

THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Reader's Digest

FEBRUARY 2023



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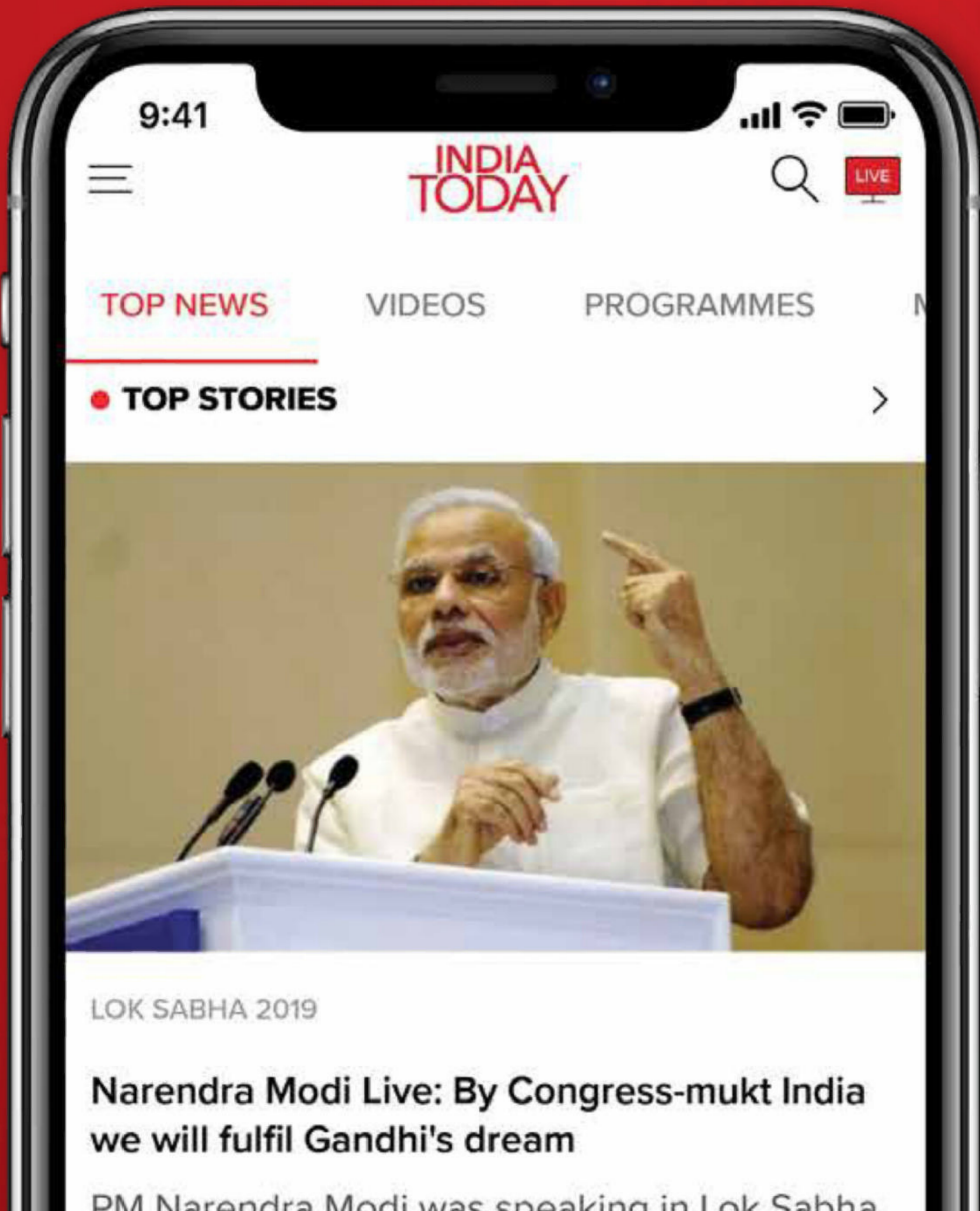
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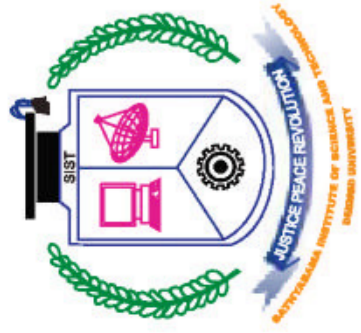
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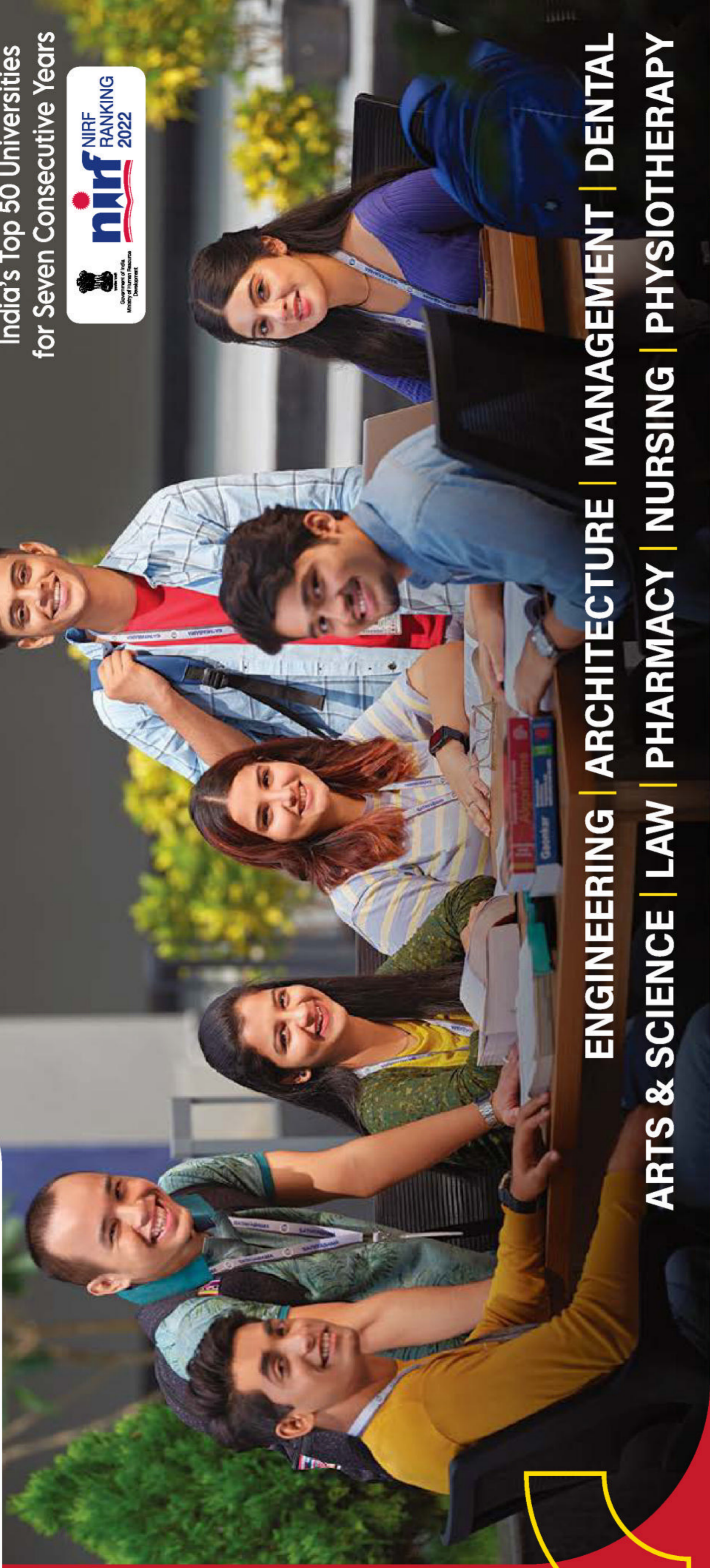


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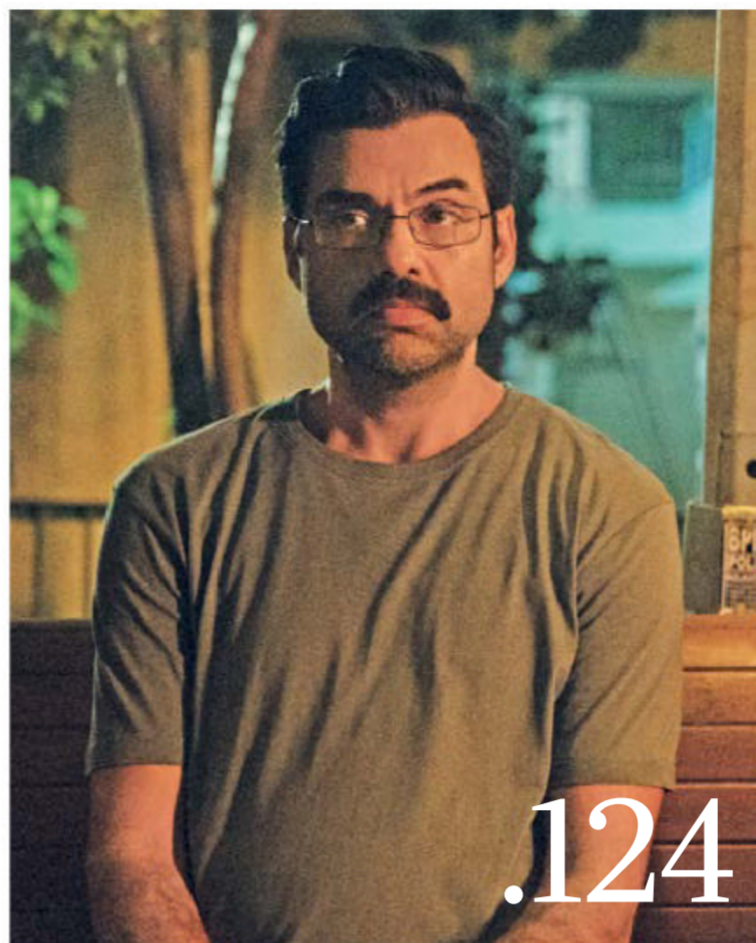
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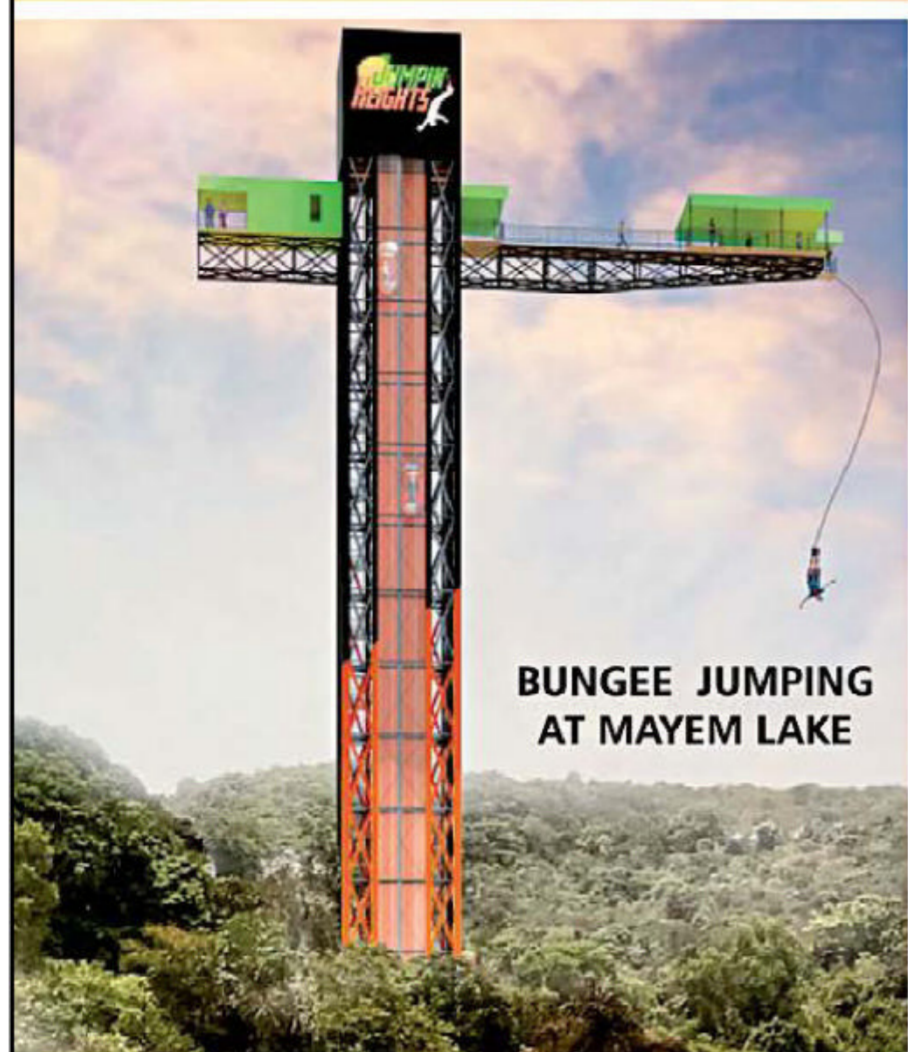
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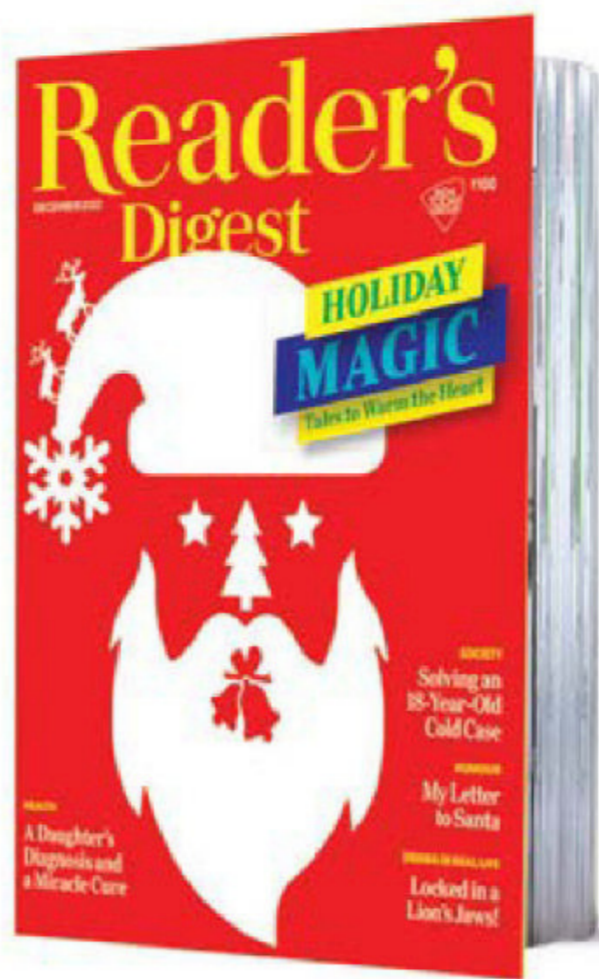
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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE
December ISSUE



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The December 2022 issue brought a wide smile on the face of my six-year-old daughter when she saw Santa on the cover. This year, when she began her volley of demands for Christmas gifts I was ready with an answer that was sure to make it a day she would always remember. So, when she began listing out the options, I suggested she buy gifts for the needy children in our neighbourhood instead. At first, she was a bit confused, but the importance of the gesture quickly sunk in and she immediately agreed. We happily went to the shops and picked up dozens of presents. Now she can't wait for next year, so she can play Santa again.

—P. S. MEHTA, *Lucknow*

P. S. Mehta gets this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. —EDs

Reading through these five stories made me so nostalgic. Apart from a decorated tree, fruitcake, homemade wine and other classic Christmas staples, another very important ingredient used to be greeting cards to and from friends and relatives. Those beautiful Christmas cards would be spread out on our centre table in the hall or hung up in corners along with other decorations in our house. With the world gone digital, I feel the loss of the personal messages they used to bring with them conveying love from those living far and wide.

FIONA WALTAIR, *Chennai*

My letter to Santa

The author's requests to Santa in this humorous letter are all very appropriate. I would like to add two more to the list: (a) Dear Santa: Why must one keep surfing through numerous news channels to find any interesting or exciting piece of news? (b) Why are public spaces like restaurants, malls, shops, airports and the like always kept so cold that one requires a jacket or woolies to stay comfortable? Must indoor temperatures be such that one must carry extra protection?

P. K. JINDAL, *Mumbai*

Cold Case: Justice for Christelle

This true-crime story is simply superb. Although tragic and deeply moving—reading vivid details of the trauma, heartbreak and disappointments that Marie-Rose Bletry and her family went



through for 18 long years—the way the police system worked in France is illuminating. As the footnote at the end of the piece titled 'A Global Problem' explains, the situation in other countries, including India, is presumably not very different. To be fair to our law enforcement departments, the bulk of the blame lies with gross understaffing, lack of basic facilities and virtually no budgets to conduct thorough probes into every heinous crime. Author Lucy Ash's narrative spells it all out in vivid detail. Even when an evangelist lawyer took up the case, she had to deal with inadequate storage of evidence, police apathy and more. If it wasn't for her efforts, as well as those of Christelle's indomitable mother and community support, this young victim would have never got justice. Lots of lessons to be absorbed here

for our crime control agencies.

KRISHAN KALRA,
Gurugram

My Husband's Secret Life

The story reminds me of an interesting incident at a bank I once worked in during the early 80s. Two women with the same name were issued one account number. One continued to deposit money while the other would withdraw it at regular intervals, quite pleased to find the coffee full of cash. She presumed the money came from the matured proceeds of her fixed deposit. They both remained oblivious until the one of them came to get her passbook updated and was shocked to see a paltry amount left in the account. The matter was cleared up after she reported the matter to me. Fortunately, the other account holder responded positively to my appeal and promised to return

the money. In fact, the curious incident led them to become good friends.

PRADEEP KUMAR, *Surat*

Locked in the Lion's Jaws

Sincere and committed people like Tony Fitzjohn give their all to help and ensure wild animals like Freddie live their lives under proper care. But one can only imagine how dangerous it must be to live in such places. Tony survived the attack with the help of not only his fellow human beings but also Freddie the lion, whom Tony nurtured from its childhood. Had Freddie not intervened, readers would probably not have had this incredible incident to read.

VASUDEVAN, *Bengaluru*

Write in at editor.india@rd.com. The best letters discuss RD articles, offer criticism, share ideas. Do include your phone number and postal address.



Shoot for the Stars

Children in Hasudi Ausanpur village in Siddharthnagar, Uttar Pradesh—once on NITI Aayog’s list of 112 most underdeveloped districts in India—can now dream a little bigger. Due to the dedicated efforts of Dilip Kumar Tripathi, its 44-year-old *pradhan*, Hasudi Ausanpur is now a fully ‘smart’ village, equipped with Wi-Fi, CCTV cameras, solar and LED street lights, an RO water plant and even an outdoor air purifier to tackle air pollution. The village school has similarly been revamped, and includes a space lab built by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). Dedicated to teaching students about outer space, the lab houses two high-quality telescopes, scale models of satellites, rockets and launchers as well as heavy and light drones, which they are trained to operate. **R**



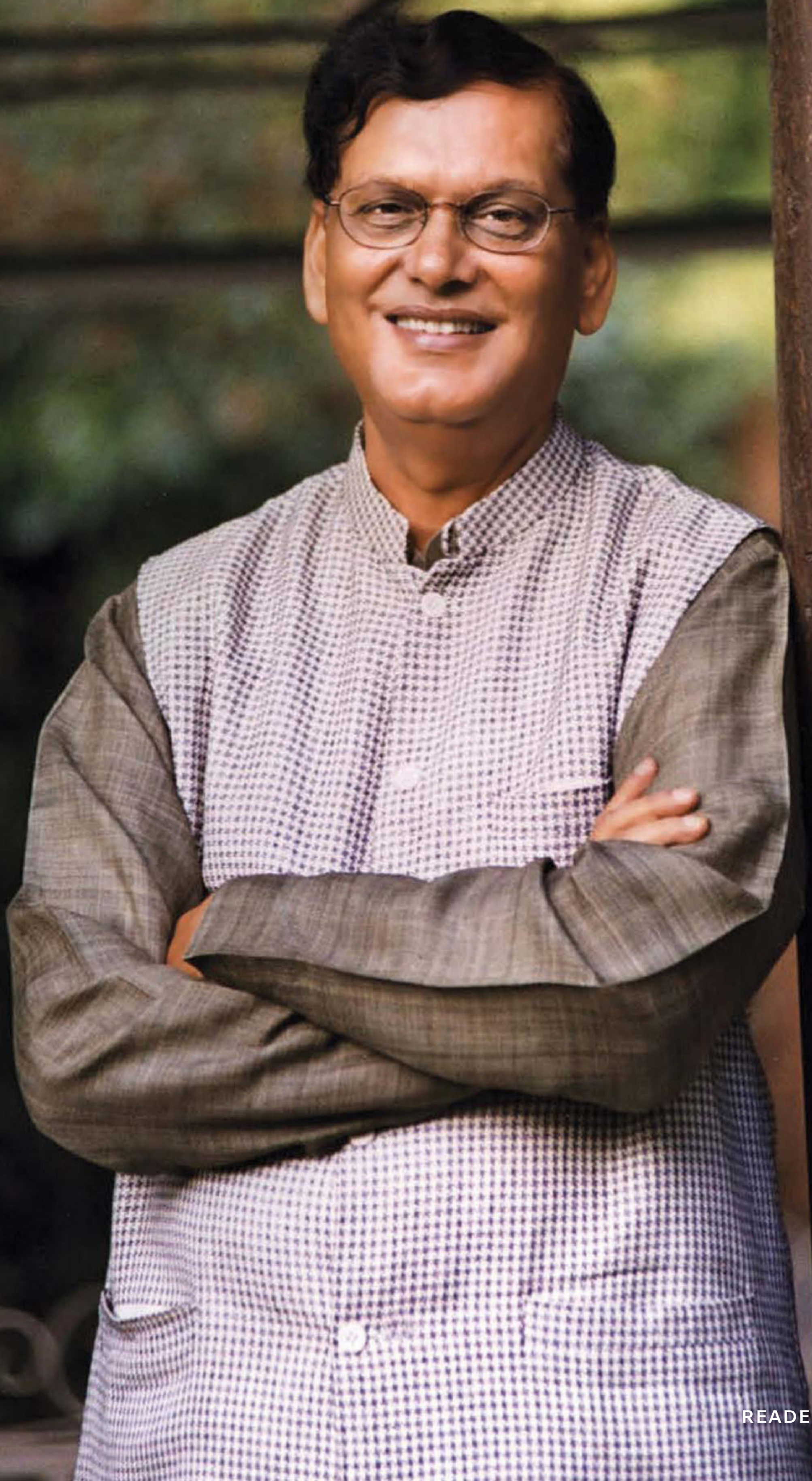
A Clean Sweep

How a simple two-pit toilet system changed the landscape of household sanitation and the fates of manual scavengers nationwide

—
BY Anu Prabhakar

“GROWING UP, WE had a great big house, which had everything,” recalls Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of the NGO Sulabh International. “Everything, that is, except a toilet. So, at about four a.m. everyday, I would hear my mother, aunt, grandmother and sisters going out in the dark to relieve themselves.”

Being born to an upper caste Brahmin family in 1943 granted one a number of social privileges, but open defecation was a common practice, and not even the elite were exempt. “Back then, there was no infrastructure that people could adopt for better sanitation,” he says of his home village Rampur Baghel in Bihar’s Vaishali district. “Septic



tanks were costly and only very few towns even had a sewage network.”

Sanitation systems at the time (one that persists in many underdeveloped parts of India even today) were rudimentary, with convenience, comfort or dignity reserved only for those among the higher classes, such as zamindars. They used bucket toilets and dry latrines but these had to be regularly cleaned—a task typically passed on to people from the ‘lower’ caste, who were deemed ‘untouchable’. People from this marginalized group had to rely on the open outdoors for their own needs, regardless of weather or peril.

As a young boy, Pathak witnessed and became keenly aware of everyday discriminations based on caste, a system so suffocatingly powerful that it dictated everything—one’s life, occupation, even death. He remembers wondering why his grandmother sprinkled the ground with water every time the lady who sold them bamboo utensils visited their house. “When I asked, she explained that the woman was an ‘untouchable’—someone who pollutes the land,” the 80-year-old recounts. All hell broke loose one day when young Pathak touched the woman out of curiosity. His grandmother forced him to swallow cow dung and cow urine in an attempt to ‘purify’ him. “‘Untouchables’ were not allowed to touch village wells, and so had to wait, sometimes for an entire day, for some kind stranger to draw

water from the well for them,” he adds.

While pained by the normalized injustices around him, Pathak’s focus turned to finding a job like most youngsters his age. He studied sociology and a bit of criminology in college and decided to pursue the latter. “I thought this could help me to become a member of the CID (Crime Investigation Department) or a police officer,” he says. And he would have become one, if not for a serendipitous train journey that would determine the trajectory of his life.

EVEN AS A YOUNG BOY, PATHAK BECAME KEENLY AWARE OF DAILY DISCRIMINATIONS BASED ON CASTE.

■

In 1968, while on his way to university for a criminology course, he happened to meet a cousin and a friend at Hajipur Junction railway station who told him about a vacant secretary’s position in the Bihar Gandhi Centenary Celebrations Committee. “They said they would get me the job and took my luggage from the train even though I resisted,” he smiles.

The Committee’s mission was to spread the ideals and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi through its four cells, one of which was dedicated to ‘*Bhangi-mukti*’ or ‘scavengers’ liberation’. The job never materialized but



In 2012, Sulabh International was one of two NGOs to be approached by the Supreme Court to work on improving the lives of widows in Vrindavan.

Pathak began working for the group, as an unpaid translator. By 1969, he was transferred to the Bhangi-mukti cell as a liaison officer and sent to live with manual scavengers in Bettiah to figure out a solution to the twin problems of open defecation and human scavenging.

Despite his familiarity with the realities of caste atrocities, Pathak's time with the scavengers was eye-opening: "Beyond description ..." is how he terms the grim conditions he found there. Human waste would have to be transported as head-loads in flimsy containers prone to spillage and seepage. Caste-based bondage was very strong. "The belief was once you are born an 'untouchable', you

will die one," says the 80-year-old.

In 1969, with the help of the Bhangi-mukti cell organizer who provided him with the right books, Pathak designed the technology for a two-fold solution: one that would establish a sanitation system and, with the elimination of the older ways of waste disposal, free those socially sentenced to a horrific occupation. His two-pit pour-flush toilet was named Sulabh Shauchalaya ('accessible toilets'). "You use one pit at a time; when the first one is full, you switch to the other. After two years, the waste in the first pit turns into manure, which can be used to fertilize fields," he explains. "One flush uses about 1 to 1.5 litres of water, compared to 10 litres used by

septic tanks. Moreover, there is no gas pipe in the pit and thus, no emission of methane. The materials needed to construct these toilets are all locally available too.”

Pathak launched his NGO Sulabh International and the Sulabh Sanitation Movement the next year from Arrah, a town in Bihar but success was far from instant. “Awareness about the need for sanitation was nil—even schools did not have toilets,” he says. It was two years before things turned around when an Arrah municipal-

SULABH NOW WORKS ACROSS 1,586 TOWNS AND ENGAGES THREE MILLION VOLUNTEERS.



ity officer offered ₹500 to construct two toilets for demonstration in their municipal compound. This show of support was bolstered by another: the ward councilor offered to install a Sulabh toilet in his own home. “When people came to know about the toilet—how it was odour-free and remained clean—they began to change their bucket toilets too. Things took off from there,” says Pathak.

Pathak also introduced pay-and-use public toilets in India with funding from the Patna Municipal Corporation. “The money for maintenance however had to be collected

from the public,” he recalls. “The first one saw five hundred people coming to use it on the first day.” In 1980, he also devised a way in which waste from public toilets could be recycled to produce biogas.

Sulabh now works across 1,586 towns across 24 states and five Union Territories and engages three million volunteers. Pathak estimates that the number of converted dry latrines and newly constructed pour-flush toilets stand at 1.6 million nationwide. State governments, with Central support, have also installed 110 million household Sulabh Shauchalayas in rural areas. Pathak’s efforts to bring effective sanitation systems into India’s heartland as well as his philanthropic efforts to rehabilitate manual scavengers and uplift other discriminated groups, such as widows and Dalits, has been recognized through multiple awards, including the Padma Bhushan and the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize. His work however, is far from complete.

“There were once 3.5 million human scavengers, of which eight lakh were cleaning toilets exclusively,” he says citing the 1961 census. “Much has changed, but more than 50,000 scavengers are still engaged in this work. If the methodologies that have worked so far are applied to the rest of the country, that cycle can be broken too. Soon, I want to extend these facilities to other countries of the world,” he says. **R**

YOUR TRUE STORIES

IN 100 Words

A 'Good' Answer

My grandson Steve, who was 12 years old at the time and a class topper, had just returned home after writing his half-yearly examination in General Knowledge, one of his favourite subjects. One of the questions in the test was 'Expand GST'. My daughter summoned her son and asked for the answer. "Good and Simple Tax," Steve said. When she told him that its actually 'Goods and Services Tax', Steve went and brought us a newspaper. In it was a full-page government advertisement for GST clearly and prominently expanded as 'Good and Simple Tax'.

—Tharcus S. Fernando,
Chennai

Got a true story that can bring out a smile? Send us your anecdotes in 100 words or less to editor. india@rd.com and Reader's Digest will pay for and print the best ones.

