubs, such as FBLA, Chemistry, and Debate Club, also offered treats to students. For certain clubs, completing an activity was a prerequisite: at the Debate Club booth, students had to convince the executives of an unpopular opinion in order to receive chocolate.

In addition, several clubs also held interactive activities and games. HOSA set up a scavenger hunt that took students all throughout the school to solve a forensic-science-related mystery, to find out “Who killed Pyper?” Students followed a series of clues, from analyzing fine details in a crime scene description to matching a fingerprint on a wall in order to win chocolate and get insight into the world of HOSA.



Photographs: Angela Xu





The Poker Club set up a table in front of the cafeteria and played poker with the school community. Students were offered five chips to begin playing with and received different prizes depending on whether they participated or managed to win a game against executives. Michael Wen, a Grade 10 student that visited the club's booth and later joined as a member, reflected on the club's activity and said, "I'd say I enjoyed it a lot. I thought Poker Club was a great way to meet new friends while playing a high stakes game."

Eco Team took a unique hands-on approach—after setting up in room 227, students visiting were offered the opportunity to plant plants that they could either take home or leave at the school to grow. They first created their own plant pots by reusing newspapers. Then, they put soil in and dug a hole to

the bottom to plant the seeds. Choosing from either parsley or lettuce, students started growing their own vegetables—many of which are still present in the classroom growing under a special lamp.

From the Fair, students obtained meaningful experiences and beneficial information to get involved in the school. When asked about how she felt participating in the Fair, Grade 9 student Amy Lie said, "I thought it was cool that there was such a variety of different clubs, and all the activities were super fun." Club leaders also found this experience rewarding. Eco Team's Vice President, Sophie Yee said, "It was super great to see everyone so excited to make their own planters and learn more about the environment through gardening," explaining that the club was effectively able to reach

out to the student community.

SAC Senior Clubs Coordinator, Saivenkat Jilla, who led the planning of the fair reflected on the event, saying that the work he put in with the help of the SAC, club leaders, administration, teachers, and caretaking was "definitely worth it" as the Fair was "a huge success, with many students enjoying it and getting exposed to the variety of clubs that MGCI has to offer." Looking ahead, Paromita Roy, the SAC President, also described the future of these interactive fairs: "Because of the amazing turn-out, we're planning on having another Clubs Fair in the spring—so if you didn't get a chance to see Mr. Di Felice play poker or sing karaoke with Singing Club, you'll get it in due time! The Student Activities Council will work towards even better things in the future, so stay tuned!" ■



# LIFE BOARD

A board for imaginative self-expression through written and visual content.



Glittering, golden oil, lifeboat-like star anise and floating chili flakes peered against my glowing face. I paused over the pot, tracing paths of circulating parsley, illuminated by the bright yellow kitchen lamp. The noisy whirring of stove fans paired with the chopping of Mother melded with rich, entropic steam swarming her. Condensation beaded the cozy kitchen window, yellowing with age inside our cluttered one-bedroom flat. Mother ladled the golden broth into chipped bowls



and sat me down. With unspoken love, she mussed my hair with her thick, strong arm and commanded to eat in our native language. I spooned out a thick scoop of broth: carrots of blazing love, corn sweet with affection, potatoes laced with care, and who could forget? Luxurious bone meat, food of limited supply. I closed my mouth and savoured the soup. Bone soup, filled with love and packed with care, a candle in the darkness, food to remember. Mother's bone soup.

# Gilded Silence

by ANJALI GUPTA

silence is golden, they say.

