

A.I. Hits New Heights

Believe it or not this image is fake. The location in the image does not exist in real life neither do the flowers, in fact nothing in this image really exists. This image was actually generated by A.I. (artificial intelligence). The A.I. that generated this image is called DALL-E 2, it takes text prompts and generates a totally new image that never existed before. In this case the prompt was “a photo of a quaint flower shop storefront with a pastel green and clean white facade.”. So how does this A.I. work? Well first a program is trained on a set of pictures with labels e.g. a picture of a dog with the caption dog. The program will then be made to match different images to corresponding titles. In doing so it will slowly learn how an image can be expressed in words. This A.I. is then run in reverse and combined with an A.I. that synthesises images to create a picture based on your prompt.

A.I. seems to be developing at breakneck pace, just a few years ago the entire idea of an image generating A.I. would have seemed novel but at the rate it's developing A.I. might be able to generate whole videos. The future of art, photography and cinematography might be people developing their own A.I. and prompts to generate new images and videos. A free primitive version of DALL-E 2 is available for free at: <https://www.craiyon.com/>

By Theo Lloyd



Snapchat's new paid version

Snapchat introduces a paid model but will it work? Snapchat is trying out a \$3.99/month subscription (snapchat+) that will give the user special perks. The paid version will let the user change the apps icon, see who rewatched their story, pin one of your friends to the top of your chats as well as a few other things. This isn't much different from the free version, so why is snapchat doing this? Well their stock price is down 74% in 2022 and is lower than when they first went public in 2017. This subscription model also comes out just a month after Snapchat warned of slowing revenue growth. With all that pressure on them, snapchat is scrambling to increase monetisation within their app as much as possible trying anything to turn a profit from, Snapchat+ is just one of these strategies. This explains why it feels incomplete, rushed and like bad value for money, that's because Snapchat+ has been thrown together in short notice without there really being a good product there.

By Theo Lloyd

Quiz

Easy - what month does Oktoberfest start

Medium - what is the acceleration gained by an object due to gravitational force?

Hard - Given that $z = a + bi$, show that $\frac{z}{z^*} = \left(\frac{a^2 - b^2}{a^2 + b^2}\right) + \left(\frac{2ab}{a^2 + b^2}\right)i$

Impossible - Pick any number. If that number is even, divide it by 2. If it's odd, multiply it by 3 and add 1. Then repeat from the start until you reach one. Does the sequence eventually reach 1 for all positive integer initial values?

Answers in next edition

Conspiracy Spotlight

This section is dedicated to talk about funny or interesting conspiracy theories. In this edition we will talk about the reptilian elite. The conspiracy proposes that there are some people who are secretly reptiles who are bloodthirsty, flesh eating reptiles who control our global leaders and people who possess power or your neighbour could be one. Their goal is to ultimately enslave the human race and use us for their nefarious deeds. It also states that many horrific acts are actually caused by reptilian born foul play, such as the disappearance of Malaysia airlines flight 370.

The reptilian elite conspiracy was originally proposed by BBC sports reporter David Icke in a book titled "The biggest secret". It featured an interview with two royal family members who were exposed as lizard people. It is claimed that humans have found bones of these lizard people but the discovery was covered up by the government and C.I.A. Among these so-called claimed lizard people include: The Queen, George. W. Bush and the Clintons or even Putin.. People claim that Mark Zukerberg is the lizard king, following a court trial whereby a famous picture of his reptilian eyes was captured.

Whether these conspiracies are actually true we will never know. However, next time you go to your grandmas, you better watch your back...

-By Michal Pyzik



The Secret to Success!

The next time you put your sunglasses on, spare a thought for Leonardo Del Vecchio 1935 – 2022. Leonardo started a company called Luxottica in 1961 but it wasn't until 1988 that he signed a licensing agreement with Giorgio Armani. That agreement helped turn sunglasses into fashion accessories worth thousands of pounds, not bad for a man who started life in an orphanage. Leonardo didn't stop there in 1990 he acquired Vogue Eyewear, Persol, Ray-Ban and Sunglasses Hut. He also manufactured frames for Chanel, Prada and Bulgari.



When you look at Leonardo's early life it makes you realise just how impressive his success was. He started life in Milan living with his mother, his father died before he was born, his mother couldn't feed or care for the children, so they were all placed in the local orphanage. Yet, when he died on the 27th of June, at the age of 87, he was the world's largest retailer of sunglasses, general glasses and frames with 77, 734 employees and over 8,000 shops. He was estimated to be worth 22.4 billion and was ranked 52 on the Forbes list of billionaires and the second richest person in Italy.

He started working in a factory at the age of fourteen and severed part of his finger in one of the machines. His early life in the orphanage was difficult to say the least he was given boiled cabbage for lunch everyday and dreamed about the food he would like to eat when he could start working.

So, what was the secret to his success, especially with such a difficult start in life? In an early interview he was quoted as saying, "He attributed his success to the intensity and strong focus he maintained throughout his career."