Followed by Aliens

The first time I flew, there had been UFO sightings near Green Bay, Wisconsin. My plane made a stop there, and when we were back in the air, I noticed red and green lights following us. After noting this for several minutes, I summoned a flight attendant. "I don't want to sound an alarm," I said, "but those lights have been following us since Green Bay." She looked out the window, leaned closer to me, and replied, "I hope so. Those are the wing lights."

—MARSHA ROBINSON LOOYSEN



Puppy's First Fetch

My wolfhound puppy was six months old and 100 pounds when his trainer taught him to fetch in a large veterinary-clinic lobby. The trainer would tell him to get the ball and reward him when he returned with it. He repeated this

several times. He then threw the ball twenty feet. It rebounded down a long corridor. The trainer said, "Fetch!" and the puppy ran after it—and returned five minutes later carrying a walker with two tennis balls on its legs.

—William Poznanski

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Aren't I Allowed to Complain?

BY *Richard Glover*

“THE SIGHING AND the groaning only makes it worse,” says Jocasta, referring to the sounds I make while hopping out of bed in the morning. It’s true that I commence with an “oomph” as I move to an upright position, then an “ahhh” as I swing my legs off the bed, followed by an “arrrrrrrgh” as I get to my feet.

Then there’s an “oh God” as I

realize that my knees are, once more, unequal to the task they’ve been set.

Jocasta believes in positive thinking. “All this complaining will simply make you feel worse,” my wife says. “If you act like a young gazelle, leaping across the savannah first thing in the morning, then you’ll feel like a young gazelle. It really is that simple.”

I’m guessing Jocasta doesn’t know

many young gazelles, at least not ones with aching knees, tired ankles and a belly that can only be described as 'third trimester'.

I decide to annoy her in the time-honoured manner of husbands everywhere. I will follow her instructions, but to the power of 10. If she wants positive thinking, she'll get positive thinking.

The curtains are first. I fling them open, allowing sunlight to flood the

**I FLING THE
CURTAINS OPEN.
"WHAT A BEAUTIFUL
MORNING!" I SAY
TOO CHEERFULLY.**

room. "What a beautiful morning!" I say in a too-cheerful voice. "The sun in all its majesty is commanding its troops to get going! Why the frown, darling? Why the blinking against the glorious light?"

Jocasta sighs. "Just make a cup of tea, will you?"

I turn on the kettle, then pop my head back through the door.

"I'm planning a pot of Sri Lanka's finest," I tell her. "It was picked on the cool slopes of the country's mountainous central district, the early morning light catching the brightly coloured saris of the pickers. The resulting nectar will be served with

milk given by a diligent young cow, reared on grassy fields not that far from here."

"Look, can you give it a rest?" says Jocasta. "I just thought you shouldn't complain so much about your knee."

I return with the tea and that morning's newspaper.

"This morning's paper is full of such marvellous news," I say, placing the tea by her side and newspaper on to her lap. "Governments working diligently; politicians selflessly putting their own interests aside in the cause of the nation. It's hard to know where to start when acknowledging their excellent work."

Jocasta wearily picks up the newspaper. "I never asked for this much cheerfulness; just a short break from the moaning and groaning."

I nod vigorously. "And so, my sweet, you shall receive your heart's desire."

This does not impress Jocasta. "If you want the science about positivity," she says, "I can give you that. The body responds to signals sent by your brain. Mood represents the chemical instructions you've decided to send yourself. When you spend 23 hours a day sounding like a miserable old man, you'll turn into a miserable old man."

I take a sip of tea before putting forth the alternative case.

"Yes," I say, "but what about the research by Dr Richard Stephens of Keele University in England, published in the *Scandinavian Journal*

of Pain? It showed that people can put up with the pain of holding their hands in icy water better if allowed to swear." (I'm not making this up.) "So," I continue, "when I limp off to work, muttering 'Oh God, my knee,' I'm just acting on the latest science."

This was rewarded with one of Jocasta's dark looks. "Since when have you been a subscriber to the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain?*"

“LIFT YOUR HEAD HIGH,” MY WIFE SAYS, “AND ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE.”

I allow myself a sniffy rejoinder. "I read all sorts of publications. It pays to be well informed."

Some minutes later, I print out the study and place it next to Jocasta as she eats her breakfast. Dr Stephens, working alongside Olly Robertson from Oxford University—all of this really is true—asked 92 participants to plunge their hands into near-freezing

water while assessing their pain levels. Those allowed to swear experienced a one-third increase in their ability to tolerate the pain.

"Science is science," I tell Jocasta, pointing to the findings. "You don't have to be a subscriber to the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain* to understand the utility of expressing one's authentic feelings."

Jocasta turns to face me. "I'm not anti-swearing or anti-authenticity," she says. "I'm just anti-complaining. Sure, your knee aches, but you can still get around. Sure, you didn't sleep well, but hardly anyone sleeps well. Pull your shoulders back, lift your head high and accentuate the positive."

There's enough tea in the pot for a second cup. It really is delicious, and somehow better for the way I imagined out loud the circumstances in which it was picked and how the milk might have been produced.

The sunlight streams in, and I find myself humming a happy tune.

Then a horrific thought intrudes: The improvement in my outlook means that Jocasta has been proved right! As the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain* might put it: "Arrrgggghhhh!" **R**



Jitterbug

Desis bobmarleyi is a spider named in honour of the song 'High Tide or Low Tide' by Bob Marley and the Wailers, because it lives in the intertidal zone.

Agromyza princei is a fly first spotted on the leaf of a raspberry plant, named for Prince's song 'Raspberry Beret'.

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE

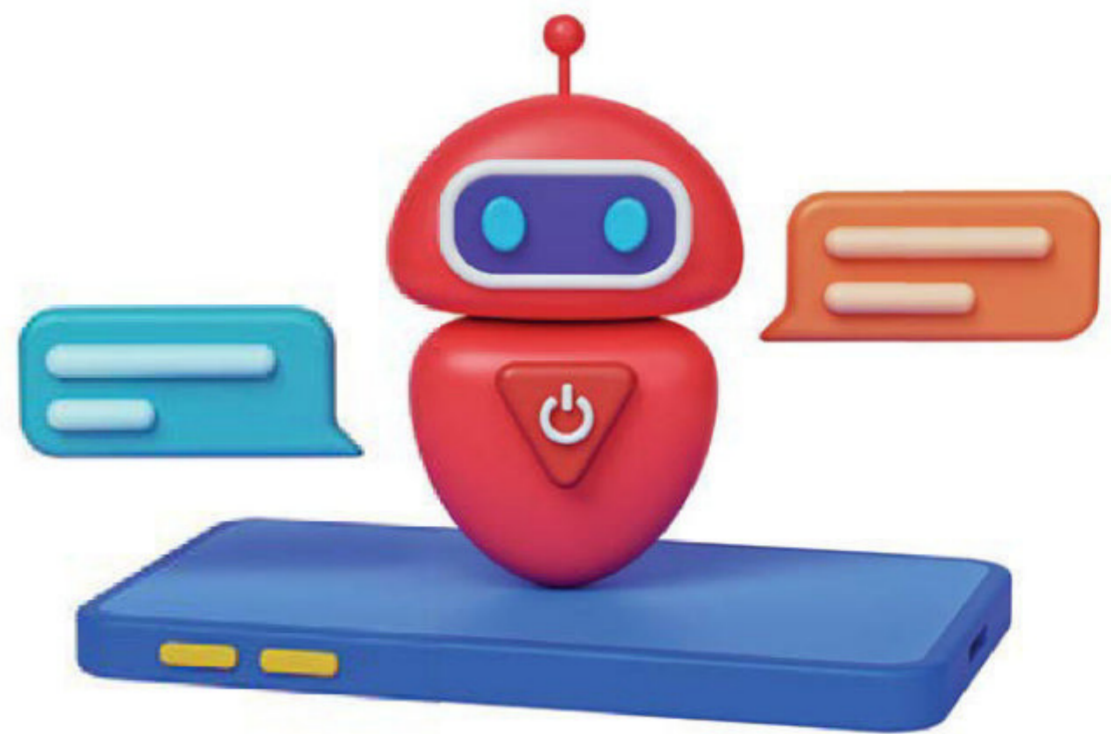
QUICKIPEDIA

Conversations with a Chatbot

BY *Naorem Anuja*

While chatbots—computer programmes that simulate human conversation through text or voice interactions—can be a boon for businesses, they're often frustrating and cumbersome for customers who just want someone to fix a problem. But ChatGPT, a free, cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot built by OpenAI is the latest gamechanger in technology. A paid version called ChatGPT Plus has been released in the US as of 1 February.

Seemingly a mix of software and sorcery, ChatGPT is being hailed as a Google killer, as revolutionary as the first iPhone, likened to the moon landing, and, as US former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers described it, the “most important general-purpose technology since the wheel or fire.” One million users signed up within five days of its release in November 2022. By this month, that number has reached 100 million. If the buzz is to be believed, ChatGPT might just deliver on science fiction's promise



of an impending AI takeover of the world. But what is it, really?

ChatGPT mimics a human conversationalist, albeit in writing, with the help of a large language processing AI model called Generative Pretrained Transformer 3 (GPT) and a vast cache of data from online and other sources. Users sign in to the ChatGPT webpage and type in inquiries into a text box. Instead of generating pre-programmed replies, like existing ones, this chatbot responds according to its best guess of the appropriate answer based on its massive information base.

And you can ask it to do anything. People have. It has written articles, essays and books, generated and debugged code, created a text-based Harry Potter game, provided mental health support, and even passed the US Medical Licensing Exam. So could we be looking at a digital Terminator for multiple white-collar jobs on our hands? The jury's still out. **R**



GARHMUKTESHWAR

ANCIENT SPIRITUAL CENTRE ON THE BANKS OF GANGA

गणानां मुक्तिदानेन गणमुक्तीश्वरः स्मृतः

Gananam Muktidaten Ganmuktishwar Smritah

A place which liberates people from the demon life. Famous for its Kartik Mela and Dussehra Mela on the banks of holy River Ganga, Garhmukteshwar is a place which according to hindu texts liberates people from the demon life. Popular as a religious site amongst Hindus, Garhmukteshwar is also called as Haridwar of UP and lakhs of devotees throng to the ghats of Ganga here on different occasions throughout the year. Less than 100 km from Delhi, Garhmukteshwar in Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh is the closest point from the national capital,

where one can take a bath in the Holy Ganges. Mesmerizing mornings and Magnetic evenings along the banks of holy Ganga attract the devotees who reach here from around the world. Recitation of mantras and Ganga aarti in the evening attracts the devotees a lot. Many festive activities continue here throughout the year. Garhmukteshwar is famous for its Ganga fair which is held every year that takes place on the full moon day in the month of Kartik. In this fair millions of people from all over the country visit this place to have a dip in the river Ganges and it looks like



■ FOCUS: UP TOURISM

since ancient times. Its ancient name was Shivvallabhpur. Here Lord Ganesha was liberated in the name of Lord Shiva, which is why this place is named Garhmukteshwar. Nestled on the banks of river Ganga, Garhmukteshar has a famous ancient Mukteshwar Mahadeva temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva which is said to be built by King Shivi. There is a huge Shiva Lingam installed inside this temple and this is said to be built by Sage Parashurama who was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Goddess Ganga is worshipped here in four temples. Ganga Temple which is one of the famous tourist spots of this city requires getting down almost 101 steps down to the river. Thousands of devotees from all over the country come to the temple to witness the shine of River Ganga and here one can also spot white stone idol of Lord Brahma. Other temples in the town include Ganga Temple, Vedant Mandir and Hanuman Temple. All of these temples are considered as highly revered and wish-fulfilling sites amongst locals. In Garhmukteshwar one can also see other temples dedicated to Lord Shiva located near Jhadina village called as Sidhnath Baba Temple and another ancient temple of Lord Shiva which has a huge shiva lingam can be seen in the Pura Mahadev and Panchi Temple which is located in the same village. The place is also famous for its 80 Sati Pillars which is a mark where Hindu widows used to have committed sati. One can visit the Meerabaiki Reti which is another attractive tourist spot of the city which is located just on the opposite side of the Mukteshwar temple. This is a long stretch of golden sands which is known as Meerabaiki Reti. According to the legends it is said that Meerabai used to stay here and offer prayers and the temple is also known for its beauty. This region is also famous for dolphin sightings.

The banks of Ganga river are perfect spots in the town where one can relish a few moments in tranquillity. The presence of calm waters, a serene atmosphere and divine surroundings altogether provide visitors with a soothing experience. These ghats are also ideal places for meditation and introspection. The town also boasts off a mosque built by Gays-ud-din Balban that bears an inscription in Arabic dating 682 Hijri or 1283 A.D.

Mini Kumbh for one week with the district administration making arrangements for temporary tents for the devotees. It has immense potential and state government is developing it as an spiritual centre.

The history of Garhmukteshwar stretches back to the ancient period. As per ancient Hindu texts, Garhmukteshwar was established thousands of years ago when the Hastinapur Kingdom was ruling the nation. Garhmukteshwar has been a religious place



GOOD NEWS

FROM AROUND THE WORLD



The drones can locate and reach victims in seconds.

THESE DRONES CAN SAVE LIVES

RESCUE Every year, around 2,63,000 people drown worldwide. And while we may think that a drowning person thrashes and waves for help, real-life drownings often happen quickly and silently. Adrián Plazas of Spain, a former lifeguard, knows this. Several years ago, he and his business partner, Enrique Fernández, witnessed a woman drowning, and despite the fact that they acted fast, they couldn't save her. The experience changed Plazas' life. Now an industrial engineer, Plazas is CEO of General Drones, a company that he founded with Fernández, who works in drone manufacturing. The two combined their knowledge to

create a search-and-rescue drone that can help prevent drowning.

Here's how it works: If a lifeguard notices a person in distress, they can notify a drone pilot, who is also at the beach and can send the drone out to the victim. The pilot locates the victim with the help of a camera on the drone, which can reach them in just a few seconds. This is important, says Plazas, because "the lifeguards have more time to get there." The drone then drops a life vest (which automatically inflates when it touches the water) to the victim. By hovering over the victim, the drone helps the lifeguard locate the person struggling in the

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GENERAL DRONES

water. Though the project started in 2015, Plazas says it took time to progress from a prototype to a finished product. "It was important to design something specifically for the beach because it's a tough environment—humidity, the sun, the high wind," he says. To date, their drones have attended more than 60 emergencies, and have been deployed at 22 beaches in Spain. He's hoping that more investments and attention will help them expand their services to other countries.

Poachers: 0; Rhinos: 2,900

WILDLIFE For the first time in more than four decades, India saw zero incidents of rhino poaching in 2022, according to an announcement by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on 1 January this year. Assam is currently home to 2,900 greater one-horned rhinoceroses, the largest in the world. Prized by poachers for its horns and once hunted for sport, Indian rhinos had dwindled to a mere 12 members by 1908. Dedicated efforts by forest authorities and wildlife protection forces have now resulted in what is being hailed as a major win for global conservation efforts.

Reigniting a Love of Reading

EDUCATION In the Mediterranean city of Tartus, Syria, Mohamed Zaher spends his time manning a kiosk called Wisdom Seller, which invites

passers-by to stop and read from the more than 2,000 books that line its walls. To encourage visitors to stay longer, anyone who reads at least 15 pages of a book gets a free coffee. The 32-year-old veteran is helping fellow Syrians to get back into reading after the war made luxuries, including printed books, unaffordable for many citizens. Zaher says reading was "therapeutic" for him during his time in battle. To keep the kiosk going, Zaher depends on funding from affluent citizens. He estimates that more than 20,000 visitors of all ages have visited his stall since its opening.

New Life for Dying Reefs

ENVIRONMENT For more than three decades, the coral reefs outside Matanzas Harbour, on Cuba's north coast, have been degrading due to climate change, overfishing and invasive species. So, for the past three years, reports Reuters, local divers and schoolchildren have been collecting coral fragments from the ocean floor and tying them with salvaged fishing line to underwater 'trees' made from recycled plastic pipe. Once the fragments grow large enough, they are transplanted on to the coral reef. If they survive—and most do—they can repopulate up to 80 metres of the reef within a year. **R**

'Rescue' and 'Education' by Tina Knezevic; Wildlife by Ishani Nandi

THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

INDIA
TODAY
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“ Happiness is finding a purpose beyond profitability. It means helping others to grow and making them happy. ”

ANANT GOENKA
Managing Director,
CEAT Limited



“ Happiness lies in acts of kindness and words of encouragement. It's giving priority to the happiness of employees and stakeholders. ”

HARSH GOENKA
Chairman, RPG Enterprises



“ Happiness is sharing a great rapport with peers along with the family while striving for a perfect work-life balance. ”

FAISAL ASHRAF
Managing Director,
Mitsui & Co. India



“ Happiness is in performing responsibly and synchronising skills, values and knowledge. ”

AALOK KUMAR
Chairman, President & CEO,
NEC Corporation India



Being happy is an inherent part of how you live for yourself and what you feel for others.

R.C. BHARGAVA

Chairman,
Maruti Suzuki



To be happy, one needs to be at peace and mentally strong. Never allow any setbacks to demotivate or demoralize yourself.

KANWAL SIBAL

Former Foreign Secretary
of India



Engaging with people who both work for you and with you, and becoming a part of their conversations.

MANABU YAMAZAKI

President & CEO,
Canon India



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Dishing Dirt

Not all gossip is bad. Here's how to quash the mean-spirited kind

BY *Katherine Ashenburg*

ILLUSTRATION BY
Paige Stampatori

WHEN I WAS in elementary school, the nuns told us, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything.”

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, President Theodore Roosevelt’s daughter and a famous gossip, took the opposite view. She kept a pillow on her sofa, needlepointed with her still-popular motto, “If you can’t say something good about someone, sit right here by me.”

People who study gossip define it as any talk about people who are not present. It can be positive, neutral or negative, but it’s the mean-spirited variety—Alice Longworth’s favourite—that has traditionally inspired disapproval. For many of us, hearing and telling scandalous stories counts as a guilty pleasure.



And yet, gossip is by no means a black-and-white affair. We have a natural need for human connection, and gossip feeds that, for good and ill. Much depends on the motivation of the gossiper: are they aiming to warn people about a bad actor, or are they enjoying the malicious pleasure of spreading a harmful story? It comes down to curbing the mean variety while benefiting from the useful.

Why We Gossip

The reasons why people indulge in gossip or shun it are as individual as they are. In 20 years of friendship, I have never heard Lyndsay Green, a sociologist and author, dish the dirt about anyone. When I asked her why she never gossips, she traced her behaviour back to her school days—and her own sense of security.

“People telling hurtful secrets seem vulnerable,” she says. “They use gossip like a chip in gambling: ‘I’m going to throw this in, and I hope you will like me more.’” It’s a tactic that might work to gain connection in the short-term, Green surmises, but even as a kid, she doubted that it built true friendship.

Still, it’s a tempting habit—and many people can attest that there’s something undeniably seductive about being the bearer of scandalous news. For better or worse, a feeling of superiority can accompany having a juicy—and exclusive—piece of news to share. Dishing the dirt can feel fun, and it can also

bring us together, tightening social bonds. The trick is learning the difference between the benign and the bad.

Some Gossip Is Good

Despite its bad name, the past few decades have seen an appreciation of gossip. Psychologists, sociologists and experts in organizational behaviour write that even snarkier gossip can be a powerful aid in bonding and social education. Criticizing those who have transgressed social norms, for example, encourages good conduct and serves as a deterrent to bad behaviour.

Scholars also hypothesize that the informational value of gossip was important for our ancestors: those who knew what was going on in the next cave were likelier to survive than more isolated individuals. While it’s not a life-and-death matter today, gossip’s informational function remains useful. Your colleagues’ speculation about the company’s change in leadership can keep employees in the loop. The same goes for potential developments in your community or neighbourhood.

Studies have also shown that gossip can alleviate loneliness, serve as a safety valve for frustration and stimulate the part of our brains that helps us deal with complicated relationships. It even calms down our bodies when it’s used to help others, says Matthew Feinberg, a professor of organizational behaviour at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management. In one

study, his subjects observed people cheating at a game. When they simply watched, their heart rates sped up, indicating their desire to tell the other players about the rule-breaking. When they were able to warn others, their heart rates returned to normal.

Motive Matters

Is your objective to be empathetic, compassionate or appreciative? Or is it something intended to wound or, as Green recognized, to increase your status? John Fraser, a journalist and author, relishes and values gossip. Fraser's gossiping ticks some familiar boxes: he uses it to bond with people, to inform, to humiliate those he thinks deserve scorn and to celebrate 'the human circus'.

"Only in rare circumstances do I believe in secrets," he says. He likes "sharing stuff", which includes others' secrets, as well as his own. While Lisa Schmidt, a life coach and consultant, believes secrets should be respected, she agrees with Fraser on a key point: "Informational gossip greases the skids of the world."

If permission is given, sharing sensitive information may provide an opportunity for compassion. Say you learn that two friends are divorcing. Passing on the information may spare them the emotional exhaustion of telling everyone themselves. The listener may also respond by reaching out in kindness to one or both members of the couple to assure them of support.

Break the Habit

Delicious as it can be to share gossip, the malicious kind can—and often should—leave a bad taste in your mouth. Pay attention to your conversation. How much of it is sneering or embroidering a discreditable story to make it even more shameful? Are you knowingly passing on information that is incomplete or incorrect?

Schmidt asks her clients, "Who do you want to be in the world?" If she notices a client disparaging others, she'll hold a mirror up to the behaviour and say, "This is the language you're using. Does that align with the person of integrity you say you want to be?"

Also, try to analyze yourself as a listener. When people regularly come to you with sniping gossip and you allow it, you're creating a culture that feeds on meanness. You may simply say that you don't want to engage in that kind of talk. But even a more subtle response works. I had a friend who, whenever I badmouthed someone, reminded me what was good about that person or about the difficulties in their life. Without ever commenting directly, she taught me that my gossiping was not going to be reciprocated. So I stopped.

Schmidt acknowledges that we won't always get it right. But if we keep pulling ourselves back to the person we want to be, it will get easier to chat about people in ways that are still fun, but never cruel. **R**

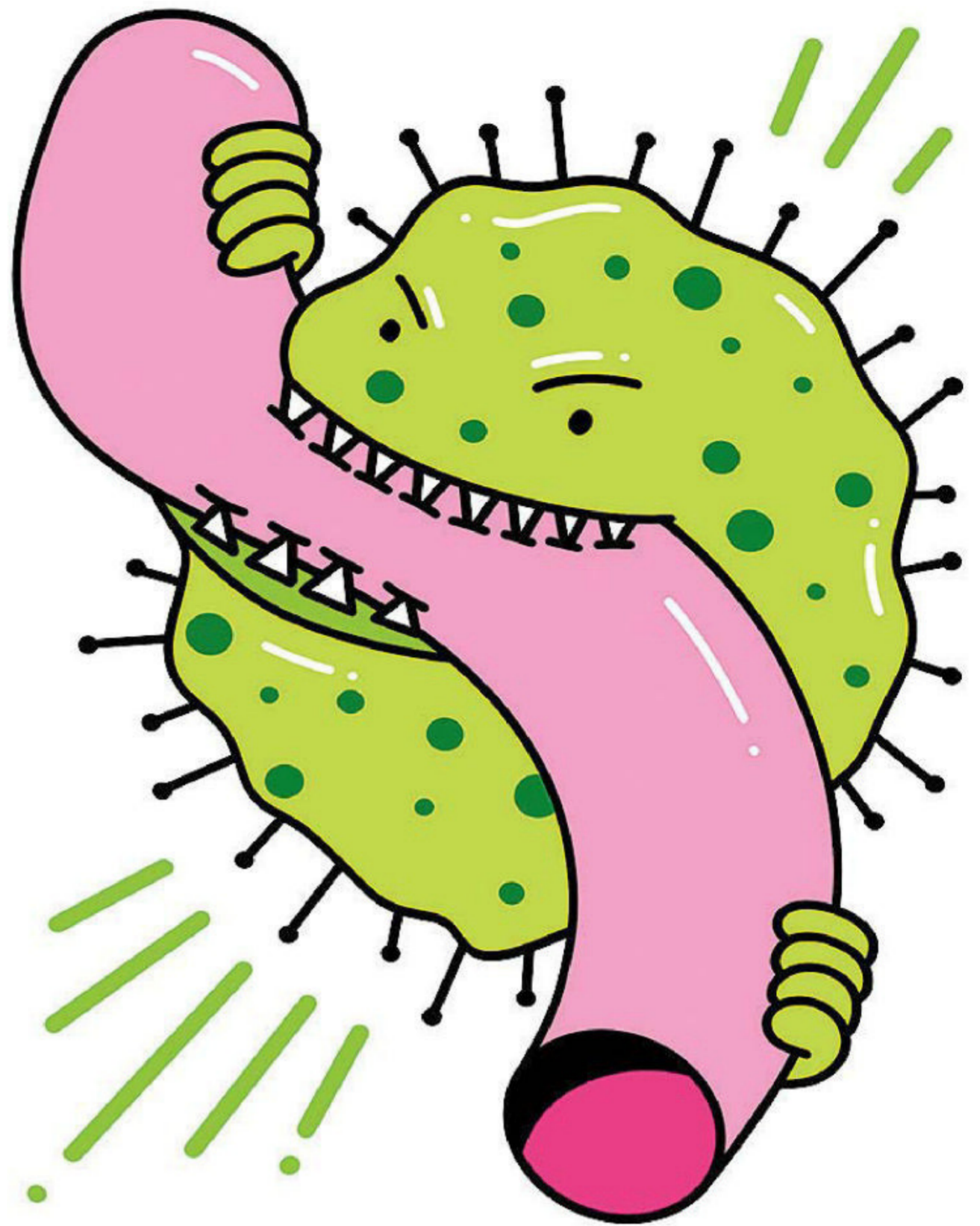


Bladder Bother

Debunking common misconceptions about urinary tract infections (UTIs)

BY *Christina Frangou*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Sam Island*



URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS can make some people, particularly women, feel needlessly ashamed. “For years, women were told that UTIs were related to their cleanliness, but they’re not,” says Dr Barbara W. Trautner, physician at Houston’s Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine.

It is true that women get UTIs up to 30 times more often than men, but it’s a matter of anatomy, not hygiene. For anyone, a UTI develops when bacteria in the bladder—usually introduced via the urethra—cause inflammation or other symptoms somewhere along the

urinary tract. Since the urethra in women is shorter than it is in men, the bacteria have less distance to travel to reach the bladder. As well, in women’s bodies, the urethra opening is closer to the anus, where *E. coli*—a common cause of UTIs—reside.

Other factors make certain women more prone to the condition: sexual activity, pregnancy and birth control with spermicides, for example.

Another misconception about UTIs is that they cause delirium in seniors. Trautner says the evidence around that isn’t conclusive. A fever related to a UTI could be a contributing factor causing confusion, but it’s more likely to be a

symptom of an underlying brain disease, taking multiple medications, malnutrition, untreated pain or organ failure. Muddling matters, Trautner adds, is the fact that bacteria are often present in the urine of older adults without causing harm—a condition known as asymptomatic bacteriuria, which normally requires no treatment.

UTIs do become more common with age, however. In women, oestrogen levels drop after menopause and the vagina loses protective bacteria that keep harmful bacteria out. In men, the prostate begins to enlarge after age 50, trapping urine in the bladder. Also, all older adults are more likely to acquire risk factors such as kidney stones, catheter use or a suppressed immune system from diseases like diabetes.

Determining whether you have a UTI depends on where the infection is located. In the lower parts of the urinary tract, like the bladder, symptoms are related to peeing: an urgent need to go, burning while urinating, blood in the urine or pain in the pelvic region. An infection that affects the kidneys is known as an upper urinary tract infection, and the symptoms are more vague, consisting of back and flank pain, high fever, vomiting, nausea or chills.

Antibiotics are the recommended treatment for UTIs, but there's a high risk of recurrence, especially among women. In fact, approximately one in four women will have a second UTI within six months.

If an infection recurs, it's not

the patient's fault, says Dr Larissa Grigoryan, an assistant professor of family and community medicine at Baylor. "In some cases, it's due to increasing antibiotic resistance," she says, explaining that physicians will then prescribe another course of that antibiotic or try a different one.

It's long been believed that cranberry juice can prevent or cure UTIs.

50%
**OF ALL WOMEN WILL
 HAVE AT LEAST
 ONE UTI IN THEIR
 LIFETIME.**

While some research shows that an active ingredient in cranberry juice can prevent bacteria from sticking to the bladder wall, larger studies have not confirmed a benefit. Even though cranberry juice is not a fix, it's not harmful. In fact, drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids is a good prevention strategy.

Along those lines, in a 2018 study in *JAMA*, women who increased their regular intake of fluids by 1.5 litres each day were less likely to get a UTI. So, to keep these infections at bay, the best prevention strategy is simple: drink water and empty your bladder often. **R**

13 THINGS

Serving Up the Sizzle on Plant-Based Meat

BY *Michelle Crouch*

1 IF YOU tried veggie burgers years ago and dismissed them as rubbery, flavourless hockey pucks, it's a good time to give meat substitutes another chance. You can find plant-based versions of chicken, pork, sausage, and deli cuts, as well as seafoods such as tuna and shrimp. Newer varieties mimic the look, flavour and texture of the real thing. Some even "bleed" like meat and give off that signature sizzle as they cook.