gilded sparkles glinting in the sunshine

facets catching the light

but beauty fades

the aureate glimmers reduce to ash

what once was, will never be again

sifting through the remnants

you discover that the gold was an illusion

just a mirage

designed to distract

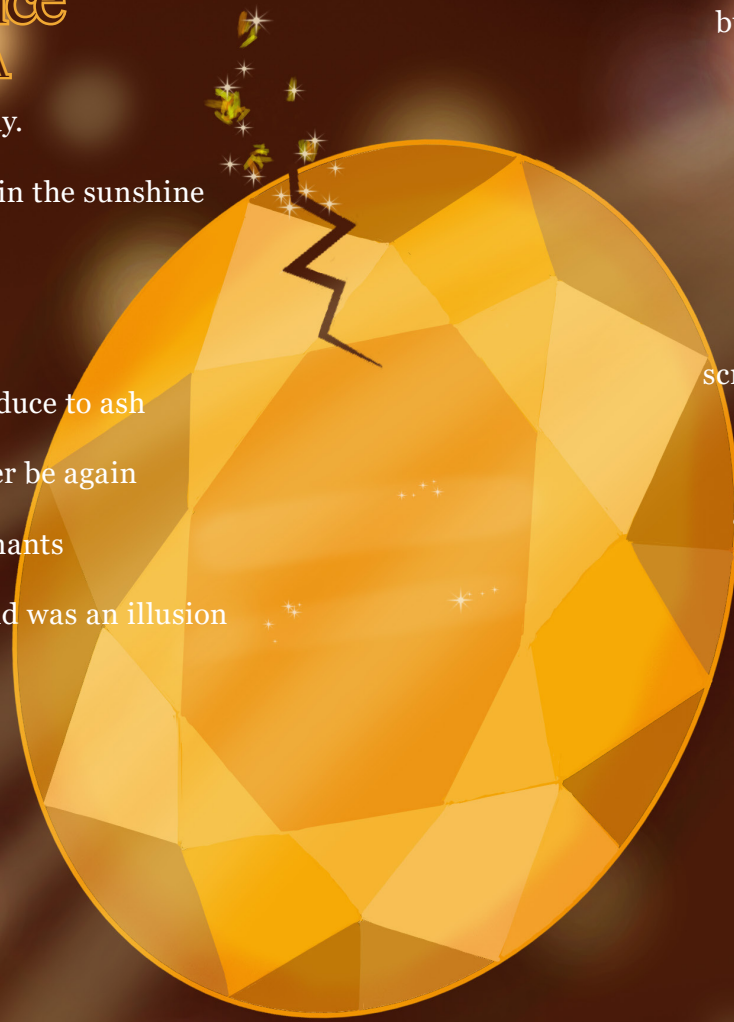
to confuse

to hide the realities

we think we see peace

beauty

joy



but we hide from the truth

sadness

anger

loss

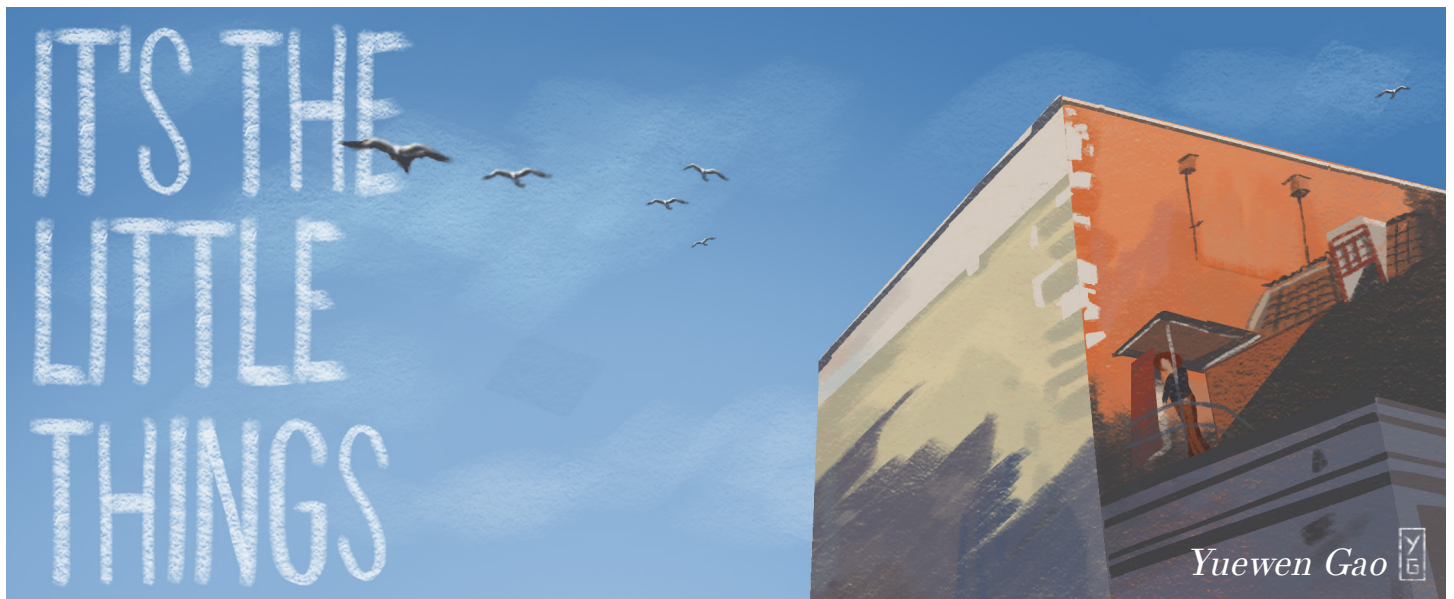
the ash swirls

screams, gunshots, sobbing

all that is left

and all because of silence

Illustration: Samara Rahman



Yuewen Gao 



# Dried Up

by ALVIN YOUNG

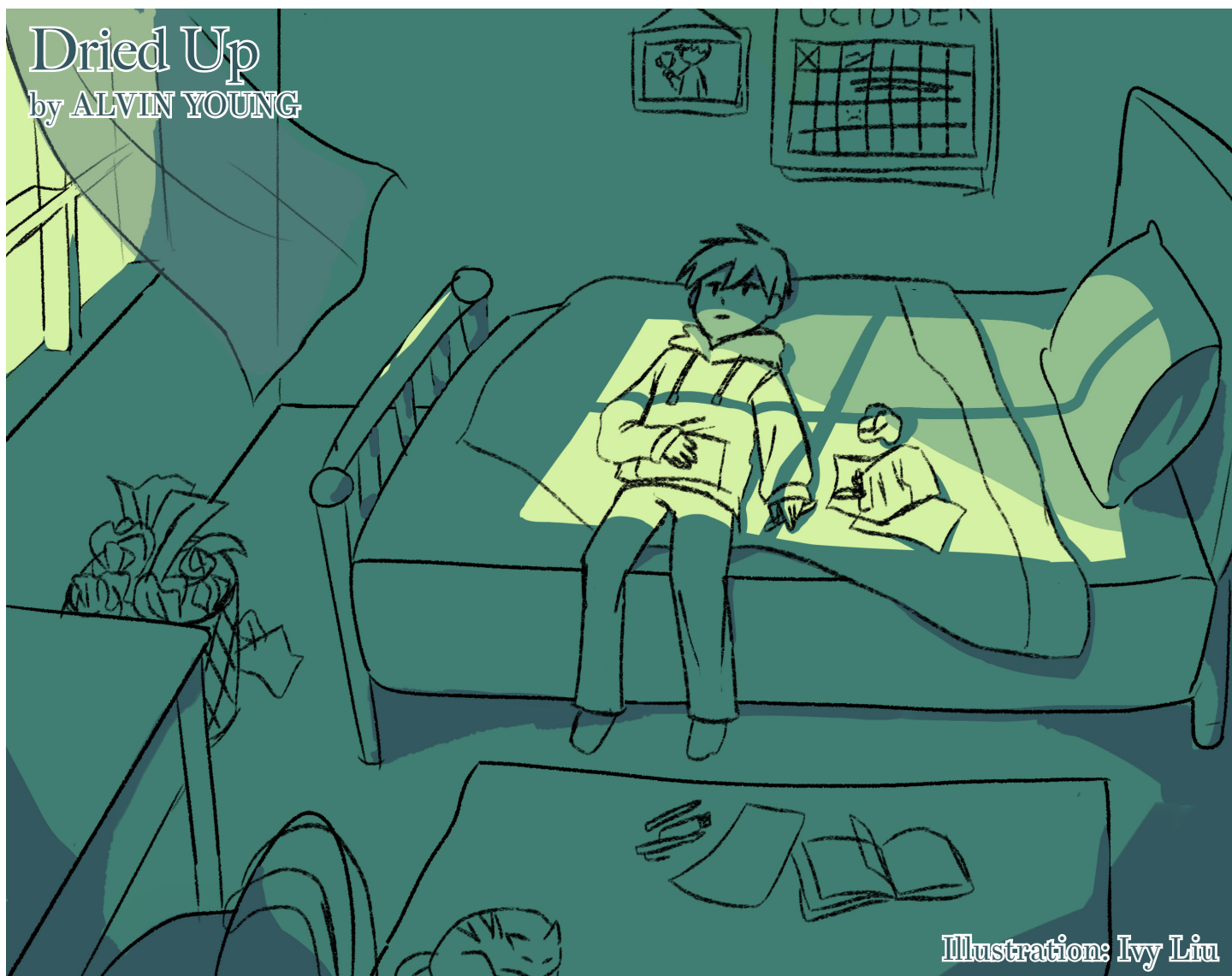


Illustration: Ivy Liu

A half-eaten bag of potato chips. A flakey plant dried up from neglect. A layer of dust on the top of the disheveled bookshelf thick enough to be a royal blanket for any dust mite. Crumpled papers are strewn across the floor, landmines that detonate each time I look at them, blasting into my mind images of hours of aimless doodles and scribbles. The mattress is suffocating under my weight, a sag that's almost touching the floor. A little more time and it could become a hammock.

It's 2 p.m. I stare at the ceiling. The grooves and bits that stick out connect like constellations. There, a rabbit. A book. A condescending grin. I roll over. The mattress seems to roll with me. Why am I still in bed? Don't I have something better to do? I could open my phone, but what then? Scroll through instagram where I can witness people having a blast, people my age that are legions ahead of me,

people poorer than me but are still doing more than me, people...

