

Scepter

The Students' Voice

Kingsborough Community College

MARCH 2020

The City University of New York



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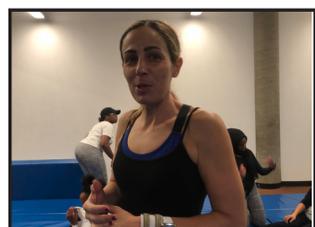
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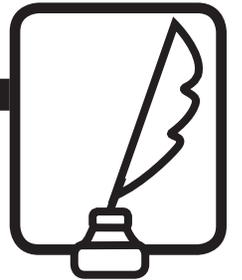
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Letter From The Editor

By Saul De Leon



Photo provided by Saul De Leon

Scepter was formed to give KCC students a voice and to inform our student body about what is going on and off-campus. As a journalist, everyone is our audience. It is our job to bring light to all the beautiful things this college has to offer. Yet, we do not shy away from the ugly things. In recent years, it seems as though this paper has lost its way and by the end of last semester, it was on full display.

Over the past three months, Scepter has undergone some severe changes that have delayed the production of our student newspaper. Following the departure of our former Editor-in-Chief and some writers, Scepter was in a precarious position. Here, I was thrust into the role of Editor-in-Chief unexpectedly. Things were in disarray. I, alongside our Production Editor, Violetta Brin, had to calculate our next move and bring the paper back into circulation. I was fortunate enough to have our advisor Patrick Hickey Jr., with former Editor-in-Chief Matt Hirsch and new Managing Editor, Ellis Santoro, to help create a new game plan. We appointed new board members, assembled a small team of writers and got to work.

Through grit and patience, we managed to pull together an issue that superseded our expectations. To everyone on the team, I would like to thank you all personally for helping make this possible and I am proud to be leading us into the new semester. Moving forward, I hope that this issue will bring some momentum. There is some promising talent on this team and I am excited for what is in store for us in the coming weeks. As newly appointed Editor-in-Chief, I vow that by the end of my final semester at Kingsborough to leave this paper in a thriving position. I hope to bring back the journalistic integrity that this paper was once previously known for.

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**CUNY
FATHERHOOD
ACADEMY**



Help a young father create a brighter future for himself and his family!

Photo by KCC

Breaking Cultural Conditioning

What It Means to be a Father

By Saul De Leon

Men as teenagers don't plan to become fathers while still in High School, but life doesn't always go as planned and education takes a back seat. At the CUNY Fatherhood Academy (CFA), education and fatherhood are just as important and should play a vital role in becoming a better parent. The (CFA) is a free 16-week high school equivalency and college prep program for fathers ages 18 to 30 that promotes responsible parenting, college readiness, work among unemployed and underemployed fathers. Located in T4-162, the program is split into two 16-week cohorts, one in the Fall and one in the Spring, to mirror the Kingsborough semester.

Each group is between 20-30 students and takes classes three times a week in preparation for their TASC Exam (High School Equivalency). The ultimate goal for the academy is to prepare each student to take and pass this exam. However, (CFA) is more than test preparation; it is a chance for these fathers to grow as men and be role models to their children.

"It comes down to our cultural conditioning and we're in a very interesting space in terms of that right now. A lot of people don't understand that defining yourself is a powerful tool. These young men define themselves as fathers based on their ability to provide. So, the child becomes an added complexity in that," Kymel Yard CUNY Fatherhood Academy Director at Kingsborough said. "If I can go and work, now I have this viewpoint of myself as breadwinner. Even if I'm not winning enough bread to provide

for a family and a household, that helps reinforce the identity that I want to live. Without realizing that it doesn't make you a father, that doesn't make you a man. Getting an education is another way to provide for your child. You're setting a precedent to an extent for your child to say education is going to be a fundamental part of who you're going to be."

Throughout the weeks, students attend parenting skills classes, conflict resolution groups, men's peer support groups and mentoring. This allows the staff to get some personal time with each student; it gives students a chance to open up talk through issues going on at home. Some students come to the program with a goal set in mind after they get their GED. For some, they are not sure about what they want (CFA) provides them with the resources to find their path.

"I was thinking like I don't know why I am here. I didn't have a job. I didn't have anything to do and then I started seeing my kids grow up like why I am here, why do they need me and now there are so many doors there that can I could go through. I can be something to them," Christian Santillo (CFA) student said. "I'm their father so, I should teach them that if I fall, I can get back up. You know, I've been down there and I don't want to stay there. This program has shown me that it didn't matter that I dropped out ten years ago from school. I can still change and be somebody."

Not all men have the luxury of having a mentor or counselor that's willing to listen to their concerns. (CFA) prides itself on providing as much attention

to each student's needs and to get to a place where they feel confident in their abilities to succeed.

Once the 16 weeks are complete and the students pass the exam, the program holds a graduation ceremony in celebration of a new beginning. If students are seeking employment (CFA) also provides job coaching and placement, internship, work readiness groups and personal and career counseling/guidance. They also have the choice to continue their education at Kingsborough as fully enrolled college students and can move on to take the (CAT) entrance exam. The program shows these students that they can strive for more, that having a child does not define you as a person or as a man. You can strive to be better and show your child that no matter what life throws at, you can get back up and keep going.

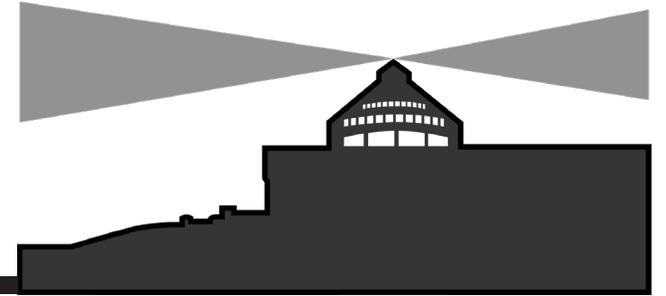
"Everybody knows how important a mom is; nobody doubts mom. Dads, it's shaky sometimes, it's kind of like you either get the disciplinarian or the provider and oh, I come in with my wise words and I disappear right," Yard said. "Those are some limiting viewpoints of fatherhood and I've realized like no, that role is pivotal in that your modeling behaviors. In everything your children are going to look for in themselves and others when it comes to masculinity. The best thing you can do is be a good person. You don't have to live up to this super ideal dad or feel that your destined or doomed to be super deadbeat dad either. You have to look at yourself, okay, who am I and how do I learn about who I am in a healthy way to pass that on to my children."

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Scepter is always recruiting new team members to contribute to monthly editions of the paper.

If you are a Kingsborough student and are interested in writing, photography, layout design, or copy editing, talk to us in M230. You can also email your opinion or letter to the editor to: scepterpublications@gmail.com

CAMPUS NEWS



Hillel International: An On-Campus Home for Heritage and Community

International Jewish Student Organization Provides a Welcoming Space for Young Academics

By Aaron Bindler

For a Jewish student at Kingsborough Community College, the Hillel Group not only provides kosher meals, they arrange praying times, study the Torah and provide an environment for students to relax and mingle. It's not the only on-campus Jewish program, however. Three groups, Hillel, Tagar and Yavneh, are their own entities and have different goals: they all share room E202 on the KBCC campus.

Hillel is the world's largest on-campus Jewish organization, with over 550 groups worldwide. The people who run these groups are usually students, chosen by Hillel International, the Organization in which The Hillel Group was founded. Hillel's mission is to teach both those who do and don't know about their shared Jewish heritage to a crowd of Jewish students from all different sects of Judaism. Once the doors for Hillel KBCC are open, the room is fully-occupied, both students and staff, until they close. They have an afternoon prayer service Monday-Thursday at 1:45 P.M and offer services to students who want to participate in programs such as Birthright, an organization that takes Jewish students to Israel that have never been.

"Hillel is more than just a club for Jewish students, it's about embracing unity, we have members that are not Jewish," Yael Pinhas, President KBCC Hillel and a biology major said. "A year ago, I was the VP of the

KBCC Yavneh Group before running for President of Hillel. Yavneh is focused on the religious aspects of Judaism and while Hillel is as well to an extent, it's really more about bringing people together. My responsibilities mostly entail making sure everyone is respectful to one another, maintaining the vibe in the room, organizing events and paperwork."

"I was really shy before I found Hillel," Nursing student Nika Abramova, also the former VP and Secretary of Hillel KCC says. "Now I have no problem talking to random people and have really improved networking skills. After going to a few events they offered me the secretary job and then eventually the VP position. Initially, I said yes because they told me it will look good on my resume."

While Hillel International is known most for its advocacy of Israel and its ongoing conflict with the Boycott, Divestment and the Sanctions movement, they do offer special opportunities to the students who run the Hillel campus groups. Hillel was started in 1923 and is still recruiting strong. Recently they had a massive scavenger hunt that included all local Hillel groups and a few weeks before that, they all went out to play laser tag. "I used to run the Instagram account for Hillel," Abramova said. "Eventually, Hillel International set me up with a paid internship recruiting students and helping to organize events for them."

For the most part, each student gets something out of Hillel. Whether it be connections, a free meal or a place to feel represented. The most common theme amongst regulars is the camaraderie. Two people from opposite sides of the Jewish spectrum, connected by a corner classroom. It's not just about the new relationships, it's the quality of them.

