

THE PHOENIX NEWS

OPERATING WITH GRATITUDE ON THE TRADITIONAL, ANCESTRAL, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE SYILX/OKANAGAN PEOPLE

Print Issue Vol. 4 No. 9

In Partnership with your Students' Union

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

THE LIBERAL RESPONSE TO WAR IN IRAN

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

The year is 2003. America is engaged in a new Gulf War, eschewing approval from the United Nations to wander into a regional conflict whose ramifications will define the region for a generation at least. In search of allies, America reaches out to friends across the globe for aid in its new expedition for freedom and democracy, including Canada.

The year is 2026, and very little has changed in the decades since. As America finds itself drawn into a war without any real allies besides Israel and the United Kingdom, the latter in a supportive role, America has begun to look for alternatives to help them in their war of ill-defined intents and purposes. Though Canada was one of the pre-eminent American allies to go out of their way to oppose the 2003 Iraq War, there nevertheless exists a hope within some American foreign policy circles that Canada will someday reverse course on this



Photo provided by The White House

conflict.

This hope likely stems from the sheer difference in circumstances surrounding Iraq and Iran: in the case of Iraq, the United States made a point of legitimizing its intervention through an international coalition with Poland, the U.K., and others. Despite those efforts, however, the Iraq War was still seen as a massive break from tradition with lit-

tle historical precedent.

Where the ongoing Iran War contrasts with Iraq, stems from this aforementioned dynamic being completely inverted: now, America has eschewed deference to international law, and has spent the last two decades stoking a debate within America and beyond as to whether an Iraq-style occupation of Iran would be necessary. Resistance towards

a new war waged without congressional approval is receiving less attention than the Iraq War did, despite the Iraq War receiving overwhelming support from Congress — because successive extralegal American military expeditions in Syria, Gaza, Venezuela, and beyond have all desensitized the liberal international order, as Carney pointed out earlier this year at Davos.

RESPONSE continued on page 2

Unsettling the Settler Conversation

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

Have you ever considered how caste hierarchies can travel, adapt, and show up far from home, even on stolen land? One panel pushed students to connect caste, settlerhood, and solidarity, and ask what those words mean now.



Photo provided by Sabhya Arora

CONVERSATION continued on page 4

Arts & Culture: A (School) Year in Review

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

Though winter never truly came, we anticipatorily got used to huddling indoors and working in silence waiting for the sun. During such times, we turn to art to keep us entertained and thinking about the world. As we reflect on the year and get excited for the summer, let us also reflect on the great art we have enjoyed.

REVIEW continued on page 3

Controversial RCMP Unit Spotted on Campus

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

The RCMP's Critical Response Unit (CRU), responsible for the police response to pro-Palestine encampments in UBC Vancouver, Vancouver Island University, the University of Victoria, and our very own campus, recently underwent a broad rebrand after a series of controversial engagements against environmentalists across Canada. Now, that same response team has recently made another appearance on campus, raising questions as to why they're here.

CONTROVERSY continued on page 3

THE 2026 ROGER WATTS DEBATE

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

On March 25th, 2026, onlookers gathered at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Downtown Kelowna to watch the annual Roger Watts Debate. The event aims at putting undergraduate debate talent on center stage while highlighting the most pressing issues facing the world today.

The Roger Watts Debate is an event held in the memory of Roger Watts, a personal injury lawyer from the Okanagan with a long and successful career where he was able to help many people. He previously guest lectured at UBCO, and supported many students who were aiming to become trial lawyers. The endowment fund supporting the Roger Watts Debate was set up to support other aspiring advocates for years to come.

This year's panel of community judges consisted of individuals from a variety of industries in Kelowna, and they



Photo provided by Charlotte Tappin

all volunteered their time to select a winning team. Wendy Thiessen is an experienced commercial litigator who works in contract, property, real estate, and construction disputes, and she has done a lot of work before the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

Max Walker is a lawyer with a taxation practice, where he works with clients on income and sales tax matters, estate planning, and issues related to the British Columbia property transfer tax and sales tax. Sarah Murdoch is a librarian who has worked in school

and medical libraries, and the topic of censorship is of great interest to her. Gavin Dew is the Conservative MLA for Kelowna-Mission, a business leader, and an entrepreneur with vast experience in the realm of public policy.

DEBATE continued on page 4

The Liberal Response to War in Iran

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

The year is 2003. America is engaged in a new Gulf War, eschewing approval from the United Nations to wander into a regional conflict whose ramifications will define the region for a generation at least. In search of allies, America reaches out to friends across the globe for aid in its new expedition for freedom and democracy, including Canada.

The year is 2026, and very little has changed in the decades since. As America finds itself drawn into a war without any real allies besides Israel and the United Kingdom, the latter in a supportive role, America has begun to look for alternatives to help them in their war of ill-defined intents and purposes.¹ Though Canada was one of the pre-eminent American allies to go out of their way to oppose the 2003 Iraq War, there nevertheless exists a hope within some American foreign policy circles that Canada will someday reverse course on this conflict.

This hope likely stems from the sheer difference in circumstances surrounding Iraq and Iran: in the case of Iraq, the United States made a point of legitimizing its intervention through an international coalition with Poland, the U.K., and others. Despite those efforts, however, the Iraq War was still seen as a massive break from tradition with little historical precedent.

Where the ongoing Iran War contrasts with Iraq, stems from this aforementioned dynamic being completely inverted: now, America has eschewed deference to international law, and has spent the last two decades stoking a debate within America and beyond as to whether an Iraq-style occupation of Iran would be necessary. Resistance towards a new war waged without congressional approval is receiving less attention than the Iraq War did, despite the Iraq War receiving overwhelming support

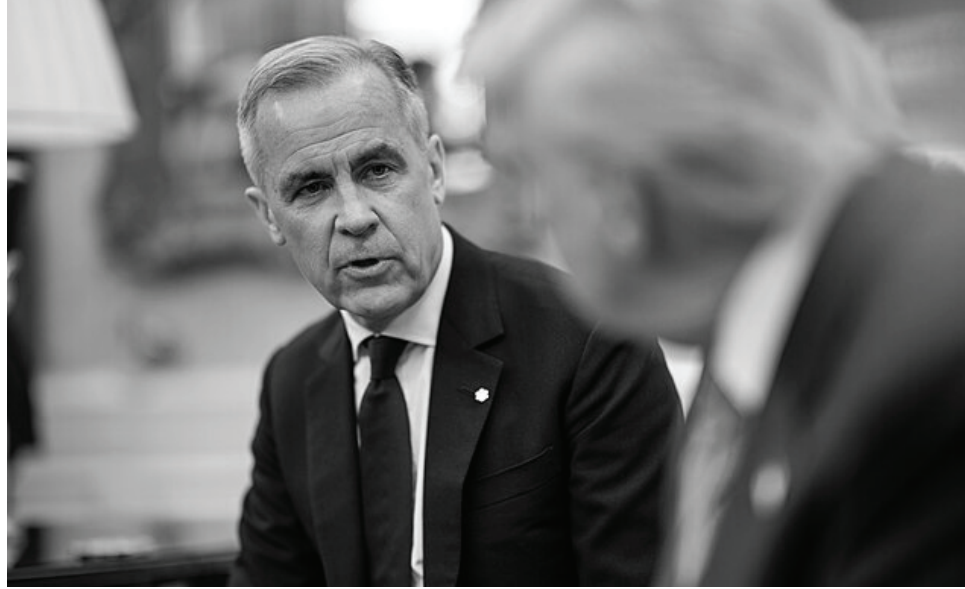


Image provided by The White House

from Congress — because successive extralegal American military expeditions in Syria, Gaza, Venezuela, and beyond have all desensitized the liberal international order, as Carney pointed out earlier this year at Davos.²

In fact, Carney's immediate response to the Iran War was one which reinforced his Davos message: the so-called liberal international order of rules and regulations was never quite real to begin with. The vital followup to this claim of "so what?" is one which has led to Carney taking a potentially unexpected road. By stating that the international liberal order is a lie, one might expect that Carney's proposed solution is to create a *real* liberal international order, though perhaps to expect as much would be to miss Carney's point: the liberal international order cannot exist because the world simply does not work that way — first world countries have been able to embrace such a society because they were powerful enough to do so.

statements/2026/02/28/statement-prime-minister-carney-and-minister-anand-situation-middle-east. Accessed 28 February 2026.
4. Al Jazeera Staff, AP and Reuters. "Canada PM Carney says unable to rule out military role in Iran war." Al Jazeera, 5 March 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/5/canada-pm-carney-says-unable-to-rule-out-military-role-in-iran-war>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
5. Fallico, Adriana. "61 per cent of Canadians disapprove of U.S. military actions in Iran: poll." Global News, 13 March 2026, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11729486/poll-canada-iran-war/>. Accessed 22 March 2026.