I could make some lunch. My stomach growls like an excited dog at the thought and I almost want to punch it. I barely have much left in the fridge, and the bills on the kitchen table haunt me every time I want to grab a bite to eat. "Oh you want something to eat? Well tell you what; you can get some after you pay off the water bill, electric bill, loans, Mr. Henderson from that laundry place..."

It's not like I don't want to do something. I want to be something big. Change the world. Write and draw a story that can bring even statues to tears. Get a girl. Travel the world. See the stars and say a cheesy pickup line in Paris. But I know even before I start that I'll fail. People are already soaring towards the finish line and I've barely put one foot over the starting line. Change the world? I haven't

even changed my clothes in three days. And the more I worry about all this, the more time passes. The more time passes, the more stressed and discouraged I get.

I'd like to think I'm stuck in a loop like a hamster running a wheel, but in reality, I'm just lying at its bottom. I take one foot forward, see it slide back, and just continue to lie down. But I've never thought about stepping to the side. Seeing where that takes me. It's dangerous. It's risky. And I might never get back up here again.

Do I want to be back up here? In my comfortable wheel? Is it even comfortable at all? I sit up and my mattress lets out a little squeak of relief. Is this what I find comfortable? If I don't step outside, one day I'm gonna fall off. When that happens, who knows when I'll stand again?