2 ACCORDING TO a 2021 Pew Research Center survey, 61 per cent of Indian adults are meat-eaters. But about 41 per cent of Indians restrict their meat consumption in some



way, paving a way for easy conversion to plant-based meat. Though the Indian mock meat market is at a nascent stage, it has been predicted to grow from \$30–\$40 million in 2021 to \$500 million in the next three years, according to a survey conducted by retail broking company Nirmal Bang. This explains the recent mushrooming of several Indian alternative meat brands in the space.

3 CLEARLY PLANT-based proteins aren't just for vegetarians and vegans. Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat—two of the biggest names in the industry—report that more than nine out of 10 of their consumers also eat meat.

4 BUYER BEWARE: Mock meats can be high in sodium and can have as much saturated fat and as many calories as real meats. As for protein, the amount in veggie burgers ranges from

about 4 to 20 grams (85 grams of chicken contains 26 grams), but the better protein options tend to have more saturated fat.

5 MANY MEATLESS manufacturers don't disclose their total emissions, but research shows they generate a lot less greenhouse gas compared to their meat equivalents. One study found that making the Beyond Burger uses 99 per cent less water, 93 per cent less land, and nearly 50 per cent less energy than making a quarter pound beef burger does.

6 WHETHER OR not these products can be called 'meat' depends on where they're sold. A growing number of US states have banned plant-based companies from using the word on their product labels—even with a qualifier such as 'vegetarian.' Lawmakers say they don't want consumers to be tricked

into buying fake meat by mistake. Some food manufacturers have challenged the law in court, saying it limits free speech and is intended to protect the meat industry.

7 THE BIGGEST FMCG brands in India such as ITC and TATA consumer products now sell their own entirely plant-based meat options. It's a smart sideline: Sales soared to \$7 billion in 2020, and Bloomberg predicts the market will skyrocket to \$74 billion by 2030—a 957 per cent surge.

8 EVEN FAST food is jumping on the bandwagon. Burger King has the Impossible Whopper. McDonald's is testing a Beyond burger called the McPlant. And KFC is working on fake fried chicken as finger-lickin' good as the original.

9 YOU CAN make your own meatless chicken with only

two ingredients, as millions of TikTok users learned in a viral video last year. Just mix together flour and water, then knead it and rinse it under more water to wash out the starch. You'll get a dough that looks (and sort of tastes) like chicken. The trick is a version of a meat alternative called seitan (pronounced 'say-tan), or wheat gluten, which has been around for centuries.

10 ACCORDING TO a report published by the US Department of Agriculture, India is a “burgeoning market” for mock meat. And this trend, unlike popular perception isn't restricted to the Indian metros. The Nirmal Bang report found that tier-2 cities drive consumption of smart protein, where consumers are not

only trying these products but are making repeat purchases.

11 IMPOSSIBLE FOODS spent years developing a molecule called heme (rhymes with seem), which gives its products a bloody red appearance and beefy taste. (For many who find meat unpalatable, heme will be similarly unappetizing.) The nonprofit Center for Food Safety filed a lawsuit challenging FDA approval of heme, but an appeals court later upheld the decision to declare it safe to eat.

12 THE NEW frontier of meat alternatives is lab-grown, also called cultured or cell-based meat. Grown in test tubes from the stem cells of animals, they are still animal products, but they don't require

breeding, raising or slaughtering. A plant-based option is mushroom meat, which mimics the texture of whole cuts such as steaks, and slices and serves like them too.

13 NEW ALTERNATE meats get all the attention, but Indians, historically have been consuming soybeans, jackfruit, dairy, and pulses for protein. Beans and lentils are excellent protein substitutes, says Kari Hamerschlag, deputy director of food and agriculture at Friends of the Earth, a nonprofit environmental organization. “They're nutritious, inexpensive, and far more sustainable than any of the processed meatless substitutes on the market today.” **R**

—WITH INPUTS BY NAOREM ANUJA



In Want of a Wife

I've never been married, but I've had a few near Mrs.

VERBERD ON *Reddit.com*

HUMOUR *in*
UNIFORM



“I may not be home tonight ... I’m embedded with the troops.”

After our physical, a sergeant addressed us draftees. “I see you all are from a county that makes moonshine,” he said. “Do any of *you* make moonshine?” Nobody answered. “Do any of you *drink* moonshine?” Silence. “Good, because the Army wouldn’t have you if you did.” From the back: “Umm ... I drink a little.”
—DEAN JORDAN

When my Air Force wing deployed to

Norway, our first sergeant wanted to make sure we behaved ourselves and blended in with the locals. “You men are representing yourselves, your country and the United States Air Force,” he told us. “Remember, when in Rome, do as the Romanians do.”
—JIM VIZE

The Military-to-English Dictionary:
♦ **Five-sided puzzle palace:** the Pentagon

- ♦ **Football bat:** criticism of a baffling order
- ♦ **Ink stick:** a pen
- ♦ **Fruit salad:** the colourful ribbons and medals on an officer’s dress uniform.

—GRAMMAR.YOURDICTIONARY.COM

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LEO CULLUM/CARTOONSTOCK.COM

NEWS FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**



Dementia Need Not Ruin Friendships

Dementia doesn't diminish a person's need for connection, but people living with this diagnosis sometimes see their friends distance themselves. It doesn't have to be this way, emphasizes a recent study published in the *Canadian Journal on Aging*.

The researchers interviewed

people with dementia and their loved ones to find out how they were remaining close. Strategies included being open about the condition, accepting changes in behaviour and the relationship and focusing on what remains accessible (like a love of music and shared memories). Other tips included providing practical support (such as giving reminders about a shared outing) and checking in with each other.

Why Thinking Hard Is Exhausting

If you've ever felt tapped out after concentrating for hours, that's because the effort is making a molecule called glutamate build up in your prefrontal cortex. When glutamate levels there are too high, they can disrupt brain function, causing fatigue and 'lazy' decision making that prioritizes easy indulgences over long-term gains. Scientists in Paris recently figured this out by enrolling volunteers to work for more than six hours on either a cognitively demanding task or a relatively easy one. The group with the more taxing assignment accumulated more glutamate, as revealed by brain spectroscopy. They were also more likely to choose a smaller, immediate cash reward over a larger one that would come months later. The only known cure for this state? Rest.

Daytime Dining Is Best if You Have Type 2 Diabetes

It's not unusual to spread a day's food intake over at least 14 hours—say from breakfast at seven a.m. until dinner at nine p.m. Narrowing that window down to 10 hours could benefit people with Type 2 diabetes, according to a Dutch study by researchers at Maastricht University Medical Center. Doing so would allow the patients' bodies to reach a fasting state during the night and lower their overall blood-sugar levels.

The study's findings line up with previous research where even shorter time windows—such as eight hours—led to increased fat burning and improved insulin sensitivity in people with obesity.

Autoimmune Disorders Increase Cardiac Risk

It is estimated that nearly 4 per cent of the world's population is affected by one of more than 80 different autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis. In all cases, the immune system attacks healthy organs and tissues, often causing inflammation.

New research out of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium has shown that people with an autoimmune disorder were at least 1.4 times more likely to develop



cardiovascular disease. Meanwhile, the risk more than doubled among subjects with two autoimmune disorders.

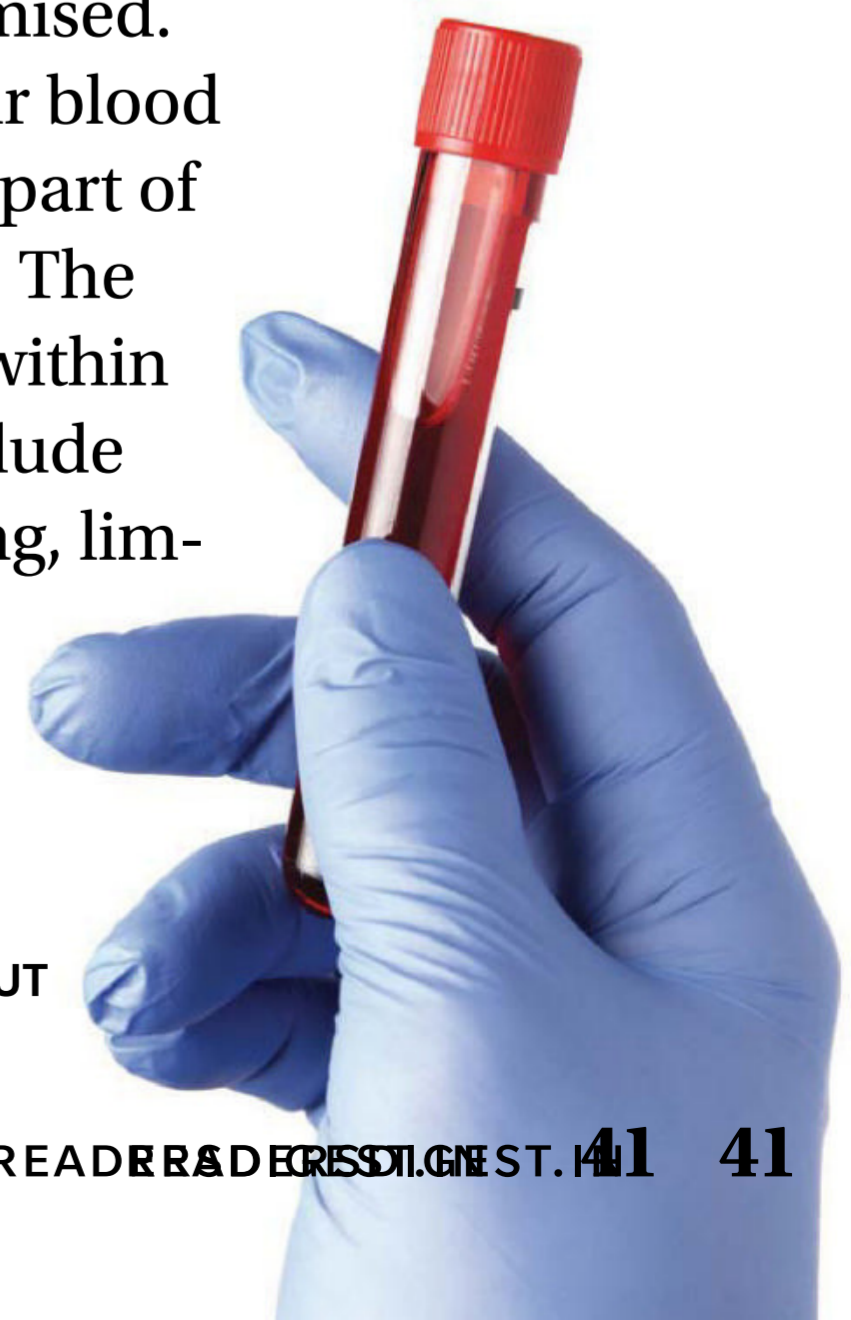
The researchers hope their work will encourage these patients and their doctors to discuss prevention strategies for cardiovascular problems—just as general practitioners already do for people living with other conditions that are known to raise the risk substantially.

Type-A Blood Linked to Early Stroke

Most strokes happen to seniors, but they're on the rise among people under 60. According to a large international review published in *Neurology*, people with type-A blood have a 16 per cent higher risk of early stroke compared to other blood types. (By contrast, the risk for those with type O is 12 per cent lower.) Type-A blood might be more prone to clotting, the researchers surmised.

That said, your blood type is only one part of your risk profile. The factors that are within your control include avoiding smoking, limiting saturated fat and managing your blood pressure.

—BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT



It Happens
ONLY IN INDIA



'thank you'

A Simple Job

If one's eight-hour workday consisted of standing on a railway platform, counting trains as they trudge past, it would be like it was no job at all. Well, turns out 28 men from Tamil Nadu believed they were 'deployed' at

the New Delhi Railway Station to do just that—count the arrival and departure of every train and each of their coaches for a month, until they discovered that they had been scammed. According to a complaint filed with the Delhi Police's

Economic Offences Wing (EOW), the job-seekers had paid between ₹2,000,00 and ₹20,000,00 as facilitation charges for various jobs in the Indian Railways. They were made to go through a medical exam, as well as issued documents such

as orders for training, identity cards, training completion certificates and appointment letters—which on inspection turned out to be forged. Truly a simple con job.

SOURCE: NDTV.COM

The Towering Con

Both the sights and stakes were high on this next job. An entire mobile tower, standing tall in Patna's Sabzi Bagh locality was carted away by thieves. Installed by AIRCEL in 2006, the tower was sold to GTL Ltd. The theft was discovered when the company sent employees for a routine inspection to the house where the tower had been installed. Imagine their surprise, when they were informed that four months earlier, people claiming to be GTL's employees turned up and dismantled the tower citing that they had to do so due to technical glitches. They even vouched that a new one would soon be set up in its place. This

@NILESHSHAH68 ON TWITTER

JOB OPPORTUNITY

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THE GREAT DIVIDE

Maybe we'll never really be able to make maths fun for all, but hiring a master to try his luck can be.

is just the latest in a dream run for thieves in Bihar: In 2022, thieves took home oil from a moving goods train, while others of the same ilk stole a 60-foot defunct iron bridge. Life Lesson: The only impediments to one's ambition are the limits we set on ourselves.

SOURCE: INDIATIMES.COM

Greener Grass

Why does the grass look greener on the other side? Maybe ... just maybe ... it's sprayed on? Madhya Pradesh is playing host to 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention and Global Investors Summit, and preparations

for this particular show-and-tell were on in earnest, including giving the local vegetation a face-lift. Videos of dried-up and yellowing lawns in Indore's Bapat Square being doused with a coat of green paint have been circulated online, to wide ranging reactions of netizens, but hey, we see no harm is playing dress-up before the party comes to town!

SOURCE: FREEPRESSJOURNAL.COM

—COMPILED BY NAOREM ANUJA

Reader's Digest will pay for contributions to this column. Post your suggestions with the source to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

SO THAT'S WHY WE SAY —

T H A T

Fun facts about the language
that's been confounding speakers
for centuries: English

BY *Brandon Spektor*
ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Richard Borge*



“If the English language made any sense, *lackadaisical* would have something to do with a shortage of flowers.”

—Doug Larson, journalist

AS ANYONE WHO'S sat through English class can tell you, this globally unifying language is baffling. And yet, somehow, there are currently around 1,71,146 words in use in the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Granted, many are of the *a*, *the* and *but* variety. Still, few of us know how the words we utter were derived or what they really mean. What follows is a hodgepodge (there's a good word!) of fun facts about the language that gave us Shakespeare, Hemingway, Angelou and those dolts on Twitter.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD

Did you know that the word *muscle* comes from the Latin *musculus*, which means 'little mouse'? Apparently, the ancient Romans thought that the movement of a muscle, especially a flexed bicep, looked as if a mouse were running under the skin. Now there's a fun visual. And that's not even the weirdest example of a word with odd, ancient origins creeping—like mice under our skin—into modern English. Here are a few of our favourites.

QUARANTINE ▶ The first quarantine was in Venice, Italy, while bubonic plague was ravaging the mainland. To help curb the spread of infection, visiting ships had to spend 40 days at anchor before entering the city. (Worst. Cruise. Ever!!!) The word *quarantine* comes from the Italian phrase *quaranta giorni*: literally, '40 days'.

GALAXY ▶ Thousands of years ago, ancient Greek stargazers looked up at the sky and saw a white river of light arcing overhead. Their reaction? “I could really go for some cookies right now.” The Greeks named that broad band of stars *galaxías*—which stems from the word *gála*, meaning 'milk'. To this day, we call our galaxy the Milky Way.

AMBULANCE ▶ The word originates from French military field hospitals of the 18th century. This type of mobile medical centre could be easily broken down and moved from place to place, earning it the name *hôpital ambulant*—literally, 'walking hospital'. Eventually, the name was shortened to just *ambulance*. Thankfully, today's walking hospitals come with wheels.

CANDIDATE ▶ In ancient Rome, the colour of someone's toga could indicate that person's social status. Politicians wore gleaming white robes, probably whitened with powdered chalk, to show the purity of their intentions. This white toga was called *toga candida*, from the Latin *candidare* (to whiten). From there, we get the English words *candidate* (one seeking office) and *candid* (truthful)—two words rarely uttered in the same sentence.

IDIOT ▶ What's the opposite of a candidate? An idiot, or *idiōtēs* in Greek.

Coming from the word *idios*, meaning 'private', an idiot was anyone who didn't hold public office. That later came to mean 'common man' and, much later, 'ignorant person', which is how it's used today. (What did the ancient Greeks call a foolish person? *Moros*, which is the basis for the modern *moron*.)

PUNCH ▶ The original recipe for fruit punch, as it was mixed in the 1600s, called for five ingredients: sugar, spice, lemon, water and booze. It's said that the name of the

drink comes from the Hindi word *paanch*, meaning five. (Watch out for that fifth ingredient; it packs a punch.)

BARBARIAN ▶ The ancient Greeks loved their language more than ouzo and looked down on those who spoke a 'lesser' tongue. To Greek ears, anyone prattling on in another language sounded as if they were saying *bar-bar*, the ancient equivalent of *blah-blah*. This bar-bar babbling led to the word *bárbaros*, meaning 'foreign and uncouth'. *Barbarian* came to us from there.



DISASTER ▶ From time immemorial, astrologers have been hunting for divine messages in the stars. Coming from the Latin *dis*, meaning 'asunder', and *astrum*, meaning 'star', a disaster means that the stars are against you and that ill fortune is close at hand. Just ask the dinosaurs, who were annihilated by an asteroid (from the Greek word *asteroeidēs*, meaning 'star-like').

MAGAZINE ▶ Coming from the Arabic word *makhzan*, meaning 'storehouse', the term *magazine* was originally used in the 1600s to describe books. Why? Because books were storehouses of knowledge. Eventually, the word came to describe printed periodicals, like the little storehouse of knowledge you're holding right now.

WHY DON'T WE SAY THAT?

English has no shortage of idioms that might sound batty to foreign ears. (It was raining cats and dogs? Really? How many umbrellas did you go through?) Here are a few colorful turns of phrase and their international origins that imports we should consider adopting in common English, pronto.

▶ Ever think of the perfect witty comeback a moment too late for anyone to hear it? In France, you've got the *esprit de l'escalier*—'wit of the staircase' (because by the time the idea comes to you, you've already left the party).

▶ When someone is daydreaming in Spain, they are *pensando en la inmortalidad del cangrejo*—literally, 'pondering the immortality of the crab'.

▶ Similarly, when someone's mind wanders in Poland, they are said to be 'thinking about blue almonds' (*myśleć o niebieskich migdałach*).

▶ If you find yourself in a pickle in Sweden, you aren't caught with your pants down, you're *sitta med skägget i brevlådan*—'sitting with your beard in the mailbox'.

▶ In English, a rare occurrence happens once in a blue moon. In Italian, it happens *ogni morte di Papa*—on 'every death of a Pope'.

▶ Travelling in Israel? If you ask for directions to a town located in the middle of nowhere, you might get this less-than-helpful response: *Sof ha'olam, smolah*. ('At the end of the world, turn left.')

▶ Uh-oh, did Grandpa forget the point of another story? In English, he's lost the plot; in Mandarin Chinese, he's 'adding legs to a snake' (*huà shé tiānzú*).

▶ Had enough of this international inanity? Then buzz off! Or, as they say in Farsi, *Gooreto gom kon!*—'Go lose your grave!'

SO THAT'S WHY WE CALL THAT THAT

In 1997, two smarty-pants, needing a name for their new data-index website, came up with 'googol', which is the number one followed by a hundred zeroes. Perfect! But as they typed *Googol* into a domain-name search engine, they committed a critical typo. And the mistake stuck. Don't believe us? Google it. Meanwhile, here are the stories behind other brand names.

Triscuit ▶ ELECTRICITY BISCUITS

Triscuit is short for 'electricity biscuit', because the first ones were proudly produced with hydroelectric power.

Adidas ▶ ADI DASSLER

Adidas is an abbreviation of 'Adi Dassler', one of two feuding Dassler brothers from Germany who founded rival shoe empires after World War II (Adi's brother Rudi founded Puma).

Häagen-Dazs ▶ ??????

Häagen-Dazs is short for ... absolutely nothing. Reuben Mattus, who moved to Brooklyn from Poland, created the ice cream company in 1959. A Jew, he wanted to give his company a Danish-sounding name in tribute to Denmark's reputation for saving Jews during World War II and settled on this nonsense phrase.

Nike ▶ VICTORY

Nike was named for the Greek goddess of victory. Allegedly, the shoe company's famous 'swoosh' logo represents the fleet-footed goddess's wings.

Lego ▶ PLAY WELL

Lego is a contraction of the Danish phrase *leg godt*, meaning 'play well'.



WORDS WE GOTTA BRING BACK. NO, REALLY, NOW!

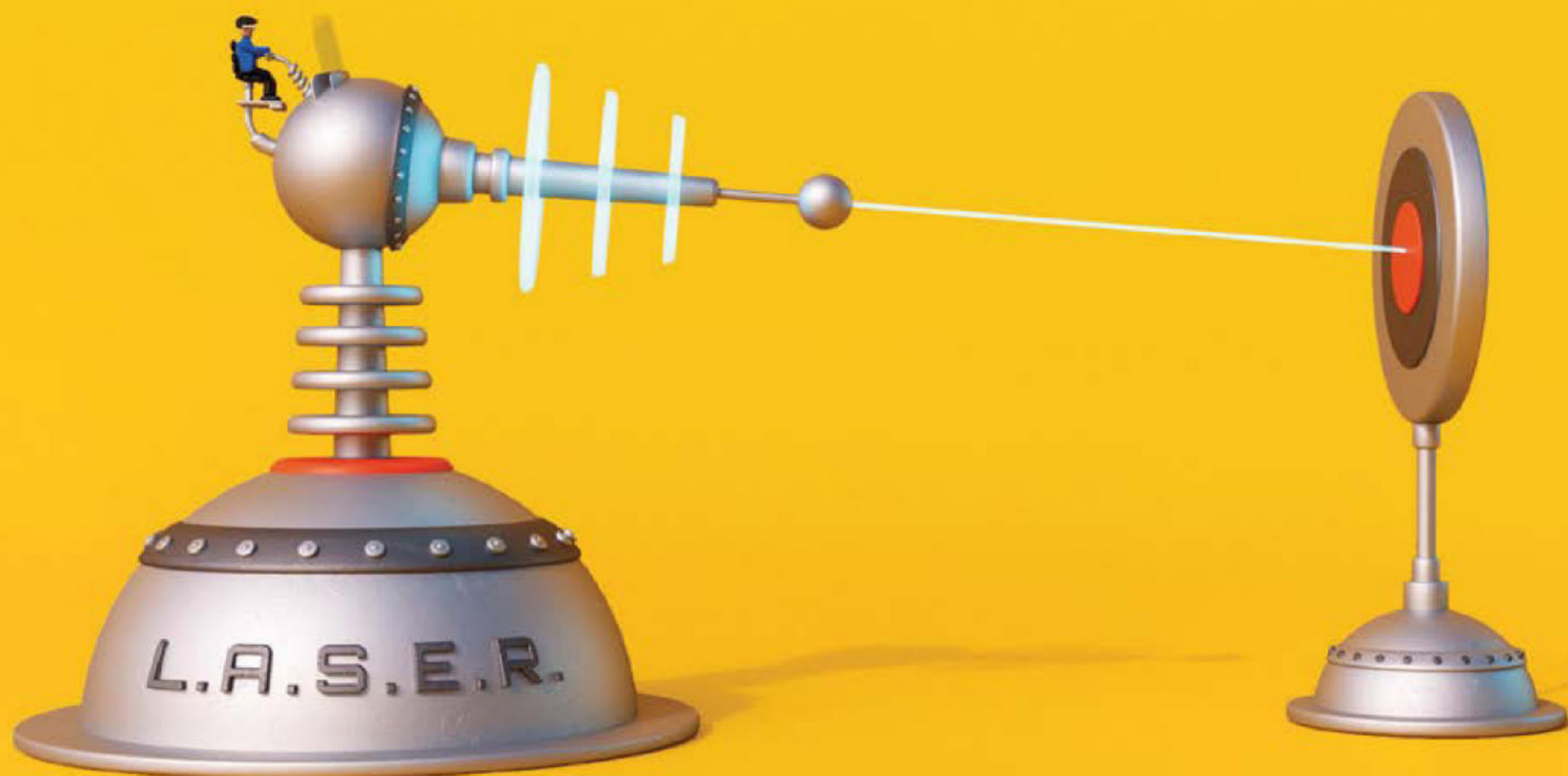
Language is full of twists and turns—or, as our silver-tongued ancestors might say, it's full of crinkum-crankum. Words that were once common become obsolete, or downright ridiculous, just a few generations later. Take these 19th-century slang words that we desperately need to bring back. Can you figure out what they mean in the story below?

The day after my bachelor party, I woke up with the worst **katzenjammer** of my life. My head felt full of **slumgullion**, and **collywobbles** battered my gut. I looked around the room, utterly **bumfuzzled**. The whole apartment was **cattywampus**, with **gubbins** of chips and pizza crusts strewn across the floor. Light shone **slantindicular** through the window. What time was it, anyway? When I looked at the wall clock, it was moving **widdershins**! I closed my eyes to shut out all the **flummadiddle**—then I realized: I don't own a wall clock! Had I been **hornswoggled**, or did I somehow stumble into the wrong house??? I rose shakily to my feet and **absquatulated** as fast as I could. I've never felt so **crapulous** in my life!



Key:

- ▶ katzenjammer: a hangover
- ▶ slumgullion: meat stew
- ▶ collywobbles: abdominal pains
- ▶ bumfuzzled: confused
- ▶ cattywampus: askew
- ▶ gubbins: scraps
- ▶ slantindicular: oblique; a portmanteau of “slanted” and “perpendicular.”
- ▶ widdershins: counterclockwise
- ▶ flummadiddle: something nonsensical or worthless
- ▶ hornswoggle: to trick or deceive
- ▶ absquatulate: depart suddenly
- ▶ crapulous: sick from excessive drinking



AHIPS! (ACRONYMS HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT)

From a casual LOL (Laugh Out Loud) to your bank card PIN (Personal Identification Number), acronyms infuse our lives now more than ever. Sometimes, you might not even realize you're using one. For example:

- ▶ Did you know that **laser** is the lazy way of saying **L**ight **A**mplification by the **S**timulated **E**mission of **R**adiation?
- ▶ **Scuba** diving? Hope your **S**elf-**C**ontained **U**nderwater **B**reathing **A**pparatus is working.
- ▶ Lube a greasy wheel with **WD-40**—that's **W**ater **D**isplacement, **40**th formula—a name straight out of the lab book of the chemist who invented the stuff in 1953, after 39 failed attempts.
- ▶ **Taser** might shock you even more. That's the **T**om **A.** **S**wift **E**lectric **R**ifle, named after a 1911 young adult adventure novel that was much beloved by NASA researcher Jack Cover, who invented the Taser in 1974.
- ▶ Shop at **IKEA**? Thank founder **I**ngvar **K**amprad, who grew up on the farm of **E**lmtaryd near **A**gunnaryd, a town in Sweden.
- ▶ When in Sweden, listen to plenty of **ABBA**. The famous pop quartet was named after its members: **A**gnetha, **B**jörn, **B**enny, and **A**nni-Frid.

THE POWER OF A SINGLE WORD

One needn't be a blabbermouth to get a point across. When a Macedonian general threatened to attack Sparta in the fourth century BC, he warned the Spartan generals, "You are advised to submit without further delay, for if I bring my army on your land, I will destroy your farms, slay your people and raze your city." The Spartans replied with one word: "If."

Whoa! The Macedonians suddenly remembered they had to wash their hair that day and never attacked.

Similarly, in 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, German troops surrounded Americans at Bastogne and ordered them to surrender or face being wiped out. Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe sent back this pithy reply: "Nuts!" And, no, he wasn't requesting snacks for his troops. Today, we'd use something a little spicier and almost as short, but the point got across and the Americans eventually fought their way out.

Another benefit of brevity? It saves you on telegram fees. French author Victor Hugo understood this in 1862 when asking his publishers how sales of his new book, *Les Misérables*, were going. Too low on francs to send a lengthy message, he instead telegraphed a single question mark. Having sold all 7,000 copies of the book's first printing in less than 24 hours,

Hugo's publishers responded in kind—with a single exclamation point.

Sometimes even masters of brevity need to employ a second word to make their point. Take America's 30th president, Calvin Coolidge—a man so tight-lipped that his friends nicknamed him Silent Cal. A popular story told by his wife, Grace, recalls Cal sitting next to a young woman at a Capitol Hill dinner party. The woman turned to Cal and said, "I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you."

His reply? "You lose."

WE CAN'T STRESS THIS ENOUGH

Take a moment to admire this sentence: "She told him that she loved him." It's a simple, straightforward profession of adoration. Or is it? It doesn't take much to change its meaning. Just place the word *only* anywhere in the sentence. Similarly, the sentence "I didn't say she stole my money" is uncomplicated, until you realize it has seven meanings depending on which word is emphasized.





A TRIP TO THE WORD BUFFET

Synesthesia is a fancy name for experiencing one of our senses through another of our senses. For example, someone might hear the word *chair* and see the colour green. James Wannerton, on the other hand, tastes words. As he told the BBC, “The word ‘college’ tastes like sausage. ‘Karen’ tastes like yogurt. ‘Yogurt’ tastes, foully, of hairspray. ‘Most’ tastes like crisp, cold toast with hardly any butter on it.” Scientists aren’t sure what causes synesthesia, though the genomes of synesthetes (those who have it) seem different from typical genomes. The result for Wannerton is that reading and writing can be an adventure, what with his taste buds in overdrive with every sentence. But sometimes, it’s not so bad.