Case in point, Carney's initial response to news of the attacks was to endorse Trump's actions, and state that "Canada supports the United States acting to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and to prevent its regime from further threatening international peace and security."³ Throughout the full statement issued, there is not a word which can be construed as criticism towards the United States. Further, Carney stated while on a diplomatic visit to Australia that direct Canadian involvement in the war cannot be ruled out.⁴

Despite that approach, Carney's statement seems to be the only actual measure of support issued to America thus far, and he is certainly in the minority on the issue otherwise. According to recent polling on the topic, over 60% of Canadians disapprove of American military actions in Iran, and Carney also seems to be in the minority on the issue in his own party.⁵ The federal cabinet has already been questioned on the matter, as have a number of local Liberal

6. Wark, Wesley. "Canada Backed the Iran War. Now It's Struggling to Explain Why." The Walrus, 10 March 2026, <https://thewalrus.ca/canada-backed-the-iran-war-now-its-struggling-to-explain-why/>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
7. Pierre Poilievre, the Conservative Party of Canada. "Conservative Statement on Military Action against Iran." Conservative Party of Canada, 2026, <https://www.conservative.ca/conservative-statement-on-military-action-against-iran/>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
8. Boulterice, Alexandre. "NDP statement on Iran bombings." NDP, 2026, <https://www.ndp.ca/news/ndp-statement-iran-bombings>. Accessed 22 March 2026.

members of parliament, and the general consensus has been wishy-washy at best.

Defence minister David McGuinty clarified that the government's position was one of deescalation, though a weakened Iranian government would open the door to a new government.⁶ In practical terms, this means that Canada was not willing to engage in a regime change war à la Iraq, but was optimistic that this series of clashes would eventually open the door to regime change — a sufficiently vague objective as to permit any action or no action at all.

The response from other political parties in Canada has been decidedly mixed on the war: the Conservatives have been all too happy to take up the fight against the government's ill-defined stance on the war, as their response has been much more coherent. The party flatly supports regime change in Iran, stating that "Conservatives support the United States, Israel, and our allies across the Gulf to defend their sovereignty and dismantle the clerical military dictatorship of Iran."⁷ The NDP and Greens, meanwhile, have both condemned the war and lamented the end of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, otherwise known as the Iran Nuclear Deal.^{8,9}

Now, however, the war seems slated for further escalation across the region as both sides continue to neglect negotiations, and it seems that America is beginning to pivot towards reopening the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁰ Carney's reaction to this continued war seems to be one of tentative distance: an affirmation that America raging this war renders it in the right, even if his government offers vague denunciations of America's methodology. Yet, for the first time in months, the polling numbers simply aren't backing Carney up.

9. The Green Party. "Statement from the Green Party of Canada on the US Attack on Iran." Green Party, 2026, <https://www.greenparty.ca/en/news/statement-from-the-green-party-of-canada-on-the-us-attack-on-iran>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
10. Binkley, Collin. "Trump's changing course on Strait of Hormuz strategy raises questions about US war preparation." AP News, 22 March 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-iran-threat-power-plants-strait-hormuz-79ae8eb369c65a7fc7b063d0492c99>.

1. Sabbagh, Dan. "What is the extent of the UK's involvement in the Middle East war?" The Guardian, 2 March 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/02/what-is-uk-involvement-middle-east-war-us-israel-iran>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
2. Yousif, Nadine. "Carney says the old world order 'is not coming back' in Davos speech." BBC, 20 January 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly3d28p4p8o>. Accessed 22 March 2026.
3. Prime Minister of Canada's Office. "Statement by Prime Minister Carney and Minister Anand on the situation in the Middle East." Prime Minister of Canada, 2026, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/>

Reflecting on Sex and the City and Today's Dating Culture

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

"And just like that," dating culture has become an entirely different world since the airing of HBO's television series *Sex and the City*. The show follows four women living in New York City in the late 90s. While a big focus of the series is on their relationships, there is also a lot of interesting commentary on beauty standards, politics, and friendship.

Carrie Bradshaw is a journalist who writes about dating in the city, and famously calls herself a "sexual anthropologist" in the pilot episode of the show. Charlotte York is a more sexually reserved art dealer who is focused on finding her knight in shining armor. Miranda Hobbes is a successful lawyer with a more cynical approach to dating, and her career-first mindset often leads her to disapprove of the other women's focus on romance. Samantha Jones is a public relations professional who is also very sexually liberal, and she remains detached from any long-term relationships.

Dating culture seems to have changed drastically since the show's release. For one, I think the internet and cell-phones have made a huge difference in how people compare the series to the present. But we also have endless buzzwords from the internet to describe our relationships, including but not limited to situationships, avoidant attachment style, beige flags, icks, ghosting, soft launches, and so much more. But is it really that different from the '90s when we have just slapped some weird names on different behaviours?

Throughout the entire show, Car-



Graphic provided by Iso Maaquod Rodriguez

rie has an on and off again relationship — or a situationship, if I may — with the infamous Mr. Big, whose real name isn't revealed until the end of the show. If anyone is patient zero of the avoidant attachment style coined by TikTok, it would be him. He consistently leads Carrie on before pulling away every single time. The only thing that keeps me convinced that he likes Carrie is that he keeps coming back, but every time he leaves, my doubt builds.

One thing I really dislike about all these different terms for things that the internet has made up is that it does not allow you to live your relationships genuinely or without overanalyzing them. Incompatibili-

ty is real, but do we really need names for every single little behaviour we experience in relationships? Focusing on fitting your partner into all of these weird boxes distracts you from properly assessing the foundational questions of whether or not your relationship is healthy, and if you and your partner are happy.

Charlotte is shown to be picky about her relationships throughout the show, and she even ends a relationship that was going smoothly because they had different tastes in dinnerware. This is not described by her as an "ick" or "beige flag," just something that she thought was a difference of compatibility while demonstrat-

ing how high her standards are.

Rhetoric on TikTok has so many weird "theories" to approach your relationships with. There is this weird saying that goes "date them til you hate them," basically saying you should remain with your partner until their flaws are so unbearable that breaking up is an easy task. While I think you could easily say that applies to Miranda's on and off again relationship with Steve, a bartender who lives a different lifestyle than her, it does not alleviate any toxicity.

The second time Miranda and Steve get back together, they stay together until Miranda can no longer stand him — he gets an annoying puppy, they have very different sleep schedules, and worst of all: she finds skidmarks in his underwear while doing his laundry. This leads to them having a very bad breakup and

Even though I do not find Samantha's inclination towards casual relationships personally appealing, I believe she has one of the best approaches to relationships out of the four main characters. She knows what she wants, she is very confident in herself, and she is quite good at communicating her wants and needs with her partners.

One of the most important messages of this show is that there is no distinct formula for finding love, happiness, and fulfillment. When approaching romantic relationships, and even friendships, remain open minded and keep your well-being and joy as a core priority.

Controversial RCMP Unit Spotted on Campus

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

British Columbia has played host to a wide realm of political controversies over the course of the past decade. Pipeline protests, logging camp showdowns, and pro-Palestinian campus encampments have all seen concerted and sustained confrontations between local activist groups seeking to remain entrenched in a given locale, and the RCMP's Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), an organization functioning not unlike a paramilitary group specifically dedicated to counter protestors of all kinds.¹

Established in the aftermath of the Standing Rock standoff in the United States between 2016 and 2017, and in the context of years of escalatory anti-pipeline protests and encampments, the RCMP took it upon itself to establish a unit dedicated specifically to disorganizing activists established in defences and encampments.²

Tasked with clearing blockades in BC, particularly through the Wet'suwet'en-led blockades in Northern BC and the Fairy Creek blockades on Vancouver Island from 2019-onwards, along with a number of other engagements since.^{3,4} The C-IRG has earned 572 complaints since its establishment, ranging from abuse of authority to excessive force, prompting a systemic investigation into its operations.⁵

That investigation continues presently, as while a final report has been certified, it cannot be released until the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP (CRCC)'s chair approves it. The issue is that the CRCC has not had a chair since January 2025, which is necessary for the basic functioning of the Commission. Accordingly, while the several years' worth of reports of RCMP (and C-IRG) misconduct has theoretically been completed with recommendations filed, the report of progress on institutional reform has



Image provided by Joshua Wright / CC-BY SA 4.0

been de-facto blocked since the final months of the Trudeau government.

Now, with a stonewalled federal investigation, the controversial RCMP group has recently been spotted on-campus by students, and questions are beginning to swirl as to why it might be here.

"I was walking from EME to the bottom entrance of the Commons when I noticed a uniformed RCMP officer step out of his unmarked truck and make his way towards the security administration entrance," said Jake Yule, a student on campus. "I took notice of the patch on his vest which said RCMP [CRU]."

Mr. Yule found the logo vaguely familiar, and following cursory research of his own, he found that it was a rebranded rendition of the RCMP's C-IRG. Identifying himself as a Canadian citizen and veteran, Mr. Yule stated that the presence of the officers made him feel uneasy by virtue of his knowledge of their prior actions.

"I still felt pretty intimidated by this action. Therefore, I can not even begin to imagine how

this scenario might have similarly affected my fellow colleagues who do not enjoy the same privileges that I do."