"I joined Hillel because I am Jewish and would like to become a part of a Jewish community, just not the one I grew up with," Allen Shumanov, a criminal justice major says. "It's nice to see other people's perspectives and what they have gained from here. I consider them my family. Someone is always there to help no matter the reason, it doesn't matter how religious you are or aren't."

No matter what one's race or religion is, we all just want to be represented in some sort of way. Hillel does that and more for the Jewish students of KBCC. Not only do the students feel proud about their heritage, they learn from each other's differences and build lifelong relationships.

"The high school I went to was ultra orthodox and sheltered me from the rest of the world," Pinhas said. "When I joined Hillel, I was able to see things completely different. Even growing up in a Jewish community, I didn't realize how many sects of Judaism there actually is. The people I have met through Hillel are now the closest friends I have."



Photo by Aaron Bindler

Hillel has improved Abramova's life.



Photo by Aaron Bindler

Hillel is more than a club, it's about embracing unity.

Cosplay in Kingsborough: Self-Expression Through a Love of Pop-Culture

The Only Place in Kingsborough to See Goku Hanging out with BTS

By Jose Tirado

If you see a student in a popular anime character costume in the MAC Rotunda, be reminded that it is not Halloween, it's the Cosplay club at Kingsborough Community College. Kingsborough has at least 80 student organizations that are led by students with help from faculty members, according to the Kingsborough website. With a variety of clubs, it's easy for clubs to be unnoticed.

"We are like a mixed Club. There's the mixes of gaming, Kpop, anime, comic book-like altogether one, but we dress up," the club leader Jentel Finch said. "They like a variety of characters cosplay us from movies: TV shows, anime, video games, K-pop groups. It's like it's a very wide variety."

The Cosplay Club gives its members the ability to dress up in what they want. Whether it's a character from the new anime, a character from an old cartoon, or a singer in their favorite K-pop band. With a variety of people, with different likes and with different personalities, inclusivity is a must for the foundation of the club. There are no outsiders in this club as Finch explains that this club is a group of outsiders. "This club is like a safe place, we have a lot of nerds and very creative people and on campus," Finch explains. "You know, how the group of kids on campus is like it's going to be hard to fit in. So with this club here,

you can come in and we welcome open arms and we try to get you involved with dressing up."

Like any organization, the budget isn't unlimited. One of the main parts of the Cosplay club is going to conventions. Comic-Con on average costs 86 dollars, according to Excite. This is comparable to a behind the baseline seat at Citi-Field, according to Tick Pick. Since the club has 12 members, in order to go to Comic-Con, it will cost them \$1,032 dollars if every member goes.

"[Our budget is] like around 2000 we were trying to get more because we are planning on future events," Finch said. "We are doing some sort of fundraiser in the Spring with the Cafe."

Even though this club has an iron-like foundation and message, how are people joining the club? Vice President Alissa Garcia said, "Through the club fair and when I saw all the photos and everything I was like, Whoa, I do that. So I was so intrigued so I came to the first meeting and that's how I became Vice President."

With the club being very open, with different fairs and conventions, there are different things to enjoy. "[My favorite part is] being able to express myself through costume and field trips to fun places," member Jubilee Bevel states. "I'm looking forward to the Renaissance Fair because we went last time and I was unprepared so I'm hoping to be prepared this time."

"My favorite parts of the club is that we go to many events, we go to Comic-Con, anime NYC, renaissance fair, a lot of great events," Garcia said. "Plus the club can fund you if you don't know how to make a costume over if it's really really hard to make." The Cosplay club has little limitations to what its members could wear, so this leads to different types of costumes being worn. One would think that this would be a problem, but not for this club because the biggest attribute for a member of this club is being tolerant of the other members. "In terms of this club, you have to be creative and open-minded," Finch said.



Photo by Jose Tirado
Tolerance for one's self-expression.

ASAP: For the Student Who "Doesn't Have the Time"

The ASAP Program is a Pathway to Graduate as Soon as Possible.

By Michelle Minero

ASAP, a play on words that has a double meaning each of which end up having the same related goal. The Accelerated studies associates program helps students in need of assistance to keep them on track financially and educationally. After all, they got your back, your books and your MetroCard. The program ASAP has many pros just as well as cons a student would consider. To be given a voucher for your textbooks, an unlimited metro card for the semester and the rest of your tuition being paid for what FAFSA couldn't give. All in return are monthly advisor meetings and to keep your GPA high enough to stay in the program. Introduced to those starting college as it's only provided to specific CUNY colleges. Recruiters like Bryant Barksdale usually inform students of these benefits through a four step check to fully inform the student about enrollment into the program.

"We want to ensure they're successful," Barksdale said. The number of applicants every year can vary from 1,000 to more, but when enrolled failing to stay for issues of not meeting the benchmarks, not going to class, disappearing, not meeting their advisor. Students will receive warnings and at the worse, which is the last thing ASAP would want, is these students would get dismissed. You can always rejoin the program; the three-year clock still continues. The main goal is to get the student their associate's degree in three years or under. They're eligible to join back as long as it's within the time span of three-year span with the credits and classes that ensure them graduation. Every student's situation is always different in terms of difficulty in keeping up with the criteria. Usually, there can be students who just take advantage of the benefits such as the MetroCard and

tuition so when they get their big check they spend it on whatever to then refuse to put the work in because "they don't have the time." Then there's the actual student with serious issues that neglect their focus on their studies.

"We try to take in count of their home life where we understand program wise that students have variants outside of school. We want them to do well in here but we understand they are providing for their families," Barksdale says. "Our advisors are here to help you academically but they are also kind of a neutral resource if you're like having work or home issues if you need someone to talk to, they're there to talk to you."

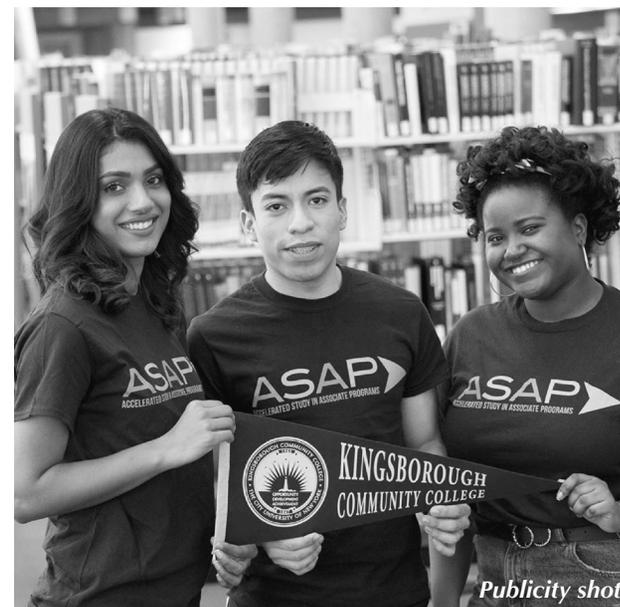
It's hard to go from a speed you're used to by taking it nice and slow to a speed of light which can be rocky for a student. Advisor Agnes Williams is well aware of the difficulties. In a setting growing up with not a lot of help, a program like this sounds like a lifesaver. So it should be an important realization that establishing a relationship with the adviser can keep you in check. Age limit is nonexistent in terms of the program, it's open to anyone who gives the minimal back. Mostly for their own benefits. First year student Lizet Mora was enrolled in the program when she was first introduced to it after taking her placement exam, an opportunity she wisely took right away after hearing about it.

"I think it's good because depending on your major it allows you to work after. It allows you to get help going into a four-year college," Mora says.

Mora, as a student herself, with a life outside of school can understand how some of the requirements can feel forced because they're "required." Especially the meetings with advisers when sometimes a student doesn't even have anything, in particular, to talk about. It's a full-time job and

even towards the winter and summer sessions, many of which wish to enjoy that time instead of taking required classes during that time, it can be such a chore. This is why they need to attend these ASAP meetings in order to know what they're getting themselves into. ASAP is a successful program that helps you get your Associates degree as soon as possible. It is being replicated outside in other states like in Ohio, even expanded to SUNY Westchester community college. With many benefits that anyone would want to have during their college education, it helps those who require these boosts to graduate as fast as possible and move on to bigger things.

"As long as you have your life and your health you're never too old or too young to go to school," Williams says.



Publicity shot
ASAP, a faster way to success.

Video Games: Just Fun, or Violence Inspiring?

Opinions From Kingsborough Students and Staff Vary

By Elleisha Richins

Are video games responsible for mass shootings? Scepter asks CUNY and other NYC academic faculty, as well as students to find out.

"I feel like what is depicted in video games is very much realistic at this point and it's a way of bringing out aggression in a non-holistic way. I think what they use in video games is what they use in real life, so yes I do think that video games are responsible for mass shootings," said **Harsh Menta, 27, Assistant Director at NYIT.**

"Partially because of the violence in the game and the influence it has over the kids that don't have better parenting at home and people to encourage them to do positive things and follow different rules," said **Ryan Maughm, 43, Psych Coordinator for High School Students District 75.**

"It may be a little influential to the violence but I wouldn't say it's a reason. I would say peer pressure and personal stuff going on at home.