“I get tremendous joy,” he says, “out of writing the blandest email.”

NOW, THAT’S BETTER!

This gem, which we found on guidetogrammar.org, has been attributed to both Mark Twain and to a letter written to the journal *The Economist*. It’s called “A plan for the improvement of the English language,” and it just may resolve many of the issues we have regarding our fickle language:

“In Year 1 that useless letter *c* would be dropped to be replased either by *k* or *s*, and likewise *x* would no longer be part of the alphabet. The only kase in which *c* would be retained would be the *ch* formation, which will be dealt with later. Year 2 might reform *w* spelling, so that *which* and *one* would take the same konsonant, wile Year 3 might well abolish *y*, replasing it with *i*, and Iear 4 might fiks the *g/j* anomali wonse and for all. Jenerally, then, the improvement would kontinue iear bai iear with Iear 5 doing awai with useless double konsonants, and Iears 6 to 12 or so modifaiing vowlz and the ri-meining voist and unvoist konsonants.

Bai Iear 15 or sou, it wud fainali bi posibl tu meik ius ov thi ridandant letez *c*, *y*, and *x*—bai now jast a memori in the maindz ov ould doderez—tu riplais *ch*, *sh*, and *th* rispektivli.

Fainali, xen, aafte sam 20 iers ov orxogrefkl riform, wi wud hev a lojkl, kohirnt speling in ius xrewawt xe Ingliy-spiking werld. **R**

COVER STORY

The
**ENDURING
DELIGHT**
of the
DICTIONARY

*Every unknown word is
a solvable mystery*

BY *Rachel del Valle*

FROM *THE NEW YORK TIMES*



I can't remember how old I was when I learnt the words 'denotation' (the definition of a word) and 'connotation' (the suggestion of a word). But I do remember feeling a little betrayed by the idea that there was a whole layer of language that couldn't quite be conveyed through a dictionary. Like most young people, I enjoyed learning but thought of it as something I would eventually be done with. At some age, I assumed, I would need to know everything. Understanding the nuances of language seemed like an obstacle to that goal.

It wasn't until after I graduated from college, and subsequently realized that there's no such thing as all-encompassing knowledge, that I was able to read for pleasure. A sense of curiosity, rather than desperate completism, steered me. I started to see dictionaries, inexact as they are, as field guides to the life of language. Looking up words encountered in the wild felt less like a failing than an admission that there are lots of things I don't know and an opportunity to discover just how many.

I prize my 1954 copy of *Webster's New International Dictionary*, Second Edition, which I picked up on the street near my apartment in Brooklyn a few years ago. Its 3,000 pages (India paper, with a marbled fore edge) are punctuated by a thumb index. I keep it open, solitary on a tabletop, the way dictionaries are usually found in libraries. I often consult it during evening games of Scrabble or mid-day magazine reading. I mostly read novels at night, in bed, so when I come across unfamiliar words, I dog-ear

the bottom of the page, then look up words in spurts. When I start encountering these words—newly resplendent to my pattern-seeking mind, in articles, podcasts, other books and even the occasional conversation—the linguistic universe seems to shrink to the size of a small town.

Dictionaries heighten my senses: They direct my attention outwards, into a conversation with language. They make me wonder what other things I'm blind to because I haven't taught myself to notice them yet. Recently spotted specimens include 'orrery'—a mechanical model, usually clockwork, devised to represent the motions of the moon and Earth (and sometimes also other planets) around the sun. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) also tells me that the word comes from the fourth Earl of Orrery, for whom a copy of the first machine was made, around 1700. Useful? Obviously not. Satisfying? Deeply.

Wikipedia and Google answer questions with more questions, opening up pages of information you never asked



Using a dictionary feels as if I'm prying open an oyster rather than falling down a rabbit hole.

for. But a dictionary builds on common knowledge, using simple words to explain more complex ones. Using one feels as if I'm prying open an oyster rather than falling down a rabbit hole. Unknown words become solvable mysteries. Why leave them up to guesswork? Why not consult a dictionary and feel the instant gratification of pairing context with a definition?

Dictionaries reward you for paying attention, both to the things you consume and to your own curiosity. They are a portal into the kind of irrational, childish urge to just *know* things, which I had before learning became a duty instead of a game.

There are, of course, many different dictionaries. The way they've proliferated over time is a reminder of just how futile it is to approach language as something that can be fully understood and contained. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, defined a paltry 40,000 words. The original *OED*, proposed by the Philological Society of London in 1857 and completed more than 70 years later, contained over 4,00,000 entries.

The Merriam-Webster universe is a direct descendant of Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828. Compiled by Webster alone over the course of more than 20 years, it contained 70,000 words, nearly a fifth of which had never been defined before.

Webster, who corresponded with the likes of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, saw lexicography as an act of patriotism. He believed that establishing American standards of spelling and definition was necessary to solidify the young nation's cultural identity as separate from that of England.

Perhaps because of Webster's enthusiasm for rules, dictionaries have long had an unfair reputation as arbiters of language, as tools used to limit rather than expand your range of expression. But dictionaries don't create language—people do. Take *dilettante*. The superficial connotation of the word is a modern invention. Noah Webster's aforementioned *American Dictionary* defines it as 'one who delights in promoting science or the fine arts.' The *OED* cites its connection to the Latin verb *delectare*, meaning 'to delight or please'. To be a dilettante once meant that love and curiosity drove your interest in a given discipline.

For me, dictionaries are a portal into that kind of uncalculated knowledge-seeking. They remind me that, when it comes to learning, indulging your curiosity is just as important as paying attention. After all, isn't curiosity really just another form of attention? Following your curiosity instead of swatting it away is one of the best ways I know to feel connected to more than what's right in front of you. **R**

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Scene: A designer talking with a prospective client ...

Me: The price for the project we're talking about will be [total].

Client: Really? I had another designer work on this for me last year and

he did it for free.

Me: I'm sorry, I can't work for free. You may want to try going back to him and seeing if he'll do it for free again this year.

Client: I can't. He's no longer in business.

—NOTALWAYSRIGHT.COM

I was visiting a friend in Minnesota, and we decided to go bowling. However, a squall appeared, dumping a foot of snow on the ground. Fearing the bowling alley might have closed, I decided to call.

"Are you open?" I asked the man who answered.

"Yes. Why?" he said.

"It's snowing."

"Son, I don't know

Sorry I'm late—my two-year-old decided he could buckle his own car seat.

—[@WILDRAINBOW2](https://twitter.com/WILDRAINBOW2)

where you're from, but here in Minnesota we bowl indoors."

—RAJ PADMANATHAN

Me at 14: Can't wait to travel the whole world once I'm earning my own money.

Me now: Mustn't forget that Tupperware at work—it's my only one.

—@ITSBOMBARDIER

The phone rang in our office, and my co-worker quickly picked up. After a few seconds I heard her say, "Sorry, there's no one here by that name." Not wanting to simply hang up, she politely, but not so helpfully, asked, "May I take a message?"

—JOHN BOUCHARD

Elaine's was a fabled New York City bar/restaurant whose clientele included such luminaries as Woody Allen, Michael Caine and Frank Sinatra. But the real star was its legendary bartender,

Thomas Carney. As the *New York Times* tells it, Carney once got into it with a customer, a famous talent agent who refused to pay his bill. "Do you know who I am?" demanded the agent. Carney climbed up on the bar, clanged a spoon against a bottle to get everyone's attention, and announced, "This man does not know who he is. Does anybody

know who he is? We need help."

OMG, thanks for ending the meeting four minutes early and "giving me some time back"—now I can finally pursue my passions.

—@SABLAH

Reader's Digest *will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com*

THE FOUR COMMANDMENTS

People often look for a sign from God. Here are signs found in churches from people who work for God.

"Do not leave your mobiles, purses, wallets and handbags unattended—others may think it is an answer to their prayers."

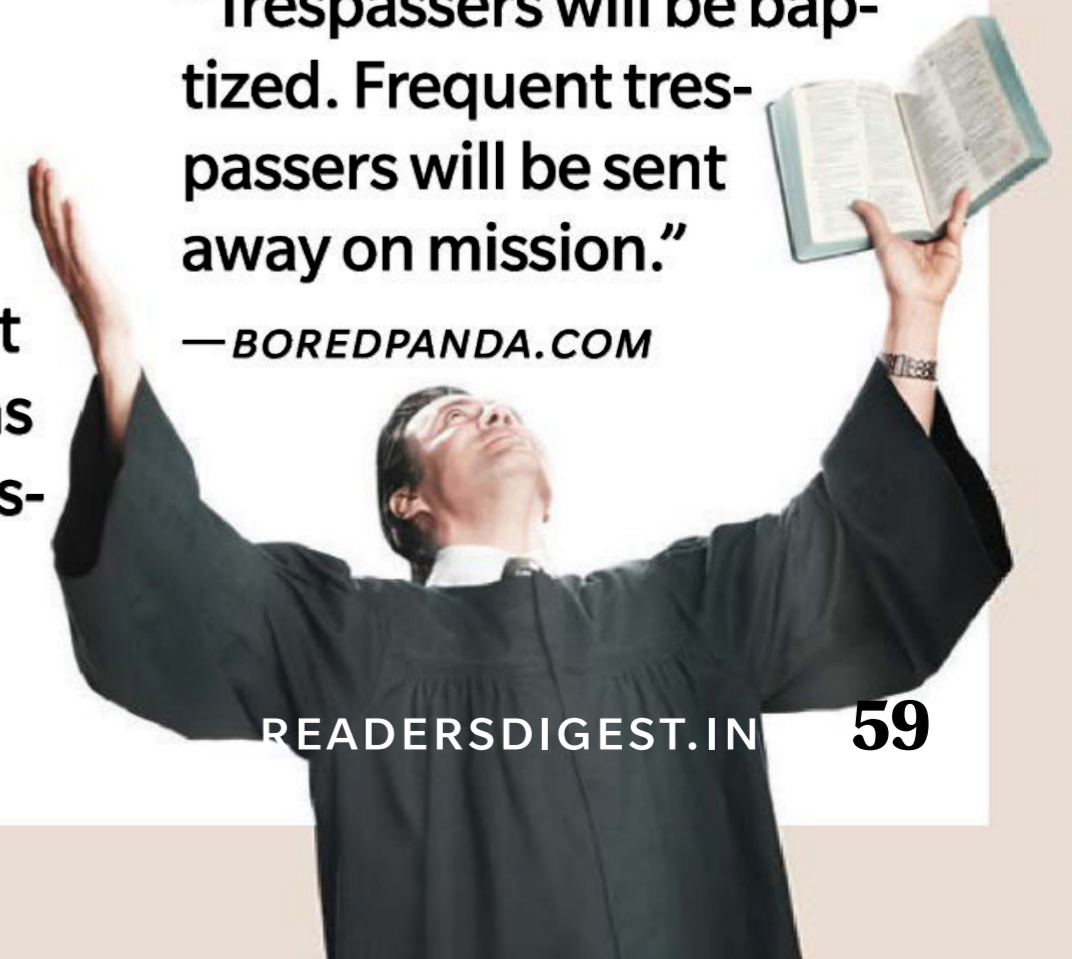
"Adultery is a sin. You can't have your Kate and Edith too."

"There is only one priest available for confessions today. Make your confes-

sion direct and to the point, and confess only your sins and offenses. No need to explain why you did it."

(In a church parking lot)
"Trespassers will be baptized. Frequent trespassers will be sent away on mission."

—BOREDPANDA.COM



HEALTH



WINNING AGAINST CANCER

THESE BREAKTHROUGHS ARE
REASONS FOR REAL HOPE

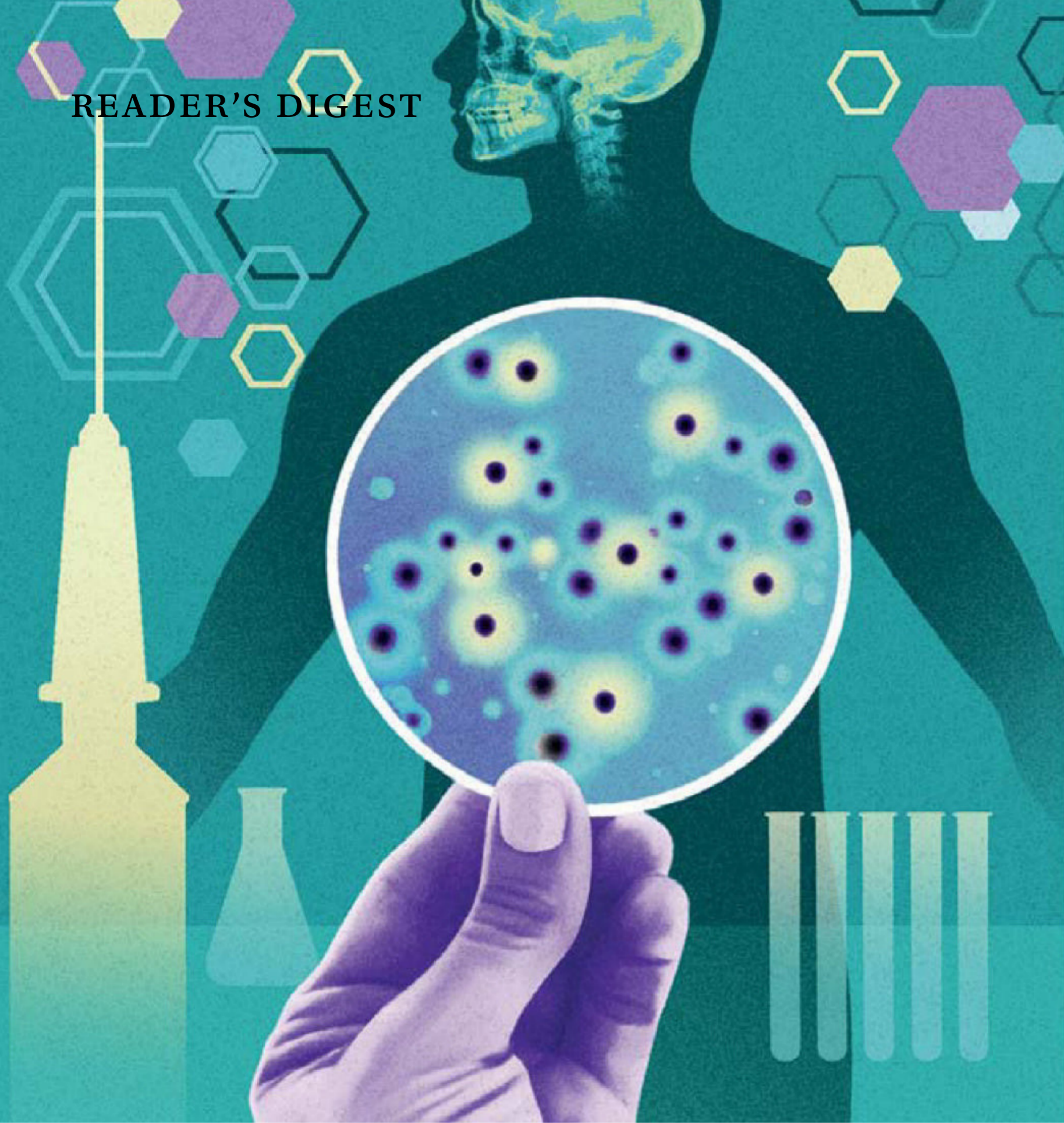
BY *Lia Grainger*

A CANCER DIAGNOSIS NO longer means what it used to. Just a few decades ago, the survival rate beyond five years was less than 50 per cent. Now, nearly 70 per cent of those who get cancer survive that long, and that proportion is set to rise. Why? Because, more than ever, chemotherapy and radiation, once the only heavy hitters of cancer treatment, are being paired with or replaced by a slate of new drugs and treatments.

For example, the first medication for what was previously considered an 'undruggable' lung cancer mutation was recently approved in the United States, Canada, Europe and the UK. And a brand-new precision chemotherapy drug delivered directly to breast cancer tumour cells is giving hope to patients with the aggressive HER2-positive form of the disease.

An even bigger newsmaker has been the promise of a treatment called immunotherapy, as researchers around the world have discovered ways to harness the body's own immune system to battle cancer cells.

Also driving hope is a focus on prevention. Decades of research and public education have led to greater awareness of how lifestyle changes can reduce our risk of developing cancer. According to an article from the journal *Pharmaceutical Research* and published by the National Institutes of Health, 90 per cent to 95 per cent of cancers can be attributed to



environment and lifestyle, rather than to genetic factors.

Here are some of the strides scientists are making against cancer.

PREVENTION

► HPV VACCINE

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common women's cancers and the leading cause of cancer deaths among women. In recent decades, Pap test screening led to a decline. But a preventive tool in use for more than a decade—a vaccine against the human papilloma virus (HPV), which is responsible for more than 95 per cent of cervical cancer cases—has been a game-changer. Here's how:

Since 2006, when the vaccine was

introduced in North America, HPV infections have dropped more than 80 per cent among teen girls and young women in the United States.

A study published in the *Lancet* at the end of 2021 found that in England, where the immunization program was introduced in 2008, cervical cancer has been almost completely eliminated in women born since 1995 (those who were vaccinated at ages 12 or 13).

An 11-year Swedish study of 1.7 million women published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2020 indicated that women vaccinated before age 17 were 90 per cent less likely to get cervical cancer.

In March 2022, Australia announced that it was on track to become the first country to eliminate the cancer.

The World Health Organization's goal is for 90 per cent of girls to be vaccinated globally by 2030, eventually eliminating cervical cancer entirely.

► MRNA CANCER VACCINES

The speedy development of COVID-19 vaccines was thanks to foundations already laid by researchers who had been working for years to create

mRNA vaccines to fight cancer. These vaccines use a specially programmed molecule to activate an immune response in the body's cells. Unlike the COVID-19 vaccines designed to help protect billions of people, each cancer mRNA vaccine is tailor-made to treat a single patient's cancerous tumours. Dozens of clinical trials testing their effectiveness against a range of cancers, including pancreatic, are underway.

"In theory, this personalized approach can be made for everyone, and for every cancer," says Patrick Ott, director of the Center for Personal Cancer Vaccines at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

SCREENING

► GALLERI BLOOD TEST

Catching cancer early can be challenging. Current screening methods in wide use—for example, the

mammogram since the 1970s and the colonoscopy since the 1990s—look for one type of cancer. And blood tests look for markers like blood cell count as well as proteins and chemicals made by cancer cells, but these tests are not highly specific; they are often used only after cancer has been detected by another method.

Now, a test known as Galleri, made by California-based global biotechnology company Grail, promises to detect more than 50 types of cancers

**THE GALLERI TEST
DETECTED CANCER 50 PER
CENT OF THE TIME.**

with one blood draw. Galleri detects tumour-generated genetic material that has entered the bloodstream; it reveals the presence of cancer and

"HALLELUJAH!"

► **SUSAN FALBO** had gone 20 years without taking a sick day. So it came as a shock in 2017 when doctors told the 59-year-old Shadyside, Ohio, resident that she had mesothelioma cancer in the membrane covering her right lung. Surgery, 30 rounds of radiation and four rounds of chemotherapy stabilized her for a year, but then tumours began to grow again. She recalls one oncologist telling her, "You know you're not going to survive this, right?" Then she discovered she was a prime candidate for a trial using immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICI) therapy along with the drugs nivolumab and ipilimumab. She began in October 2019, and within three months, all four of her tumours had shrunk. Today, three are virtually gone, and the fourth has shrunk by three-quarters. "I'll hit my five-year mark in September," says Falbo. "Hallelujah!"

where it originated. In a study published in the *Annals of Oncology* in June 2021, researchers found that the test detected cancers more than 50 per cent of the time and predicted a cancer's origin with 89 per cent accuracy.

The test holds particular promise for cancers such as pancreatic and ovarian, which are so deadly because symptoms are elusive and there are no screening methods. This past June, the U.K.'s National Health Service announced a massive trial of 1,40,000 participants to assess Galleri's effectiveness.

TREATMENTS

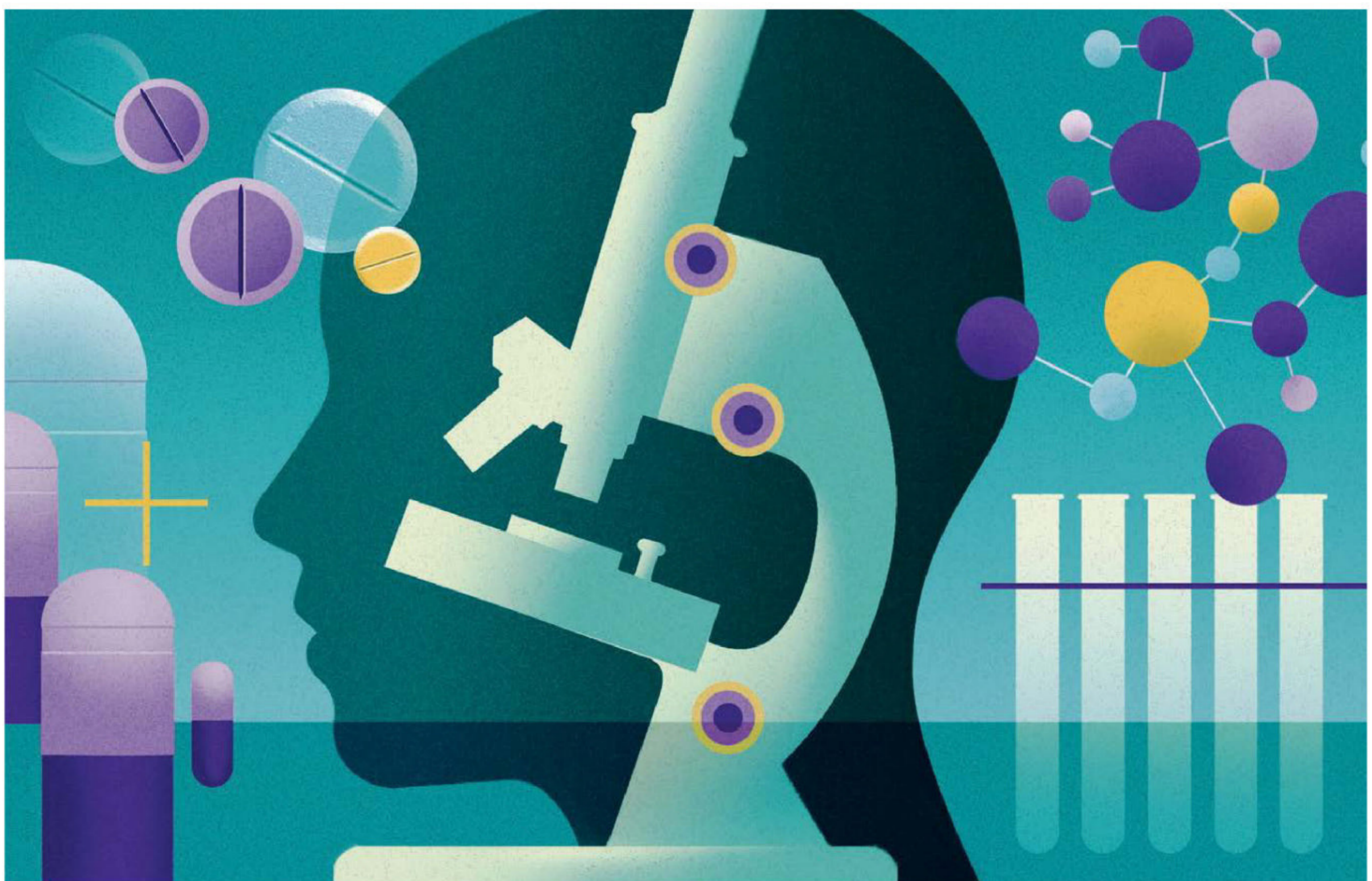
► ENHERTU

Though breast cancer mortality rates have been falling for three decades, it's still the most common cancer in

the U.S. (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) and in Europe. One of the deadliest types is that in which the tumours overproduce a protein called HER2. Affecting about 1 in 5 breast cancer patients, this type usually grows and spreads faster than other breast cancers—and is more likely to return after treatment.

But in 2019 in the U.S. and in 2021 in Canada, Europe and the U.K., Trastuzumab deruxtecan (Enhertu) was approved. The precision chemotherapy drug dramatically slows progress of this aggressive cancer.

“This is very important,” says Rebecca Roylance, a medical oncologist at University College London Hospitals. Dr Roylance specializes in breast cancer and was involved in



“LIKE PAC-MAN”

► **IN 2010**, Owen Snider, then 63, was diagnosed with lymphoma. Chemotherapy sent the disease into remission. When it returned in 2016, Snider had a stem cell transplant. But when his lymphoma returned again in 2020, doctors told him he had a few months to live. Then he got a call: There was a spot in a CAR T-cell immunotherapy trial. “It was a ray of hope,” says the retiree, who lives near Ottawa in Ontario. Doctors extracted T-cells and sent them to a lab where they were genetically modified and allowed to multiply. Meanwhile, Snider received three days of a milder chemo treatment, and then doctors injected him with the modified cells. “They went to work like Pac-Man, chomping up all the cancer cells,” says Snider. Thirty days later, there was no trace of lymphoma. Now, two years on, he is still cancer-free.

administering the U.K. trials of Enhertu. “A drug that is well tolerated is so important to improve patients’ quality of life despite the impact of their cancer and treatment,” she says.

It works by transporting a chemotherapy drug directly to HER2 tumour cells to destroy them. Enhertu delivers more than double the chemo payload of existing treatments, and also destroys nearby cancerous cells. An international trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in July 2022 showed that patients taking Enhertu went a median of 10 months without tumour growth compared to about five months with the current standard treatment.

► LUMAKRAS

Lung cancer is the leading cancer killer in Canada and the United States, accounting for almost a quarter of cancer deaths here. It’s the leading

cancer killer in Europe, too, causing 20 per cent of cancer deaths there.

Until very recently, there were no drugs to treat lung cancers caused by a dangerous mutation in the KRAS G12C gene. The mutation, which causes the cancerous cells to duplicate wildly, affects about 13 per cent of patients. Currently, the only treatment has been additional chemotherapy that might give these patients a few more months, at most, to live.

A new KRAS-inhibiting drug that

“IT OFFERS HOPE TO PATIENTS WHOSE PROGNOSIS IS GRIM.”

has been recently approved for use could transform that prognosis. Results of a phase-one trial published in June 2021 in the *New England*

Journal of Medicine are promising. Patients previously treated with both chemotherapy and immunotherapy took a daily sotorasib pill (brand name Lumakras). Around 40 per cent of patients experienced tumour shrinkage of 30 per cent or more. And according to a recent update, 1 in 3 was still alive two years after starting treatment.

“It offers hope to patients whose prognosis is grim,” says Ferdinandos Skoulidis, an oncologist at the MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas and the lead author of the groundbreaking study. “It’s a hugely important discovery.”

► **IMMUNOTHERAPY**

Immunotherapy alters cells in the body’s immune system, allowing them to recognize and fight cancer cells. The field is barely a decade old, yet it dominates cancer research: Nearly 5,000 immunotherapy cancer

trials are being conducted worldwide.

“There has been a revolution in the treatment of several cancer types in recent years thanks to immunotherapies,” says Marco Donia, a medical oncologist at Denmark’s National Center for Cancer Immune Therapy.

The field is so groundbreaking that in 2018, immunologists James P. Allison of the United States and Tasuku Honjo of Japan were awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for their discovery of the principle behind immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs), the most common type of immunotherapy cancer treatment used today.

The treatment, administered intravenously, is used against many cancers but is particularly successful against lung, skin and some colon cancers. The effects of ICIs can last long after treatment ends. A 2021 survey of progress made in the treatment of melanoma, published in the

“I HAVE FAITH IN THIS MEDICINE”

► **IT WAS 2017** when Susanne Andersson Barkels, then 36, of Stockholm, Sweden, noticed lumps in her breast and armpit. Doctors diagnosed her with the aggressive HER2-positive breast cancer. After enduring chemotherapy, surgery and radiation, her cancer went into remission. But by 2021 it had metastasized to her spine and brain. She underwent more treatment, but the tumours continued to grow. Then her oncologist told her about a new drug that targets HER2-positive breast cancers: Enhertu had just been approved in Europe. After three doses, the largest tumour in Barkels’s brain had shrunk by more than 50 per cent. She continues taking Enhertu, hoping to shrink it further. “I have faith in this medicine,” says Barkels, “and I have hope that other new cancer treatments are on the way.”



journal *Cancers*, reports that ICI combination therapy results in long-term survival for more than 50 per cent of metastatic melanoma patients.

“This is the first time we’re seeing patients with solid cancers with a six-month median survival rate essentially being cured,” says Dr. Donia. (“Solid” cancers are those with tumour masses, as opposed to “liquid” cancers, such as those that occur in blood.)

Another type of immunotherapy, called Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy (or adoptive cell transfer), also shows great promise. The personalized immunotherapy, first used in 2017, involves extracting some disease-fighting white T-cells from a patient’s blood, genetically engineering them to recognize and target a specific cancer protein, and then reintroducing them into the patient’s bloodstream. Then they circulate, attacking and

destroying cancer cells. The therapy has been shown to add years of life to people with blood cancers.

The treatment has been approved for specific types of adult lymphoma and child and youth leukemia in the U.S., Canada and Europe, but because it is so individually tailored, CAR T-cell therapy is used relatively rarely—and it’s expensive. Researchers are investigating development of universal CAR T-cell therapy.