Photo provided by Jake Yule

Evidently, seeking to overcome that reputation, the C-IRG changed its name to the "Critical Response Unit - British Columbia" (CRU-BC), and expanded its mandate with the cooperation of the provincial and federal governments.⁶ Since its rebranding on January 1st, 2024, the CRU-BC has been tasked with intelligence-gathering operations for the provincial government's secretive "Critical Incident Secretariat" and the "Civil Disobedience/Public Order" groups.⁷

This rebranding and further integra-

tion into the provincial government's response plan to protests and demonstrations was seemingly first planned after the public relations disaster that was the Fairy Creek blockade, which resulted in 1,188 arrests at its peak in 2021, making it the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history.^{8,9}

Since the formal 2024 rebranding, the CRU-BC has been heavily involved in the clearing of campus encampments across B.C., not only in the act of evicting activists, but also in advising campus administrators on how to punish those students with anything from expulsion to criminal charges.¹⁰

UBCO is not the first campus to take clear note of the presence of the CRU-BC on its campus beyond the campus encampments of 2023-2024, as UBC-Vancouver has recently seen. By virtue of a freedom of information request filed by Breach Media, it has become known as recently as March 2026 that the then-C-IRG was actively monitoring the UBC-Vancouver campus encampment of 2024 as soon as it became active.¹¹

In the meantime, the increased presence of the CRU-BC has only raised further concerns, as the RBC Off-Campus movement at UBCO continues to operate legally, though perhaps with renewed consternation. When reached for comment, RBC Off Campus provided the following quote: "It is shameful that UBC has repeatedly welcomed the RCMP onto campus under the guise of 'security' and 'community safety'. Cops don't make us safe. Normalizing police presence is dangerous. We know that the CRU branch of the RCMP has collaborated with universities to suppress life-affirming, anti-genocide student protest for Palestine. We know that they violated Indigenous Land Defenders' charter rights. Cops off campus means more safety for everyone."

1. Hosgood, Amanda Follett. "BC's Secretive Plan to Tighten Protest Response." *The Tyee*, 6 March 2026, <https://breachmedia.ca/a-notorious-rcmp-unit-shaped-b-c-universities-reaction-to-palestine-encampments/>.

2. Bainbridge, Emma. "A notorious RCMP unit shaped B.C. universities' reaction to Palestine encampments." *Breach Media*, 28 August 2024, <https://breachmedia.ca/a-notorious-rcmp-unit-shaped-b-c-universities-reaction-to-palestine-encampments/>.

3. Hosgood, "BC's Secretive Plan," 6 March 2026.

4. Pasternak, Shiri, and Tia Dafnos. "Controversial B.C. RCMP unit to police opposition to fast-tracked resource projects." *Breach Media*, 21 August 2025, <https://breachmedia.ca/rcmp-unit-controversial-police-opposition-fast-tracked-resource-projects/>.

5. "Summaries of Reviewed Public Complaints." *Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP*, 2026, <https://www.crcc-ccetp.gc.ca/en/decisions/summaries-re>

viewed-public-complaints. Accessed 6 April 2026.

6. Forester, Brett, and Vanessa Caldwell. "RCMP C-IRG unit announces new name, mandate amid federal investigation." *CBC*, 5 April 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/rcmp-cirg-cru-renamed-1.7163886>. Accessed 6 April 2026.

7. Pasternak and Dafnos. "Controversial B.C. RCMP unit," 21 August 2025.

8. Bainbridge, "Notorious RCMP unit," 5 March 2026.

9. Cox, Sarah, and Shannon Waters. "Fairy Creek blockades set to be Canada's largest act of civil disobedience." *The Narwhal*, 25 August 2021, <https://thenarwhal.ca/fairy-creek-blockades-august-arrests/>. Accessed 6 April 2026.

10. Bainbridge "Notorious RCMP unit," 5 March 2026.

11. Bainbridge, "Notorious RCMP unit," 5 March 2026.

Arts & Culture: A (School) Year in Review

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

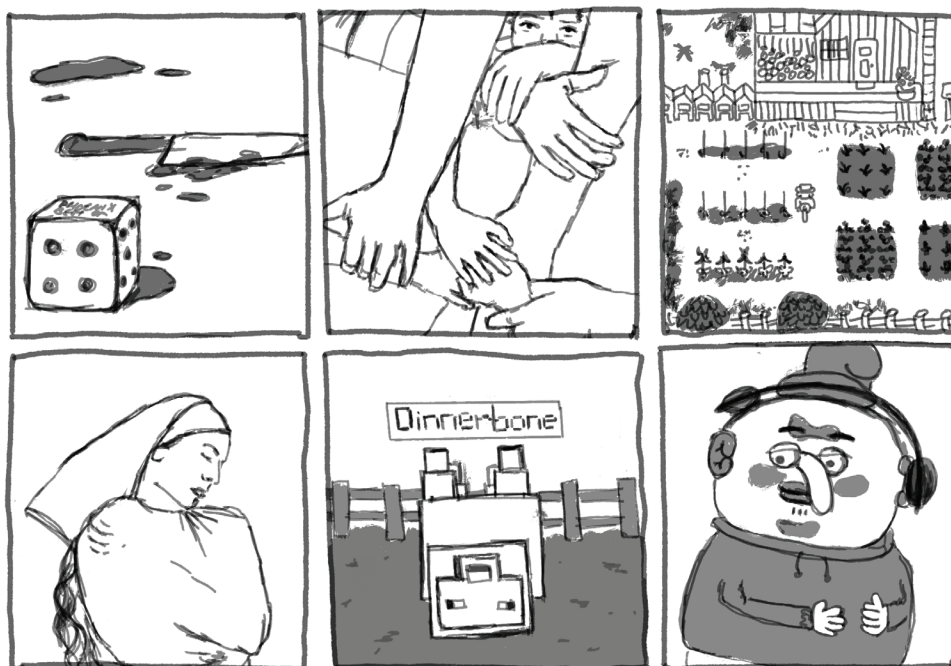
As the beginning of spring finally rears its head, many are prompted to reflect on the long, grey, colder months that came before. Though winter never truly came, we anticipatorily got used to huddling indoors and working in silence waiting for the sun. During such times, we turn to art to keep us entertained and thinking about the world. As we reflect on the year and get excited for the summer, let us also reflect on the great art we have enjoyed.

Not everything in these couple of categories was created this year, but they are works enjoyed this year. Each category will come with some of my own personal favorites as well as the favorites of a couple of the lovely members of our newspaper.

As the Oscars have just announced their ultimate "Best Picture" of the year,, I thought it would be appropriate to start with movies.

There have been many exciting movies this year. The Oscars zeroed in on a couple of movies like *Marty Supreme* (2025), *One Battle After Another* (2025), *KPop Demon Hunters* (2025), and others. However, many other films flew under the radar and delighted many.

Clue (1985) is a movie many people I know have a secret love of. One of our Phoenix team members discovered it this year and brought it to my attention. *Clue* has an interesting history as one of the last films to have a theatre gimmick ending. When the movie ran in theatres,, different theaters screened different endings to the story. The version released onto streaming services has each of these endings together with a super-ending that retconn's all previous ends. If that's not in theme with the bizarre flip-flopping in weather and news this



Graphic provided by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

year then I do not know what is. If you want a laugh and to see Tim Curry flailing around dramatically, this is the movie for you.

I would personally recommend watching *Endless Cookie* (2025). I have written about *Endless Cookie* in a previous article but I really want to stress how good this movie is. The movie follows many different facets in the lives of brothers Seth and Peter Scriver, in Toronto and Shamat-tawan respectively. The movie starts as a few small stories told by Peter and animated by Seth, but is continuously interrupted by many other, subsequent stories which create a portrait of the family and their histories. It is a delightfully funny and personal movie

that gets into the realities of being an Indigenous person in colonial Canada.

There has been an abundance of good music this year. I have received many recommendations from friends for albums that have blown me away.

WILLOW's new album *Petal Rock Black* is classified as a jazz album, but it is also an album full of experimental fun, especially in how WILLOW utilizes her vocal range. It was recommended to me by a friend who thought it was not getting due attention, which I agree with. My favourite track, "sitting silently", is fun and experimental while being equally complex

and artistic. "ear to the cocoon" is a more emotional track that still maintains the artistic and experimental qualities of the album. Another one of my friends told me her favourite album of the year was Rosalía's new album *LUX. LUX* is a beautifully composed and sung album based on the lives of multiple different female saints.

The Phoenix team seems to have decided that relaxing sandbox games are the theme of the year. Games like *Minecraft* and *Stardew Valley* provide gentle reprieve from real life small tasks and chores by providing you with in-game small tasks and chores.

However funny the paradox of these chore based games, they are fun in the sense that the digital chores are often easier and more fun to do than their real-life counterparts. Ask anyone if they would rather punch a tree or write an email and you would have your proof.

I would also recommend checking out Itch.io if you like cheap indie games that explore more personal topics. *Consume Me* is a cute game about the struggle of maintaining expectations under extreme stress, and it was developed by a very small team.

This year has been tough on many. Let this article be a reminder that art keeps us running in dark moments and often reminds us why we were running in the first place. Let this also be an appreciation of the wonderful *Phoenix* team.

Thank you all very much for an excellent year, and a special thank you to you, who picked up a copy of the newspaper along the way.