And so, for the 11th time, I start to dust my shelf. ■



# A fictitious street

*Hannah Xu*







The autumn wind brings change to the elementary school garden: a squirrel tears into the ground to store her nuts for the winter, a tree blushes orange and red in embarrassment as his leaves fall asleep, the children come to school. Crouched at the base of the tree trunk, a young girl picks at the blades of grass turning pale and faded. Her jacket is zipped up all the way to the top, her hood hiding all but the tips of her hair, and she picks at the grass with an odd determination that the squirrel could not figure out.

So she puts the walnut down. "What are you doing?"

"Picking at grass," the girl responds without breaking her rhythm: straighten out the grass. Pick it at the base. Toss it in a pile. Repeat. It is methodical and mindless.

"Yes, but for what reason?"

"I dunno. I just need something to do."

The tree pipes up. "All your classmates are over there. They're playing—they're playing tag! Look, Becky is it! She's almost catching Nico—oh, I wish I could run around and play tag. You should go join them!"

"Of course I wanna join them," she frowns. Another blade of grass falls into the pile.

"Then try asking them to join," the squirrel says. "Then you can play tag."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because then I can't talk to you guys."

The tree grins in response. The squirrel only tilts her head. "But we are not talking to you," she says. "You are talking to yourself and pretending like we are talking."

The girl looks irritated. A blade of grass slips out of her hand. "That doesn't matter," she reasons to the squirrel, to herself. When she looks closer at the squirrel, she realizes it did not stop to talk to her in the first place. It stopped to dig the ground.

"That doesn't matter," the girl repeats again, so the squirrel and the tree start talking again.

"Of course it doesn't! We're your best friends, right?" The tree beams. It's true, they are her best friends. She doesn't think she can look anyone else in the eye. Well, the tree doesn't have eyes, so it's kind of cheating, but she can look at his trunk. And she doesn't know it, but one day, she'll gather up the courage to talk to her classmates, to play tag with them, because she has the legs the tree will never have, she will be confident and catch everyone, even Becky, and everyone will call her fast and the winner of tag and their friend.

"Yeah, we're your best friends," the girl says in her best squirrel voice.

And if the squirrel and tree really could talk, they would truly call her their best friend. Because they are all lonely. The tree, left all alone every autumn when he starts to become too woody and dull, all the birds flying away from his branches to somewhere warmer, somewhere better. The squirrel, who's chosen to live in the school yard to pick up the children's scraps, when her family calls it unrespectable to eat what the human children leave in the grass. And the girl, who has not yet gained the courage to make friends—but until that day comes, and even when it does, she will always make time to pick grass with the squirrel and the tree. ■





Witch  
*Amy Long*

Aria bounces around, shaking her clipboard. “I haven’t tried this on any humans yet, obviously, but it should be very similar.”

“What have you tried it on before then?” I ask.

“Oh, you know. Cats, mostly. A couple pigs, their organs are pretty close in size to those of humans. Lots of rats, too. They’re so much easier to get this year. Remember last year when we had to catch squirrels? That was so rough, but my suppliers are willing to sell to me again!”

It had been rough, but... “Cats, pigs, rats? Those aren’t close to humans at all!”

She giggles. “Don’t be silly. I know exactly what I’m doing. All the math checks out, and I’m pretty sure there’s no gross side effects! You’ll be fine. It’s just a little something to loosen your mind, that’s all.”

“Oh, Ari.” I almost want to shake some sense into her, but her ingenuity has always oddly captivated me, even before. Still—“Are you hearing yourself? You told me earlier that you’re doing some maintenance tests. What does that even mean, ‘loosen my mind’?”

Dropping her clipboard, Aria comes over and squishes my cheeks.

“I’m a genius, babe. The cats, the pigs, the rats. I can influence, no, control them. I can speak to them, I can hear them, I can make them do whatever I want.” She pokes me on the nose. “If it works on you, on humans, then who knows what we could do with it.”



“Ari,” I whisper, and pause. “I thought you were different now. I thought with just you and me left, we could live a better life.”

“I can make a better life. I’m gonna change the world. If this works, and I know it will, I could be a king.” She waves her hands, nearly slapping me in the face. “We could be kings, emperors, even gods if that’s what you want to call it.”

The gleam in her eye, the

caffeine-induced trembling in her hands, the messy, knotted hair. All familiar from a younger us, from a worse time. I should have known she hadn’t changed at all.

But then again, neither have I.

“You know I’d follow you for lifetimes, Ari. I already have, and I always will.”

She grins at me. “Right back atcha, babe. So?”

“Ok. I’m in.”





## A Summer Evening

*Hania Ahmed*

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# EDITORIAL BOARD

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A board that amplifies student voices through supported opinions.

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## Human Euthanasia: The Right To Respite

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by CHANG CHANG LI (TRIGGER WARNING: Self-harm, Suicide)

In a societal ocean full of crashing waves and cracking thunder, it's appalling that many are forced to endure a bitter battle to stay afloat—legally barred from swimming to shore and finding peace on land. Truthfully, our world is nothing more than a cruel and turbulent ocean that forces those who have no desire to sail to either continue on with the last string of their will or drown themselves along the rocky shores of life. What human euthanasia ultimately is, is the ability to lay anchor for one last time. To allow those who are suffering, tortured by the mechanisms of daily life, to find peace on land and to find comfort in a fictional heaven.