Sometimes that person is not getting enough attention. Maybe they're trying to get something out and don't know-how. I think that's more of a reason. It's not easy to pinpoint everybody's reason for violence. There can be many reasons such as bullying, peer pressure or a little bit of everything," said **L. Robin Nelson, 60, CUNY Administrative Assistant.**

"No, because I'm a gamer myself and playing the game is just like watching movies so I don't feel like video games are responsible for that. Pressure in households and other things that can cause people to snap but definitely not video games," said **Ukari Baker, 18, Criminal Justice Major.**

"In games, they don't have schools, they don't have kids that's under 18, it's all adults. There are no kids in video games and also if that was the case, the majority of school shootings are done by white kids in places that guns are accessible like Arkansas," said **Crystal Sierra, 18, Mental Health Major.**



Photo by Elleisha Richins

Thoughts on video games are polarizing.

Shannon Caravello: Mother, Teacher, Fighter

Kingsborough Professor Empowers Her Students With the Tools They Need to Defend Themselves

By Catherine Vladimirov

She came here to study fine arts, but became a farming, health-advocating teacher of self defense. Shannon Caravello, a martial arts enthusiast, mother, gardener and professor of various courses at Kingsborough Community College has been steadily collecting college degrees, now working on her dissertation. It all began when Caravello decided to go to college and her mother told her that she was crazy for thinking she could go and actually graduate. Caravello's reaction was simple: "Oh? Watch."

This sparked the flame that lit her path, not only to be the first college graduate in her family, but also to become a life-long student. The flame still lights her eyes as she lists the degrees obtained thus far, raising her chin a bit higher with each mention. With a Bachelors Degree already in hand, she came to Kingsborough Community College to study Fine Arts and soon-after, Exercise Science, where she met the director of the program, Christine Fey. Caravello had been involved in martial arts for years now and Fey approached her to ask if she knew anyone who could teach women's self defense.

"So I said to her, I don't have anybody for you, but let me just look into this thing and type up a two, three page curriculum," Caravello explains.

Soon she brought in her outline as a suggestion and Fey chuckled. "She just looked at me and says 'see, I knew you'd be the perfect person to teach this class!' I panicked," Caravello said. Caravello had known many teachers, but she was a mother of two children already, working in the fitness industry, and had never expected to go into teaching.

"It's just not something I saw myself doing, but she believed in me and saw something I didn't see, I took a dive, taught the class and immediately entered a Masters program at Brooklyn College for Physical Education."

Her background in mixed martial arts gave the new women's self defense class exactly what was needed. "At that time there was a lot missing in the self-defense field, particularly really good women's self defense, it just wasn't there. It was a lot of stand up techniques, a lot of 'don't go to the floor.' That's just not how it is when it comes to women's self defense. You might wake up and somebody's on top of you, or you're already on the floor, you might get pushed to the floor."

Caravello makes a point in her classes not to become paranoid or fearful, instead she instills power and confidence in women, giving them the tools and techniques that allow them to feel more free and secure. Many people advocate healthy lifestyles, but Caravello backs it up with actions. Not only does she help women learn to defend themselves, but she is also an active advocate for healthy eating. You can find her at Kingsborough's farm teaching an urban agriculture course and she herself has undergone a major weight and self care transformation.

"No weight loss journey is easy," she explains. "It took me a year and a half to feel like 'oh, I have to go to the gym.'"

According to her however, she's no different from anyone else: "I just became accountable." Caravello believes that it's not about your weight, it's about if you're happy with how you look and if you physically feel good or not. With three Associates degrees, a Bachelors degree, Masters degree, dissertation on the way, two children and three classes to teach, she explains her seemingly never ending energy with "I have to be hyped up, you know, I've been in a lot of classes and I cannot stand a boring teacher."

With all of the versatility and achievements even through hardships, Caravello said it best, "Your life fell apart? So what? Now what are you gonna do?"



Photo by Catherine Vladimirov

Your life fell apart? So what?



Photo by Catherine Vladimirov

Caravello demonstrating a self-defense skill on a student.

Kingsborough's Urban Farm Offers Students the Opportunity to Gain Experience in Agriculture

Greener On This Side

By Odaine White

For many, growing your own food doesn't seem like a possibility. The vast majority of everyday people don't know how to properly plot out seeding beds or what time of year is best for growing tomatoes. All skills that someone working on the Kingsborough Urban Farm can not only gain, but also allow to flourish alongside the vegetation.

The KCC Urban Farm was founded in 2011 in hopes to initiate active thought and action in the betterment and solution of the food crisis. The Urban Farm to many is a full-time year-round job/operation that takes the cooperation of all those who are passionate about their mission to keep the Farm running and providing free organically grown foods for students and staff. Glenda Ullauri, one of the directors and Farm Educators of the Urban Farm, gave insight on what it is like being apart of this kind of initiative. "The Farm is a full-time operation. A necessity and a passion, not everyone likes the idea of going out in the sun with bugs but passion is what drives our work," she said.

The Farm is kept running by the passion of the students and staff who dedicate their efforts to it. "Staff works on the farm seven days a week. Students work Monday to Thursday about five hours each day," she said. The efforts of the Farmworkers and aids do not go to waste as well, as all the production of the farm and all the hard work put into it is given back to the student body. The Farm Manager, Mr. Izaguirre, outlined what seasonal planning is like for him, what preparations must be made to allow a good growing season for the plants and how he adapts to any changes that may take place throughout the year. Izaguirre told an anecdote on the issue of the small Harlequin bugs that enjoy attacking farm crops

during warm weather- terrorizing the Urban Farm after a light winter. "If something happens that I don't expect I usually have a back-up plan. Being Farming Manager makes me feel like I am always problem solving and I always have a backup plan." Izaguirre has dedicated himself to making sure the farm operates as properly and efficiently as it can.

Alongside the efforts of Ullauri and Izaguirre, there is also the student efforts that keep the farm running. "The Urban Farm is needed everywhere, not just at Kingsborough, it helps everyone learn and understand vegetables Ravi, who is apprenticing for the farm from Farm School NYC says. Ravi works on the Urban Farm, assisting in the preparation and conservation of the Farm and even participates in the distribution of free vegetables to the student body. Throughout Kingsborough, many of the students are not aware that the Urban Farm offers many opportunities for volunteer work and paid student aid work. "Paid student aids are important because we recognize that this is hard skilled labor and students should be properly compensated for it," says Ullauri.

The Urban Farm is a green and growing part of Kingsborough. The students are what make the Farm and student support can only help the farm grow greener. The workers continue to put in the maximum amount of effort to gain the maximum amount of results from their work. For the members of the Urban Farm, this is more than just a passion, it's a need for better, cleaner and greener ways of eating that everyone should know about. Head down to the Urban farm- there are volunteer opportunities every week, learn how greener the grass is on the other side and maybe grow something even greener yourself.



KCC Students can volunteer at the Urban Farm.



Various fruits and vegetables are grown at the Farm.

Business is Booming

Learn How to be Your Own Boss in the Entrepreneurship Club

By Elleisha Richins

Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. you can find the Entrepreneurship Club in the Business Department's Office M-355 where students are able to connect and network with each other and learn real-world business concepts. In this club, students learn how to generate business ideas, pitch their ideas, come up with the budget and turn their idea into an actual business. They also try to visit big businesses to learn all the parts a business needs to function properly. In joining this club, you now have access to their joint club Business Society which meets on Tuesdays at 10:20 a.m. in the same room.

"We're really almost like one club but we're two. We have a lot of overlapping members and faculty, so we figure it's better we have it," according to one of the founders of the Entrepreneurship club, Professor Dawn Levy. The clubs are meant to enhance our business students' experiences at the school networking with a small group of students that are interested in the same things as them and hopefully open up some opportunities for them career-wise and transfer-wise.

"For example, we're thinking about attending an entrepreneurship forum where we hear entrepreneurs talk about their successes, how they got there and what they did. Also possibly going to watch competitions out there like Shark Tank where we can go with a business idea and

get seed money where we can actually start the idea."

The club members aren't only looking for outside resources to guide them and teach them about the different aspects of a business, they are also looking at Career Services here at Kingsborough to help them with resume building and setting up their LinkedIn accounts. These clubs are open to everyone no matter the major because they believe no matter the field it would have something to do with business.

"What we teach in business is that no matter what field you're in, you're probably going to be a part of a business" said Levy. "You're a nurse but you're going to be working in a hospital which is a business. You're going to have a manager, you're going to have a supervisor. We teach about management, operations, customer service, technology and how that integrates into business and feedback so we welcome every major."

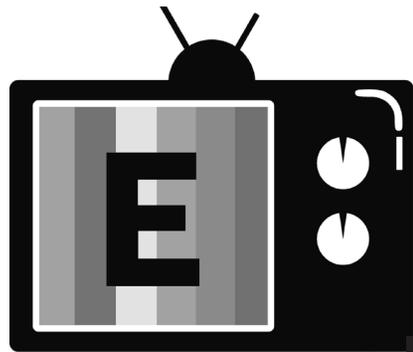
One of the overall things that the faculty want the members of the club is simple enough for every student to understand, regardless of their affinity for business.

"The effort that you put into the study, the determination, the GRIT and the perseverance is the part that makes people successful in life. It is a skill that can't always be taught but it is appreciated

and it comes out in your grades when you go to work and when you do a good job," said Professor Levy. "What I'm teaching on the board and what you need to know is important but the willingness to try and keep pushing, ambition and perseverance is a big part of it. It's what differentiates people.



GRIT & Perseverance creates success.