Unsettling the Settler Conversation

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

The word “solidarity” looks good on posters, Instagram stories, and in land acknowledgments. It sounds like progress, but solidarity has a way of getting stuck at the level of language. It is an easy way to show how strongly we feel, through rants and rage, but then what? What does solidarity require when the conversation asks you to confront your own community, not just point at someone else’s?

These questions, and the tension that follows, ran through *Overcaste in Conversation: Unsettling Caste, Power, and Belonging on Stolen Land*, a panel organized in collaboration with the Poetic Justice Foundation, the Indian Student Association, and UBC Community Engagement. Moderated by Dr. Neha Gupta, the event brought together Dr. Shikha Diwakar, Dr. Nishant Upadhyay, and Ty Bryant to discuss caste, settlerhood in diaspora, and what solidarity demands.

Some students drifted in for the free food and drifted out just quickly, treating the event like a quick pit stop between classes. But inside the room, a much heavier conversation was unfolding, one that had nothing to do with snacks.

The first question that anchored the panel sounded deceptively simple: What does the word “settler” mean to you?

Diwakar described encountering the term through land acknowledgments after moving from India to Canada. She emphasized the need to educate herself without flattening everyone into one category. Yes, she said, she is a settler, but not a “homogenous” one. Not everyone arrives in Canada with the same history or power. Her relationship with settlerhood circles back to accountability and the idea that solidarity is a practice.

Bryant agreed and pointed out how conversations about settlerhood can “run their course the way land acknowledgments do” when they stop at discourse. He wants to see action and execution, not just the right lan-



Photo provided by Sabhya Arora

guage.

Upadhyay argued that it matters less who gets labelled a settler and more what people are actually doing to decolonize structures and understand how they are complicit in them. “Settler can be a very dubious term,” he warned. “It can turn into a fight over who qualifies instead of what changes. That is not the purpose.”

The second question moved from labels to structure. What are the transnational links between brahmanic supremacy and white supremacy? How do we recognize these structures and call them out?

Brahmanism is an early form of the Hindu religious tradition that is based on the authority of the Brahmin priestly class and its rituals, seen as a precursor to later Hinduism (the world’s third largest religion). This system accentuated the caste system, where Brahmins are placed at the top.

Upadhyay described Brahmanism as central to caste violence and a “useful frame-

work” for understanding white supremacy, because both systems keep old hierarchies alive through inherited status and normalized exploitation. He also pointed to a pattern shared across contexts of dominant groups often claiming victimhood when their power is questioned.

Diwakar grounded the pattern in everyday life. Arriving in Canada, “new to racism” but already familiar with casteism, she recognized how quickly the structures rhyme. As someone belonging to the Dalit community, she highlighted her experience when meeting new people — the casual questions that sound like curiosity but act like a sorting process. People’s obsession with names, surnames, and “where are your parents from?” serves to place you socially before conversation even begins.

Bryant added a political angle, describing these systems as formations that want to “actualize the certainty of a future.” He argued that colonial projects often behave like anxious machines or failed projects: they de-

mand certainty, and so you get surveillance and control. If a system is truly stable, it does not need constant domination to prove itself, does it?

The third question asked what stops racialized communities from being in solidarity with Indigenous communities?

Bryant called the relationship complex, especially when people lump anti-racism and multiculturalism together. Indigenous communities are not another “minority group” within Canada’s multicultural story. They are nations living under an ongoing settler-colonial structure, and that changes what real solidarity looks like.

Diwakar added a newcomer’s perspective. When she first arrived, she was told to learn about Indigenous communities by visiting museums. It left her with a lingering question: if this land belongs to Indigenous communities, why is she learning about it through a museum? She also pointed out how, in terms of education, Indigenous knowledge can feel siloed into one course, instead of being treated as foundational.

The panel finally asked where does hope lie? None of the panelists offered a neat ending. Diwakar said that hope is not a mood; it is intention and relationality — how you treat people, build relationships, and what steps you take when there is no applause for it. Upadhyay admitted that academia trains people to be pessimistic, but said he has been trying to unlearn that, because hopelessness becomes an excuse to do nothing.

It is everyone’s responsibility, especially those belonging to a privileged background, to become educated, understand the history of the land they live on, and reflect on their power and place. Solidarity means confronting harm in your own community, not only the harm that is easy to criticize from a distance.

The 2026 Roger Watts Debate

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

On March 25th, 2026, onlookers gathered at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Downtown Kelowna to watch the annual Roger Watts Debate. The event aims at putting undergraduate debate talent on center stage while highlighting the most pressing issues facing the world today.

The Roger Watts Debate is an event held in the memory of Roger Watts, a personal injury lawyer from the Okanagan with a long and successful career where he was able to help many people. He previously guest lectured at UBCO, and supported many students who were aiming to become trial lawyers. The endowment fund supporting the Roger Watts Debate was set up to support other aspiring advocates for years to come.

This year’s panel of community judges consisted of individuals from a variety of industries in Kelowna, and they all volunteered their time to select a winning team. Wendy Thiessen is an experienced commercial litigator who works in contract, property, real estate, and construction disputes, and she has done a lot of work before the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Max Walker is a lawyer with a taxation practice, where he works with clients on income and sales tax matters, estate planning, and issues related to the British Columbia property transfer tax and sales tax. Sarah Murdoch is a librarian who has worked in school and medical libraries, and the topic of censorship is of great interest to her. Gavin Dew is the Conservative MLA for Kelowna-Mission, a business leader, and an entrepreneur with vast experience in the realm of public policy.



Photo provided by Charlotte Tappin

This year’s debate centered on the motion: “be it resolved that Canada create a national drone program for civilian and military use.” Following the parliamentary model of debate, the two teams consisted of government and opposition, which both had two members.

The government consisted of Prime Minister Kamran Ismayilov, a fourth year PPE Honours student and Vice President Events for the Pre-Law Society at UBCO. Member of Government Ava Rothmaier is a third year Political Science student from Kincardine, Ontario, the co-founder and co-President of the Political Science Student Association, and the Vice President International for UBCO’s Runnymede Society.

The opposition was composed of Leader of the Opposition Dhayven Khabra, a first year student with lots of previous debate experience considering a major in

International Relations and planning on pursuing a legal career. Member of Opposition Nicole Menard is in her final year of a BA in Philosophy, and she currently co-runs the Philosophy Course Union at UBCO.

The debate was very lively, and many students I spoke with commented on how entertaining they felt the event was. Going into the debate, I expected moral questions about how soldiers’ lives could be spared in drone warfare, but I was pleasantly surprised by the approach taken by both sides. A lot of focus turned to how drones could be useful within Canada in times of peace.

Rothmaier gave a compelling case of how drones could be used to assist in search and rescue missions, delivering supplies to remote communities, and for wildfire detection. The opposition, especially Khab-

ra, were concerned about the costs of implementing a national drone program and whether or not it would even be worth it.

In rebuttal, Ismayilov insisted that developing a domestic program and utilizing resources within Canada would not only be great for the job market, but would allow Canada to no longer be dependent on countries with strong military institutions. Menard continued a defense of the opposition’s position and continually asserted that this program is a quick fix to the many systemic issues Canada’s military faces presently.

All in all, despite both teams arguing with passion and precision, the Government was awarded as the winning team of the debate. After a poll from the audience, Rothmaier won the people’s choice award for her outstanding performance.

Rothmaier commented to me that she was “so happy we all got to come up front and debate together. The four of us have been practicing since September, which was a lot of fun. We are also very grateful to Professor Garner for leading those practice sessions.”

For those interested in watching the full debate, a recorded version will be available on UBCO’s Department of Economics, Philosophy, and Political Science website.



A Perspective on Death and Suicide

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

Content warning - this article discusses suicide and assisted death.

Death is a word that carries a lot of baggage, varying from one person to the next. It provides us one truly fixed fact: one day we will all die.

The concept of death has been pondered over thousands of years of thought, tradition, and research. It is discussed through grief, science, ritual, the whole shebang. Our modern day social perspectives on death are shaped by this vast wealth of knowledge, but also by issues we face in the current day.

The fear of death and the desire to live longer fuels the industrial desperation to prolong life. A lot of funds are invested in research on how to live longer and the mainstream “health industry” places a lot of importance on length of life. These ideas appear in popular culture in a multitude of ways, especially since the advent of the internet.