It is integral to understanding the necessity of euthanasia and by proxy, death, to first contextualize the experiences of the disgruntled—the experiences of those with no motivation nor desire to exist. Life with depression and/or any similarly severe mental illness is incomparable to the life of the majority of people. The many activities and ideas that you consider comforting or exciting are painful and

stressful for others to think about. The purpose of life is to ultimately find happiness, to make sense of the entropic nature of existence and to find purpose within it, yet if you cannot find happiness or purpose there is ultimately no purpose to life. If every day is a painful struggle to continue, where the future just seems like a nightmare slowly creeping upon you, there is no reason to be forced to live. Life is only beneficial when you're happy, and being forced to live is nothing more than a curse that you force upon a person. Nobody chooses to live, so people should be given the choice to die if they need to.

Given the unique circumstances, personalities, and thought processes of all people, it's important to note that many aren't cut out for a happy life. Not because they're bad people or they're somehow inferior, but because their entire existence conflicts with what our society desires. A society that, without the right to die, only works to ensnare and abuse people. Like a dog diagnosed with death, at some point, you must give one the option to end

their own suffering—to find complacency in the total neutrality that is death.

Before moving forward, it is integral to note the boundaries necessary with human euthanasia. It would obviously be unwise to allow everyone, with no consideration of history, to sign a form and kick the bucket. Such legislation would be inconsiderate of the common mood swings and hyperdramatic nature of the human condition, many acting upon impulse as a reaction to setbacks. Obviously, someone who has failed to seek help nor show any history of suffering shouldn't be allowed to do such a thing, as it would simply be irresponsible. On the other hand, those with a history of sustained pain—physical or mental—along with a track record of treatment, an already demonstrated desire to recover, and then an unfortunate inability to recover. In such cases, with nowhere to go and pain building up upon their backs, death is unfortunately the best course of action.

Think first of those with terminal physical conditions, such as Cancer





Illustration: Zaid Azhar

or Alzheimers, who literally have no other course of action than death. Does it matter if one has their life taken in six months on the accord of some illness or now under their own conditions and preferences? When the outcome will inevitably be the same, does it not make sense to cut off the constant stream of pain that infects one's body in such times? Does it not make sense to give peace to those with no hope? There is no world where someone should be forced to live tied to a hospital bed, living off of tubes and machines until the pain finally gets

to them.

There is no world where families of patients should be confronted with the emotional dilemma of preparing for one's inevitable death, the trauma that is watching someone in pain— watching someone they love reduced to nothing more than a bag of bones slowly over time. Ultimately, there is no world where a constriction of such an important right can be considered morally just. There is nothing worse than a long drawn-out illness, and by proxy, a long drawn-out illness from within the mind. An illness

that may not take physical form but nonetheless infects your body and constricts you from within, leaving you as nothing more than a shell of the past.

Just as horrific as physical conditions are, mental conditions are simply another side of the same coin that to this day is still overlooked and diminished by our general society. Struggling with mental illness isn't far different from an infectious virus or a terminal illness, simply one that requires recovery through more implicit avenues than simply a few injections or a doctor's care.



With constant waves of setbacks and anxiety crashing down upon you, it is difficult to forever stay afloat and continue on, and even when you do it is both displeasing and an excruciating struggle— one that you can't simply "get over" or "cope with".

There comes a point where the best therapy and the most sophisticated drugs fail to ail the most severe of mental anguish, and at that point, death is a necessity of choice. Truly, there is no point to life when every day is torture, one where from the moment your eyes flutter open to the moment they shut tight at night you feel nothing but the same suffering that you've seen as the new norm, and at that point does one not deserve the right to choose to die? When treatment and care are no longer effective, why should anyone be forced to fight through their struggles for the small chance of redemption?

Choosing death isn't dishonourable nor selfish, for many it is simply the smart decision—a choice that allows one to resolve their wrongs and provide closure to their loved ones. It is a final day that feels right and in place before they sleep peacefully for the rest of eternity. Death is a moral right for everyone, and it is a right that is often ignored within the world. Just as everyone has the right to live a fair life, everyone has the right to die from a fruitless and painful existence.

Finally, it's important to note the

importance of a safe death. One that is quick, painless, and fully fatal. As the common saying goes, there's a lot worse than death, and that horrible state often finds itself in the motions between life and death. A state of pain, shock, and often life-long impacts. Scattered along the papers are stories of suicides gone wrong, filled with horror stories that wrench at one's heart.