In Canada, a national trial of CAR T-cell therapy is underway. Results so far have been promising: For 13 of the 30 people enrolled, cancer cells can no longer be detected in their blood, according to Natasha Kekre, a scientist and hematologist at The Ottawa Hospital and the trial’s principal investigator.

“This will allow us to cure so many people,” she says. **R**



The Hole in the Fence

A child's unlikely friendship with an unseen neighbour transforms in isolation

BY *Adrian Van Young*

FROM GUERNICA

ONE DAY, MY son befriends the nun. It starts with voices in the yard. Through the glass kitchen doors where I stand chopping onions, I hear Sebastian's voice and then a woman's. Sebastian, woman—back and forth. Sebastian is five, and when I come out to check on him, his face is pressed into the slats of the fence in the backyard.

This part of New Orleans is called Hollygrove—what Lil Wayne, who

grew up here, refers to as “the Holy Mecca.” I’ve also heard it called Pigeon Town, Leonidas, or, in faintly ominous tones, “the fruit streets”—a modest subset of what locals call Uptown, with its grand columned houses and clothing boutiques. It’s working-class, mostly, with middle-class fringes: White, Black and Latinx.

We’ve lived here since the summer of 2014, a month before our son was born, when two friends and I unloaded a U-Haul while my wife, hugely

pregnant, supervised in the heat.

Hard to say what Sebastian and the woman are discussing. Immersive to him, something else to the woman: Bemusing? Disarming? I really can't say. But I hear traces of it, whatever it is, in the gentle upspeak of the fence-talker's voice, the emphatic, reiterative questions she poses.

Beyond that fence reside the nuns—a whole nun condo, two stories tall and eggshell blue. The nuns were there before we came. I had imagined uncanny habits with shadows inside them, but these are chill, back-to-the-land nuns. Sometimes I see their lights at night, the mellow, anonymous squares of their windows.

The woman says, "You wait right here; I'll be right back."

I wait for Sebastian to turn, but he lingers, enraptured. I can see the tense shape of his young, restive body, the chicken wings flexing beneath his slight shoulders.

"Stand back," says the sister when she returns. There's a whirring. A circle in the wooden fence, roughly the size of a baseball, drops out of sight. The saw blade retreats from the circle.

The hole reveals little of the woman who made it. I see her stoop to pick up the missing piece.

"Dad!" Sebastian spins around. "Sandy just drilled out a hole in the fence so Sandy and me can talk!"

he says.

"I see that," I say.

I hadn't known her name was Sandy.

I hear the saw start up again. Sandy tosses half the fence circle through the hole and Sebastian picks it up. "I'll keep half and you keep half," she says. For the nun and my son, this is just the beginning.

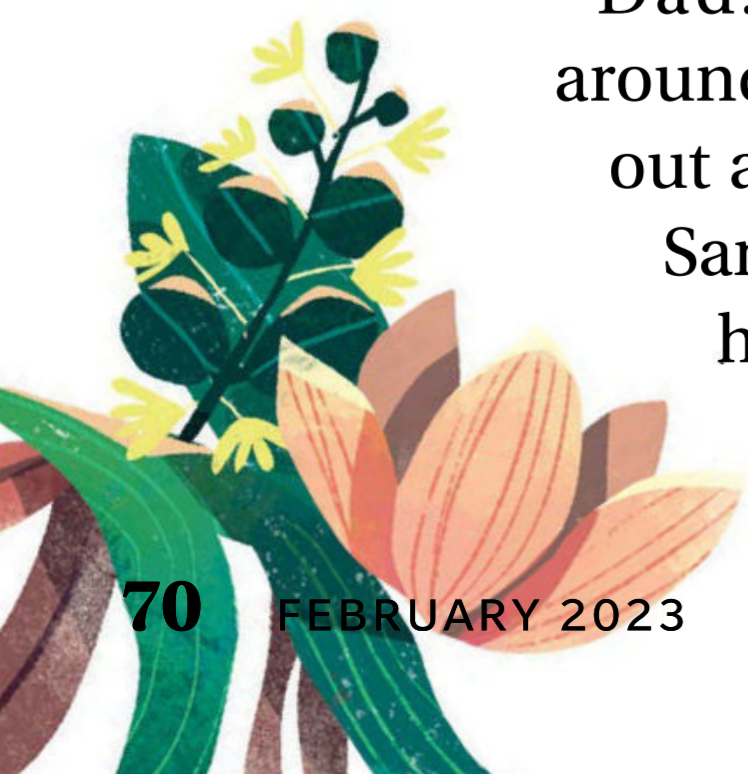
My wife, Darcy Roake, takes the little half-moon that Sandy sawed out of the fence and puts it on Sebastian's mantel between the picture of whales and the Bluebird of Happiness.

Over the next few weeks, then months, Sebastian's and Sandy's murmuring voices continue.

Most days Sandy is out doing whatever she does in her garden, and whenever Sebastian is outside I see him circling near the fence that isn't a fence anymore, but a portal. Some days my son just goes to stand at the hole, yelling, "Sandy! Saaaaaandyyyy!" with a mournful exuberance. It's never summoned her outside, but she must hear him out there.

Sandy's days are busy. She has that vibe of an alpha nun, keeping the other nuns humble and spiffy. I hear their voices in the garden, shooting the breeze on their way to do errands, mumbling about the heat. Youth groups arrive and embark cheerily upon team-building efforts, their college voices floating up, but none of these kids holds a candle to Sandy. Sebastian is a child transfixed.

Partly due to the fact that these hangouts with Sandy provide me with a short respite from imaginative





play and fetching snacks, and partly because of an ear surgery that rendered me partially deaf on one side, all I really get are snatches.

“We did watercolours today at my school.”

“Oh yeah?” Sandy asks him. “And what did you make?”

“I painted a monster,” says my son.

Or: “Wheeler and Jackson were playing football, and they told me I couldn’t play.”

“That wasn’t very nice,” says Sandy. “Did that hurt your feelings?”

“Yes?” says my son, in that way he has sometimes of answering a question and asking another one in the same breath.

“Did you let them know that?” says Sandy.

I can’t hear how he responds. A

crackle of jealousy runs through me. When I get him from school at the end of the day, I’m always full of questions for him: “What did you do?” “Make any new friends?” Most of the time he’s taciturn; sometimes he’ll try to change the subject. For the moment, I stand in the kitchen, eavesdropping.

When Sebastian wasn’t passing messages to Sandy, he enjoyed a river of playmates who deluged our house every day around 5 p.m. He was overjoyed that our house had become the neighbourhood hangout, but sometimes the constant company left me feeling like Sebastian’s hamster, which had never bargained on 15 child owners. It was passed from hand to hand, and when it was finally put back in its cage it was wild-eyed, its fur matted and sticky with ice cream and juice.

It's late winter of 2020, and the raucous visits of the neighbour children have stopped. Five p.m. is more than quiet. There's a tension or longing that hangs in the air, reminding us of what we're missing. Sebastian and Sandy are friends. They not only keep chatting through the hole, they also exchange gifts. A kaleidoscope materializes, then a Hot Wheels car. It's unclear what Sebastian gives Sandy in return.

We are in the early, anxious weeks of coronavirus, but we reluctantly let



THEY NOT ONLY KEEP
CHATting THROUGH
THE HOLE, THEY ALSO
EXCHANGE GIFTS.



Sebastian keep trading a shared art project with Sandy under the fence. More than the fact of their friendship alone, which my wife and I find wholly novel and charming, the nun who lives behind the fence is the first friend Sebastian has made on his

own, and we'd never deprive him of something like that.

They push shells and leaves that they've found through the hole. They ask and answer endless questions. Sometimes there is silence, Sebastian sitting with knees drawn up and his back to the fence while Sandy paces.

Sebastian runs inside one day and announces that Sandy has left something "too big for the hole" for him on the porch. It's a large cardboard box filled with knickknacks: sponge brushes and tubes of paint, wearable butterfly wings made of paper, a partial Hot Wheels racing track.

We've been in isolation for a month when I see Sandy in person. The day is any other day, as we've come to perceive time since COVID-19 began: Sebastian is hunting around near the fence while I attempt some yard work.

I hear Sandy's voice floating over the top of the fence with the hole. "I thought maybe Sebastian could come for a playdate. I've got some bricks here and they need painting yellow."

I'm not sure what to do at first, but my wife wants to go and so does Sebastian. We ring the bell on Sandy's porch. Sandy's yard is sweet with the smell of flowers; tulips and rosebushes bloom at the edges.

The first thing Sandy does when she answers the door is point to a row of concrete blocks in front of the curb to her house. She's a middle-aged woman with brown hair cut in a page-boy. Her eyes are squinty, foxed with

mirth, a spray of freckles on her nose. She wears sandals with cuffed jeans, her T-shirt tucked into the waist. She's shorter than I thought she'd be. She explains that she's tired of the whole neighbourhood blocking the path to her door with cars. It delights me that Sandy, a woman of God, is irritated with her neighbours for parking their cars legally on the street.

"How you doing, Mom?" says Sandy, gesturing at Darcy's stomach.

Darcy is seven months pregnant. We're checking COVID-19 numbers hourly. Our state of mind isn't what you'd call relaxed. Still, there's something momentous about a mid-day sojourn with our son's adult friend, who is as chatty and warm as she is enigmatic.

We've suddenly passed through the hole in the fence; we have to learn to breathe the air.

Darcy lightly rubs her belly. "Getting there, all right," she says.

A month later, Sandy leaves for good. We never expected this to happen. In regretful, low tones, we say these very words, "I never expected her to leave!" as though if we say it enough, she won't leave and our son won't be heartbroken, robbed of her magic.

From the nun whom Sandy sends

to the hole in the fence to break the news to us, we learn that Sandy has left suddenly to care for her mother in Kansas. The other nun says that Sandy looked for Sebastian to say goodbye but couldn't find him in time.

Sandy left behind another box of presents: a colouring book, sidewalk chalk, the missing orange segment in the Hot Wheels track. When I look at Sebastian, he's looking down at his shoes.

Our second son is born in the spring. The baby is healthy, and in two days, he and Darcy are home. Sebastian adores his brother, but inevitably wanders down to the fence. Instead of calling "Sandy!" he cries, "Hello! Helloooooo!"

Sometimes the nun who broke the news about Sandy comes for desultory chats. Once, she slides a piece of paper under the fence with Sandy's address on it.

Surprising my wife and me, they write. They are proper pen pals: They write frequently, warmly. Sebastian writes of a summer indoors. He writes to "tell her that he loves her." Sandy writes of her new life in Kansas.

"God loves you, Sebastian," she signs every postcard. **R**



A Massive Moniker

My middle name is War-and-Peace. It's a long story.

—  @JIMMERTHATISALL

AS KIDS SEE IT



“These are SO last year!”

I was shopping with my two-year-old granddaughter and her mother. We walked into a chocolate store where they were handing out free samples. The employee asked my granddaughter’s mother, “Any allergies?” before offering my granddaughter one. When my

granddaughter finished her chocolate, she said to her mom, “More allergies, please.”

—ARLENE FAUVELLE

My new shoes came in the mail but they were too small. My 11-year-old said, “Just order two sizes up and if they’re too big, you’ll grow into them!”

—REDDIT.COM

How to portion control your snacks: eat them in the presence of a three-year-old. You’ll be lucky to get two bites.

—[@PRITIKARYAN](#)

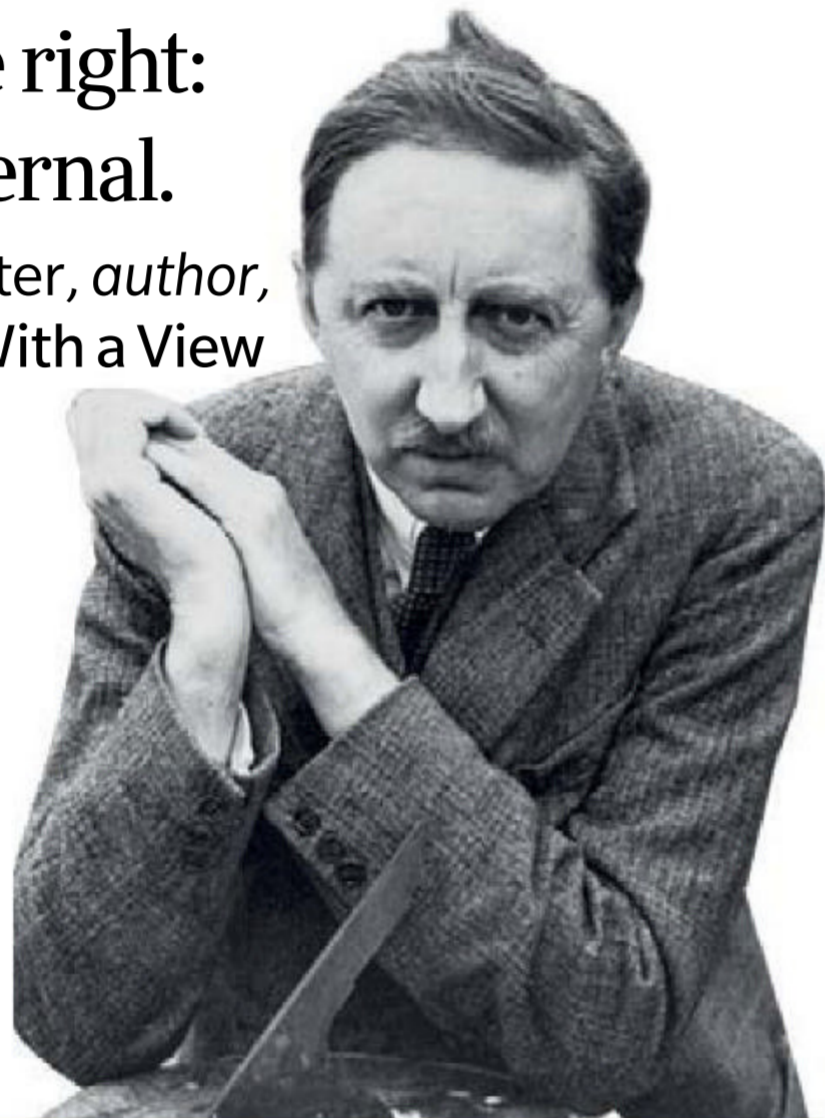
Reader’s Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

CARTOON: ROSE ANNE PREVEC

QUOTABLE QUOTES

It isn't possible to love and part. You will wish that it was. You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it out of you. I know by experience that the poets are right: love is eternal.

—E. M. Forster, *author*,
in *A Room With a View*



The secret of happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less.

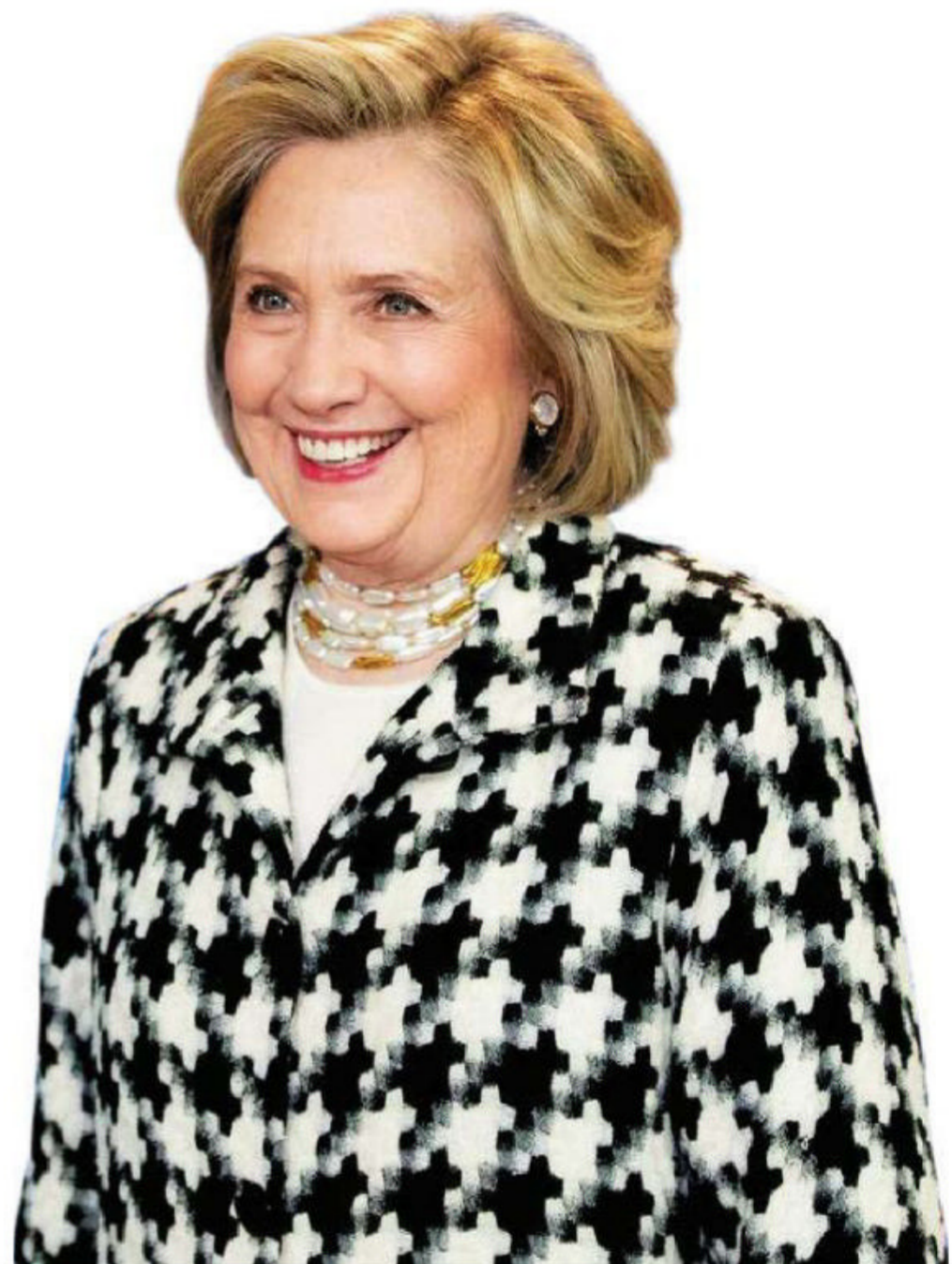
Socrates, *philosopher*

It is simply this: do not tire ... never grow indifferent ... Lose your invaluable curiosity and you let yourself die.

Tove Jansson, *author*

Take criticism seriously, but not personally. If there is truth or merit in the criticism, try to learn from it. Otherwise, let it roll right off you.

—Hillary Clinton, *politician*



I understood the life around me better, not from love, which everybody acknowledges to be a great teacher, but from estrangement, to which nobody has attributed the power of reinforcing insight.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *novelist*



From Covid conspiracies to lies about the Ukraine war, traditional fact-checking is no match for the power of the crowd

Fighting Disinformation

BY *Eliot Higgins*
FROM THE GUARDIAN

IN RECENT YEARS, the internet has become the venue for a general collapse in trust. Trolling, fake news and ‘doing your own research’ have become such a part of public discourse, it’s sometimes easy to imagine that the online revolution has only brought us new ways to be confused about the world.

Social media has played a major role in the spread of disinformation. Malicious state enterprises such as the notorious Russian ‘troll farms’ are part of this, but there’s a more powerful mechanism: The way social media brings together people,

whether flat earthers or anti-vaxxers, who might not meet like-minded folks in the real world.

Today, if you’re convinced our planet isn’t round, you don’t have to stand on street corners with a sign, shouting at passers-by. Instead, you have access to an online community of tens of thousands of individuals producing content that not only tells you you’re right, but builds a web of pseudo-knowledge you can draw from if you feel your beliefs are being challenged.

The same kinds of ‘counterfactual communities’ arise around any topic

that attracts enough general interest. I've witnessed this myself over the past decade while looking into war crimes in Syria, Covid-19 disinformation and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Why do counterfactual communities form? A key factor is distrust in mainstream authority. For some, this is partly a reaction to the UK and US governments' fabrications in the build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Sometimes, it stems from a sense of injustice around the Israel–Palestine conflict. These are of course legitimate

FACT-CHECKING OUTFITS DO GOOD WORK, BUT THEY ARE MISSING THE POWER OF THE CROWD.



positions, and are not by themselves indicative of a tendency to believe in conspiracies. But a pervasive sense of distrust can make you more vulnerable to slipping down the rabbit hole.

One way of looking at this is that government deception or hypocrisy has caused a form of moral injury. As with the proverb “once bitten, twice shy,” that injury can result in a knee-jerk rejection of anyone perceived as being on the side of the establishment.

This creates a problem for traditional approaches to combatting disinformation, such as the top-down

fact-check, which might be provided by a mainstream media outlet or other organization. More often than not, this will be dismissed with: “They *would* say that, wouldn't they?” Fact-checking outfits may do good work, but they are missing the power of the crowd. Because, as well as counterfactual communities, we've also seen what could be called truth-seeking communities emerge around specific issues.

These are the internet users who want to inform themselves while guarding against manipulation by others or being misled by their own preconceptions. Once established, they will not only share fact-checks in a way that lends them credibility, but often conduct the fact-checking themselves.

What's important about these communities is that they react quickly to information being put out by various actors, including states. In 2017 the Russian ministry of defence published images on social media that it claimed showed evidence of US forces assisting Islamic State in the Middle East. Huge, if true—except it was instantly debunked when social media users realized within seconds that the Russian ministry of defence had used screenshots from a computer game.

I would go as far as to say that internet users who are heavily engaged with particular topics are our strongest defence against disinformation. At Bellingcat, a collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists I founded in 2014, we've seen this play

out in real time during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Our investigation of the downing in July 2014 of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine helped create a community focussed on the conflict there that uses open-source techniques to examine, verify and debunk information.

In the weeks before the invasion, we gathered videos and photos of Russian troop movements that forewarned of the planned attack, and we debunked disinformation spread by separatists—including images of a supposed IED attack posed with bodies that, as we discovered, had been autopsied before they even arrived at the scene.

After the invasion started, many of the same people collected and geo-located images, including those of potential war crimes, that Bellingcat and its partners have been verifying and archiving for possible use in future accountability processes.

But how do you grow and nurture what are essentially decentralized, self-organized, ad hoc groups like this? Bellingcat's approach has been to engage with them, creating links from their useful social media posts to our publications (all thoroughly fact-checked by our team), and crediting them for their efforts. We also create guides and case studies so that anyone inspired to give it a go has the opportunity to learn how to do it.

But there's more to do than simply waiting for crowds of investigators to emerge and hoping they're interested

in the same things we are. The answer lies in creating a society that's not only resilient against disinformation, but has the tools to contribute to efforts toward transparency and accountability.

For example, the digital media literacy charity The Student View in the UK has been going into schools and showing 16- to 18-year-olds how to use investigation techniques to look into issues affecting them. In one case, students in the city of Bradford used freedom-of-information requests to uncover the unusually large number of high-speed police chases in their areas.

Teaching young people how to engage positively with issues they face and then expanding this work into online investigation is not only empowering, it gives them skills they can use throughout their lives.

This is not about turning every 16- to 18-year-old into a journalist, police officer or human rights investigator, but rather giving them tools they can use to contribute, in however small a way, to the fight against disinformation. In their home towns, in conflicts such as Ukraine, and in the wider world, they really can make a difference. **R**

Eliot Higgins is founder of the Netherlands-based Bellingcat investigative journalism network and author of *We Are Bellingcat: An Intelligence Agency for the People*. He lives in the UK.



INSPIRATION



NEED A GOOD
ADVENTURE?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO CLIMB A MOUNTAIN OR
GO ON SAFARI. YOU CAN ADD EXCITEMENT TO
YOUR LIFE ONE SMALL TWEAK AT A TIME

BY *Elizabeth Bernstein*
FROM *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC, we have been buried in bad news, just trudging along through our days. If we took a risk, it was often mundane: going to the grocery store, socializing with another human being in person. We spent so much cognitive energy trying to stay safe and keep up with events that we had little left to pursue the types of big, frightening-yet-exciting adventures that expand our lives.

Now, it's time to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone. Anna Torgerson, a 35-year-old piano teacher in Chicago, pushed way outside of hers recently when she signed up for a local open mic night.

"Everything's felt so dim," Torgerson says. "I needed something to make me feel alive." So she made a plan to sing several songs she's written, which she'd never done in public before.

Adventures expand our world by allowing us to engage with our self and others in a new way. Research shows that novelty activates our dopamine system, which enhances our mood and positive outlook. It also may make us more creative, more motivated and better able to adjust to stress.

New situations, especially ones that seem dangerous, also force us to confront our fear. This can boost our mood by making us feel less stressed, less tired and even euphoric.

"An adventure gets us out of our



patterns and helps show us our own competence," says Rachel Kazez, a clinical social worker in Chicago. "We get to see that things will turn out well, or that we can cope if they don't."

You don't have to free solo Yosemite's El Capitan to reap benefits. Any adventure where you stretch yourself and learn something new counts. For some, it may be jumping out of a plane or scuba diving in Iceland.

For others, trying a different workout or going out to dinner at a new place might do the trick.

Ready for your adventure? Here's some advice.

START SMALL.

The risks you're up for now might look different from the ones you took before the pandemic. That's OK. Pick a manageable activity you can do soon—this weekend!—close to home. This will break your inertia, build your confidence and help you ramp up to bigger adventures.

"Taking gradual steps teaches your brain that the experience is not as bad as you expected and you can handle it," says Jacqueline Sperling, a clinical psychologist and co-programme director at the McLean Anxiety Mastery Program at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts.

SHIFT HOW YOU VIEW ANXIETY.

Research from Harvard University shows that people who interpreted their nervousness about activities such as karaoke singing and public speaking as excitement enjoyed the experiences more and performed better than those who tried to tamp down their anxiety.

This changed their threat mindset into an opportunity mindset, says Samantha Boardman, a New York psychiatrist and author of *Everyday Vitality: Turning Stress into Strength*. Try talking to yourself out

loud, saying "I am excited" or "Let's get excited."

USE YOUR IMAGINATION.

Envision the worst-case scenario. Say you want to go on a hike but are worried you'll become lost, hurt or too exhausted to get home. Try to picture this. Next, visualize the best-case scenario: the beautiful view, the fun you'll have, your sense of accomplishment afterward.

Now ask yourself what will probably happen. Are you more likely to feel happy after your hike, or to be carried off the mountain in a stretcher? This exercise helps put fear in perspective, says Boardman.

WRITE YOURSELF A LETTER.

Think of it as a pep talk. Start by addressing your trepidation. "I know you're nervous. This is normal because you're leaving your comfort zone." Then write about the skills you





have that will help you succeed and the past experiences where you took a risk and the experience went well.

“The point is to validate your feelings and remind yourself that, even though you feel nervous, you can handle this,” says Sperling.

TAP IN TO REGRET.

It can be very motivating. Think about whether you’ll feel disappointed if you miss out on this interesting, expansive experience or glad you stayed home. (Another way to put it: Will you be proud you bit the bullet and took the adventure, or proud that you didn’t?)

“We tend to regret actions we don’t

take rather than ones we do,” says Boardman. “So the fear of missing out can help you.”

RELAX ABOUT THE OUTCOME.

“If you could do this whole thing perfectly, it would not be the adventure you’re looking for,” says Kazez.

Remember: Whatever happens, it should make a good story. Imagining how fun it will be to tell your friends about your adventure later will help you stop ruminating now. And you’ll feel connected to others.

“People love stories of someone triumphing over adversity or dealing with awkwardness because they

can relate,” Kazez says.

Torgerson says her dream is to be a singer-songwriter. She is trained in classical music and has experience performing as a pianist and in choirs, but was terrified to sing her own songs in front of strangers.

“It’s sharing an intimate piece of myself,” she says.

For days before her first open mic night performance, her heart raced, her chest felt tight and she had but-

**“I FELT A LITTLE HORRIFIED
BECAUSE I MESSED UP,
BUT IT ALSO FELT GOOD.”**

terflies in her stomach. To calm her nerves and prepare herself, she performed her songs for her roommate

and then-boyfriend and sent voice memos of herself singing to several close friends to get feedback. She also attended an open mic night just to observe.

On the night of the show, Torgerson sat on a high stool in front of 50 or so people and sang two songs, accompanying herself on ukulele.

“I felt a little horrified because my voice wobbled and I messed up some chords,” she says. “But it also felt good because my friends were cheering for me after I was done.”

Now, she’s become a regular at the shows. She still gets nervous. But she has more confidence now—and it spills over into other areas of her life, such as her social life and her teaching.

“I feel stronger,” says Torgerson. “And this makes me more likely to take another risk in the future.” **R**



Keeping the Faith

To have faith is a good thing, no doubt. But that faith should rest on the foundation of facts, not emotions

RAVISH KUMAR, JOURNALIST

Part of being optimistic is keeping one’s head pointed toward the sun, one’s feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair.

That way lays defeat and death.

NELSON MANDELA, FORMER PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

You ought to discover some principle ... that grips you so much you will never give it up. Somehow you go on and say, “I know that the God I worship is able to deliver me, but if not, I’m going on anyhow, I’m going to stand up for it anyway.”

DR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR, US CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

WHO KNEW?



Written centuries ago or newly passed, here are 30 regulations in force across the globe that range from mildly amusing to downright bizarre

THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST LAWS

BY *Susannah Hickling*



Standing Room Only

It's illegal to spontaneously dance in a bar or restaurant in **Sweden**. Owners must adhere to a bygone law and get a dance licence. The Swedish parliament announced its intention to repeal it in 2016, yet a restaurant owner in the province of Härjedalen was prosecuted as recently as 2020.