Bryan Johnson is an American online influencer who became popular for his desire to “live forever” through an extremely regimented training plan, diet, and the use of strange experiments like swapping blood with his son. In an interview with *Wired magazine*, Johnson rambles about the science behind his journey and how he plans to “live forever”. He talks about an AI clone of himself he has been feeding personal information to that will take over when he dies, leaving behind some kind of legacy of the real person.¹

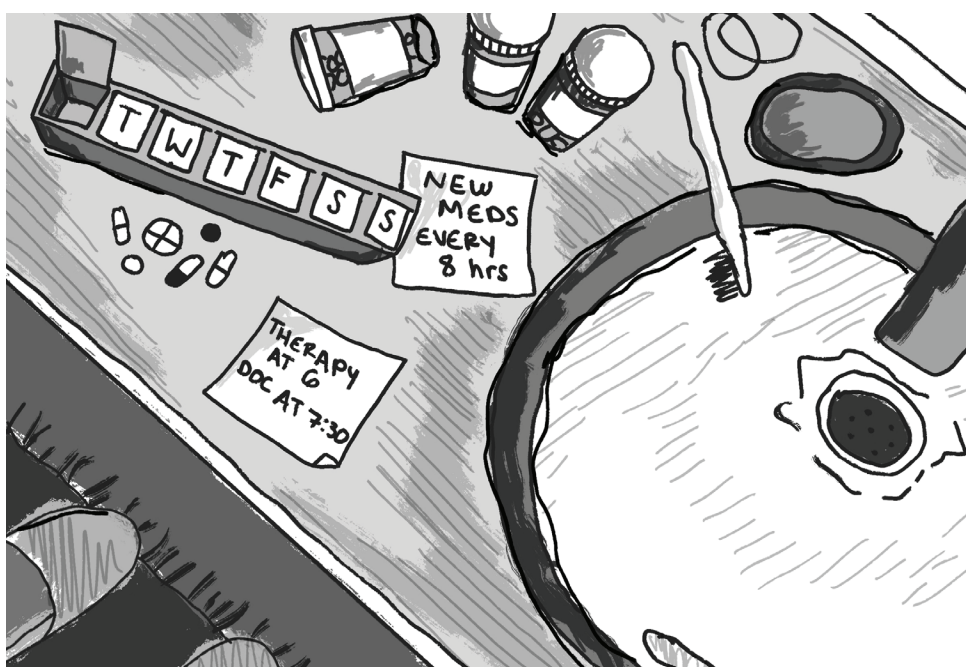
Questions of legacy come up a lot in conversations about death. Funerals and similar services are chances to remember the lives of the people who have died. There are a variety of traditions across cultures regarding death and memory. Paa Joe is a coffin artist based in Accra, Ghana who designs elaborate coffins in the shapes of items, animals, and even detailed scenes.² These pieces follow a Ghanaian tradition of designing coffins to represent a person’s career, family, or something they were passionate about. Thousands of different traditions exist around death, each with their own brand of ritual relating to memory legacy, even if just through friends and family.

These societal factors like fear of death and the need to create a legacy contribute to larger conversations about how we see it. Social issues like rising suicide rates further impact the way we view death.

Mental health awareness has become a wellbeing buzzword in recent years. Much of this awareness has failed to take on an intersectional perspective and many groups affected the most by mental illness and disorders have been removed from the equation entirely. The rise in mental illnesses alongside very high rates of suicide and suicidal ideation among Canadians alone is enough to change the way we think about death. This is not even considering the drastically different suicide rates in minority groups like Indigenous Peoples.³

There is still a great stigma surrounding mental illness which remains in Canadian society today, especially in conversations around death. The idea of having important conversations about mental health is wonderful and eye-opening, however in practice much of the ideas discussed are not implemented.

Part of the motivations behind writing this article stem from my own struggles with suicidal ideation and mental illness, as well as struggling within mental health institutions that only seem concerned with mental health when it becomes dire. Another part was also



Graphic provided by Iso Maauad Rodriguez

growing up and seeing others struggling with the same institutions around me and not having a place where they could talk about how they really felt or resources to better understand what they were going through.

When I was looking for resources on mental illness as a kid, I discovered a string of articles about assisted suicide in the Netherlands, where laws around assisted death extend to debilitating mental disorders as well as physical ones. One specific article was about Zoraya ter Beek, a 29 year old woman who successfully pursued medically assisted suicide for the treatment of mental illnesses she felt she could never truly recover from. She died in her home with her partner on May 22, 2024.

Reactions to her original decision to pursue assisted suicide and articles which carried the news internationally were mixed to say the least. Outrage was directed at ter Beek’s medical team for endorsing the idea that she had “reached the end of her treatments,” despite her continued mental suffering. A complicated issue that comes with mental disorders is that treatment is not as linear as diagnosis, medicine, cure. Though research has increased, many who have mental disorders struggle with them their entire lives.

Backlash to ter Beek’s story often stemmed from the implications of legal medical suicide. While assisted death laws in the Netherlands are strict and cases are subject to evaluation, there are concerns about the widespread implementation of assisted death for mental disorders. Europe is no stranger to the ways in which science can be abused to horrific degrees under the wrong governmental powers. Questions of who qualifies, who can consent to such a procedure, how do you determine when there are no worthwhile treatments left, and whether or not those barriers are imposed systemically all rose to the front of the conversation internationally.

Canada has experienced similar discourse with its own laws around assisted death, specifically with medical assistance in dying, or MAID. Canadians have been debating MAID since its legal inception in 2016. I remember learning about the case of Al Purdy in high school, a Canadian poet with lung cancer who was an activist for the national “right-to-die” movement. Even then, many opposed his final decision and called for the person who helped him commit suicide to be jailed.

Part of me agrees that giving the government power in this way could have dire consequences. A poll of Canadian opinions about MAID showed that

11% of Canadians interviewed were in favour of being unhoused as an acceptable reason to seek MAID.⁴ The implications of this statistic coupled with popular callous opinions about unhoused people in Canada is incredibly worrying.

Another part of me believes that the stigma surrounding death adds to the stigma of mental health and suicide. Suicide and suicidal ideation are incredibly complicated and situational. The word “suicidal” serves as an umbrella term which captures a far broader range of experiences which we have heard more and more of in the past couple of years.

Okuntakinte is a poet living in the Netherlands who gained notoriety for his openness about his decision to pursue assisted suicide. While a controversial figure for many reasons, it is undeniable that his Instagram page became a space where people could talk openly about death and their experiences with it, primarily from a mental health perspective. He would frequently post his own writing and respond to comments and direct messages he received, which were full of stories about loved ones struggling with mental illness and suicide, as well as stories from people who are actively suicidal.

This honest way of speaking about the process of death and grief was helpful for many who never saw their stories told in the mainstream. Judgments about the poet’s journey were not the main focus of his writing. Sitting with and thinking about the experiences and perspectives of others became central in that space.

One of the conversations sparked by these confessional works was on the topic of grief. Mental disorders do not just affect the people who must live with them. Symptoms affect the way in which the person interacts with the world, which has potential to be traumatic for friends and family. As the novel *Olive Kitteridge* speaks on, suicide always leaves behind traumatized people to mourn.

Okuntakinte speaks on how assisted suicide can allow for conversation and closure to occur before death, as well as how openness about suicidal ideation and death can lead to a greater understanding of the perspectives of mentally ill people. In an ideal society, perhaps these conversations being more common would alleviate some of the internal struggle. This is part of the aim of counselling and therapy: speaking about your experiences to better understand yourself.

Some of my first interactions with the idea of death came from classmates who struggled with their mental

health. Suicidal ideation has been a part of the lives of many people I hold very dear even when I was young. When I was young I also really liked *Bob’s Burgers*.

The first episode is all about Bob and his family trying to prove their restaurant is not stealing bodies from the neighbouring crematorium and turning them into burgers. The episode progresses and the bizarre plot leads to all sorts of silly situations, but at the end, Bob says something that really stuck with me at the time. He shouts at a mob gathered in front of the restaurant, “Maybe we should treat our living better than we treat our dead!”

However silly the context, the message rang true to me. We embalm and ritualize death when it happens, we fear it, try to cheat it, ruminate about what happens after, but what of the living? Conversations around death and suicide should be had before they occur.

In an ideal society, perhaps we would not have rising rates of mental illness and suicide. Perhaps we could really focus on the systemic issues which contribute to rising rates and build a government which cares for those who need it most. Maybe our conversations about the option of assisted death and death in general would be more leveled.

Have these difficult conversations with the people you love. It is important to de-stigmatize these topics in our circles so when the people we care about are struggling, they feel like they can reach out. Talking deeply with my own friends and family about life and death makes me feel less alone in my own thoughts. Death is something we will all face in our lives, I think it is better we talk about it before it is too late.



KIANA ONYANGO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

SAMAIRA TALWAR
OPERATIONS MANAGER

AVERY CUMMINS
TECHNICAL EDITOR

JUHI SARVAIYA
CAMPUS LIFE WRITER

GABRIELA CHAN
FEATURES WRITER

QUINLIN OSADCZUK
NEWS WRITER

WENDELL ZYLSTRA
ARTS & CULTURE WRITER

CONNOR BRAKE
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY WRITER

CHARLOTTE TAPPIN
SUO CONTENT CREATOR

AIDEN MALCOLM
OPINIONS WRITER

MARKUS GILL
PHOENIX FILES PODCAST HOST

AUGUST WYMA
PHOENIX FILES PODCAST HOST

SABHYA ARORA
VIDEOGRAPHER & PHOTOGRAPHER

ISO MAAUAD RODRIGUEZ
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

DAKSHIL PATEL
SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR

CHIRAYU AHUJA
WEB DEVELOPER & LAYOUT DESIGNER

The Desalination Revolution

BY CONNOR BRAKE

As we navigate through the beginning of 2026, conversations about resource security are growing increasingly important. No longer is a potential water crisis a looming shadow of the future — it is a present reality. This year, United Nations scientists officially declared that the world has entered “global water bankruptcy.”¹ With freshwater demand projected to be 40% higher than what can be supplied by the end of the decade, the eyes of scientific and industrial worlds have turned toward the most abundant, yet undrinkable source of water on our planet: the ocean.²

For decades, desalination has been viewed as an expensive last resort. It has long been criticized as a massive energy consumer, and a potential nightmare for marine life. However, a convergence of material science breakthroughs and a high need for climate-resilient infrastructure has transformed desalination into a core strategy to meet the needs of current freshwater demands.