People jump onto train tracks only to have their bodies permanently mangled and their lives ruined. Hanging attempts in which the victims find themselves not in the pearly white lights of heaven but under the bright lights of institutionalism, suffering from permanent and debilitating brain damage. According to the University of Michigan, only 1 in 25 suicide attempts actually work, meaning that for every story of death there are 24 more of lifelong suffering and bodily debilitation. Truly, there's nothing worse than wanting to die and being put in a place where you can neither ever recover from your current state nor attempt to end it all once again. When people are forced to take their lives through unsafe and painful methods (hanging, jumping off of bridges, drug overdoses), you only prolong the pain that they've been suffering from throughout their life and desperately hold them back in the realm of life with no consideration of the consequences.

There is no reason that to find

peace and tranquillity in death should people have to go through agonizing pain first. When you put an animal down, you don't slowly peel off its skin and rub them with salt, no, you slit its neck and allow them to die instantly. Just as it would be cruel to slowly kill an animal, there is no reason to ever inflict the same treatment on other human beings.

Ultimately, those who desire to take their own lives will do it, all we can do is make it easy, safe, and as peaceful as possible. Legalize euthanasia, and create a society where we eliminate the sadness behind death and replace it with calming neutrality. A society where there is no stigma behind suicide and one where life isn't placed on the impossible moral pedestal that we see today. With euthanasia, a world can be created where those in pain aren't forced to bob up and down under the crashing waves, gasping for a breath of relief and shivering from the icy suffering of illness. With euthanasia, a world can be made where people are given the option to lay forever on the sandy beaches that is death, blissfully nonexistent and able to forever rest in peace along the hot sandy shores of release, finally free of the tendrils of terror that had constricted them their entire lives. That is the dream of many. To be able to close your eyes for one last time, and for the first time in your life, or rather death, be able to breathe. ■



# To Stop the Obesity Epidemic, More Regulation is Needed

by ANDREW XU

Obesity is a severe public health problem all over the world, especially in developed countries such as the United States and Canada. It has long been an established fact that obesity causes numerous negative health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. The

epidemic imposes a huge burden on the healthcare system and it is crucial to tackle the problem from its roots and mitigate the harmful effects.

Studies have concluded that the most significant root cause for the worsening obesity crisis is an in-

crease in calorie intake coupled with lack of adequate physical activity. In the United States, among the entire population from 1985 through 2002, there was an increase of per capita calorie intake by more than 300 kilocalories [1]. Over the past decade, the glut is



Illustration: Sonia Ravindran

only getting worse.

Besides genetic and metabolic factors, body weight is most affected by food choices since they determine a person's energy intake. With large portion sizes and high energy density, fast foods can lead to excess intake of calories, sharply increasing the risk of obesity. Making matters worse, fast foods often affect children and youth much more than adults. The fast food industry often takes children and youth as the targeted customers in their promotion campaigns, tirelessly cultivating sustained consumption patterns among them. Children with the habit of eating out in fast food restaurants will oftentimes not be able to keep a balanced energy intake. Studies found that a sustained excess energy imbalance intake of approximately 2% leads to obesity over time [1]. For an average individual, a 2% imbalance could mean an excess of merely 30 kilocalories per day. To put it into perspective, a can of soda contains well more than 100 kilocalories. Even a chocolate cookie packs more than 30 kilocalories.

To tackle the pressing obesity-caused public health crisis, governments are trying to make new rules and laws to regulate the fast food industry and guide people to healthier eating habits. Canada has experienced a fast rise of fast food consumption. Thus various levels of governments have looked intensely into regulatory measures to keep the problem under control. Ontario turned out to be the first province to legislate menu labelling requirements by enacting the Healthy Menu Choice Act (HMCA), which required restaurants to display caloric information for any food or drink item starting from January 1, 2017 [2].

The aim of HMCA is to encour-

age restaurants to put more focus on healthier, low-calorie options. If food service providers are forced to demonstrate transparency as far as caloric information is concerned, customers tend to make informed choices and choose healthier options while dining out. HMCA also helps with Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy to prevent and reduce childhood obesity.

However, there are disputes on the real impact of the act. Although people tend to agree that the enactment of HMCA was done with good intent and purpose, some critics concentrate on the effectiveness of using caloric labelling as the sole measure. They argue that consumption patterns won't change much without stronger measures.

In principle, I agree that the HMCA was a step in the right direction. But I do think that caloric labelling is far too weak a measure to incur real meaningful changes. The implicit assumption behind labelling is that the major accountability for healthy eating falls squarely on consumers. The reality is that the role of the food industry plays no small part in affecting people's food choices.

The fast food restaurants actually spend billions of dollars a year to entice customers to eat at their places. So much money and resources deployed by the industry are very powerful and effective. People will need utmost self-control to put more weight on reading caloric labels than being persuaded by the bombarding marketing campaigns. For example, marketing campaigns with toys being offered are very attractive to children. Children don't care about the fact that meals coming with the toys are high in fat, salt, and calories, but low in essential nutrients. But parents usually yield to their kids and

take them out to eat fast food for the toys anyway. Similar marketing tools include packaging with famous cartoon characters or endorsing celebrities favored by people.