ENTERTAINMENT

Alder's Blood: Scary and Punishing

Shockwork Games' Newest Release is Deep and Difficult, But Has Some Kinks to Iron Out

By Brandon Coaxum

The latest game from Shockwork Games, Alder's Blood is a stealth-advised, turn-based game set in a horror-filled atmosphere that heavily relies on tactical gameplay. It's an entertaining stress-inducing game but the slow-paced story and similar level design drives this game to fall short of being one of the better indie games of the year.

The game follows hunters in an old-aged world, who were banished from civilization, but have the pact to help humans from malevolent beasts and ghouls. These hunters use an assortment of weapons to rid the world of evil. For instance, they use long-range guns such as rifles, short-ranged weapons like two sets of pistols. Long swords, greatswords and five types of rapier type blades and machetes. You are equipped with two-plus spots for items for the three hunters you have per level like health boosts, potions to stop your hunter from bleeding per turn or being poisoned by different beasts you encounter throughout the game. You can also pick a net to trap beasts in an effort to escape a stronger level beast. To lure beasts out of an ideal area you can throw rocks and whistle to lure them out.

There is a pretty standard level system. The Hunters gain XP from killing characters or completing various objectives in the world. The Hunter's role in this world is to protect mankind at all costs, but a little gratitude for their efforts is always welcomed

from NPCs. Your Hunting Party (which consists of Three Hunters) may receive items, weapons, charms or resources as a reward for completing missions and side quests. The upgrades go to upgrade the movement of a character (how fast the character moves), vision (how far a character can see), smell (to sniff out the various beasts in the area), health/stamina (this improves your health bar and stamina bar). Resources are also obtained such as food to travel from location to location and to heal character in downtime and crafting resources to create new weapons after acquiring weapon blueprints which are also acquired from finishing quests.

The game is in the horror genre, so the world shows that well. Filled with mist and a playing field filled with all sorts of evil, it's a great atmosphere to be wary of every move you make. Every move is crucial. After playing the first several missions you start to notice that every area is exactly the same but with just larger XP villains. This makes the game get boring real quick. If it wasn't for the fun stealthy tactical gameplay this game would not have been finished. This game is completely gameplay driven. The A.I. is smart, which makes it a challenge to get through each level. The A.I. combats every move you make with great precision, so you have to plan your move three steps ahead. The character design is also very inviting - the hunters look like something

out of Assassin's Creed and the beasts look like some of the horrors out of the PlayStation exclusive Bloodborne. They have a pencil sketch element for each character model.

The Good:

The Stealth Gameplay is what drives this game forward. Not only does it make you think, but it makes sure every move is crucial. Character Models and landscapes are really cool with its pencil shading style for every area.

The Bad

The Story falls short of keeping the player's attention. Minor bugs such as not being able to revive a Hunter after death resulting in restarting the game. Autosave is not existent this is really unfortunate because some of the levels are really long and you need to dashboard to the home menu to stack more items.

Final Thoughts:

With the revitalization of horror games coming out, this is one of the better ones to drop since Evil Within II and Resident Evil 5. Even though it isn't a third-person experience, it still captures the horror element very well. It's a great start to what could be a franchise. Minor bugs/glitches sprinkled throughout the game due to it still being in early development. It will be exciting to see what Shockwork games has in store next.



Photo by Shockwork Games

Alder's Blood is a welcomed entry to the horror genre, but falls short in maintaining the player's attention.

Obsidian By Syd Silvair: Tranquil

Silvair's Single is a Deep Dive Into the Artist's Subconscious

By Saul De Leon

Syd Silvair's first single, "Obsidian", off of her upcoming EP was released on October 25, she captures a dreamy sound that has you drifting away into a state of tranquility.

Obsidian opens with a serene harmonizing synth progression that disarms your emotions. It taps into the suppressed fears and anxiety tucked away in your subconscious, it pulls them into the forefront as the songs build up the tension.

Silvair sings with a mystical tone that soothes the ears as she guides us through this emotional journey.

"I sent myself to oblivion

She said honey you've been warned

But I let the wisdom wither away and I crawled back to your bed

I can't help but listen lying awake when the voices in my head

Are always calling for you

Are you the curse or are you the cure."

Silvair dives into the unknown headfirst. Not letting her intuition dictate her decisions as she lets her temptations and emotions guide her through the oblivion. The voice inside of her head warns her that this may be a bad idea. Yet she chooses not to fight her allurements and wants to find out if her desires for spiritual freedom will be her curse or her cure.

The lyrics perfectly match the mysterious contrast of dark spacy synth tones with upbeat guitar riffs. She focused on the theme of the lack of assurance within oneself, that it can be terrifying but also an adrenaline rush. Silvair brilliantly creates this effect with her sound and mirrors it

with her lyrics. The tension is then released as the composition opens up into the chorus. She is saying that whatever path you take it doesn't matter, as long as you're free emotionally and not bound by your fears. She draws her inspiration for this track from tarot cards specifically the moon card and is the artwork on the cover of the single. The moon card in a tarot deck when faced upright represents illusion, fear, anxiety, subconscious, intuition and when reversed means release of fear, repressed emotion and inner confusion. She manages to encapsulate the essence of this card into a beautifully composed four-minute track. The track has '70s pop and psychedelic influences with its otherworldly vibe.

Overall, the tracks introspective lyrics and sound is a breath of fresh air. The track is a strong introduction to a new artist with an interesting and unique style.

Pros:

Cover Art: Creative and original Silvair ties the themes from the moon card in elegant interpretation that shows off her personality and style.

Composition: Silvair lets the instrumental breath like you're coming down from a high. It isn't something many artists do but it pays off for her and when she slides back in and hits that final chorus it gives you chills. It's not just a song but an experience that feels like it ends prematurely.

Identity: Silvair personality drips off of this track. She gives us a piece of her enough to have us coming back for more.

Cons:

Lack of a 3rd verse: It would have been appreciated if she had added a third verse instead of repeating the chorus. It would have put this track on the next level.

Final Thoughts:

Silvair is talented and has an infectious voice. Though this may be her first-ever track released on streaming platforms, she comes across mature in her writing and seems to have a strong production team to match her passion.



Silvair has a ton of talent.

Earthadelik by Silvermouse: Otherworldly EDM

Silvermouse's New Album Takes You on a Journey Without Words

By Michelle Minero

A person's soul can be seen through their taste in music, with all the genres that exist you get a deeper dive to see what the rhythm is about. Silvermouse presents it very differently in his Earthadelik album through the combination of unlikely sounds to create something new, different and unique.

Silvermouse represents what electronic music is about through his newest album in a form of storytelling. Artists always tend to tell a story through each of their songs. Silvermouse however does it differently, with no type of lyrics included but just beat to listen to carefully. It's not for everyone because of how long each of the songs in the album are. It's also not very relatable, so it's difficult to be able to connect to it. But like any other album the first song usually introduces what to expect and it carries that well all the way to the end.

Electric and alienated are the type of sounds you would hear if you're being brought into an unknown space like environment. There are different beats like clapping, maracas, drums, guitar. For all of it to sound anonymous and even corrupted, adding to the motion of the story its trying to tell, a space abduction perhaps. It's a very trippy feeling. There are also hints of echoes, deep bubbly sounds, it sounds like a sheet of metal is flapping. Every song continues into the next song to where it left off. The noises low-key and

subtly transform into the new beats. It makes you think of an adventure happening in space, where everything is scary in the beginning where it builds up to warmth and action. A deep continuous drop base is in the background to add oomph into the rhythm which makes it consistent.

Cons:

This album is not a go to. Not a song you would go to if you're going outside, trying to get into an upbeat mood or just jam out with your friends in a hangout. Not too diverse. It's hard to connect or relate to which is a lot of what people look for now.

Pros:

Background music. Great for background music if you're working on something, like homework, projects, etc.

Unique. It stands out for how different it is, it's interesting and consistent. The beats make up a story on your head.

Album Cover. The artistry truly connects to the music. All the details in it matter because its earth elements being spread into the space world.

Final Thoughts:

The artist most defiantly reaches its goal to represent a storytelling plot through the rhythm of his beats, it's different and it really makes you want to pay attention to where every song leads, every minute

is a surprise. However, the reach may be difficult because it's not flexible music you would go to if you had the choice to listen on a daily basis. It's more like listen to it once and appreciate its type of reach.



Earthadelik's tunes are fresh ones.

Baldur's Gate: A New Coat of Paint on a Classic

A New Home for a Classic RPG, and Enhancements to Go With It

By Andrew Nicoletti

Baldur's Gate is a game made for true fans of Beamdog's original work. The game originated in 1998 where it lacked many features such as state-of-the-art graphics and updates, which is why 20 years later Beamdog has decided to enhance the game and develop everything to an updated 2019 version of the classic beloved game.

The 2019 version of Baldur's Gate is more colorful and detailed compared to the 1998 version. The characters and places are brought to life more in this version. Placed before you is a world full of fantasy for you to explore. When you first start the story mode on the game, you are brought to choose from many different vibrant characters that will define who you are in the game. Also, besides the race, you have to choose a class. After those are chosen you land in a world that is small and easy to navigate around. Eventually, the land grows as a mysterious killing has you investigate the iron shortage that everyone in the land is questioning.