Historically, desalination was synonymous with massive, multi-million or billion-dollar facilities like the Sorek plant in Israel.³ While effective, these kinds of plants are capital intensive and prone to geopolitical risks. Recent events, including event targeting of water infrastructure systems, have helped display the vulnerability of centralized systems.⁴

In response, 2026 has seen move-

ment towards decentralization and modularity.⁵ Using modular units allows cities to deploy desalination capacity in months rather than years.

At the heart of modern desalination lies reverse osmosis (RO). The physics is quite simple at a basic level: dirty water is pushed through a semipermeable membrane at high pressure, leaving dirt behind and creating drinkable water.⁶

The energy that is required to overcome the natural osmotic pressure of seawater is quite high. The theoretical minimum amount of energy required for desalination is roughly 1.1 kWh/m³.⁷ For years, traditional polyamide, cellulose acetate, and polysulfonate membranes⁸ operated far above this limit, requiring massive amounts of electricity to force water through.

However, within the 2020’s we are now witnessing the industrial-scale⁹ rollout of graphene oxide (GO) and biomimetic membranes.^{10,11} Graphene, a single layer of carbon atoms, can be punched with holes so precise they allow water molecules to get through while blocking larger molecules.

Even more futuristic are aquaporin-based membranes.¹² Scientists have successfully synthesized “biomimetic” channels that mimic the protein pores found in human kidneys and plant roots. Their pores are naturally designed to transport

only water molecules, making the filters a very interesting and promising technology if developed correctly.

While RO dominates the market, 2026 is seeing a resurgence in thermal desalination, specifically in solar-driven interfacial evaporation.¹³ Traditional thermal plants boiled entire vats of water, which is not exactly the most efficient. New technologies use complex 3D structured materials, such as porous graphene spiral rolls, that float on the water’s surface.¹⁴ These materials localize solar heat exactly where the water meets the air. This allows the transformation of water into steam to be done with a much greater efficiency.

However, there is a major problem with water desalination — brine, a super salty, chemical-laden wastewater pumped into the sea. For every liter of freshwater produced, roughly one and a half liters of brine is created.¹⁵ In 2026, the desalination industry is attempting to pivot towards a circular economy model known as brine mining.¹⁶

Rather than viewing brine as a pollutant, engineers are trying to treat it as a “liquid mine.” Through a process called zero liquid discharge (ZLD) industrial plants are now extracting valuable minerals from the toxic foam.¹⁷ For instance, high-purity lithium batteries for EVs are being created through the industrial process.

As the freshwater business pivots, the ability to produce it is no longer just an engineering goal, but rather it is a matter of national independence. Jordan’s recent \$6 billion investment in the Amman-Aqaba Water Desalination and Conveyance project is a testament to this.¹⁸ In Jordan, desalination offers a path towards national stability, where the potential competition for freshwater can be reduced.

However, the cost remains the biggest hurdle. While the International Desalination Association projects a 50% decrease in the cost of desalinated water by 2030, many challenges still lie ahead. A problem for the late 2020s will be ensuring that these more novel methods of desalination are properly distributed to where they are needed most.

The era of global water bankruptcy appears to be on the horizon, but technology and human persistence seems to be the answer. The desalination plants of 2026 are not the noisy polluting giants of the past, they are sleek and more optimized for the future.

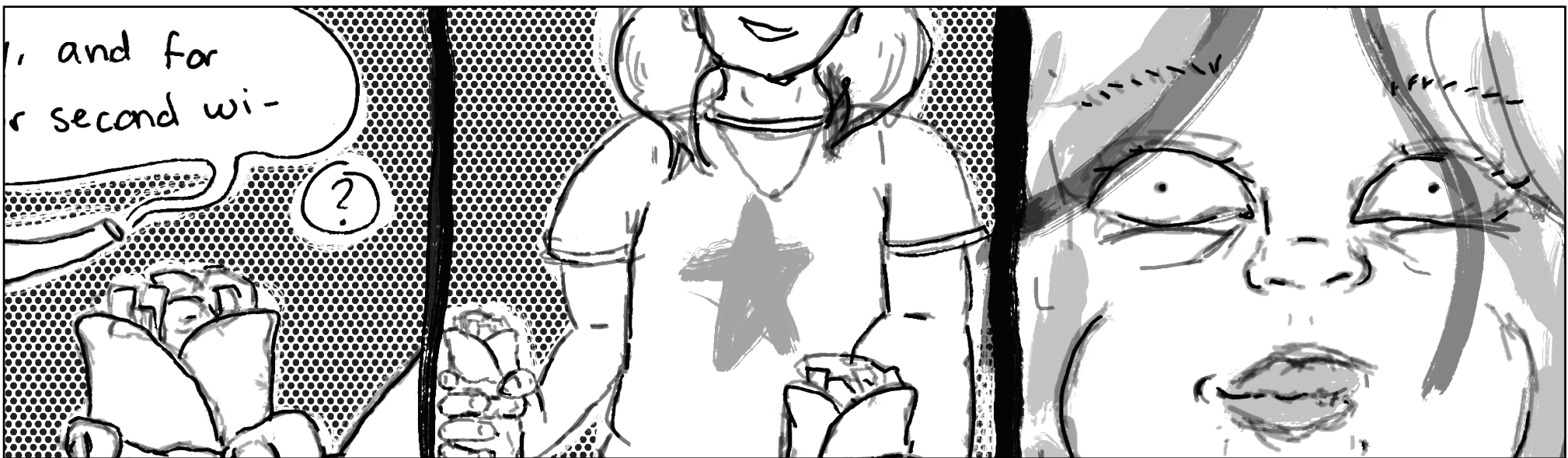
We are finally starting to live more sustainably with the oceans. By mimicking nature’s own processes, we are securing a future where thirst is a choice. The transition to a desalination water strategy is a cornerstone of this decade.

1. World enters “era of global water bankruptcy” Un scientists formally define new post-crisis reality for billions. United Nations University. (n.d.). <https://unu.edu/inweh/news/world-enters-era-of-global-water-bankruptcy>
 2. Global freshwater demand will exceed supply 40% by 2030, experts warn. World Economic Forum. (n.d.). <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/03/global-freshwater-demand-will-exceed-supply-40-by-2030-experts-warn/>
 3. Sorek desalination secures US\$400mn in project financing. (2011). Pump Industry Analyst, 2011(5), 2. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1359-6128\(11\)70171-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1359-6128(11)70171-9)
 4. Michel, D. (n.d.). What causes water conflict?. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-causes-water-conflict>
 5. Tabsissi, K., Semmar, A., EL Ansari, L., Rabbah, N., Shrestha, S., Paudel, S. R., Medromi, H., & Machkour, N. (2026). Current insights and future outlooks of energy-efficient desalination plants: A compre-

hensive bibliometric analysis. Results in Engineering, 29, 109342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rineng.2026.109342>
 6. Reverse osmosis (RO) fact sheet. Water Quality Association. (2025, December 19). <https://wqa.org/resources/reverse-osmosis-ro/>
 7. Wang, L., Violet, C., DuChanois, R. M., & Elimelech, M. (2020). Derivation of the theoretical minimum energy of separation of desalination processes. Journal of Chemical Education, 97(12), 4361–4369. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c01194>
 8. Affairs, O. of R. (n.d.). Reverse osmosis. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/inspections-compliance-enforcement-and-criminal-investigations/inspection-technical-guides/reverse-osmosis>
 9. Shah, I. A., Bilal, M., Ihsanullah, I., Ali, S., & Yaqub, M. (2023). Revolutionizing water purification: Unleashing graphene oxide (GO) membranes. Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering, 11(6), 111450. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jece.2023.111450>

10. Shah, I. A., Bilal, M., Ihsanullah, I., Ali, S., & Yaqub, M. (2023). Revolutionizing water purification: Unleashing graphene oxide (GO) membranes. Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering, 11(6), 111450. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jece.2023.111450>
 11. Tiwary, S. K., Singh, M., Chavan, S. V., & Karim, A. (2024). Graphene oxide-based membranes for water desalination and purification. Npj 2D Materials and Applications, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41699-024-00462-z>
 12. Fuwad et al., “Highly Permeable and Shelf-Stable Aquaporin Biomimetic Membrane.”
 13. Hou, J., Zhu, Y., Zhao, H., Wan, Y., Xu, H., Li, Y., Guo, J., Wang, K., & Yang, Z. (2025). Review on the structural design of solar-driven interfacial evaporation. Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering, 13(3), 116462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jece.2025.116462>
 14. Hou, J., Zhu, Y., Zhao, H., Wan, Y., Xu, H., Li, Y., Guo, J., Wang, K., & Yang, Z. (2025). Review on the structural design of solar-driven

interfacial evaporation. Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering, 13(3), 116462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jece.2025.116462>
 15. Rehm, J. (2019, August 8). Toxic brine poses a threat as the desalination industry grows. Science News. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/desalination-pours-more-toxic-brine-ocean-previous-by-thought#:~:text=Previous%20evaluations%20didn%27%20assess,Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East.>
 16. Rentier, E. S., Hoorn, C., & Seijmonsbergen, A. C. (2024). Lithium brine mining affects biodiversity and sustainable development goals. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 202, 114642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2024.114642>
 17. Li, X., Zhu, B., & Zhu, J. (2019). Graphene oxide based materials for desalination. Carbon, 146, 320–328. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.carbon.2019.02.007>
 18. Early warning system IFC-47924. (n.d.-b). <https://ewdata.rightsdevelopment.org/temp/mpqRdVJR/IFC-47924.pdf>



INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH THE PHOENIX NEWS?