Based on the facts mentioned above, the natural conclusion is that strong regulations need to be adopted to discipline the industry in terms of marketing and promotions. There have been calls for that all along, but it is very hard to enact regulatory measures to constrain the industry. The lobbying groups for the food industry have been very successful in painting such regulations as anti-free-market, which virtually killed the idea. But I think governments should have courage to do the right things, no matter how controversial it could look. Government interference in a lot of things is not desirable and should not be a norm in society. Public health, however, is an exception, since for-profit private sectors rarely put public interest in front of self-interest voluntarily. In my view, governments should try to enact regulations to discourage the industry from excessive marketing campaigns. For instance, a cap on marketing spending or special tax could be considered. The marketing venues and channels can also be limited to reduce the efforts of fast food restaurants to reach children and youth.

In conclusion, more effective regulatory measures to mitigate the obesity-caused public health crisis is crucial. It is about time we demand bold action from the government. ■

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# A Compulsion to Learn

by JEREMY DAI

Video games. The bane of all parents and a plague that saps away children's energy and time for studying. They have been so villainized in society that in recent years, China has implemented a strict limit on gaming time for minors — 1 hour from 8-9 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays [3]. Restricting the access and availability of video games is one solution to this problem of addiction. But, instead of implementing measures that act on the negatives of this problem, perhaps a better solution could be found by praising the positives of video games. Perhaps we can explore

how their compelling nature can be used to cultivate curiosity.

Think about the last time you played a video game and felt the urge for just one more level or one more game. That craving to keep playing is intentional. Video games are masterful at keeping players engaged for long periods of time, as the ability to keep their user base hooked equates to greater revenue for the company. This type of addictive design is created by exploiting the reward center of our brain, specifically a hormone called dopamine [5]. Dopamine is released when the body experiences pleasure. This motivates

our body to repeatedly seek it out. More dopamine is released each time we act to obtain that pleasure, reinforcing the behavior and creating a feedback loop. In addition, dopamine has the power to control our interest and attention, making it even more compelling for you to click the “next stage” button.

Video games are able to utilize this inherent biological system by being just challenging enough such that real effort is required in order to succeed while also feeding the player nuggets of dopamine in the form of small wins to keep them trying [4]. A prime example of this is the



Photograph: Sam Li

high score, which challenges the player to continually beat their best performance for the rush of pleasure that comes with it. Additionally, video games can engross the player through riveting storylines or new discoveries, adding another element of temptation to the mix.

With how adeptly video games manipulate players into playing for long hours without losing interest, it is no surprise that their usage in education has been speculated to help children enjoy learning. There are five main criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of learning: Context, authenticity, motivation, room for mistakes, and learner autonomy [1]. Context acts as a way for the learner to relate new information to the knowledge they already have, thereby helping it stick better. Video games achieve this by creating a captivating narrative to which everything else is tied, thereby engaging the player emotionally and creating a memorable experience. Authenticity refers to the importance of the information to the learner and having it be used in a purposeful manner. In video games, this can look like learning about the world and interacting with characters in order to achieve a goal. Motivation is a critical component in effective learning and, as pre-

viously mentioned, is a category in which video games excel. Having the freedom to fail provides opportunities for learners to grow, and video games are arguably one of the safest environments to make mistakes, as all it takes is one push of the restart button to start anew. Finally, autonomy, or allowing the learner to explore for themselves, is shown to yield better results in learning. And what more autonomy can you ask for than a video game where you are the protagonist of the story, free to choose whatever you do?

Companies have already begun developing games meant for educational purposes that uphold all five learning pillars. As early as 1 November 2016, game developer Mojang Studios released Minecraft Education Edition, a version of the hit 2D sandbox game Minecraft tailored towards students in a learning environment. Studies have shown that students who used Minecraft Education Edition had an increased overall motivation for school, better communication and information technology skills, a more positive learning environment, and numerous other benefits [6].

Even video games that aren't created with education in mind can provide advantages to the children playing them. During

times when it may be difficult to meet up in person, such as the pandemic, video games offer a crucial source of socialization and a way to connect with friends online [2]. Additionally, the challenge of video games can build perseverance in children, helping them learn how to persist through the frustration of failure.

While restricting game time is certainly a powerful and effective aid against video game addiction, the power of video games and their application for educational purposes should not be underestimated. ■

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# The Price of Ice: Canada's Northwest Passage

GUEST SUBMISSION by ANTHONY CHEN

A long time ago on a continent far, far away, dinosaurs roamed the lush green fields. But all things come and pass, and both prehistoric animals and plants were soon sinking into the seafloor as the surrounding continents drifted away and sediment accumulated above—today, they have long since metamorphosed into coal and oil deposits either embedded in the subsea continental shelf or just under the permafrost [8]. Rife with fossil fuels, fishing grounds, and mineral resources, the Arctic is perhaps the last frontier of undiscovered and unextracted riches left on Earth [7].

It is, then, no surprise that it plays host to eight duelling territorial claims and counter-claims: Canada,



Illustration: Grace Zhu

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States [6]. Those countries claim airspace, they claim land, they claim sea, and some even claim the seafloor. Of particular note is Canada's long-standing claim to the Northwest Passage, a series of Arctic waterways running through Northern Canada that connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. While Canada asserts our claim and right to regulate the passage by extension, other countries—most notably the United States—vehemently disagree [2]. This article explores why the Canadian claim is justified not only from international law but also a practical utilitarian standpoint.