Lights Out

No light must be visible within five kilometres of the king's bedroom in the Palace of Versailles in **France**. This

18th-century law means the Versailles football club doesn't have floodlights and, as a result, can't host all of its home games—including one against Toulouse in January 2022. It had to move the match to its opponent's pitch nearly 700 kilometres away.

Rodent Repellent

Rats aren't allowed to enter the province of Alberta in **Canada**, not even as pets. They're considered a pest that destroys crops and spreads disease, and a rat-control programme has kept them at bay since the 1950s.

Fishing Rights

All beached whales and sturgeons in the **United Kingdom** must be offered to the reigning monarch, according to a decree from 1322. Nevertheless, as recently as 2004, the late Queen Elizabeth II waived her right to a



120-kilogram sturgeon caught by fisherman Robert Davies in Wales.

Wedding Wakeup Call

Being unconscious at your own wedding is *verboten* in **Germany**. The marriage can be annulled if one of the parties wasn't aware that they were getting hitched.

Weather Warning

In Texas in the **United States**, you must make an announcement if you want to mess with the climate. Anyone wishing to engage in cloud seeding to generate rain must publish a notice in a local newspaper once a week for three consecutive weeks.

Creatures Great and Small

In **Belgium**, no one can take your last cow or 12 sheep or goats. Your last pig and 24 chickens can't be removed either. This law is to prevent a bailiff leaving you destitute.

Welcome to Earth

In 1995, the city of Barra do Garças in **Brazil** passed a law setting aside five hectares for a UFO airport—to cater to the 'flying saucers' reportedly spotted in the area. The city has since also sanctioned an annual 'E.T. Day'.

Hikers, Stay Clothed

Naked hiking is banned in **Switzerland**. While being nude in public isn't illegal, the demi canton of Appenzell Inner Rhodes fined one rambling

naturist for indecency after he walked past a family with young children who were picnicking. Citizens then voted in a referendum to put a stop to the practice and in 2011 the man lost his appeal against his conviction.

Exasperation Nation

It's a crime to be annoying in the **Philippines**. The offence of 'unjust vexation'—deliberately upsetting another person—is punishable by a prison sentence of up to 30 days or a fine, or both. While it's sensible to outlaw harassment, this law can cover anything that causes irritation. For example, the mayor of Caibiran was convicted of unjust vexation for padlocking a market stall and taking its contents to the police station because the stallholder had not paid her rent.

Berry Good Idea

You may pick someone else's cloudberries in **Norway** but only if you eat them on site. The fruit, which resemble an orange or yellow blackberry and grow wild, are an expensive delicacy, so in the counties of Troms and Finnmark and Nordland, if the landowner has signs prohibiting picking, you're allowed to gather them but not take them away.

What's in a Name?

In football player Lionel Messi's hometown of Rosario, in **Argentina**, you aren't allowed to give your child the first name Messi. The director of



the Civil Registry in Santa Fe province stepped in after a family in another area did just that. He ruled that it was against the law because Messi is a surname. (Lionel remains a perfectly acceptable name.)

The Hot Seat

In **Pakistan**, having a rider on the back of a motorcycle is banned in some provinces on certain public holidays. But the rule doesn't always apply: exemptions can include women, children, senior citizens, law enforcement personnel, security staff, employees of essential services and journalists.

Burglars Have Rights, Too

You mustn't lock a burglar in the toilet if he breaks into your home in the **Netherlands**. This is considered deprivation of freedom, which is illegal.

Bye Bye, Buccaneer

In the state of Victoria in **Australia**, you can be sentenced to up to 10 years in prison for trading or even corresponding with a pirate under a relatively recent 1958 law.

Noise Complaint

Anyone who sets off a cannon or other firearm within 200 metres of a house or road in **Hong Kong** “to the annoyance of any inhabitant or passerby” and who then, after being asked to stop, does it again, is liable to a fine of US\$25 [₹2,036].

Beer, Please

All ‘peasants’ must plant hops in **Finland** unless their land is unsuitable. Contravening this law dating back to 1734 will, in theory, incur a fine in ‘thalers’ (silver coins that were the currency at the time).

It's in the Water

In **Italy**—Rome, specifically—your lips must not make contact with the spout of a drinking fountain. This was just one of a series of laws introduced by city authorities in 2019 to improve life for residents and tourists.

Money Problems

It's illegal to step on local currency in **Thailand**. Under the country's strict *lèse-majesté* law, you could face a prison sentence if you disrespect the king. This extends to insulting his image, which appears on all forms of money.



Sober Judgment

Selling alcohol 24 hours before a major election can be prohibited by states in **Mexico**, ostensibly to maintain public order. This “Dry Law” dating back to the early 20th century also limits the sale of booze on election day itself.

Dirt Road

You're not permitted to wash on a public thoroughfare in **Malaysia**. Under the Minor Offences Act of 1955, you can be fined for cleaning items such as your car, an animal, yourself or another person on the highway.

Keep Your Cash

People born in **Monaco** aren't allowed to play in its casinos, despite being citizens of a principality that is world famous for gambling. The origins of the law go back to the 19th century when the royal family aimed to shore up Monaco's dwindling fortunes by making it a paradise for the world's wealthy. It also wanted to protect its own less-than-affluent populace from further impoverishing itself.

No More Rust!

In Valencia in **Spain**, the local police can confiscate rusty beach umbrellas. They can also take away rusty chairs and hammocks 'to avoid any type of possible contamination'.

Flush After Use

You could be fined up to US\$700 [around ₹57,000] in **Singapore** if you don't flush after using a public toilet.

Gluten Free

Using bread to clean wallpaper or floors is prohibited in **Austria**, according to a 1915 law.

Flight Risk

Under the 1934 Indian Aircraft Act, a kite is defined as an aircraft. As a

result, you aren't allowed to fly one in **India** without a permit.

Banner Bans

In **Chile**, you can be fined for forgetting to hang the national flag from your home on Independence Day. Hanging it the wrong way will also get you into trouble. The flag must be suspended from a white pole or from the front of the building, and be clean and in good condition.

Live in the Present

It's against the law in **Malta** to pretend to be a diviner, fortune teller or interpreter of dreams and make money from it.

Condiment Control

Salt, ketchup and mayonnaise are banned from restaurant tables in **Uruguay**. In the capital city of Montevideo, if you want them, you have to ask. The measure is part of a drive to reduce high levels of hypertension.

Under the Influence

You can be prosecuted for drunk driving in **Japan** even if you're not drunk and not driving. It's against the law to be a passenger in a car in which the driver is over the limit. **R**



Look Twice

Power can be defined as the ability to make a particular perspective seem universal.

ALOK VAID-MENON, IN *BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY*

LIFE'S

Like That

I was in the nail salon when a woman in her 40s walked in and smiled at me. I couldn't place her, but she did look familiar. I'm active socially—I thought maybe I knew her from one of the groups I've joined. It was eating at me, so I caught her eye and said, "I think I know you. Maybe from an organization we both belong to?"

Smiling, she leaned over and whispered, "I'm the mayor."

—MARGARET WEBSTER

At dinner with my young grandkids, we decided they were old

enough to try a spicy jalapeno pepper. They each tentatively picked up a jalapeno, stared apprehensively at it, then took a nibble.

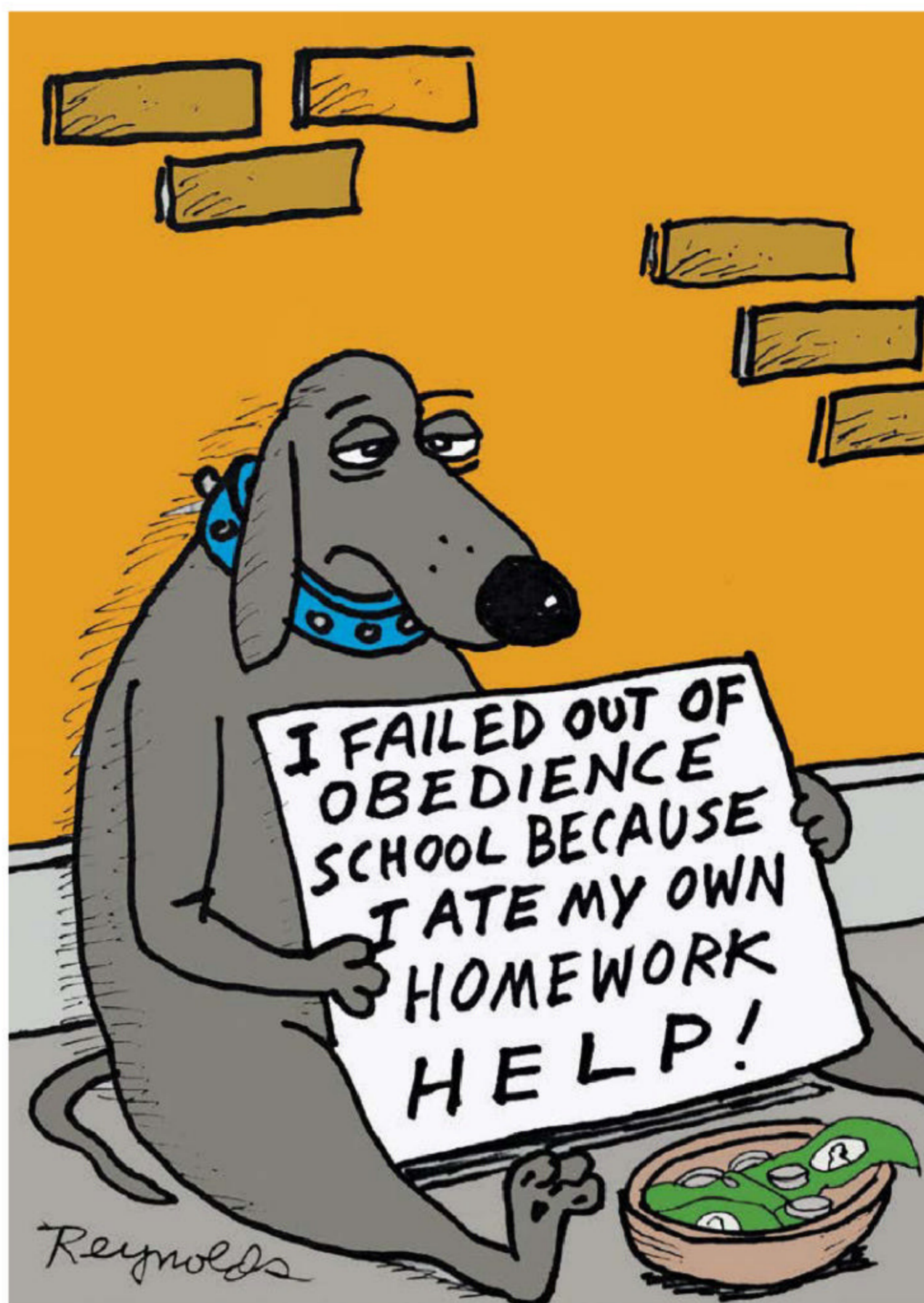
A second later they were squealing as their mouths caught fire.

After dousing the

burn with his soda, my grandson put it very well: "These are angry pickles!"

—RICK CARDER

While admiring some dinosaur bones in the Museum of Natural History, a tourist asks a



Living in a colder climate, you have to deal with snow, sleet, freezing temperatures and that one jerk who texts you, "It's 80 degrees [27°C] where I am."

—[@MOMMAJESSIEC](#)

guard, "So, how old are they?"

The guard replies, "73 million, four years, and six months old."

"That's a rather exact number," says the tourist. "How do you know their age so precisely?"

"Well," answers the guard, "The dinosaur bones were seventy three million years old when I started working here, and that was four and a half years ago."

—REDITT.COM

Some baby on this plane is singing the ABCs all out of order and a guy just shouted, "Yes, girl, remix!"

—@SILENCE_KIT

My three-year-old nephew watched much of the funeral procession for Queen Elizabeth, including the 96-gun salute, which featured cannon fire. As impressive as it was, he looked a bit concerned, asking after it was over, "Is that how she died?"

—CARYGARLINGHOUSE

Redditors reveal the dimmest bulbs they've encountered:

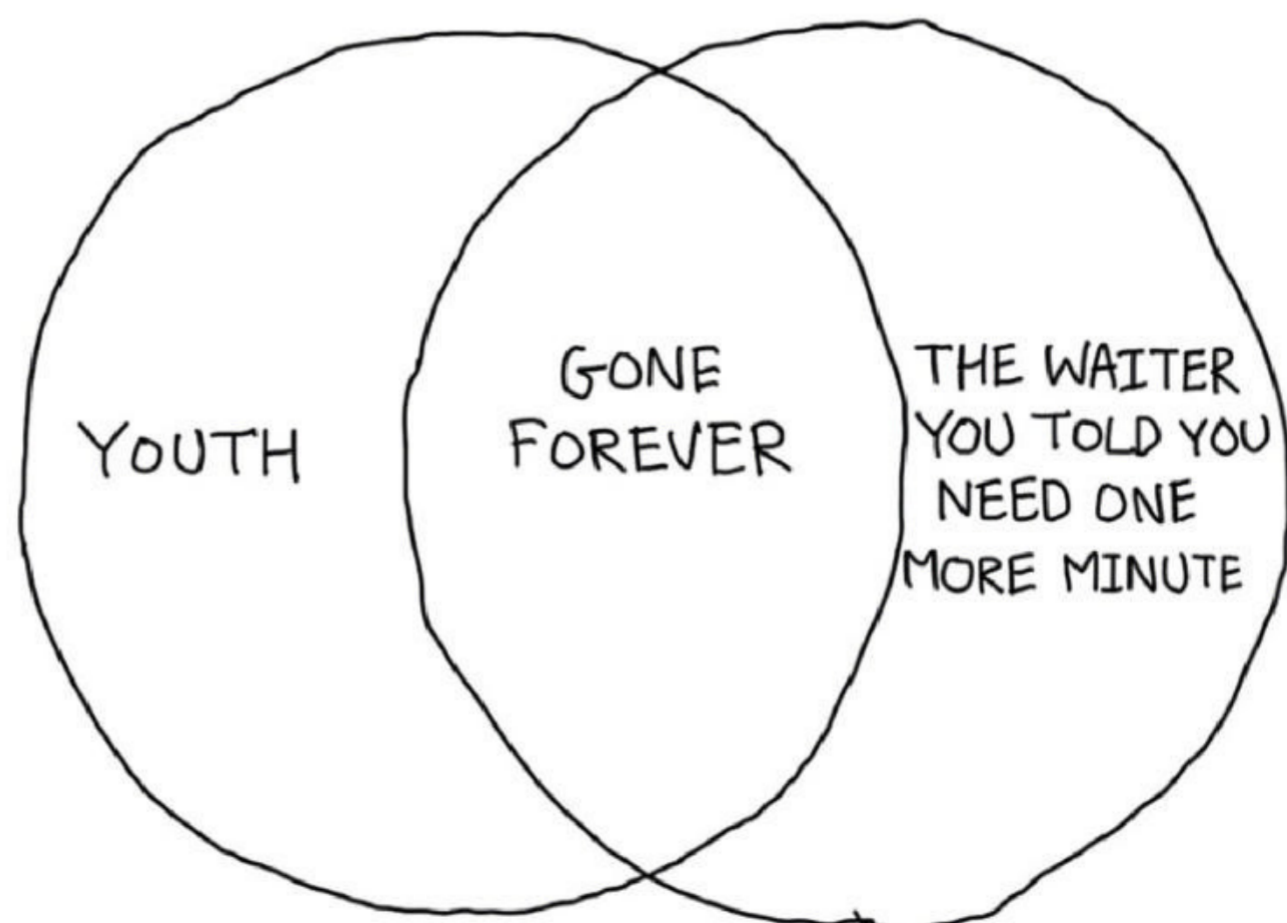
- ◆ A work colleague once asked whether any of those ancient prophecies about the end of the world actually came true.
- ◆ I was asked my 'biological' name.
- ◆ "You shouldn't drink carbonated water; it's full of carbs!"
- ◆ Someone once said they couldn't wait for Halloween to fall on Friday the 13th.
- ◆ "We don't need farmers, because we have grocery stores."

There I patiently stood in front of the commode, a 79-year-old man with a stingy prostate, waiting for what seemed a decade to finish relieving myself. I stood there, stood there, stood there ... then suddenly my Apple Watch came to life, stating, "Congratulations on meeting your standing goal!"

—LARRY SEWELL

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

VENN VILL I LEARN



—@STEINBERGDRAWSCARTOONS

CHASING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

A visit to Canada's Northwest Territories in search
of a primeval encounter with nature

BY *Sallie Tisdale*
FROM *Harper's*

The aurora borealis lights up the sky near Yellowknife in Canada's Northwest Territories.

BY THE TIME I finish dressing and walk into the lobby of the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife, it's 9 p.m. There is a crowd of Japanese tourists wearing identical red parkas and black polar boots the size of toasters. Outside, in the black Canadian winter night, four yellow school buses pull up. The Japanese group fills the first three, and the rest of us, a mixed dozen from several countries, climb into the last.

The bus bumps on to the dark highway. It is February 2020, and it's almost as cold inside as out; the windows are already icing over from our breath. Our guide is Céline, a petite Frenchwoman. "The prediction is clouds tonight," she tells us. "But a prediction is just a prediction. So we will be hopeful."

After about 20 minutes, the bus turns down a narrow road toward Aurora Village, a collection of teepees and small buildings beside a frozen

WE WATCH THE GLOWING TRACK CROSS THE SKY LIKE A PAINTER'S BRUSH.

lake. The few lights are dim and downcast to protect our night vision. We follow Céline's blinking red head-lamp, the only way we can tell her apart from the crowd. More than a hundred people are plodding from the parking lot

along hard snowy trails between dark trees. As we emerge from the woods, Céline points out the path to the heated, 360-degree-rotating recliners (extra fee required). We find our teepee at the edge of a field—a place to warm up and rest, but not to stay. We aren't here to be indoors.

The clouds lift. The teepees are in a small bowl, and trails lead through the trees to low bluffs with longer views. I join a crowd of silhouettes. I shift from foot to foot. All winter, Portland, Oregon, where I live, had been unseasonably warm. I longed for cold, the kind that would make me sit up and pay attention. I went north for the aurora, but also this: the dark, the sky, the ice.

"Is that it?" someone asks, pointing at a small dome of brightness on the horizon. I think it is Yellowknife. The city has dark-sky compliant streetlights, but the town is plainly visible from a distance.

"Is that it?" somebody else asks, pointing at a pale flash on the opposite horizon. But it is just headlights from the highway. We don't really know what we are seeking, what we will see. We may see nothing at all. The aurora follows its own subtle schedule, and aurora tourism runs on hope, on expectations deformed by Instagram and travel websites. Thousands of edited, enhanced photos of emerald-green drapery and quivering ruby-red arcs make false promises. I've tried to keep my own expectations tightly bound.

We watch, and over about 20

Yellowknife sits on the shore of Great Slave Lake, one of the world's largest, deepest lakes.



minutes, a cloud grows into a fine white arc stretching across the lower half of the sky, brightening until it is a river of pearl. Céline and I lie back on a pile of packed snow, watching the glowing track cross the sky like a painter's brush. It changes without changing; a fraction dissolves and reappears, slides away, returns. The river cleaves into two puddles of ghostly milk. I can't see it changing, yet it changes. Soon the two wide swaths thicken and then burst, flooding the banks until the entire sky is filled with vibrating light. A hundred voices shout from the darkness all around. Fluttering sheets of pale light, pinkish folds shifting as if from a breath, shimmering rays, and billowing golden clouds, liquid and shining in all directions. Now, I know.

THE SUMMER BEFORE, a friend invited me to come along on a trip organized by the Cloud

Appreciation Society (CAS), of which I was also a member, to view the aurora borealis in Yellowknife. I don't generally do that kind of thing: travel in packs, with guides. I'm too cheap for curated trips, too introverted for groups, and I prefer to stay close to the ordinary daily life of a destination. But viewing the aurora is a peculiar undertaking, something best done in very cold places at night, far from cities, in an environment that doesn't reward the solo traveller. I decided I would need to go in a group for this, and if so, this was the group for me.

The capital of the Northwest Territories sits on the shore of Great Slave Lake, one of the world's deepest and largest lakes. The Dene people have lived along its shores for thousands of years; Yellowknife is named for Indigenous copper knives. It began as a fur-trading outpost, then ignited with a gold rush in the

1930s, and is now a diamond-mining centre with a population of roughly 20,000. Until 1960, the whole region was inaccessible by road, and until about 10 years ago, Yellowknife was not a major tourist destination. Its winter visitors were mainly miners, trappers, and a few travellers seeking a hideaway. By 2019 there were almost six times as many visitors as residents.

A large proportion of visitor spending here is related to the aurora borealis. Viewing it is often promoted as a kind of primeval encounter with na-

TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, THE LIGHTS ARE WORTHY OF RESPECT.



ture. Just as people yearn to see megafauna such as lions and elephants, we seem to have a collective desire for the cosmic view, for those things large enough to push us down into our place, close to the skin of the planet.

After two nights at the Explorer Hotel, I joined the CAS group for a trip to Blachford Lake Lodge, about 100 kilometres away. Small bush planes are a common way to get around in this vast territory of more than 1,63,000 square kilometres of fresh water. There were about a dozen people from the United States, England and Australia going up in the Air Tindi turboprop. We crammed in among luggage and

supplies, and the unpressurized craft slid over a quilt of spindly trees, frozen lakes and satiny mounds of snow. This is part of the immense Canadian Shield, where the continental crust was swept clean by ice, and the oldest rock in the world was found. The boreal forest of black spruce scribbled across the white in all directions, a fraction of a vast biome stretching around the globe. Except for a few snowmobile tracks just outside Yellowknife, there were no signs of humanity at all.

We landed on the lake; a smooth, fast slide between small islands. The lodge, at the top of a hill, was to be our living room for several days. Our cabins were down the long slope, along interlacing trails, their paths compressed by snowmobiles. The surrounding snow was deep and fine; I learnt to beware of the trail's edge when I stepped off it and into powder up to my waist.

Three of us from Oregon shared the cabin farthest from the lodge, near the shore. The low trees leaned every which way in the permafrost, small and dark and ancient, and the lake stretched out of sight around layered hills under virgin blue sky.

Our time at Blachford Lake was marked by shared meals and conviviality. We gathered every evening in the lodge. One night, Elizabeth MacDonald, a visiting space scientist from NASA, gave a lecture on the aurora's physics. She told us how glad she was to be here; she spends most of her time on data. "I study the aurora," she said,



Blachford Lake Lodge is best reached by bush plane.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACHFORD LAKE LODGE & WILDERNESS RESORT

“but I don’t get to see it that often.”

We see the aurora because electrons charged by the solar wind collide with atoms in the upper atmosphere, mostly atomic oxygen. A fountain of resulting photons spills across hundreds of kilometres in seconds. Atomic oxygen releases red light when high in the atmosphere and can emit greenish-white light at lower altitudes. Sometimes deep blues and purples appear from ionized nitrogen. A furious discharge cascades down through the atmosphere into increasingly dense air until it is exhausted. The power of the aurora can be as high as 1,00,000 megawatts.

For eons, people have said the aurora makes noise, that it swishes, whistles, cracks. One polar explorer described it as “the sound of field-ice, then it was like the sound of a watermill, and, at last, like the whirring of a cannon-shot heard from a short

distance.” It has been long thought, however, that whatever audible sound reaches a human ear at ground level could not be an effect of activity at such a high altitude. But in 2012, Finnish scientists captured faint hissing, popping and clapping during an aurora, and proved the sounds were coming from the sky. A geophysicist in Alaska reacted to the news by saying that auroral sound was “scientifically unreasonable,” but admitted that he has heard it, too.

To Indigenous communities, the northern lights are familiar but worthy of respect. Many Inuit people in the Arctic share a myth of the lights, which they call ‘aqsaarniit’. They are said to be the spirits of the dead playing football, usually with a walrus skull. The aqsaarniit were traditionally considered dangerous because they move so quickly and heedlessly in their pursuit. It’s been said that the



The Aurora Village viewing area and its collection of teepees.

in their pursuit. It's been said that the Sámi people, of Fennoscandia, believed that the aurora, called 'guovsahasat', could swoop down and burn a person. Women would cover their heads to keep the aurora out of their hair, people kept silent to avoid irritating it and bells were taken off reindeer when the aurora was bright. Early European and Asian observers thought the aurora was a heavenly battle, a line of enormous candles, or a fissure in the sky. Edmond Halley—the early 18th-century astronomer of Halley's Comet fame—theorized it was the result of water vapour somehow igniting the atmosphere after being released from fissures on Earth's surface.

The aurora is only a few hundred metres thick, since it follows the lines

of our planet's magnetic field. But it is also immense, hundreds of kilometres wide and high, and it occurs between 100 and 1,000 kilometres above the earth, in the ionosphere. The International Space Station flies through this range. The lights cannot form lower in our skies because the energy of colliding particles is lost as the atmosphere becomes denser.

Each evening at Blachford Lake, we waited. The intensity of the aurora depends on many factors: the roughly 11-year solar activity cycle and its many effects; whether the solar wind is steady or gusting; and the sun's rotation in relation to Earth's. In the end, viewing is a local problem. Maybe you need a treasure to trade, good luck, good karma or a blessing.

PHOTO: © KEN PHUNG/SHUTTERSTOCK

Once you are in the right place at the right time, all you can do is wait.

After lectures, we mingled in the lodge, an artificial family. I joined games of Trivial Pursuit. I hung out with a doctor from Melbourne and talked to a retired social worker from the US state of Maine.

About 9:30 p.m., someone would say, "It's starting." We would get dressed and go out, and move slowly from one viewpoint to another, from the bluff in front of the lodge to the tepee on the far side of the hill. A few gentle arcs would gradually widen and join and become an arch with trailing ribbons, wavering, glowing, seeming to shimmer.

Before I had seen aurora borealis, I had imagined it erupting above me, an abrupt display of light spilling out of the sky. I put myself in the centre. But I was just spinning slowly beneath an enormous event. It is happening all the time, this torrent of ionization and spectral light; mostly we don't see it. For a few hours each night, I was granted a fractional view of cosmic forces, by the benevolence of darkness and a clear sky.

The days were clear and bright and flagrantly cold. After breakfast, people would break into pairs and small groups to go on snowmobile rides or ski across the lake. I read, napped, played more Scrabble. I went for hikes, stomping along snowmobile tracks in several layers of insulation. The trails passed

through mounds of glittering snow dappled with velvet-blue shadow, broken by the marks of other travelers: snowshoe hares, caribou, lynx. Walking was cacophony, every step a chorus of squeaking snow, swishing pants and creaking ice. But when I stood still, silence. A single bird's note. Then silence again.

"IT'S STARTING," SOMEONE says. This is our last night at the lake, and the temperature is minus 32 degrees Celsius. We stand at the ice's edge under the black sky. The snow, which is everywhere, which is the whole world, reflects the faint fog of starlight, and yet we see one another only as shadows.

Above us the sky is a white wash. The wash glows, widens, brightens and begins to spin over my head, a luminous cyclone of pearl and dove and alabaster, suddenly so thick and near I could pluck off a tuft in my hand. Faint flashes of pink and green and blue, barely there, gone. We spin and crane our necks, gasp and laugh.

When I first arrived in Yellowknife, I kept reminding myself that I might not see the aurora at all, that it wouldn't look like the pictures, that the real thing would be less than I expected. And I was wrong. I am not sorry that I couldn't see what is in the photos. I am sorry that the photos don't capture what I could see. **R**

FROM HARPER'S (DECEMBER 2020), COPYRIGHT © 2020 BY SALLIE TISDALE.

BONUS READ



THE DOGS OF WAR

BY *Jason Daley* | FROM *Truly*Adventurous*



Caesar and his handler, Rufus Mayo, far right, pause with other handlers and dogs during the fighting.

In 1943, U.S. forces attacked the South Pacific island of Bougainville. Outnumbered and outgunned, their best hope lay with specially trained soldiers named Jack, Andy and Caesar. Two problems: The trio had never seen combat, and they were canines

THE

soldiers filed off the beach and into the twilight world of the jungle. The enemy lay concealed ahead, they could be sure. They followed an unlikely leader: a black-and-tan Doberman named Andy who betrayed no sense of the danger of the situation.

Some of the men bristled at the arrangement.

This was to save them all from enemy fire? The canine was a ruined show dog. To make matters worse, the platoon's backup was a German shepherd who months before had been roaming the streets of New York City with the three boys who owned him.

As they moved up the trail, they heard gunfire and artillery in the distance as the rest of the U.S. Second Marine Raider Battalion fought to secure the shoreline. It was 1943; the assault on Bougainville, a speck of land among the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, had just begun. Allied forces needed to capture a safe zone large enough to build an airfield for an eventual attack on the nearby island of New Britain, the final Japanese stronghold in the region. From there, the Allies would hop from island to island until they were within

bombing range of Japan itself.

The campaign in the Pacific depended on Bougainville. For the Marines marching blindly into the dense, enemy-occupied jungle, the future depended on dogs who were never supposed to have been part of the war in the first place.

A Different Kind of Soldier

Alene Erlanger was a 46-year-old New Jersey socialite with a love for show poodles when Pearl Harbor was bombed in December 1941. Days after the attack, she invited her friend Roland Kilbon, a journalist who covered the dog world, to lunch. "Other countries have used dogs in their armies for years and ours have not," she told him. "Just think what dogs can do guarding forts, munitions plants and such." Erlanger envisioned dog owners around the country grooming a new kind of warrior for a new war. Kilbon agreed, and the two created Dogs for Defense, an organization that would train dogs for the military.