As the story goes on, you either fight people on the land or try to figure out where and how to fix the iron shortage. The cool thing about this game is you don't have to follow orders. As your quests add up in your journal you can go wherever you want in the land and do it in whatever order you please. It makes you feel like you are the character you chose because you lead his path through this fantasy world.

As you go along through the game you meet allies who come with you and you also encounter enemies who pose threats to you and your allies. There is indeed a narrator in the game who helps keep you up to date on where you are and what to expect for example in a battle.

The thing that makes Baldur's Gate special is that there are so many things for the player to do in one world.

While playing this game you don't feel as if you are being restricted as to what you can do. You can choose your own path for your character and take a different journey than a different player would. No one's Baldur's Gate experience is the same as another person's. Whether you are fighting the battle of immediate conflict or going on a long journey to discover the secrets behind dark magic. The world of Baldur's Gate is yours to venture.

Baldur's Gate plays smooth, but with how it is set up it is a little difficult to maneuver because it was originally a PC game. All they did was just buff some things and enhance the graphics. The good thing that the enhanced version of Baldur's Gate does is it didn't take away from what the game originally was.

Players who have been fans since 1998 can play this and still feel that nostalgia. It's amazing how 20 years later a game could be enhanced from an original version and have

this much hype around it. Old players and new players will both enjoy this game for what it is and what it once was.

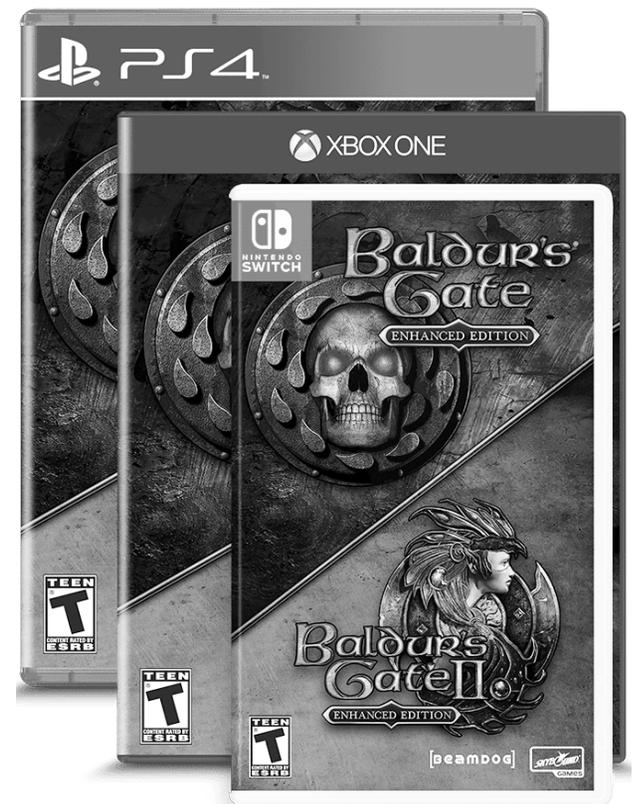


Photo by Beamdog

The world of Baldur's Gate is yours to venture.

Skulldigger: Fans Love a Good Anti-Hero

This Dark and Brooding Comic Published by Dark Horse is Confusing but Gorgeous to Read

By Michelle Minero

A comic that immediately catches your attention with the art style and the hook, in the beginning, Skulldigger represents the antagonist "hero" who's also subtly considered the enemy, the start of a boy's life ending in a heart wrenching gruesome loss that possibly leads him to become the sidekick of Skulldigger.

The art style is simple but still eye catching, the color wave chosen is dark but yet colorful at the same time and fits into the theme of the story. While the background color palette can be dull at times, it makes up for the pop of neon that shows and gives it a mysterious vibe. It also connects to the emotions of the characters.

The dialogue can get confusing towards the middle, losing you on the type of story it's trying to convey, or what's happening in general. The information given can be easily misunderstood and that could be problematic if one is trying to make a reader stay for the rest. However, the repetition that happens towards the very end of the comic, is a callback to the first dialogue presented. "And then I wasn't alone anymore." It's a nice touch and gives you a sense of connection, which brings more curiosity on how skulldigger has anything to do with the other characters presented throughout as well.

It has a whole mysterious energy going, especially towards the end where the traumatized boy gets taken under the wings of Skulldigger,

suggesting that skulldigger may have possibly created something worse than himself. Skulldigger has begun the first step of bringing his death upon him as understood from the last line in the comic.

Cons:

Confusing Dialogue

Towards the middle, you are given information about an enemy or situation but it's a bit confusing when one doesn't know what they're talking about and it's just thrown at you with no context.

Pros:

Artstyle

The color palette is beautifully presented, the dark black dull contrasts, the pop of neon and colorful colors between the characters and backgrounds. It catches the attention of the mix.

Anti Hero:

The character Skulldigger is an interesting twist, someone who punishes those who commit crime through an inhumane way of suffering by bashing their heads in till death. Actions of a villain, but the heart of a hero.

Final Thoughts:

It makes you want to continue, to read more, and see where the rest of the story continues, what will happen, who will die, are the background characters going to come into play. It captures the essence of a classic anti-hero story, you could truly feel that the worst hasn't happened, it has only begun.

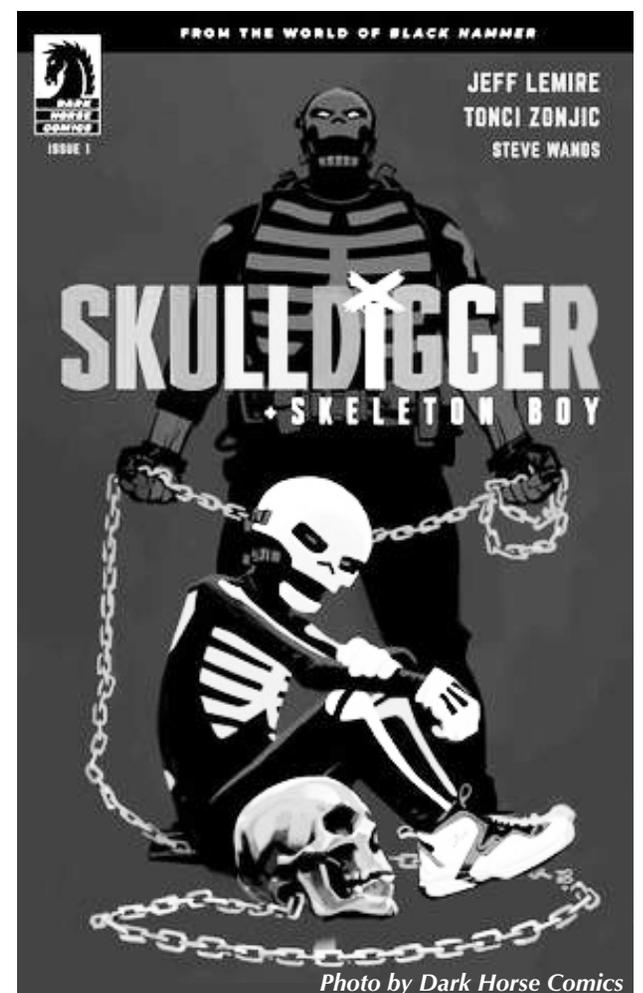


Photo by Dark Horse Comics

Skulldigger has the heart of a hero.

Pokemon Sword Review: Trubbish No More

Gamefreak's Newest Entry Brings Soul Back to Pocket Monsters

By Matt Hirsch

When Nintendo announced the Switch, most die-hard fans of the company's first question was, "so when do we get Pokemon?" A staple franchise of Nintendo handheld consoles since Yellow, Blue and Red released on the original Gameboy in 1996. Long time fans of the series were ecstatic to finally be able to play a main series Pokemon game on our televisions, (not counting the Gamecube's Game Boy Player.) And much to the confusion of fans everywhere- the world got Let's Go! Pikachu and Eevee. While they weren't awful, the replacement of wild Pokemon battles with a Pokemon Go style wild encounter system wasn't what the fans were hoping for, for the next generation. It felt like Nintendo was alienating the core Pokemon fanbase in favor of a younger, more casual one. Finally though, on November 15th, 2019, we got Sword and Shield, a true main series entry in this beloved franchise.

When it was originally announced, Sword and Shield was polarizing to say the least. The lack of a National Dex and the removal of the Mega Evolutions that were introduced in generation six with X and Y rubbed a lot of fans the wrong way. They felt like Nintendo was being lazy and were taking the easy way out. Instead of Mega Evolutions there would be a new form for Pokemon called Dynamax which would make your beloved pocket monsters grow to gargantuan sizes and deal massive damage. Instead of changing into an awesome new evolution they would just...get bigger. And to be fair, these are all valid complaints. These are features that came to be staples of the franchise and were just suddenly removed. However, the game should be judged for what it is and not what it isn't. And what it is, is

a return to form after Sun and Moon completely changed the structure of a Pokemon game, albeit with a few new twists.

In the new Galar region, (modeled after the United Kingdom,) Pokemon Battles are a super popular spectator sport and the gyms are stadiums with thousands of fans in the stands. When you challenge a gym leader, you will do so in front of roaring crowds. It adds a sense of grandeur to these battles that the series has never seen before and it's a nice touch. Though, the biggest change to the gyms doesn't come when you challenge the leader. Every gym now has a puzzle that you have to solve in order to progress through it. And while they could have been nice brain teasers to break up the trainer battles, most of the time they fall flat. They feel like padding for time and more often than not are laughably easy. The rock-type gym's puzzle was particularly aggravating. While they don't ruin the experience of challenging gyms, if Gamefreak chooses to implement the puzzles in future titles, they should definitely put more TLC into them.