SEND YOUR RESUME TO eic@thephoenixnews.com AND WE’LL REACH OUT OVER THE SUMMER!

BROUGHT TO YOU IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE Students' Union UBC Okanagan

RAGNARÖK

by Brendan James

Estimated Difficulty: 6/5

2	3			8			
8		1	7		3		
	7	9	1	2			
	9	2		3	1	7	8
3		7	2		8		9
	8		9	7			2
			4				3 6
			3	1	2	8	9
						4	1

Will the Scanner See Clearly or Darkly?

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

A *Scanner Darkly* may appear a screaming baby to the monolithic pharmaceutical-rehab-complex, calling out the medical model for hooking a great majority of the population on prescription medication. The contemporary drug climate reinforces this notion, where the populace widely accepts that evil people pushed compounds on unsuspecting patients, but the temporal inconsistencies invalidate this claim.

Richard Linklater's movie was released in 2007, before public awareness of the opiate problem existed. Moreover, the oligarchical impunity, shifting the target to a monolithic system which could only be operated by elites, would reveal itself much later, but seem to be a great theme in this film. Most damning is the publishing date of the source work, Phillip K. Dick's masterpiece of the same name as the movie, 1977.

Phillip K. Dick might have been paranoid, popping amphetamines like oh so many candies, but that is not the primary focus of this book. Instead, it centers around a dyadical obsession with sanity, written from the perspective of a life which Dick knew well, one of long-days-into-nights blending as users wandered in and out of his house & life.

Bob Arctor's insanity is the central point of the film. It affects everything, slowly skewing events until characters disappear and the real/fake paradigm comes into question. The key to understanding Substance D, and the movie, is understanding it revolves around a dyad. Duality emerges all throughout the film: his two friends, the twin doctors diagnosing his issues, and importantly the left and right side of his brain. Arctor, ever the "canary in the coal mine" is told that he



has "bilateral dysfunction", a lack of coordination between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Linklater does specify the conditions caused by the dysfunction for us fools, specifying that it causes a divide between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which in turn causes something like split personality disorder.

These splits in identity are not independent splits, arbitrarily occurring as Arctor continues his spiral down a new path, but conflicting splits. His right brain was not some new development, but instead a long marshalled and subordinated counterpart to the dominant left-brain. Because of Substance D however, right-brain (or Bob Arctor) began to disrupt this hierarchy, taking over his left-brain (or Fred) for vast portions of time, becoming so different a person that

the Agent can't even recognise Arctor as himself.

This subversion of the observer-observed is a major dialectic within the film. Slowly, Arctor transitions from an observer, into the observed, and then finally to a third state somewhere between the two, where he is both observing and observed at the farm. This dialectic is mirrored by his own path through drug addiction. First, Fred was observing the users, and himself, under the influence. At this stage a degree of separation is maintained between Arctor and Fred. This degree of separation, just like the separation between right and left hemisphere on Substance D, slowly dissolved. The drug subsumes Fred's life, and before long he is no longer Fred posing as a junkie, but Arctor "[posing] as a narc". He came to enjoy the

time he spent with Barris and Luckman, all of them rooting in disarray and paranoia like pigs in the mud.

Despite the strung-out enjoyment he derives from his threadbare life, Arctor understands he is on a path of certain doom. As he puts it: "D is for dumbness and despair and desertion. [...] D is, finally, death". The scanners represent an escape from this path. They are the tentacles of the agency, remnants of a time when Fred held a separate and dominant identity. They are the only ones that know who he truly is, who exists beneath the hollowed-out shell of Arctor, the scanner who sees darkly.

Luckily, the scanners do see clearly. Donna finally comes out of the woodwork, taking a transformed Fred to New Path. He feels the full effects of D. He is barely above a vegetable, abandoned in a corporate rehabilitation center. However, he emerges from the red & black cocoon of a Substance D capsule as someone with renewed capability to finally eliminate the scourge that nearly killed him. Before, he could not enter within the networks from below. Substance D was simply too powerful for agents to spend enough time around junkie levels to glean useful information without getting addicted and lobotomized. His lobotomization allows Arctor to be injected right into the mainline of the organization, farming the very flowers that produce the drug. The future seems bright not only with the imminent destruction of New Path and Substance D on the horizon, but with the reunion of Fred & Arctor's disparate halves, a slow return of the monad, and the end of the isolation.

Movie Analysis: Inherent Vice

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

The black-and-white separation of the civil rights era was nowhere to be found in a post-Manson world, with bad and good split across a proverbial Mason-Dixon line. "Good guys" are a P.I. (the anarchist's cop), a lieutenant detective (the bureaucratization of legitimized violence), and an informant (a transactional relationship that seeks to undermine the sacred in-group): after all, *c'est la vie*. Insurgents, lovers, cops and junkies all wash up when the tide of revolution ebbs, pulled by the great moon of capital.

Everybody operates within the frame of institutions and hierarchies of power, despite the "peace, love and drugs" of the hippie era. Doc Sportello, perhaps the freest in the movie, only must contend with being a minor part of the medical establishment, but most have a position and occupy it too. Subversive interests became subverted by moneyed interests, and the paradigm shifted ever so slightly, but real change was never truly accomplished. The defining moment of the 1970s was the realization that the whole movement had been swallowed whole, turning their karmic character from the Ahab of the '60s to Pinocchio of the '70s.

The whale here is the Golden Fang. It is a vertically organized international crime syndicate. Everybody falls somewhere in its hierarchy of power, and Doc Sportello, Coy and Bigfoot sit at the bottom. They squirrel away every missing person Doc hunts for, killed Bigfoot's partner, entrap Coy, and as



for the drugs that seem to motivate the whole movie, they "finance it, grow it, process it, bring it in, step on it, move it, run Stateside networks of local street dealers, take a separate percentage off of each operation". They are a cancer, representing nothing short of the total derailment of the hippie movement, the subversion of horizontal to vertical, establishing structures of domination and lending the power created to hippies at the high, high carrying cost of yuppie-dom.

This new "fully fuckin' weird outfit" subsumes preestablished hierarchies, including the functionaries of the fading state, the police. The boys in blue kill Bigfoot's

partner when he discovers the police are merely another agent of the Golden Fang, part of the hierarchy that stretches right to the top. The death of his partner seems to radicalize Bigfoot, leaving him with an air of "possessed melancholy", but far from partnerless. The partner role is supplemented by Doc Sportello who, despite their power games, are on equal footing, a key trait of partnership, and of horizontal organizations more generally. These horizontal organizations were a central part of the hippie movement, and as Sortilege says, "this bond between partners was nearly the only thing Doc had ever found... to admire about the

L.A.P.D." Perhaps the "greedy little hippie" is right after all: maybe the only thing to be admired about vertical organizations is the small pockets of horizontality that form.

Bigfoot does not command respect, despite his position (lieutenant) in a hierarchical organization. It is a deep undercurrent that flows beneath the formal organization of power, robbing those that do not conform to dignity. So, Bigfoot goes to the Japanese Coffee Shop to find respect, and yell "MOTTO PANNUKEIKU!" to replace the respect he Freudianly does not win from both his wife and his mother. Both the matriarchy and patriarchy have disowned his sordid desires, and he is thus reduced to a hero, forcing our protagonist to tear at the lowest dregs of the institution which ruined him so many years ago.

In the end, *Inherent Vice* is a mourning of the past. Of a time when we really had it going, when "the man" was really scared, and we lost it. Whether it was our own greediness or the evil designs of capital itself, we failed. The '60s might have had some real change, but the central tenets of the hippie movement went unfulfilled. It was their war to win, but unfortunately, they made love not war. Ironically, the love they chose over war is not even free anymore: it can be bought for 24.95 at Chick Planet Massage, itself a part of the vertical hierarchy that is the Golden Fang.

Has K-pop Lost Its “K”?

BY GABRIELA CHAN

K-pop is a lot of things. It is South Korean pop music, clean-cut choreography, a culture of artist idolization, and now a global phenomenon. The worldwide spread of South Korean culture, or Hallyu, the Korean Wave, dates back to the mid-1990s when K-dramas such as *What Is Love* (1991) trended across Asia. In recent years, the Korean Wave has thrived on music.