In a recent interview he gave a more thoughtful response to the same question "If you are distracted or rest on your laurels, as I saw happen with various entrepreneurs who started out with me, without you realising it, someone will come and claim your business. Once they have surpassed you it becomes very, very difficult to catch up."

The secret to success according to Leonardo is focus and hard work, which as we know isn't always as easy as it sounds.

By Theo Lloyd

Better Than Busking

Songfinch is a platform where you can buy custom made songs that capture your personal stories and memories. The turnaround time is between four and seven days, which is great if you need a birthday present for someone.

If you need to make money this summer or just want to start saving for university Songfinch could be a great way to make it happen. If you have a few hours spare each week it could be the side hustle you need. However, it isn't guaranteed that you will be accepted by Songfinch, saying that between 40-50% of applicants are accepted but do the maths that also means that 50-60% of applicants get rejected.

So, what can you expect if you apply, firstly you need to be a good all round musician that means you must have the ability to write songs, play instruments, sing and audio engineer or rather produce the actual completed song. Lets say you can do all of the above great, Songfinch will give you a prompt and ask you to deliver an original test song that you have written, recorded and produced yourself. Once you are accepted you will be eligible to write songs for people.

The customer will usually give you specific phrases or words and ideas to include and may even suggest a tone or sound direction. So, all you have to do is bring it all together and record it, sounds too technical not really there is an abundance of recording software out there that can easily be utilised. Songfinch allows you to use the same track on multiple occasions, so once you have a track that would fit a variety of lyrics you can reuse it so long as you create original lyrics each time.

£115 per song plus tips for a happy customer, not bad for a few hours work. The best bit of all is that Songfinch has your back and if the customer doesn't like your work you don't have to refund them, Songfinch will take care of it.

By Theo Lloyd

Peecycling

The war in Ukraine has caused supply chain issues for farmers. Russia exports 20% of the world's nitrogen fertilisers, whilst Belarus exports 40% of the world's potassium – gee whizz!

Human pee could replace 25% of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilisers, it might sound disgusting, but we have been nourishing crops with human pee for centuries, I bet you wash that lettuce the next time you have a salad!

As we naturally take in nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium we also excrete them, and the plants are crying out for them. A French researcher working for OCAPI believes we could replace the synthetic fertilisers with human pee, and it would be cheaper. Another added benefit would be cleaner water for drinking. As we look towards the future and think about the possibility of water shortages, due to global warming we may well need to rethink our current plumbing infrastructure and think about the prospect of peecycling alongside recycling.

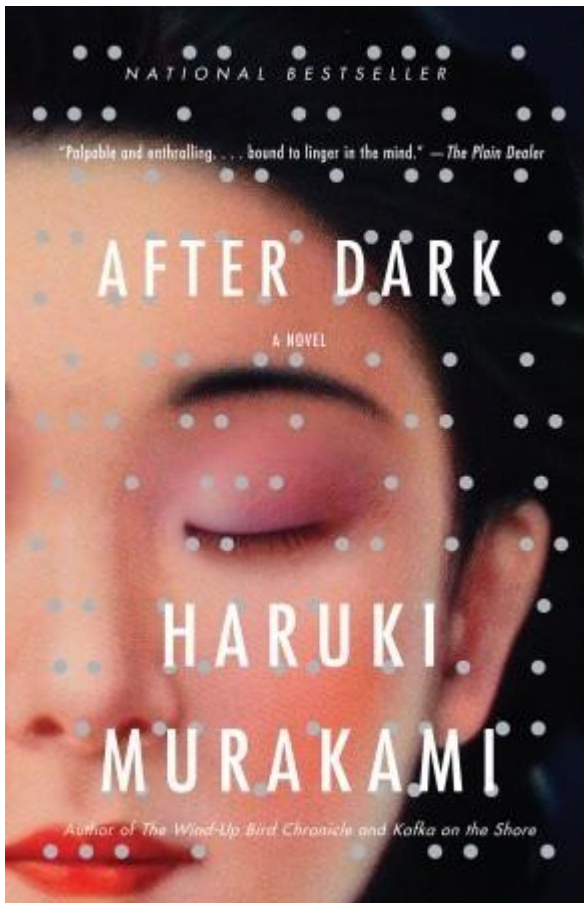
It is already happening in some countries – In Vermont the Rich Earth Institute already collects 10K+ gallons a year from volunteers who peecyle at home, bottle it, and drop it off at a urine depot. In Sweden Sanitation 360 collected up to 70k+ in three years from waterless toilets. The urine is dried and pressed into pellets which are scattered on barley crops.

By Theo Lloyd

After Dark | Haruki Murakami



After Dark is a stylish and eerie novel about a group of people whose lives merge over seemingly chance meetings and occurrences during the course of one sleepless night.



Murakami's tender approach to atmosphere is at its best in this novel as he explores the stories of some very different people and their reasons for living at night rather than during the day.

The novel deftly explores existentialist notions of purpose, control, and identity, through blending the seemingly banal nighttime with a sense of metaphysical surrealism.