Sword's biggest strength comes from the art design. After some massive missteps in recent years, the new Pokemon are awesome. Corviknight, Boltund and Grapploct to name a few, are especially cool. In general, the game is gorgeous. The extra memory that was freed up when they nixed the National Dex and Mega Evolutions was most definitely put to good use. Dynamic lighting has been improved and textures are sharp. Clouds roll by that cast shadows over the landscape and from the beginning of the game, you're shown beautiful vistas that make the Galar region feel epic. You can tell that Gamefreak

put extra love into making this the prettiest game in the series. And of course, the music is top notch as well. One nice touch that was included in Sword that can't go unmentioned, is the elimination of the EXP share. Now from the very beginning of the game, Pokemon in your party will all receive XP from battles, even when they didn't participate at all. It reduces the amount of grinding you'll have to do to keep your party evenly leveled. It's little things like this that make an already fun game just that much better.

Though many people will hate on Sword because they can't look past the fact that there's no National Dex and no Mega Evolutions, they're missing out on a great entry in the Pokemon franchise. No series will make you feel like you did when you were a kid like this one and Sword captures that magic perfectly. It rectifies the missteps that were taken with Let's Go! Pikachu and Eevee. Sword offers plenty of content to keep you satisfied and tons of cool and interesting new Pokemon to catch. Pokemon die-hards should rest easy and enjoy this excellent new entry in the series.

The Good:

Awesome new Pokemon: The eighth generation of Pokemon are interesting and capture the magic that was lost in recent years.

The Bad:

No National Dex or Mega Evolutions: While it doesn't ruin the game like some fans make it seem, Mega Evolutions were an extra layer of fun and hopefully they come back.

Final Thoughts: Give Sword and Shield a chance. Nothing makes you feel like a kid like Pokemon does and the new games don't disappoint.



Photo by Nintendo

Pokemon Sword and Shield are gorgeous new entries into the main Pokemon franchise.

You & Me, That's Enough: Music to Bring People Together

Devin Kennedy Talks About his New EP, and the Role Music Plays in His Life

By Bielka Aime



Photo provided by Devin Kennedy

Kennedy has a soulful, swoony voice, laden with potential.

Rising, singer-songwriter Devin Kennedy is making his dreams a reality with his first EP, “You & Me, That’s Enough.” His laid-back sound and heartfelt approach to writing and performing have captured many hearts far and wide. He has a soulful, swoony voice and a charismatic way of speaking. Aside from that, his songs are full of meaning with a widely universal appeal. Each song he produces is calming, blissful and soothing to the ears.

Most of the love for music came from his family and the way they’ve brought him up. They shaped his character and had a huge role in him creating his first ever EP. “I grew up with it [music] around my house, musical family, my grandpa was a pianist, my dad did film and TV music a lot growing up. So, I was in and out in a lot of studios, met a lot of producers and writers at a young age. I guess I was just always around it,” says Kennedy. “Music truly is a part of my life, I think it inspired me so much at a young age and it was what shaped the fabric of who I was when I was young so, it was really like the only option for me.” Growing up, Kennedy was heavily influenced by his father. From seeing his father running a brand design company, he used to create logos and websites until he noticed that other people were making music for infomercials and were making more money

than him. That’s when he decided to redirect his business to also create music for infomercials using his guitar. His father also formed a band at 25-years-old and although they never released any albums Kennedy was overall exposed to music throughout his childhood.

“I grew up with a lot of classic rock, Kansas, like Clapton. The first concert was Paul McCartney, I got introduced at a really young age to amazing music. John Mayer is my favorite artist of all time, that was my third concert. I fell in love with like, true musicians, from a young age,” said Kennedy. “As I grew up, I started to get more into pop, producing and all that good stuff. Through like middle school and High School I started getting into bands like Fall Out Boy and All Time Low and the world tour scene. I thought I was going on a world tour one day, that was my dream. I fell in love with the kind of stuff I started doing and that was the first lane I found and it made me think, ‘I really want be in a pop punk band.’” It took some time for Kennedy to find his own lane of music. At first, he went into the pop genre but realized pretty quickly that it wasn’t the space for him. It took him a year and a half to find the lane that he is currently in right now. For him, it’s having some form of organic

musicality to what he’s doing, even if it leans towards pop a lot. One thing for sure is that he prefers to have a guitar, piano or some type of instrument that he can play on stage and that’s more interesting to him than just pressing play on a track during a live show. For his first EP, “You & Me, That’s Enough,” he dedicated it to his friends and family. From creating this EP, he learned to have a common thread between each song and he realized the impact his friends and family had on his musical talents.

“This was the first EP that I put out as a solo artist and it was interesting to see that many songs and look at all of them and say, ‘what’s the common thread?’ What do I want to say? How can I put these together? I can’t just take a song about wanting to spend time with my family and then put a song about how I love spending money at the club,” says Kennedy. “I have to find what the common thread between them is and what I connect to and what I want to say as an artist in 2019.”

The theme of this EP was family and friends, something that is important to him, even though it wasn’t the first thing he set out to do when he began this EP.

“It was something that after looking back on all the songs, one of the ones that I care about were the ones that were really highlighting and reminding me to make time for friends and family,” says Kennedy. “And respect the people that you love and feeling grateful to be in the circle that you’re involved in and know the people you know and just remember to take care of them and take care of yourself and spend time with the people you love.” With this theme, the song that resonated with him the most is ‘No Worries.’ It’s a single that doesn’t necessarily have a specific story behind it but has great descriptive lyrics and relates to his personal experiences.

“I’m kind of highlighting some things, I’m guilty of working too much and writing too much, not sleeping enough, not spending enough time with friends and family and especially earlier this year, I had that impact my personal life,” Kennedy said. “I just wasn’t thinking about that enough and that song came at a time for me where I wasn’t sure what was next for me, sound wise and also conceptually. I didn’t know where I wanted to go this year and when it came along, it just felt like everything clicked, that’s the song, that’s the message. That’s exactly what I needed to be saying right now.”

After releasing “You & Me, That’s Enough,” he now wants to continue touring and finish a lot of writing at the end of this year. As not only a singer but a songwriter, he wrote upwards of 200 songs this year. He spent two to three months just writing for other people and writing for himself. Now that he’s getting bigger, he plans on dropping more music.

“I love music so much. I think it’s the most important art form in my life,” Kennedy said. “But I think without it we’d lack a lot of connection and with it, we have a lot to learn from each other. It can definitely bring us together.”

The Glass Menagerie: A Rollercoaster of Emotions that Goes Perfectly with a Glass of Wine

A New Take on a Classic Captivates the Audience

By Catherine Vladimirov

Austin Pendleton and Peter Bloch's revival of the Tennessee Williams play, "The Glass Menagerie" is exactly what you need to see on a chilly October evening. Staged at The Wild Project, it's a roller coaster of emotions that goes perfectly with a glass of wine in hand.

Matt de Rogatis opens up the production, explaining that memory is "sentimental, not realistic," in a charmingly tired southern accent. As the narrator of the play, de Rogatis makes millisecond eye contact with each viewer, sometimes holding his stare for longer, as he pauses to reflect. Like an uncle you haven't seen for half a decade or a man at the bar who'd been waiting for someone to ask how his day went, you sometimes forget if de Rogatis is playing a role or telling you about his own life. Chuckling from nostalgia and gritting his teeth as he imagines his future unchanging, from walking with a jump in his step to hanging half off the couch in despair, he gives the viewer the emotions we may lack as we go about our daily routines. You find yourself laughing and going crazy with Tom simultaneously.

Directors Austin Pendleton and Peter Bloch did an excellent job of capturing the viewers' focus on the characters in the play. There were no props used besides their clothing, furniture, a candle and of course, the glass menagerie. Each argument over dinner or inhale of an invisible cigarette was accentuated by cringing of eyebrows or the clench of a jaw, rather than chicken

and potatoes or cigarette smoke. Each time de Rogatis, playing Tom Wingfield, would flick his cigarette free of ash, you could see the nervousness and aggravation in his hand, a true portrayal of a man who'd rather be dead than live another day in his current life.

Ginger Grace, starring as Amanda Wingfield, perfectly portrays a nervous mother whose eyes light up only when she tells of her youth. From her pronunciation of "mayonnaise" ('mai-nez'), to the way she clasps both hands around the phone as she plans her daughter's future, reacting to every pause with such expression, that the viewer has no problem filling in the second half of the phone conversation amidst the quiet.

Any child who has ever hidden something from their parents will recognize the fear in Alexandra Rose's eyes, playing Laura Wingfield as her mother discovers that she'd been deceived. Rose came to a wonderful start, as this is her professional theatre debut. Eyes wide open as she stares like a deer in headlights at Jim through candlelight, or toes crinkled as she walks barefoot, pleading with Tom, Rose came off gentle and genuine, perfect for her child-like role of Laura. Each of us can recognize a Jim O'Connor, played by Spencer Scott, at our workplace. Properly composed with his shirt neatly tucked in, perfectly mannered and smiling, Jim O'Connor calmly goes about his life, making an appearance in the play as the catalyst for change and disappointment for the audience.