They were promptly stonewalled. At the outset of World War II, the United States Army had just a handful of sled dogs in Alaska. Otherwise, the Army wanted nothing to do with dogs or animals of any sort. Over the years, jeeps had replaced horses, trucks had taken the place of pack mules, and radios had made carrier pigeons obsolete. Even casualty dogs, which during World War I brought medical



Scout and messenger dogs patrolling a captured trail on Bougainville with Marines.

supplies to men wounded in the field and stayed by their side until a medic arrived, were considered quaint.

But that wasn't a sentiment shared by everyone. At the outbreak of World War II, the Germans had an estimated 2,00,000 highly trained dogs trotting at the heels of their armies. They even sent 25,000 trained sentries to the Japanese military. The British and French established their own war dog programs in the early 1940s. The

United States was the holdout.

Then, in June 1942, in the dead of night, four German saboteurs laden with high explosives, detonators and timers landed on Long Island, New York. Around the same time, a German U-boat surfaced off the coast of Florida and four more would-be saboteurs rowed ashore.

The FBI tracked down all eight invaders, but the incidents showed how vulnerable munitions factories

Dogs participated in World War I, as this poster shows, but by World War II they had been phased out of the U.S. military.

and other high-value operations were. Facing a shortage of men due to the war, the government reluctantly realized the country needed dogs to patrol 5,954 km of unguarded coastline. Erlanger went to work.

She had a talent for attracting the interest of well-heeled and quirky personalities. Hollywood actress Greer Garson gave Dogs for Defense her prized poodle, Clicquot. Popular singer Rudy Vallee enlisted his Doberman pinscher, King. Ezio Pinza, a singer with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, donated his two Dalmatians along with an album of his singing, instructing the handlers to play the record for them if they got lonely.

Motivated by a desire to help, Americans sent dogs from all corners of the country.

Brothers Max, Morris and Irving Glazer of the Bronx in New York City owned Caesar, a purebred German shepherd. Caesar was big, with a black-and-grey coat and a graceful stride. And he was smart.

The boys trained him to sit, fetch,



shake hands and stay, all the classic obedience skills. But his most impressive skill was delivering items to their intended recipient. The brothers could buy a parcel at the grocery store or butcher shop and tell Caesar to “take it to Mom.” The dog would carry the package through the city blocks to the door of the Glazers’ fourth-floor apartment without trying to eat the contents—even steak.

When the war broke out, the Glazer brothers headed into the military,

POSTER: DAVID POLLACK/GETTY IMAGES

leaving Caesar in their mother's care. With the boys away, the dog grew morose. He needed purpose. So, after consulting with her sons, Mrs Glazer signed the shepherd up for the war effort. He soon shipped out to an Army camp for training.

On Long Island, New York, Joseph Verhaeghe was making his own painful decision. As a teenager during World War I, he had watched his infant sister be killed when the Germans invaded Belgium. As a grown man, he moved to the United States, married, and had a son named Bobby. Then war broke out again. Verhaeghe was determined to join up to fight for his family, but he was rejected because of his perforated eardrum.

When he learned of Dogs for Defense, desperate for some way to contribute, Verhaeghe decided to enlist Jack, the family's Belgian sheepdog, a slinky relative of the German shepherd. Jack was a good boy with a mischievous streak who gulped down the ice cream of neighbourhood children when they weren't looking. Verhaeghe hesitated to send the dog off until 11-year-old Bobby tearfully announced, "Pop, if Jack can save lives, I want him to go in." And so Jack went off to war.

Meanwhile, a prim Doberman named Andreas von Wiede-Hurst—known as Andy to most—was about to join the war effort as well. Andy had impeccable bone structure, but his penchant for scrapping with other

dogs led to a mangled ear, which kept him off the show-dog circuit. It was a blessing in disguise. With his good looks and even temperament around humans, Andy enjoyed a robust career propagating his genes within the elite Doberman community.

When the Marines began looking for dog recruits, Andy's owners knew he was exactly what they were seeking—a strong, athletic, levelheaded animal with an eight-foot leap.

Training for War

All dogs went through two weeks of basic training, where they learned commonplace commands like sit, stay and come, as well as how to ride in the back of trucks on bumpy roads. They were also exposed to the sound of gunfire until they didn't flinch. The majority became sentry dogs and were taught to growl or alert at the approach of strangers.

Two more select classes of dogs trained for combat duty. Over 13 weeks, messenger dogs were drilled until they would run between two handlers, dodging all obstacles in their path to get their communication from one trainer to the other. They would be especially important in fighting in the South Pacific, as the best walkie-talkies of the day had a reception range of just a quarter of a mile and experienced interference in the dense jungle.

The animals with the keenest noses and most stable temperaments

became scout dogs. They were trained not to bark when they sensed danger but rather to raise their hackles, lift their tails, or perform some other silent sign that danger was afoot.

As the Marines readied to head into deep jungles on steamy Pacific islands where the enemy would be camouflaged in the dense vegetation, dogs began to seem like a viable and even necessary tool of war. But they remained untested and, to many of the men whose lives hung in the balance, untrusted.

handler in Robert Lansley, a redhead nicknamed “daredevil” for his eagerness to participate in combat. He nurtured real pride for Andy. “He is a perfect gentleman in every respect, and he’s also rated among us fellows as the best dog in the field,” Lansley wrote to his wife.

For the three-week journey, the handlers and canines lived in their own segregated village of dog huts and peeing posts placed on deck. Most days, they endured catcalls from veteran Marines. “Everyone looked on

WOULD THE DOGS PANIC AND FORGET THEIR TRAINING UNDER HEAVY FIRE?

Into the Pacific Front

In June 1943, a transport ship left San Diego, California, carrying thousands of Marines to the South Pacific, including the 24 dogs and 48 handlers of the 1st War Dog Platoon. Gordon Wortman and Paul Castracane from Cohoes, New York, handled Jack, the Verhaeghes’ sheepdog. “I think that the officers here have too big ideas for Jack and me to carry out,” Wortman wrote to his parents. “We’ll surely do our best, though.”

Rufus Mayo, an Alabama native who had raised hunting dogs, and Johnny Kleeman, a 17-year-old from Philadelphia, handled Caesar, the Glazer boys’ shepherd. And Andy, the strapping Doberman, found a brave

us as a curiosity and wondered what we were supposed to do,” said Clyde Henderson, a chemistry teacher from Ohio and a Doberman breeder who was in charge of the platoon. “We weren’t too sure ourselves.”

As the Marines approached Bougainville, the dog handlers began to worry. Would the animals panic and forget their training under heavy fire? Would they be so shell-shocked they couldn’t work?

The American forces would confront members of the notorious 6th Division of Imperial Japanese Army infantrymen. On top of this, jungle fighting was still a new proposition for the Marines. The only chance they had to get out of this alive was to keep



Jack, shown here with a handler, was commended for “outstanding performance against the enemy.”

to control the area surrounding the two main trails running through Bougainville: the Piva and Numa-Numa. They were no more than footpaths, but they represented the most developed roads on that part of the island.

Japanese soldiers riddled the dense forest surrounding them. Pillboxes with crisscrossing machine guns dotted the trails, and snipers—

morale high and stay disciplined. Adrenaline coursed as they steeled themselves for war.

On the morning of 1 November 1943, around 14,000 Allied troops landed on Empress Augusta Bay in Bougainville, which was defended by 45,000 Japanese troops. Dogs and men huddled aboard three Higgins landing craft. Mortar shells rained down on them, almost capsizing one of the boats. They rushed onto the beach, dodging enemy fire on the way to the tree line.

Hours after landing, Andy the scout dog and Caesar the messenger dog were called up for their first assignments. The Marines needed

faces painted green, bodies camouflaged with leaves and branches, and strapped high into trees—waited patiently for Marine patrols to make it into their gunsights. The Japanese soldiers often dug holes six or seven feet deep into the ground and fired on approaching soldiers from below. They were experts at camouflage, and the inexperienced Americans’ vision would be obscured by dense vegetation and smoke from artillery and guns. The dogs would be their eyes and ears.

If the island could not be secured, a revitalized Japan could take the offensive in the South Pacific and wreak havoc on the Allies. The war dogs

With the war now ended, this lucky dog would be going home.

had their work cut out for them.

The temperature hung around 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the humidity about 90 per cent. Light rain came and went. Robert Lansley, the redhead “daredevil,” felt his heart beating in his chest. He clutched an M1 rifle and carried 80 rounds of ammunition hanging from his belt. He even had grenades in his pocket.

Lansley grabbed Andy’s leash and volunteered to lead a patrol of 250 Marines of M Company into the steamy jungle. The company commander agreed. As he jogged ahead with Andy, Lansley turned and looked at the men behind him. Really, they were kids, most about 20 years old. Some sported mustaches to hide their youth, but the bewilderment in their eyes gave it away. The faint *tick-tick-tick* of the Japanese machine guns continued somewhere in the distance.

The men watched closely as the dog, now off-leash, paced down the path, leading them deeper into the green wilderness. When eager Andy got too far ahead, Lansley made a low *cluck* sound and the Doberman pattered back to his side.



About 365 metres up the trail, Andy halted. He turned his head slowly to the left, then to the right, signalling some disturbance. Lansley made a gesture for M Company to halt. The Marines, many of whom were experiencing combat for the first time, squatted down, fingers on the triggers of their rifles, their hearts in their throats. They waited. Silence.

Finally Andy relaxed. The commander looked bewildered. Why was the dog alerting them for nothing? Lansley said it was probably just a wild boar nosing in the undergrowth. The commander’s confidence in the dog, already suspect, seemed shaken. M Company pushed on.

Another 137 metres along the trail, Andy stopped again. He perked up his good ear and let out a low growl, pointing his muzzle slightly to the

right. Lansley squatted down and patted the dog. He could feel the tension in Andy's muscles.

"Well, this is it," Lansley told his fellow Marines. "There's a sniper back there, about 68 metres."

The patrol leader sent Lansley and another soldier forward. In the distance, they saw what Andy had sensed: two camouflaged machine gun nests manned by the enemy. They unleashed a spray of gunfire, which was returned. Andy, according to his training, hung back and crouched out of the way of the fire fight.

A Life-Saving Dash

While Andy scouted out snipers, Caesar became the fastest means of communication among the Marines. He quickly earned the distinction of carrying the first war dog message in actual combat. The men pressed forward, inch by painstaking inch in the jungle, while the dog zipped between the forward position and command post. Until then, the Japanese fired only upon the men, but when they realized canine messengers also conspired against them, they took shots at dogs.

Rufus Mayo, Caesar's handler,

THE JAPANESE WERE VERY CLOSE. AMBUSH SEEMED IMMINENT.

M Company men hit the ground as shrapnel flew overhead. The air filled with smoke and dust and the rumble of machine guns—the Americans' *clack-clack-clack* and the Japanese's *tick-tick-tick*. When he lost what little visibility he had, Lansley tossed two grenades towards the Japanese. Their explosions rocked the earth.

Silence fell. Dazed, the Marines continued forward, past the machine gun nests, which were completely wiped out. The Americans had all survived. They found eight dead Japanese soldiers. Suddenly, the Marines were very glad they had the dogs.

would attach messages about the company's progress to the dog's collar and send him back to Kleeman. Despite Mayo's advancing, Caesar always found him again. When the Marines recovered written plans from a dead Japanese officer, it was Caesar who raced with them to camp. He made nine runs the second day, with sniper fire trailing him each time.

When night fell, the Marines hunkered down in place. Far off in the jungle, they heard Japanese soldiers yelling, "Help! Help!" It was possible that they were truly wounded, but it was just as possible this was psychological warfare. Either way, the

Japanese were very close. Ambush seemed imminent.

At dawn, Mayo was bolted awake by Caesar's growling. The private peeked out of his foxhole. Japanese soldiers had infiltrated the camp—and two of them were now heading toward Mayo. Caesar leaped out of the foxhole to intercept them. Mayo called for his companion and then watched the dog falter, skitter sideways and fall.

In the confusion, with Japanese soldiers overrunning the camp and Americans fighting them off, Mayo lost track of Caesar. After the gunfire

taking out. The lead would stay, but the doctor believed the gutsy dog would pull through. Caesar remained in sick bay recovering, with once skeptical soldiers sneaking him food while the nurses weren't looking.

Jack, the Belgian sheepdog, replaced Caesar. A few days later, Jack and his handler Gordon Wortman were working a roadblock with E Company, which had relieved M Company, when the Japanese cut the phone line. A savage attack soon followed. Wortman took a round to the leg, and a bullet cut through the loose

JACK BOLTED OUT OF CAMP. GUNFIRE KICKED UP THE DIRT AT HIS HEELS.

ceased, he found a trail of blood leading into the jungle. Where the red line ended, he found Caesar bleeding and barely conscious. Mayo dropped to the ground and hugged the dog gently, just like the Glazer boys must have when he was a pup.

Three Marines jury-rigged a stretcher from two lengths of bamboo and a blanket. A dozen Marines volunteered to carry Caesar to the regimental first aid station. Mayo and Kleeman waited anxiously outside the tent while the surgeon operated. After 20 minutes, he appeared. The surgeon had removed a slug from Caesar's hip, but the other bullet, in his shoulder, was too close to his heart to risk

skin on Jack's back. The Marine lay there in agony. Jack, gushing blood, leaned against his handler, whimpering in pain.

As the Japanese tightened the noose, with no phone line and no radio to request reinforcements or medical aid, the commanding officer said to Wortman, "Your dog is the only one we can send for help. Can he make it?"

Wortman looked at his wounded dog, pain clouding Jack's normally intelligent eyes. "I think so, sir," he said. "He's got lots of guts." Wortman tucked a request for aid into Jack's collar pouch. He stroked the dog and whispered, "We're depending on you.

Report to Paul!” Jack warily rose to his feet and looked at Wortman. Then he turned his head toward the path and bolted out of camp. Automatic fire kicked up the dirt at Jack’s heels as the dog zagged into the underbrush.

It was a long dash through the jungle before the bedraggled dog, caked in blood and mud, appeared near headquarters at the feet of Paul Castracane. The Marine urgently fished the message out of Jack’s collar pouch and ran it to battalion command. Then he returned to carry Jack to the first aid tent.

Soon, reinforcements fought their way up the trail and stopped the Japanese assault. Wortman and other casualties were carried out on stretchers. To every Marine who made it out of the jungle that day Jack was a war hero of the highest order.

ANDY, CAESAR, JACK and other dogs in the 1st War Dog Platoon were all raised to the rank of Corporal, and letters of commendation were sent to their owners at home, most likely the first they’d heard of their dogs since they shipped out.

In all, 423 Marines died capturing Bougainville, yet no patrol with a dog on point had lost a man. The survivors of Bougainville, including Caesar and Jack, continued island-hopping, serving in Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Other Marine War Dog Platoons were instrumental in the Second Battle of Guam in July and August 1944. The animals worked over 450 missions on the island and 25 of them were killed. (In all, 29 Marine dogs were killed in action during the war.) A National War Dog Cemetery on the U.S. Naval Base Guam honours them today.

When the war in the Pacific finally ended in September 1945, the Marine Corps had to decide what to do with the 559 dogs remaining in its service. An order went out to euthanize the animals. The men who fought alongside them wouldn’t hear of it. After being inundated with protests, the Marines agreed to de-train the dogs and return them to their owners.

The war dogs were going home. **R**

FROM *Truly*Adventurous* (MARCH 9, 2019), COPYRIGHT © 2019 BY *Truly Adventurous*, LLC.



So, This is Love ...

For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.

CARL SAGAN

Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*

A proud lion spots a chimp and roars, “Who is the king of the jungle?”

“You are, mighty lion!” says the trembling chimp.

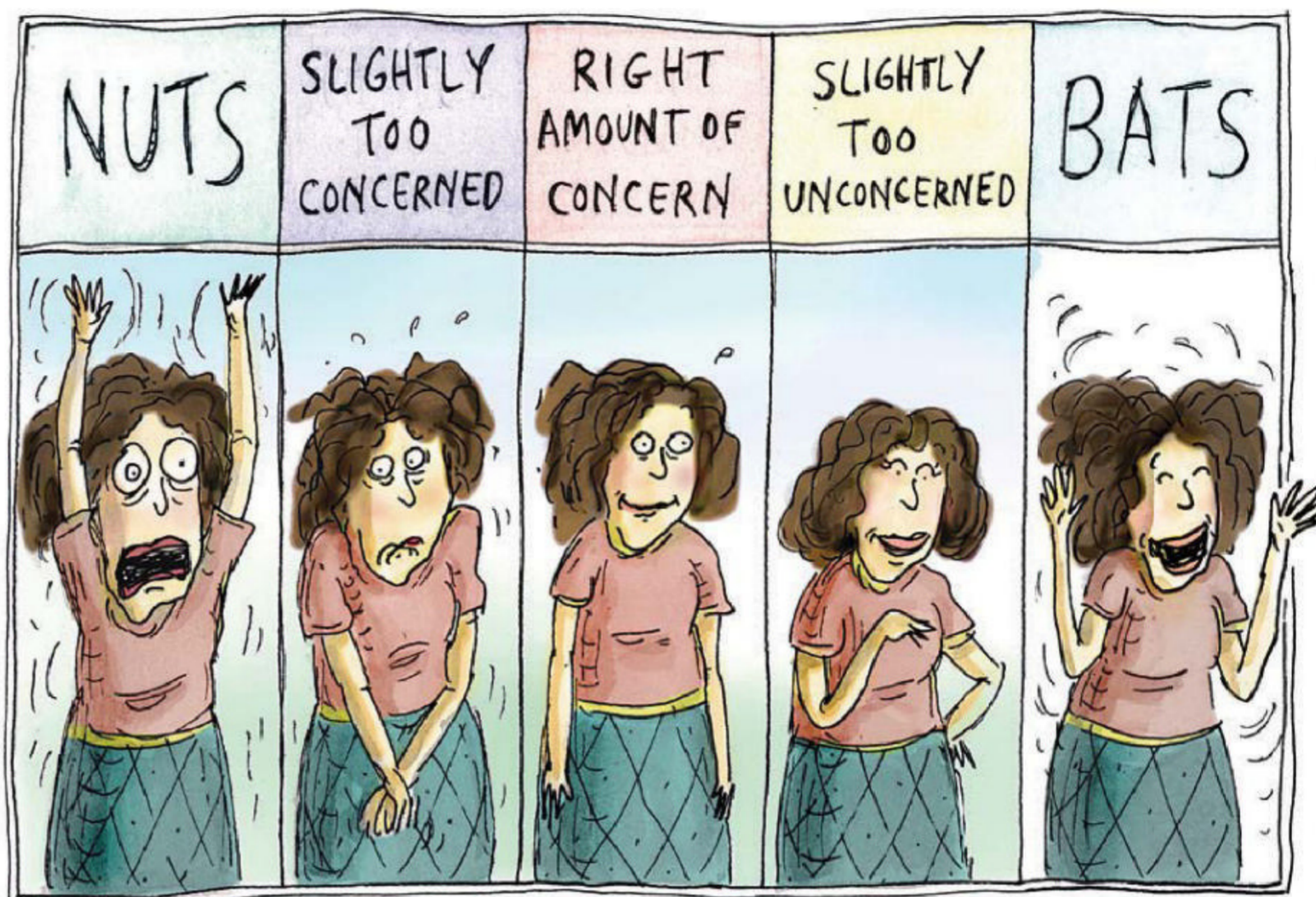
Next, the lion stops a zebra: “Who is the king of the jungle?”

“Y-y-you are!” stammers the zebra.

Feeling cocky, the lion swaggers up to an elephant and demands, “Who is the king of the jungle?”

The unfazed elephant snatches up the lion with its trunk, slams him against a tree a dozen times, then stomps off. The dazed lion shouts, “Just because you don’t know the answer

CONCERN CHART



doesn’t mean you have to get nasty about it.”

—Submitted by
JOE SEBASTIAN

How can you tell a Russian pessimist from a Russian optimist? The pessimist says “Things couldn’t get worse.”

The optimist says “Oh yes they can.”

—centreforoptimism.com

A judge tells the defendant, “You’re charged with attacking your boss with a hammer.”

“You jerk!” yells a voice from the back of the courtroom.

“You’re also charged with attacking a bartender with a hammer,” the judge continues.

“Jerrrkkk!” bellows the same man.

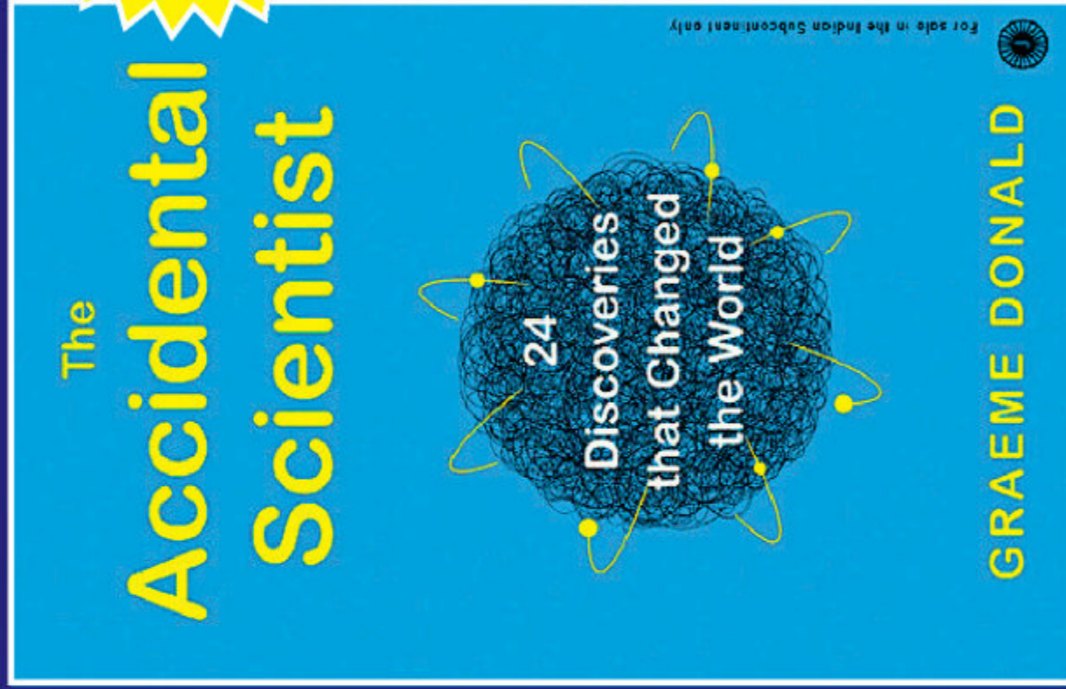
The judge bangs his gavel. “Sir,” he says, “one more outburst, and I’ll charge you with contempt.”

“I’m sorry, Your Honour,” says the man.

Just ended day 7,000 of never having used the Pythagorean theorem.

—@THEBLOGGESS

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“But I’ve been this jerk’s neighbour for 10 years, and every time I asked to borrow a hammer, he said he didn’t have one.”

—*thehulltruth.com*

Corporations spend years building up a product’s brand. Jimmy Fallon invited viewers of the *Tonight Show* to ruin all that work by simply adding one word to the product’s name:

- ◆ Ben & Jerry’s Chunky Monkey Pox
- ◆ Gorilla Tape Worms

- ◆ Essential Oil Spill
- ◆ K-Pop Tarts
- ◆ Peppermint Cow Patties
- ◆ Fleetwood Mac & Cheese
- ◆ Easy Bake Cremation Oven

Food for Thought:

◆ I’m tired of people saying, “Here’s my go-to lazy meal” —and then they start chopping an onion.

—*@NALEDIMASHISHI*

◆ The waitress said “Wow,” after I ordered.

—*@KAUFMANAUDREY*

◆ I hate people who say “It’s too early to be eating that.” What time do a stomach open?

—*@CODEINEFRIDGE*

◆ People who think you can’t be happy and sad at the same time have obviously never eaten all the cookies in the house in one sitting.

—*@PINKCAMOTO*

◆ I think the hot dog eating competition should award me extra points for not blinking during the event.

—*@LISABUG74*

STAR-CROSSED KITTIES

Reader’s Digest cartoonist Bob Eckstein insists these are the ideal names for cats in Hollywood:

- ◆ Fleas Witherspoon
- ◆ James Spayed
- ◆ Hissy Spacek
- ◆ Jimmy Kibble
- ◆ Leonardo de CatNapio
- ◆ Meow Farrow
- ◆ Spike Flea
- ◆ Tabby McGuire
- ◆ Will Feral

—From *The Complete Book of Cat Names* by Bob Eckstein (W. W. Norton)

If **HGTV** has taught me anything, it’s that the key to happiness is an open-concept layout, double sinks in the bathroom, a kitchen island the size of Hawaii and a \$1.2 million budget.

—*@ABBYHASISSUES*

Reader’s Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com



SHUTTERSTOCK

CULTURESCAPE

BOOKS, ARTS AND *Entertainment*

FEASTING ON THE FOOD OF LIFE

By Karishma Upadhyay

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Shobhaa Dé celebrated her 75th trip around the sun with an Elvis Presley themed soirée. The party might be over but the celebrations continue with *Insatiable* (HarperCollins India), a diary of sorts that chronicles the post-pandemic year of 2022. She writes about ‘the brood’ aka her children; Ansariji the mutton-*wala* and Babita the *maalish-wali* (masseur); watching the late M. F. Hussain sketch in the middle of dinner; and fangirling over Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee. And, these anecdotes are peppered with food (so much food!). In an interview with *Reader’s Digest*, De talks about her writing process and why she’d always pick *bhakri* over foie gras.



The book almost reads like a year-long food diary. Why did you decide on this format rather than a biography?

Food is at the centre of all our lives, but we don't always acknowledge that. The structure is interesting for me because I had done a memoir of sorts when I turned 50, then again when I turned 60, and then at 70. And I didn't want to let this one go, the big one at 75, because it's a big hurrah for me and for all who achieve this landmark birthday, especially post-COVID. I didn't want it to be just another memoir that goes back and forth, the “I was born in Satara,” kind of thing. *Searching for Anuradha* [a name her parents originally chose for her, only to change it to Shobhaa at her uncle's suggestion] was

the working title, and the idea was to look for a Maharashtrian girl; where did I leave her behind? But that would have again turned a little maudlin and a bit too sentimental. Maybe that search was too personal; it may not be relevant to readers.

Early in the book you write “I’m in a snarky mood”. You’ve been known as somebody who writes as she sees it. When was the last time that you had to rein in the snark?

Only in today’s environment. Even while writing this book, there were more than just a few nudges in the right direction from publishers who are looking at legal [implications]. If the book has to pass that scrutiny, it also makes you much more aware and conscious of what you’re saying. And if ‘he who shall not be named’ is not to be named or referred to because it could land the publishers in a mess, then you do think about content in a more conscious way. All these years, I’ve never ever had that come in the way of what I wanted to say. But this is now across the board, in all the columns one writes, and certainly in this book; it’s very deliberately apolitical. Barring a few stray comments here and there, I’ve completely stayed away from something that has become very tricky terrain for all writers.

Has your writing process changed?

Not really. I just write in torrents, it just comes like the Brahmaputra in spate.

The words, they explode out of my head and heart. And my imagination is non-stop, I’m writing even when I’m not writing. Even in my sleep, I’m actually writing. Everything is about writing.

And do you still write by hand?

Not anymore. I started bullying my children into keying it in for me till one fine day when they had their final exams, they got a laptop, threw it at me and said, “You’re on your own. We can’t do it any longer.” A lot of the early books are handwritten manuscripts running into 1,00,000 words. I still enjoy writing by hand. I still journal, all of which is handwritten. I hope I never lose that because I find the physical act of writing extremely powerful.

What would Anuradha think of Shobhaa at age 75?

I think Anuradha would giggle and chuckle because Shobhaa Dé is to me, another creature. It’s like a brand name. It’s like an out of body experience, when I think of Shobhaa Dé, because I don’t really connect emotionally to that persona. I have become that persona professionally but within, it’s still Anuradha. At the core of my existence, it will always be *bhakri* over foie gras. It has always kept me grounded, and thank God for that *bhakri* I used to eat—and still do, every evening for dinner. It’s a way to reconnect, even briefly, over those five bites with Anuradha and keep her alive. **R**

RD RECOMMENDS

Films

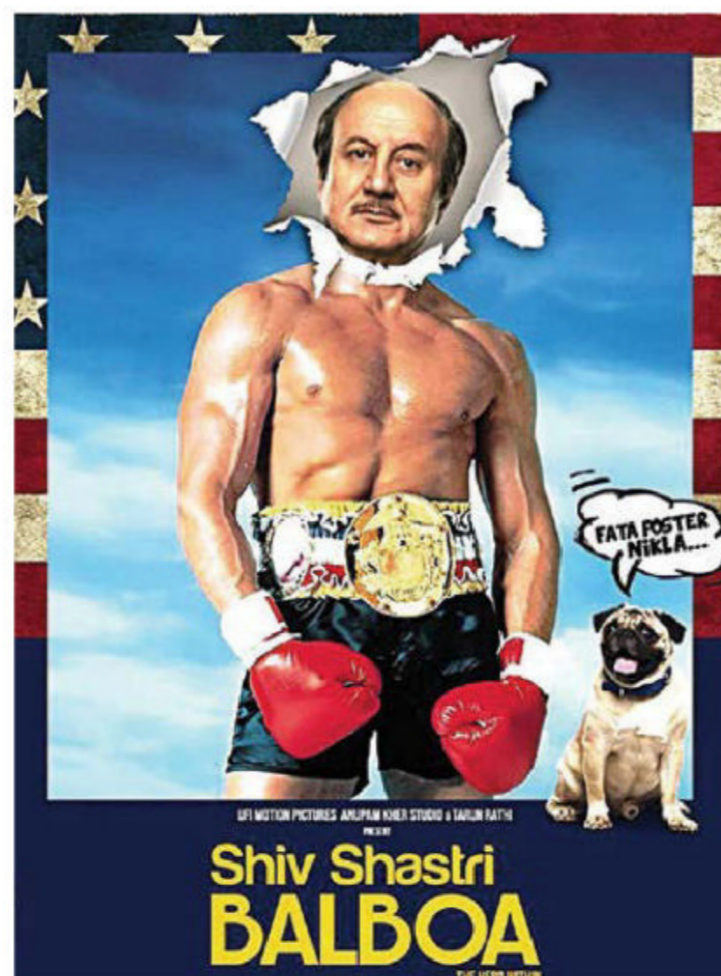
ENGLISH: Quintessential nice-guy Tom Hanks returns to the big screen in **A MAN CALLED OTTO** as a grumpy man who's given up on life after the death of his wife. His curmudgeonly ways is challenged when quick-witted Marisol (Mariana Treviño) and her two daughters move in next door, leading to a friendship that turns his world around. Directed by Marc Forster of *Finding Neverland* and *Kite Runner* fame, the film is set to reach theatres on 10 Feb.