We are presented with mere snapshots of people's lives throughout this novel, which gives it an air of mystery that is maintained throughout.

To me, this book seemed to occupy itself with the phenomena of observance. The narrators inveigle you into imagining yourself as a swooping night-bird or a TV camera, whispering softly for you to join the "we", but they also drop subtle hints of a collective identity that you do not share: they have sets of "rules" and "principles". One gradually comes to suspect that the narrators are not even human.

I'm reluctant to rate this book higher as it feels incomplete in its shortness, and not enough of it comes together. Personally I didn't find anything compelling about the characters. They were not very fleshed out and were like romanticised caricatures.

A short novel that has the power to baffle the mind, chill your bones, and warm your heart at the same time.

"The night has begun to open up at last. There will be time until the next darkness arrives."

By Sara Mohan

Fun fact: the most expensive book ever is the Codex Leicester by Leonardo da Vinci. The book was purchased by Bill Gates in 1994 for \$30.8 million

Homelessness in Cardiff

Homelessness is an increasing problem in the UK's towns and cities, with 227,000 households across the UK purportedly experiencing the worst forms of homelessness; that's about the population of Swansea. Homelessness is also on the increase even here in Wales. In 2017 7,881 people were homeless in Wales. By 2023 that's estimated to hit a record high of 10,271 people homeless in Wales alone. That means that the amount of homeless people in Wales has increased by 30% in 6 years.

Covid is undoubtedly a large puzzle piece when it comes to forming a complete image of homelessness and all its causes. As the British economy reconciles the damage done by multiple subsequent lockdowns grinding our economy to a halt. Although the furlough scheme meant many people could be paid during the lockdowns, many were not eligible for the furlough scheme like contractors, agency workers and small business owners. Many of these people didn't get paid through covid and struggled to find employment and money. However, due to temporary legislation banning the enforcement of evictions, people were able to avoid homelessness. As we come out of Covid and legislation is stripped away, the floor is pulled from beneath these people who are still struggling financially. They might have had to take out loans during covid that they now have to pay back. Covid has also bankrupted many small businesses and made larger ones downsize, putting many out of jobs and looking for a way to put food on the table. The service industry is also still not up to pre-Covid profits, with many still hesitant to go out and put themselves at risk leading to sizeable job losses. Many people cannot return to work due to mental health problems caused by the pandemic, leaving them in a cruel mental and economical place if they are unable to work.

When it comes to mental health and homelessness, the troubles caused by the pandemic are only the tip of the iceberg. A recent government audit found 45% of homeless people have a diagnosed mental health problem. The actual rate is suspected to be much higher, though, as many with mental health issues go undiagnosed their whole lives. One of the reasons many people who end up homeless suffer with mental health issues is because mental health wasn't accepted by wider society until very recently. In fact, many suffering from debilitating mental health conditions were told to 'just get on with it' by friends and family who didn't understand the severity of their condition and, in many cases, stopping people from seeking the required help.

Gambling is also a key factor in homelessness. As gambling goes online, it's able to reach many people anywhere anytime and be more addictive than ever. This addiction starts a downward spiral of trying to recoup your losses but just losing more every time. Since gambling and addiction are rarely discussed, many people never talk to family or friends about their addiction, and many don't ask or turn a blind eye.

Another factor in the surge of homelessness is Brexit. Although in the long term, Brexit could help the UK economy by letting us establish trading relations with other nations, in the short term, there are growing pains as the economy has to get used to new non-European suppliers and buyers. These growing pains mean people who made the majority of their money from exporting or importing to the EU have now lost a lot of business. Even if they can keep that business, it's now more expensive to transport things across into Europe, cutting into companies' profit margins. Although it is only short term, few businesses are exempt from the temporary effects of Brexit, leading to a short term economic squeeze, meaning job losses, downsizing and pay cuts. Brexit and coronavirus have combined at just the wrong time to create a perfect storm of declining employment and mounting debt leading to an unprecedented level of homelessness.

There is no easy solution to homelessness as homelessness is more the effect of many different problems in our society and economy like addiction, gambling, mental health problems, covid, Brexit, and so many more, with one leading to another like financial difficulty leading to addiction or gambling and vice versa. So once you're on the streets, it's hard to get back up; this is where a network of charities like the big issue and crisis UK come in to help. But this does not address the root causes and doesn't

solve anything. Until we as a society address wide-reaching problems such as addiction, gambling and mental health more seriously, more people will pile up on the streets, unable to get back on their feet.

Sources: Crisis UK, local Government Association

by: Theo Lloyd

Editor's Note:

I'm so proud of our first issue of 'The Epicenter'. Our journalists have chosen a multiplicity of topics, which they have carefully researched to ensure they are based on sound evidence. However they are still opinions of our journalists moreover if you would like to respond to any of these articles with any of your own views, or if this issue has inspired you to have a go at writing an article on a different topic please join the team by emailing me at: theo.lloyd@stjohnscollegecardiff.com

I hope you enjoyed our first issue - feedback appreciated.

T. Lloyd