Thanks to the depth of these four characters, all played with such power and peculiarity, the theatre is filled with thought-provoking emotions and conversation starters for after the show. Make no mistake, The Glass Menagerie is worth getting lost in.



Photo by Chris Loupos

The Glass Menagerie goes perfectly with a glass of wine.

The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide: Leveling Up Your Intelligence

The Guide Perfect for Boosting your Gaming Skills

By Odaine White

We all have our roles to play; but are we playing them correctly? Have you balanced your stats, repaired your armor, counted your gold? If you haven't, The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide by James D'Amato, will help you get your inventory in check. This guide takes you down a bright path to victory using interactive writing and well-educated role-playing language that keeps the reader making those dexterity saves.

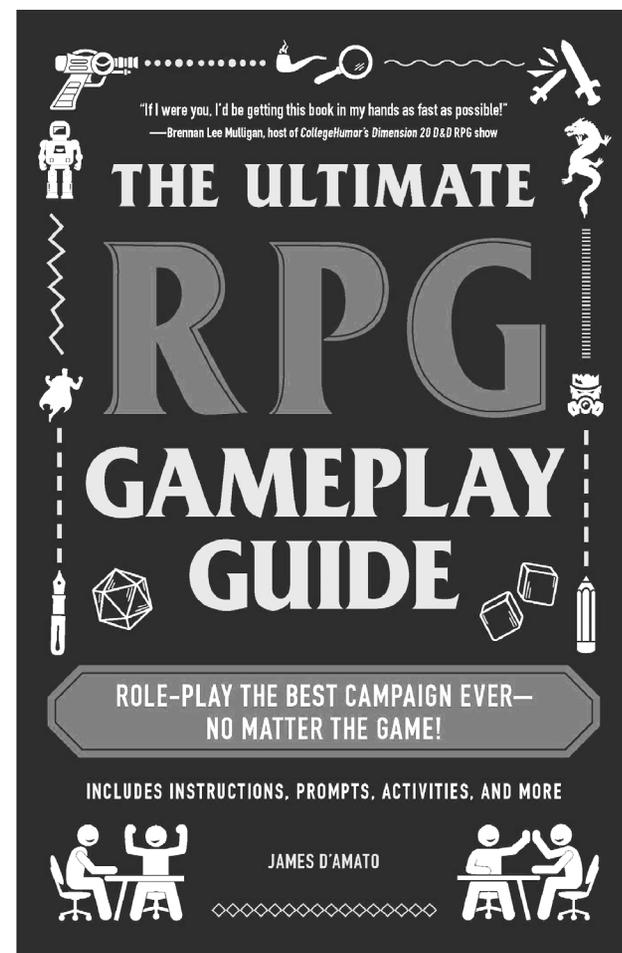
To properly understand and break down the levels of this book's intricacies, we must start at the book's very structures. The guide is broken up into three parts-save the introduction and reader insert sections- each with the respective labels, Basic Storytelling, Advanced Player Techniques, and Playing from Experience. Each section gives an in-depth look at some otherwise basic concepts, showing that the game doesn't just stop at your stats or character sheet. What you thought was basic has much more layers than most could imagine.

The guide touches on what every RPG player has heard once in their gaming career. What sets this guide apart from the tutorial is how properly interactive the guide is by engaging the reader and asking them what they want from their games, what do they want from their plays and how can they reflect on what they have done or will do and how to bring it to the Experience Cap. The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide uses terms that at times can catch some of the most seasoned

RPG veterans off guard such as "Schrödinger's Goblin" yet still goes over classics that are necessary for a player's proper understanding of world-building and storytelling such as The Lord of The Rings and Hamlet. James D'Amato exhibits not only his extensive knowledge of RPGs but also his knowledge of the culture surrounding the communities of RPGs and how games once seen as abasement activity have now made their way into mainstream media and only continue to grow.

The guide puts much emphasis on the importance of taking anything you write seriously, but taking a world you create much more seriously. Creating non-playable characters (NPCs) that are not direct members of the party but still have an important overall impact on the story you have written creates lives for these characters, which lets the players know an NPC is much more than a faceless drone who has a set amount of information to vomit at them before disappearing into an alleyway. The guide brings the importance of creating a world that feels lived in to the front view of the reader. Shops that felt shopped in, homes that feel lived in, Lands and worlds that feel as if there is history in the ground that your players stand on.

After getting to the end of this guide it's easy to say I can add a +2 to my intelligence score, The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide is a love letter to the fans of all RPG from Dungeons and Dragons to Final Fantasy.



RPG Gameplay Guide is a fun one for fans of the genre.



SPORTS

The hypocrisy of NBA's China Controversy

The NBA's Support for Hong Kong is All Talk

By Ellis Santoro

The hypocrisy of the NBA's China Controversy When politics are meshed with sports, arguing always ensues. In one October, 2019 case, the results were more than just an argument—an NBA team ended up getting blackballed by an entire country.

Since March, 2019, Hong Kong has been engaged in peaceful-turned-violent protests, fighting against mainland China for their right to independence. Daryl Morey, general manager of the NBA's Houston Rockets, tweeted out a picture on October 4th that read, "Fight For Freedom, Stand With Hong Kong." It seems like a good cause to most of us in America. However, the message of the photo directly goes against China's politics. China is a massive market for the NBA, so angering the country isn't something that is ideal from a business standpoint. In the eyes of the Chinese government, Morey encouraged anti-China protests. In the eyes of the Chinese fans though, there are mixed feelings.

One Chinese perspective expressed resentment towards Morey. "The Rockets used to have lots of fans in China," said Xuewei Li, of Beijing. "Hong Kong is definitely part of China. I never liked Rockets and I never ever will. Rockets general manager is so LOW." A different perspective came from Chinese NBA fan, Ruilin Liu, also from Beijing. When asked if the comments from Morey changed his perspective on the NBA, Liu simply responded: "Nope, game is game." Morey's comment angered China enough though and in response, many sponsors and investors in China cut ties with the team. The Chinese Basketball Association ceased all cooperation with the Rockets. All Rockets games were blacked out from television in China. China threatened further action as well, such as blacking out all NBA games entirely and stopping all sales of NBA merchandise. According to an article on USA Today.com by Jeff Zillgitt and Mark Medina, the NBA earns about \$500 million annually from TV deals and merchandise sales from the Chinese market. That's only the company itself, that number doesn't include individual player's profits.

LeBron James, the biggest name in the NBA, saw his profits at risk. He decided to step in by making comments during an interview, disavowing Morey and his original tweet. Fans didn't respond well. James then decided to clarify himself on twitter, but only angered fans more. The two tweets by James were as follows: "Let me clear up the confusion. I do not believe there was any consideration for the consequences and ramifications of the tweet. I'm not discussing the substance. Others can talk about that" (@KingJames) "My team and this league just went through a difficult week. I think people need to understand what a tweet or statement can do to others. And I believe nobody stopped and considered what would happen. Could have waited a week to send it." (@KingJames) These two tweets sent social media into a complete firestorm. Almost

every single one of the 76,000 and counting combined replies were bashing James for his disregard of the original message from Morey and instead only caring about his profits.

The problem with James' tweets however go beyond his stance on the protests. James chose to attack Morey for his comments. He didn't just denounce the comments, he chose to criticize Morey. Had James just given his opinion on the China protests or said that he disagrees with Morey's comments, people would still be mad, but there really wouldn't be a problem with it. Instead James made it about himself. Who in their right mind would sit back and let hundreds of millions of dollars evaporate though? James is aware of his value to the global market. Matt Steinmetz, accomplished journalist and sportscaster for the Golden State Warriors of the NBA, shared his opinions on the situation. "There are players in the league who are so vital to it that they have far more leeway to express their opinions than, say, the 12th man on a team," said Steinmetz. "LeBron James and James Harden are two of the biggest stars and highest-paid players in the league. Those two, for example, aren't really bound by the same rules as 'normal players.' What would be most interesting to see is if an 'OK' player expressed strong views."

Steinmetz begs the question: what would a player who has nothing to do with the situation say? If a player of the caliber of someone such as journeyman Knicks player, Wayne Ellington, spoke out against or for China, would there be the same reaction? That player would have nothing to lose (in terms of endorsement value) by disagreeing with China and nothing to gain by bowing to China. However there are risks outside of political backlash. The player might run the risk of angering someone with a big market such as James or Harden and might undermine a possible future playing alongside one of them. Maybe the owner of their team wouldn't appreciate them talking politics and would terminate their contract as a result.

Daryl Morey is acknowledged as one of the smartest and best general managers in the league. LeBron James and James Harden are recognized as two of the best players in the league. There was backlash, but there was never a doubt that any of them would lose their jobs. Their value to their team is too high to just get rid of. For some players though, their value to their team might not outway the criticism that they might bring. If a player who is barely contributing upset a group of people and brought drama to the organization, there is little doubt that they would be released from the team. This was proven in the National Football League in 2019. Jermaine Whitehead lost his NFL job because he threatened to assault a reporter for criticizing him. Whitehead was a relatively unknown defensive player for the Cleveland Browns of the NFL and a

social media meltdown was enough to outway his skills for the team. He was released from the team the next day. Meanwhile, wide receiver Antonio Brown, who had so many different pieces of drama that it's impossible to list them in this article and was an absolute headache for every team he played for, got a third chance after causing so many problems for his previous team that he was released before the season even began. It was until he got accused of rape by multiple women with viable proof that he was finally let go by his third team and hasn't played since. The elephant in the room is the Colin Kaepernick saga. Despite his past success as an NFL quarterback, the powers that be decided that bringing his talent to the team along with his knee-taking protest of racial inequity wasn't worth losing a significant number of fans who oppose his protest.