By 2009, Australian teenager, Jessica Watson, had already made a name for herself as an avid and competent sailor. At 16 years old, she takes up an incredi-



Tom Hanks and cast in *A Man Called Otto*

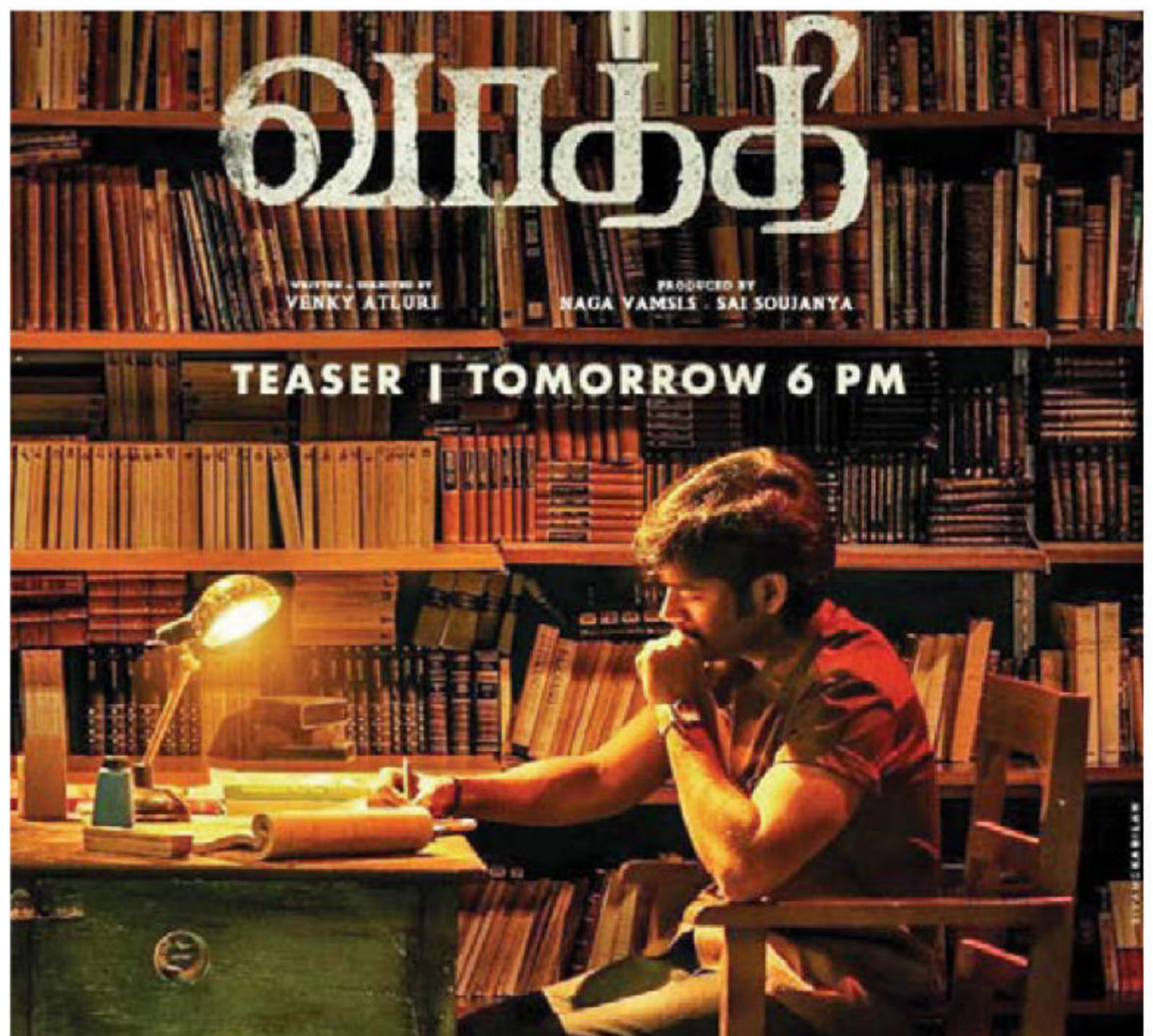
ble mission—to sail around the world non-stop and unassisted. This inspiring true story of her successful run against all odds, is told in the film **TRUE SPIRIT**, on Netflix from 3 February.



Poster for *Shiv Shastri Balboa*

HINDI: Veteran actors Anupam Kher and Neena Gupta join hands in **SHIV SHASTRI BALBOA**, directed by Ajayan Venugopalan. Shiv Shastri, an everyday Joe and die-hard Rocky Balboa fan, travels to the US to meet his son (Jugal Hansraj). There he encounters a woman who longs to return home to India. Misadventure and hilarity ensue as he embarks on an unexpected journey through the American heartland in an attempt to help her. The film releases in theatres on 10 February.

TAMIL+TELEGU: National-Award-winning actor Dhanush stars in the bilingual action-drama film **VAATHI/SIR** (releasing in theaters on 17 February) which finds the protagonist, a junior teacher up against the education mafia, bent on commercializing the world of academia for private gain. Directed by Venky Atluri, this social drama promises to shed light on the need to ensure that learning remain accessible to all.



Dhanush in *Vaathi/Sir*

**#WATCHLIST:
ON OUR RADAR**

Carnival Row: Season 2
Starring Orlando Bloom and Cara Delevingne, the Victorian fantasy drama *Carnival Row*,



Orlando Bloom and Cara Delevingne in *Carnival Row*

returns with its second season, in which a series of murders threatens to destroy the tenuous peace of the fictional realm. The season comes to Amazon Prime on 17 February.

My Dad the Bounty Hunter
When his two children unintentionally board his spacecraft and interfere with his mission, an interplanetary bounty hunter goes above and beyond the call of duty as a father. A must-watch for animation lovers, this se-



A still from *The Night Manager*

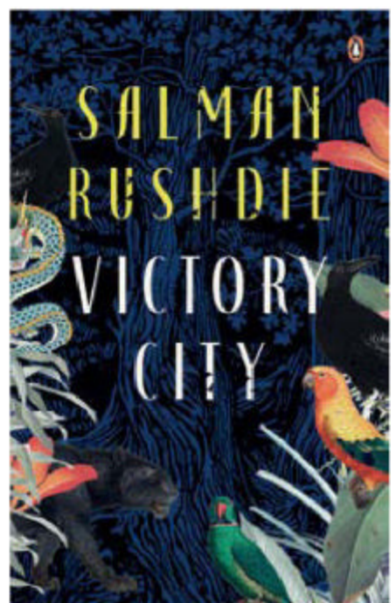
ries comes to Netflix on 9 February

The Night Manager
This Hindi remake of the English series by the same name, starring Anil Kapoor and Aditya Roy Kapur is out on Disney+ Hotstar on 17 February.

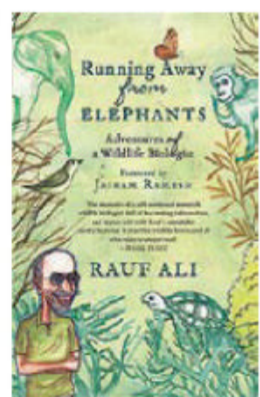
Books

Victory City by Salman Rushdie,
Penguin Hamish Hamilton

Brilliantly told in the style of an ancient epic, *Victory City* harkens author Salman Rushdie's return to magic realism with an enchanting, otherworldly saga of love, adventure, and myth. The five-time Booker Prize winning author completed the book a few months before suffering an on-stage attack last August at the Chautauqua Institution in New York.



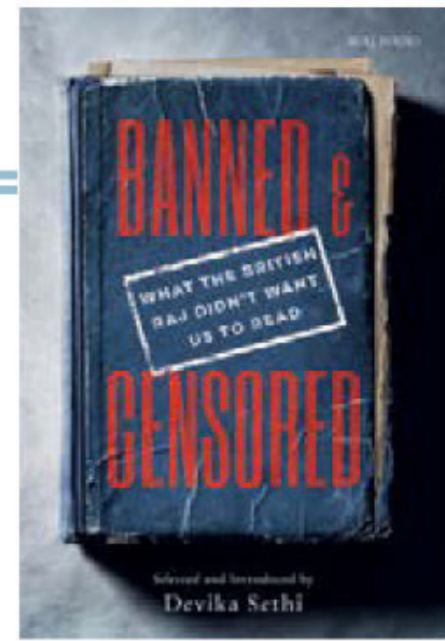
In the wake of a battle between two kingdoms in 14th-century southern India, grief-stricken nine-year-old Pampa Kampana encounters a goddess, who grants her miraculous powers. She becomes instrumental in the rise of the wondrous city named Bisnaga—‘victory city’ until tragic ruination arrives in the most human of ways: the hubris of those in power.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

Running Away From Elephants: The Adventures Of A Wildlife Biologist

by Rauf Ali (*Speaking Tiger*): Beginning with his interactions with the legendary ornithologist Dr Salim Ali, who was also his grand-uncle, wildlife biologist Rauf Ali explores India's natural history. A lively and quirky collection of personal tales from his fascinating three-decade-long career, the author explores the state of environmental conservation in India, and the complex relationship between locals, wildlife researchers and forest officials.



Scope Out

Banned & Censored: What the British Raj Didn't Want Us to Read (Roli Books): A treasure trove of lost historical gems, this book by Devika Sethi dives into the history of sedition and censorship in colonial India.

A New History of India: From Its Origins to the Twenty-First Century (Aleph): This ambitious and comprehensive one-volume tome unearths the history and evolution of India and Indians.

Not Quite a Disaster After All (HarperCollins): Simple in its telling and gently ironic, Buku Sarkar's debut novel deals with self-destruction, survival and falling in love—with a person, a city or the promise of something new.

STUDIO

***Rajniben Descending
the Staircase,
2020–2022***

by Atul Dodiya
Oil on Canvas
60 x 78 in

A LARGE OIL CANVAS with the aspect ratio of a 35 mm movie, this painting is one of a series created by Atul Dodiya ‘in loving memory of Rajesh Khanna’ first seen in a recent exhibition, titled ‘Dr Banerjee in Dr Kul-karni’s Nursing Home & other paintings.’ The title invokes the 1971 film *Anand* starring Khanna (and Amitabh Bachhan as Dr Banerjee). Like the other frames in the show, this one isolates and animates a cinematic moment—in this case the start of a comedic dance interlude which foreshadows the melodrama’s memorable coda in which ... well, you know.

The artwork contains so many playful references, it’s hard to look at it without feeling many



things at once. Nostalgia of course, for a gentler time and its cinema, but also a perplexed voyeurism that mirrors the Khanna character’s own gaze catching the eye of the dancer. The canvas is layered in painterly annotations, evoking the aesthetic of vintage hand-painted lobby cards as well as the conventions of Mughal miniatures in the flat fields of colour. There’s Warhol-ery too but the most obvious wink—one that Dodiya has flashed before—is to

Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2. Marcel Duchamp’s scandalous (in 1913) painting had cinematic inspirations of its own (Edweard Muybridge, for one) and it’s said that it ended Duchamp’s career as a painter and set him on the path of Provocation as an art form. Dodiya likes to put the provocation back in paint. Looking at *Rajniben*, I can’t help but think that Duchamp’s nude too was really dancing down the stairs. **R**

— BY KAI JABIR FRIESE



Abhay Deol (left) and Rajshri Deshpande in a still from *Trial by Fire*

REVIEW

A Study in Love and Loss

Trial by Fire offers a powerful exploration of the lesser known victims of a well-known tragedy

BY Jai Arjun Singh

It is a truism—and a cliché—that many time periods live alongside each other in India. But for those of us who have a clear memory of 1997,

it feels like that was a particularly strange, transitional time. Most city-dwellers were encountering the internet for the first time, via noisy dial-up connections. Quaint pagers were making way for bulky ‘mobile phones’. Just a few years into economic liberalization, there was much promise of glitzy consumerist things to come (such as First World-level malls), but the execution was slow. The country’s first multiplex did open in south Delhi’s Saket that year, promising to glamorize the big-screen experience; and yet, just a

few kilometres away, a much older single-screen hall—poorly maintained and lacking basic safety procedures—was about to see a grisly tragedy unfold.

The new Netflix series *Trial by Fire* is about the Uphaar fire which claimed 59 lives in June 1997, told through the tribulations of Neelam and Shekhar Krishnamoorthy (deeply felt performances by Rajshri Deshpande and Abhay Deol) who lost both their children that day and have spent the last 25 years trying to hold powerful people accountable for the

many lapses. This is a narrative that constantly expands its canvas. First it gives us a glimpse of a single family doing everyday things, a few hours before being torn apart; then the numb grief of two people in a house that feels empty; then it moves on to show the wider world, as Neelam and Shekhar become proactive and form a group for healing and for justice.

All of which makes for a hard-hitting show that understands how time seems to stand still, or coil back on itself, for people whose lives have suddenly been petrified. The urgency of the first few episodes, where the Krishnamoorthys still hope for quick results, yields to a shift in pace as they realize this will be a long-haul fight.

The show focusses on little details, such as Shekhar and Neelam each trying to hide painful reminders of their loss from the other: a birthday cake,

extra toothbrushes in the bathroom. It is about middle-class concerns too: "*Kharcha kitna hua?*" (How much was the expense?) Neelam is asked when she brings home photocopies of dozens of important files), and about systemic rot.

These themes are also explored through the stories of other key people who were in different ways consumed—or scarred—by the Uphaar fire. This makes *Trial by Fire* structurally challenging in its later episodes, which move back and forth in time: between the Krishnamoorthys as their fight continues into the new millennium and others who, in a sense, are still frozen in 1997. Episode five, for instance, introduces us to an embittered former soldier and his wife (Anupam Kher and Ratna Pathak Shah). Then there is the marvellously directed episode six, in which an electrical engineer, Veer Singh (played by Rajesh Tailang), is implicated as

the search for easily prosecuted people gets underway.

In the Veer Singh narrative, long takes are artfully employed to span different events: he goes to jail, comes out again, goes back, while his family lives in a state of suspension, waiting, hoping, despairing. Here is a view of what the fight for justice can do to the truly little people who are scapegoats.

Even the episode title—'Villains'—is telling: from the perspective of this poor family, the Krishnamoorthys are the ones who have indirectly caused their misery. One beautiful shot gives us Veer Singh and his wife reflected like pale ghosts in a TV set after they have watched Neelam and Shekhar give an interview in a posh newsroom. It's a suggestion that in a country where class privilege is so distressingly pronounced, the lines between victims and villains can become blurred. **R**

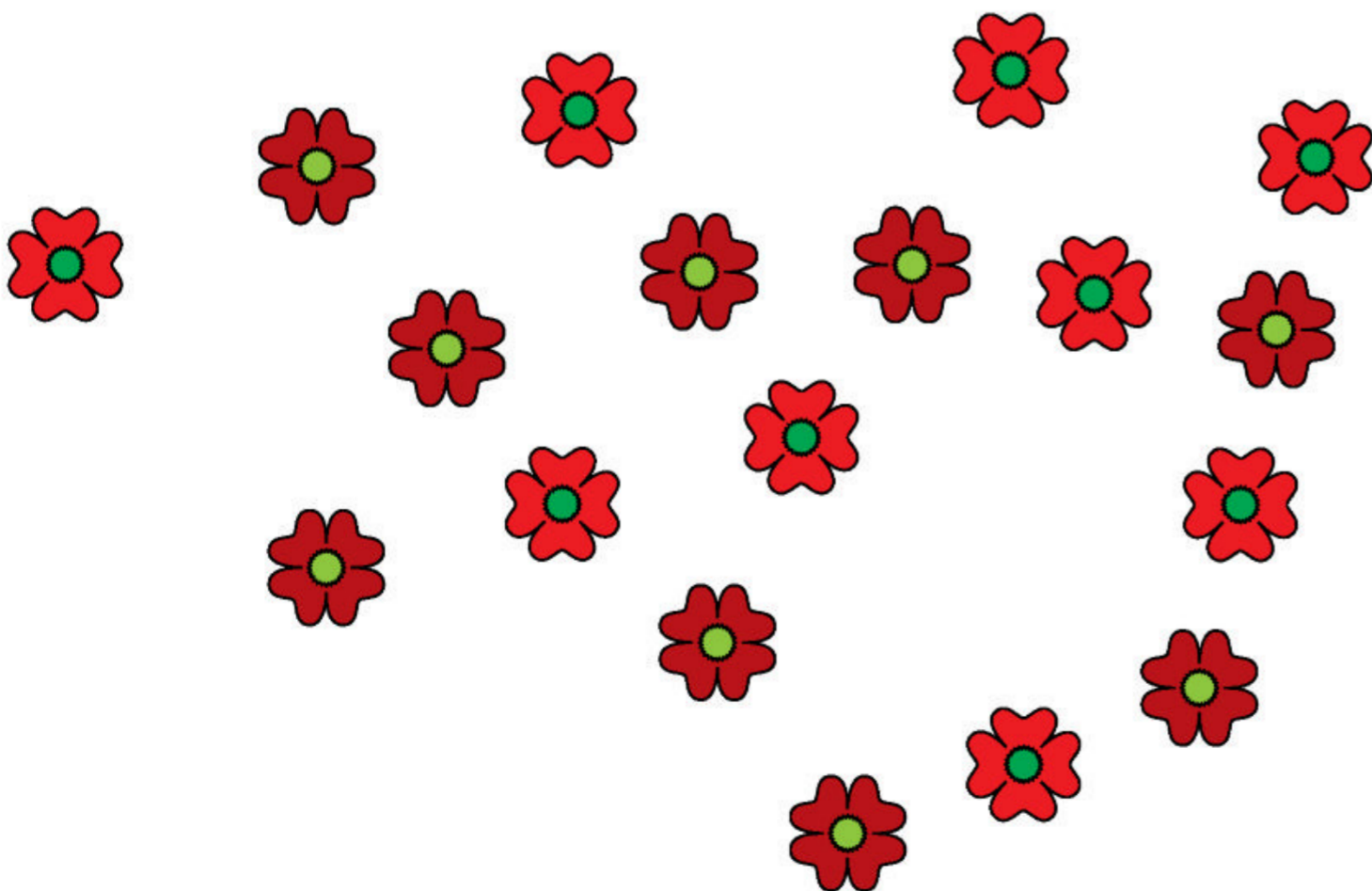
BRAIN TEASERS



Race to the Top

MEDIUM Two parent-child pairs are at the climbing wall in their gym at the same time, though they aren't all from the same family. They are four different ages and have a race to see who can get to the top fastest. From these clues, can you rank all four people by age, height and speed?

1. If these four people stand in order of height, the fastest person is not at either end.
2. Olivia, being only eight, is both the youngest and the shortest person, but she's not the slowest.
3. Abhishek is faster at climbing the wall than his father, Michael.
4. Sunita teased Abhishek that his extra height was the only reason he beat her to the top of the wall.
5. The oldest climber said that it would have been embarrassing to be beaten by Olivia.
6. None of the three orderings (oldest to youngest, tallest to shortest, fastest to slowest) are the same.
7. Sunita said that she hopes she's as active as Michael when she's his age.



Poppies

EASY There are two kinds of poppies in the diagram, turned 45 degrees from each other. Can you find the poppy that's exactly halfway between two poppies with horizontal and vertical petals, and is also exactly halfway between two poppies with diagonal petals?

Number Maze

MEDIUM In this maze, start at the 2 in the top-left corner and move horizontally or vertically (but never diagonally) to reach the star in the bottom-right corner. At each move, travel the same number of squares as the number in the cell you are currently on. Since you are starting on a cell containing 2, your next move is either two squares to the right or two squares down. The next move will be based on your new cell's number. Can you find the correct path?

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 4 | ★ |



Cover Up

EASY Which one of these four tiles could not be used to cover a floor if you had an infinite supply of them? Flipping them over is allowed.



For answers, turn to PAGE 128

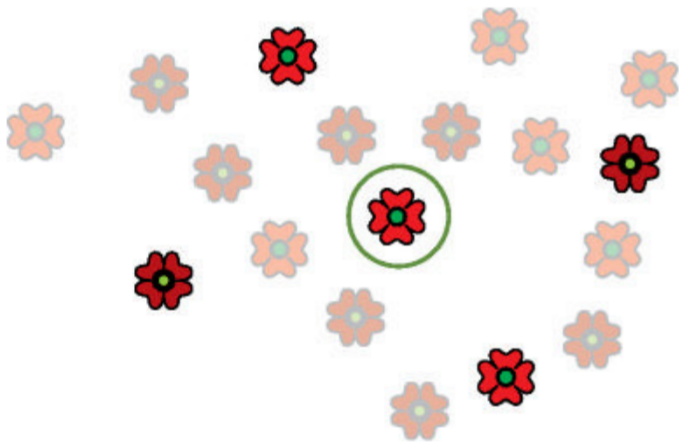
BRAIN TEASERS ANSWERS

From pages 126 and 127

Race to the Top

From oldest to youngest, they are Michael, Sunita, Abhishek and Olivia; from tallest to shortest, they are Michael, Abhishek, Sunita and Olivia; and from fastest to slowest, they are Abhishek, Michael, Olivia and Sunita.

Poppies



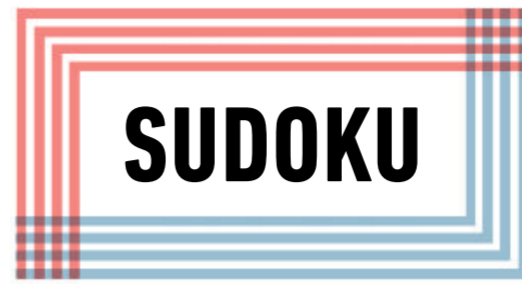
Number Maze

The correct sequence of moves is: down 2, right 5, left 1, down 2, left 2, up 3, down 4, right 3.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 4 | ★ |

Cover Up

The purple 'N' shape.



BY Jeff Widderich

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| 8 | | | | | 3 | | 9 | 7 |
| | 5 | | | 6 | | | | |
| | 1 | | | | 4 | | 5 | |
| 5 | | | | 9 | | | 6 | 8 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 9 | | | 4 | | | | 5 |
| | 6 | | 2 | | | | 4 | |
| | | | | 5 | | | 3 | |
| 4 | 8 | | 7 | | | | | 2 |

To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

- ♦ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- ♦ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| 9 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 3 |
| 5 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| 1 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 9 |
| 8 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 5 |
| 3 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| 4 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 8 |



Since 1925, the Scripps National Spelling Bee has challenged participants to enrich their vocabularies. Test yourself with some of the winning words.

BY *Rob Lutes*

1. fracas—

A: crack in the earth's crust.

B: rough, noisy quarrel.

C: epithet uttered in anger.

2. abrogate—

A: ignore.

B: deny.

C: abolish.

3. démarche—

A: political initiative.

B: drainage canal.

C: mechanical failure.

4. chlorophyll—

A: green pigment in plants.

B: acidic gas.

C: chemical used to purify water.

5. dulcimer—

A: cotton blanket.

B: American folk

instrument.

C: savoury seaweed dish.

6. vouchsafe—

A: protect or defend.

B: hide or conceal.

C: allow or reply.

7. kamikaze—

A: showing reckless disregard for personal safety.

B: rhythmically complex.

C: extremely windy.

8. antediluvian—

A: archaic.

B: frugal.

C: rational.

9. vivisepture—

A: training vines for horticulture.

B: dividing land into equal parts.

C: burying something that is alive.

10. knaidel—

A: dumpling eaten during Passover.

B: loveseat.

C: four-wheeled bicycle.

11. catamaran—

A: crocheted shawl.

B: boat with two hulls in parallel.

C: nursery rhyme.

12. torsion—

action of:

A: lifting.

B: twisting.

C: tilling soil.

13. semaphore—

A: musical symbol indicating a half note.

B: horizontal structural component in a wall.

C: system of signalling using two flags.

14. fibranne—

A: tempered steel.

B: unbleached flour.

C: linen-like fabric made from rayon.

15. serrefine—

A: little tomatoes.

B: ridges on fabric scissors.

C: small forceps used to clamp an artery.

Word Power ANSWERS

1. fracas—

B: *rough, noisy quarrel*; as, The twins' disagreement caused a fracas.

2. abrogate—

C: *abolish*; as, With the stroke of a pen, the CEO abrogated the training programme, imperilling the company's future.

3. démarche—

A: *political initiative*; as, The sudden invasion of neighbouring territory was a stunning démarche for the new government.

4. chlorophyll—

A: *green pigment in plants*; as, The chlorophyll in the leaves declined through the fall, turning the once-green canopy orange and red.

5. dulcimer—

B: *American folk instrument*; as, For authenticity, Richie insisted on playing the Appalachian reel on his father's three-stringed dulcimer.

6. vouchsafe—

C: *allow or reply*; as, The official would only vouchsafe that a burglary had taken place and jewellery was missing.

7. kamikaze—

A: *showing reckless disregard for personal safety*; as, A fearless child, Arvin had attempted countless kamikaze moves on his bike.

8. antediluvian—

A: *archaic*; as, Some of Granny's antediluvian beliefs about gender roles made Annie wince.

9. vivisepture—C: *burying something that is alive*; as, The horror film depicted scratches on the inside of a coffin to capitalize on viewers' fear of vivisepture.

10. knaidel—

A: *dumpling eaten during Passover*; as, Morrie tried his first knaidel at the renowned Jewish deli.

11. catamaran—B: *boat with two hulls in parallel*; as, Kankana loved to sail

her catamaran around the small island.

12. torsion—

B: *action of twisting*; as, To preserve his back, Dr Paswan advised Devesh to avoid torsion of any kind.

13. semaphore—

C: *system of signalling using two flags*; as, Arif skills earned him the Scout semaphore badge.

14. fibranne—

C: *linen-like fabric made from rayon*, as, Said's new fibranne shirts were comfortable and wrinkle-free.

15. serrefine—C: *small forceps used to clamp an artery*; as, The surgeon used the serrefine to stem blood flow in the arm.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: average

10–12: good

13–15: excellent

TRIVIA

BY *Beth Shillibeer*

1. Why are plant species *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* and *Hoya kerri* especially popular in February?

2. What was Austria's Reisi, built in 2020 to be the tallest of his kind?

3. The first ever YouTube video, posted in 2005, featured what animal at the San Diego Zoo?

4. When stores in Japan play the song 'Hotaru no Hikari', known in Europe as 'Auld Lang Syne', what does it signify?

5. Due to wartime metal shortages, Academy Award winners from 1943 to 1945 were given temporary Oscars made of what?

6. Sweet frittelle and galani are pastries traditionally eaten during what festival in Venice?

7. What kind of nut can spontaneously combust, making it dangerous cargo on ships?

8. If you were at Point Nemo in the Pacific Ocean, where would you find your nearest human neighbours?

9. How many time-zones does New Zealand have during the summer?



10. The 1,200-kilometre Finnmarksloppe, held every year in Norway, is Europe's

longest distance race in what sport?

11. Which English author is credited with linking St Valentine's Day to love and romance in his 14th-century poem 'Parliament of Fowls'?

12. Adolescent mammals share what feature that causes them to fall asleep and wake up later than adult populations?

13. Eris, Makemake and Haumea are what kinds of objects in our solar system?

14. What language has the most letters in its alphabet?

15. The toquilla straw hat, known as the Panama hat, is made using a weaving technique from which country?

Answers: 1. They have heart-shaped flowers or leaves. 2. A snowman. 3. Elephants. 4. Closing time. 5. Painted plaster. 6. Carnival. 7. The pistachio nut. 8. At the International Space Station. 9. Three. New Zealand, Chatham Islands and Tokelau. 10. Dogsledging. 11. Geoffrey Chaucer. 12. Temporary circadian-cycle changes in the brain. 13. Dwarf planets. 14. Khmer (Cambodian), with 74 letters. 15. Ecuador.



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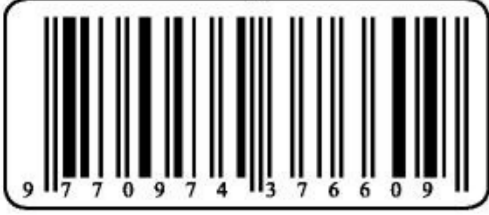
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