Even though the Inuit have been living in the Arctic since time immemorial, its first major appearance in recorded history was when the British government sent several expeditions to seek out the fabled Northwest Passage. Among those was the ill-fated Franklin expedition. Undeterred, other explorers set out and eventually discovered viable routes—for some definition of viable. Unlike ignorant predictions of calm and ice-free seas, what they discovered was a maritime hell that only heavy icebreakers could traverse with a healthy dose of luck [5]. Thus, there was originally no dispute. Instead, the issue has only heated up in recent years with climate change reducing the amount of ice in the passage [2].

As for territorial claims, Canada

was the first country to lay claim to a slice of the Arctic through the sector principle in 1925. It allowed Arctic countries to extend their borders all the way to the North Pole, cutting the Arctic circle like a pie. The Canadian government put much stock in this claim over the years, forcibly relocating Inuit families—almost like human flagpoles—and inviting the late Queen Elizabeth II to visit the Arctic [6]. When the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was signed in 1982, Canada swapped the sector principle for Article 47. It essentially says that countries with archipelagoes—like Canada with our Arctic islands—can draw a boundary joining "the outermost points of the outermost islands" and designate the contained sea as "internal waters". It would then receive the same legal status as a lake or river of that country [4].

That seems reasonable, but there's another factor at play. The International Court of Justice's (ICJ) first case in 1947 had led to a decision that countries had a legal obligation to allow passage through straits, even if they were otherwise defined as internal waters [1].

So what's a strait? In their ruling, the ICJ concluded that a two-part test with both geographic and functional components was required to determine whether an area of water qualified as a strait. Specifically, they held that a strait had to "connect two parts of the high seas" and be "used for international

navigation" [1]. Though the geography is unambiguous, the vagueness of the definition was a major driving force that motivated countries to draft the UNCLOS. Unfortunately, the United Nations (UN) was unable to reach consensus and the final revision of the UNCLOS used the same wording as the original decision [4].

This uncertainty undoubtedly justifies the Canadian claim. Despite the fact that the passage connects "two parts of the high seas", few ships have transited it so it is not regularly "used for international navigation" [2]. Even fewer ships, less than can be counted on one hand, have undertaken the journey without approval from the Canadian government [3]. A pragmatic acknowledgement that the Canadian government would need to coordinate search and rescue efforts if needed was no doubt part of this, but one also sees that this was because the international community recognised Canada's claim. Indeed, why should anyone expect Canada to sail to their rescue if they recognised the Northwest Passage as a strait, and therefore international waters?

The Agreement of Arctic Cooperation in 1988 has calmed tensions thus far between Canada and the United States, which argues that "used for international navigation" also covers potential future use [1]. In other words, they would have the passage declared international waters of its potential



use in the future. This appears inconsistent when set against the warm Canada-United States relationship, but more logical with context: Russia similarly justifies their claim to the Northern Sea Route, and a strait would enable cheaper trade with Asia [3].

Even though Canada's Northwest Passage claims are on solid legal footing—backed by both the UNCLOS and ICJ, not to mention other countries—there are other reasons for Canada's control of the passage. That doesn't stop the United States from threatening Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), though. Well known because of their use in the South China Sea, it would mean American warships sailing through the passage without prior approval in defiance of Canadian claims. Unfortunately, Canada's legal options to deal with the situation are limited—the United States Congress has not ratified the UNCLOS, and insists on the illegitimacy of the ICJ [3].

Nevertheless, Canada's claim still stands without international law. A major reason for that is the status quo of the passage. As previously hinted at, Canada is, for all intents and purposes, the owner of the passage. We approve or reject vessels that want to transit the passage, sending escorts and breaking ice when necessary. If something goes awry, we coordinate the search and rescue response in and around the passage. If there's a massive oil spill, we're the ones

who have to foot the bill [2]. Thus, Canada controls the passage now and should retain that control well into the future.

Make no mistake; even though Canada is effectively in control, it's still important that other countries recognise our legal justification and claim to the passage. This is because the government has been hesitant to further develop or encourage navigation through the passage, fearful that their efforts will be for naught if they lose their claim [1]. A well-placed transoceanic shortcut, the passage has immense potential to increase trade and reduce emissions—and that potential should be developed. Beyond that, a resolution of the issue in accordance with treaties and precedents will also increase global trust in our fragile system of international law [3].

Climate change may have brought us here by melting ice and opening the passage, but the aforementioned waterway can also serve as a route out of the crisis—from reducing transportation emissions to lightening the strain on marine ecosystems along other shipping routes, the Northwest Passage is a powerful weapon against climate change and the other consequences of human activity [1]. Locally, the development of the passage would also benefit Northern Canadian communities. Despite its legal status currently mired in ambiguity between international treaty articles and court rulings,

Canada has the best claim to the passage and should therefore take responsibility for it.

There is no doubt that the Canadian government will encourage navigation through the passage once the regulatory uncertainty is settled, benefiting not only Canada but the entire international community. This goes hand-in-hand with the UN's much lauded sustainable development goals and should therefore be supported and encouraged by all [9]. ■

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