In 2020, a South Korean musical act topped the Billboard charts for the first time in history. That was “Dynamite” by BTS. One could say that K-pop owes its global success to that iconic seven-member boy band. Prior to BTS, second-generation K-pop stars like Wonder Girls and PSY had made their marks on the Billboard Hot 100, but at the time, these artists were the exceptions. Today, it is no longer a surprise to hear K-pop outside of Korea.

“A strategy of Western acceptance” is what *El País* writer, Marta Espana, calls the shift in K-pop.¹ English lyrics and TikTok format dance challenges have enabled K-pop to thrust itself into the North American pop culture mix and gain worldwide recognition. Was this a miracle or a cultural mouse trap? The South Korean music industry’s diversion to the West leads some to wonder whether K-pop has lost its “K.”

Various factors set the K-pop industry apart from the Western music industry, one being how an artist is prepared for their career. The trainee system in South Korea is like a long-term music bootcamp: a tight schedule of vocal, rap, and dance sessions, monthly evaluations, and the looming risk of getting dropped by your entertainment company if they deem you insufficient to debut.

A decade ago, if you wanted to become a K-pop artist or in industry terminology, an “idol,” there was no way other than auditioning to become a trainee, ideally at one of the “Big Three” entertainment companies, JYP, SM, and YG. Most would do so in their teens because trainee life lasted on average from five to seven years. The system is cutthroat like no other, requiring physical and mental endurance.

Nowadays, the doorway to the K-pop industry has widened. The trainee system still exists but many get to debut after training for just one to two years, maybe less. At the same time, going through long and harsh years of training in the same company builds a tight bond between members of an idol group, a family-like dynamic which some might argue has been lost in newer K-pop groups.

Besides the trainee system, another special aspect of this industry is the close relationship between idols and fans. A big part of an idol’s day-to-day job is interacting with their fandom, which includes frequent livestreams and text messages on designated apps like WeVerse and Bubbly, as well as fan-meetings.

At an internet café in Seoul, do not be alarmed if you spot a row of K-pop fans hovering intently over their PCs. They are just waiting to snatch themselves a fan-meeting ticket, because at these events, you not only receive an autograph but can also meet your idol one-on-one, hold their hands, or ask them to do aegyo (perform cute actions).

Any artist, Korean or not, forms a relationship with their listeners through performances and promotional



Graphic provided by Iso Maauad Rodriguez

events, but fan-idol intimacy is especially pronounced in K-pop and is part of the appeal. In fact, many people fall in love with a group not after listening to the music, but after feeling that they have gotten to know an idol, albeit a surface-level understanding of their personality.

Frequent fan-idol interactions allow for a valuable sense of intimacy. However, this has created a culture of idolization. There is a tacit, slightly possessive expectation for idols’ musical abilities, visual appearances, and personalities to remain consistent throughout their career. This means harsh hate comments when idols, especially female idols, gain weight. “Problematic” behaviour caught on camera can spark controversy to a point that the company decides to put an idol on hiatus.

K-pop artists are put on a pedestal, creating a high-pressure and often toxic industry environment. As such, K-pop has never been perfect, and that is ironically due to the industry’s perfectionistic standards.

If the “K” in “K-pop” encompasses its toxic perfectionism and cutthroat trainee life, then it might be good that this industry is shedding its old skin. However, part of what gets shed is the South Korean community’s affiliation with the genre.

For example, native Korean fans who have followed K-pop since the beginning struggle to recognise the “national character of the genre” in a song like BTS’s “Dynamite” — besides the band members’ ethnicities, there is nothing very “Korean” about a disco-pop single sung in full English.²

BTS themselves can be taken as a case study for how K-pop has shifted over the years. The different “eras” of their discography reveal a detour from emotional storytelling (take *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* albums) to upbeat songs supporting mental health (“Dynamite”). Interestingly, their earliest songs such as “No More Dream” and “N.O” reveal heavy rap and hip-hop influences, showing that K-pop has been in contact with Western music for longer than one would think.

While some complain about K-pop losing its distinctly “Korean” features, a fact of music is that it travels, and then it evolves. As K-pop and Western pop become increasingly intertwined, K-pop has started to adapt certain Western values of artistic prac-

tice. Some idols have been given more creative liberties in their music, which has not always been easy in this industry. An example is Yunjin from Le Sserafim who has participated as a songwriter for several of her group’s songs.

What is more, the landscape for K-pop has expanded drastically. Blackpink and Le Sserafim have performed at Coachella; Katseye is a multiethnic K-pop group based in Los Angeles; the recent Netflix hit, *K-pop Demon Hunters*, is beloved by both Korean and non-Korean viewers. All this proves that K-pop is not just for South Korea but can be enjoyed globally.

On March 21, 2026, the K-pop Dance Team (KDT) at UBC Okanagan hosted their annual year-end show. This year, they did a generational throwback, covering dances for new songs like Viviz’ “Shhh!” (2024) and making their way back to the early 2000s with SHINee’s “Lucifer” (2010) and Girls’ Generation’s “Into the New World” (2007).

In the audience, I observed two things. First, fewer cheers erupted during “Lucifer” than during “Shhh!” suggesting that the audience was more familiar with present-day K-pop than older songs of the genre.

Secondly, “Shhh!” had more memorable dance moves and a simpler song structure than “Lucifer,” for which the choreography was more basic and there was a dramatic high note at the end of the bridge. In that moment, the KDT dancer lip-synced to Korean lyrics and vocal flourishes, but that acting was inevitably a little awkward for the non-Korean student. Comparatively, “Shhh!” seems more suited for a K-pop dance cover at a Canadian university, a cultural landscape in which “Lucifer” was not born into.

Some things about K-pop remain the same. As KDT led the audience down memory lane, we got to see that the genre continues to be visually captivating and a lot of fun. K-pop brings people together through performance, and that is exemplified by the diversity of the KDT community.

Most members of the K-pop Dance Team at UBCO are not Korean. Students from all over the world including Vietnam, the U.S., China, and the Philippines enjoy K-pop for many of the genre’s unique characteristics that were mentioned earlier in this article.

“I am a really big fan of the music to the point that it is the main genre of music I listen to nowadays,” states a

KDT member from Hawai’i, “but I also like the fan-interaction aspect of K-pop. I find myself deciding to ‘stan’ K-pop groups more because of the group’s variety [show] content as opposed to their music.”

Britt Chen from China loves the creative musical arrangements that involve a variety of instruments, as well as the stories told through such experimental melodies. “Most importantly,” adds Chen, “the dances are always enjoyable to watch and learn, letting me discover all the amazing people who work behind the scenes.”

When asked whether they think K-pop is a global genre of music or a representation of South Korean Culture, seven out of nine respondents voted for the former.

“On the bright side, the Westernization of K-pop has indeed blended a great deal of excellent and innovative styles and creative methods, making the music much more catchy,” says Chen, “Simply put, it makes good music more globalized and allows it to spread further. This is a positive thing for universal listeners, yet it also comes with many hidden issues.”

Chen explains, “For example, cultural identity and the attribution of certain musical elements have gradually become blurred amid the large-scale cultural intersection. When a K-pop song becomes a hit, people may mistakenly believe that [the musical sound] originated from the place where the song was released. If the song’s creators don’t point this out appropriately, it can lead to misunderstandings, or even disputes and conflicts.”

Mikhail from the Philippines offers a similar take: “I think K-pop has always taken from non-Korean genres, mostly without credit... and in a highly sanitised way. Saying K-pop has only recently become too Westernised ignores how the genre was built from appropriating Western sounds.”

Adding to that, another KDT member from Canada wrote, “I don’t think [K-pop] has lost its identity. K-pop has always been influenced by Western music, and its core elements — such as choreography, group dynamics, and visual storytelling — are still unique. Instead of becoming ‘too Westernised,’ it is evolving to reach a global audience while maintaining its distinct style.”

Most of the above respondents have been listening to K-pop since before BTS’s catalytic diversion to the U.S. market. Their perspectives reflect that K-pop has always been a complex web of song, dance, entertainment, and of lingering questions of cultural appropriation.

Perhaps the inclusion of Western musical elements in K-pop is nothing new, but the cultural diversity of its fanbase certainly is. Global demand will only proliferate the diverging opinions about what K-pop is and what it should be, but as with any form of music, the past sets a foundation for the genre but does not define it. Let us continue to observe how K-pop moves through this world and how its listeners move with it.

1. Espana, M. (2025, June 11). Seismic shift in K-pop: Tension between authenticity, globalization, and cultural roots. *El País U.S. Edition*. <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-06-11/seismic-shift-in-k-pop-tension-between-authenticity-globalization-and-cultural-roots.html>.

2. Espana, M. (2025, June 11). Seismic shift in K-pop: Tension between authenticity, globalization, and cultural roots. *El País U.S. Edition*. <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-06-11/seismic-shift-in-k-pop-tension-between-authenticity-globalization-and-cultural-roots.html>.