The NFL doesn't run the same way as the NBA, but you have to imagine that if any below-average basketball player who did what Whitehead did, he would be let go by the team and would struggle to find a second chance in the league. Any elite player who did what Brown did (minus the rape) would be given additional chances. Good players can do whatever they want, bad players lose their jobs for the same infraction. The hypocrisy boils down to dollars and cents. Fans aren't buying Jermaine Whitehead jerseys, they're buying Antonio Brown jerseys. The priorities of sports team owners are guided by economics. The fans from whom they get their money prioritize their passion for the sport. Is either built to last?

"My friend Mr. Han plays basketball, but he doesn't watch NBA anymore; he used to like it," said Shane Wang, a Chinese translator who resides in Beijing. "It wasn't because of the tweet, Chinese NBA fans were angry, but still watch the games. I feel like he just lost passion of watching the games."



Photo by NBA

The drama is all about dollars and cents.

Paul Watson: Winning Isn't Everything

Kingsborough Alumni and Coach Talks About What it Takes to be a Student Athlete

By Ellis Santoro

There is more to sports than winning and losing. Although many people take it as though wins and losses are the only things that matter, there are hidden attributes in competition. Paul Watson, part-time physical education and health professor at Kingsborough Community College, as well as accomplished coach of the Kingsborough Wave women's volleyball team, explains the hidden attributes of playing on a team.

"Number one as an athlete, you can't hide yourself. Your emotions, your physicality, it involves a lot of things. I try to make my team like a family. There's socialization, there's getting along with people, it really is a microcosm of what life is all about," said Watson. "It's not always about the wins and the losses, it's just about improving and inventing yourself as a person."

Winning is obviously the goal in sports, but Watson views his team as just another component of an education. The student athletes on his team build strengths such as communication and a mix of competitiveness with sportsmanship. The athletes on the team are students just as much as they are competitors. Big name Division-I schools give out scholarships for student athletes to play their respective sport and typically are expected to do only the minimum of classwork. The goal of most big name sports schools is to use the students to win games and gain publicity, while also trying to develop the players to the point where they can play at the next level professionally. Community college isn't like that. Watson realizes, as much as he values winning, it isn't as important as his students' education and livelihoods.

"You have to understand that the young ladies also have classes and some work, some have families. It's a juggling act all the way around, trying to get them all in

to practice at the same time, which during the season you know happens all the time. It's hard to work things out at times," said Watson. "For us to be successful though and for me to make the girls competitive, we have to work out as much as we possibly can." Watson realizes that sports are not the only thing that matters in his players' lives. However, playing up to his standards requires tons of practice and preparation. During the short 6 week season, volleyball is an everyday thing for the team. Games are Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On days where they aren't playing, they're usually practicing. For this coming season, practices resume during finals week of December and go into the Winter module. Coach Watson has big goals for his team every year.

"My expectations are always to be in the CUNY championship," he says. He has coached Kingsborough to four CUNY Championship game appearances and has won two of them, the last being in the 2012-2013 season. Getting back to that championship level is a challenging task however. "What's difficult about community college is the turnover rate, which is just two years. Last year I only had one returning starter from the previous year and only three returning players all together," said Watson. He offered optimism about this coming year though: "Coming up for next season, I have three girls that I recruited out of highschool, two walk ons and we're gonna have five coming back, so it gives us a good base to work around." The team could be heading back to the top this season. Not winning a championship since 2013 doesn't define them as an underperforming team though, in fact they outperformed expectations in the 2019 season by finishing 3rd, one spot higher than they were projected. Watson is optimistic about this coming season, but winning isn't

what fulfills him as a coach. "To see the girls progress through the season, that's what fulfills it for me and makes me happy." Watson's roots are at Kingsborough. He was a student there from 1985-1987 and has been coaching women's volleyball there since the early 2000's. He has accomplished everything he wants to accomplish. "My goals are just for the girls to improve year by year. We're very competitive, we've always been one of the better teams in the city. As far as coaching-wise, I don't have any other goals, you know to move up in the world or anything of the nature," Watson spoke of his future.

"I enjoy Kingsborough, I'm here as an alumni. I'm here 16 years now. This is like my home."



Photo by Ellis Santoro

According to Watson, sports is more than winning and losing.

Pitchers Pop Off, Batters Get Plunked

The Double Standard of Celebration in the MLB

By Ellis Santoro

Imagine if you accomplished something that you were proud of and got excited about, only to be punched in the face by some nearby person. That's essentially what happened when Rowned Odor turned Jose Bautista into a meme on May 15, 2016. Jose Bautista hit a tie breaking home run in the 2015 playoffs which ended up advancing his Toronto Blue Jays past the Texas Rangers. In doing so, he emphatically threw his bat over his shoulder. May 15th, the next time the two teams played against each other, Bautista was intentionally hit by a 98 MPH fastball and then was punched in the face by Odor after sliding into second base. The punch gained tons of media attention due to the build up to the game. Everyone knew that a fight was coming due to the Rangers making clear how disrespected they felt by Bautista's bat flip. There is a big question that comes out of all that: Why were the Rangers so upset at Bautista?

Excitement has become a dangerous emotion in baseball. Whenever a batter hits a homerun and then shows the slightest bit of enthusiasm, they have to worry about hurting the pitcher's feelings and then getting intentionally plunked by a pitcher's fastball in their next at bat. It has become somewhat of a tradition for a pitcher to retaliate against any form of celebration. Bautista's bat flip was driven by emotion. Whether it was disrespectful or not, the bat flip was his celebration at the fact that he just gave his team the lead in a win-or-go-home playoff game. In football, the celebration after a touchdown is natural. In basketball, when a player hits a three-pointer or

dunks and runs down to the other end of the court while doing a celebratory gesture, it is thought of as normal. In hockey and soccer, when a player scores a goal, they go crazy in celebration and nobody bats an eye. So why is celebration in baseball not allowed? Celebration in baseball actually is allowed. Only for the pitcher. When a pitcher strikes out a batter in a crucial situation, there is a customary fist pump off the mound. When a batter celebrates hitting a crucial home run and then flips the bat, there is a customary plunking. So why is this double standard a thing? The reason is that pitchers usually don't get as severe punishments for their roles in fights as they deserve. After the Blue Jays vs Rangers fight, Bautista was suspended one game and Odor was suspended eight. One notable player wasn't suspended though - Matt Bush, the pitcher who tried to first hurt Bautista y throwing 98 MPH to his ribs. The MLB concluded Bush had intentionally hit Bautista, yet he wasn't suspended. According to an article by Tim Kurkjian of ESPN, "Said Orioles third baseman Mark Reynolds: 'The ribs are the worst. It's like getting hit with an uppercut but without boxing gloves on. It knocks the wind out of you.' Bush basically uppercutted Bautista before Odor cross punched him, yet Bush got off with just a fine. Pitchers don't get punished as severely as they should for intentionally throwing at someone. That suggests that the reason they continue to intentionally hit batters is because they feel like they can get away with it. A typical suspension for a pitcher in a fight is around four games. That means nothing to a starting pitcher who pitches every five games.

Getting rid of intentional hit by pitches isn't possible. Upping the amount of time a pitcher is suspended for an intentional hit by pitch is the most logical and beneficial solution to this problem. It would discourage pitchers from intentionally hitting a batter. There would be problems such as pitchers feeling like they can't pitch inside to avoid being accused of intentionally hitting someone, but that doesn't outweigh the good it would do. Celebrations would become a part of baseball since they don't have to worry about being plunked in their next at bat. Fun and excitement is better than boring dullness.

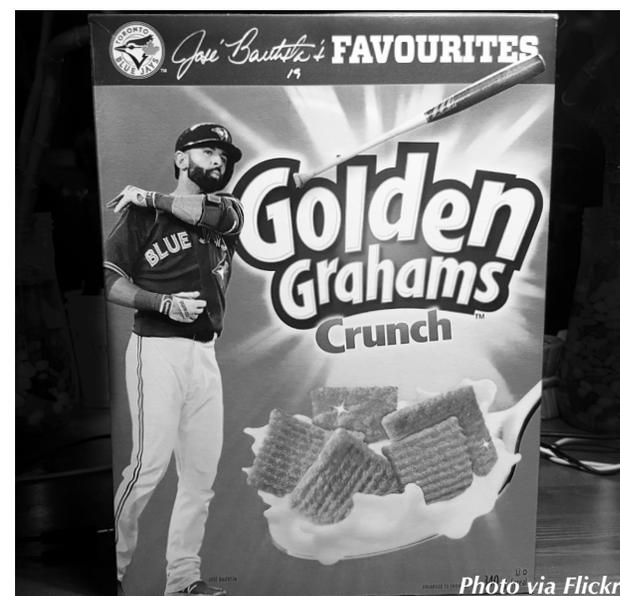


Photo via Flickr

How do you feel about Bat Flips?

Indie Wrestling: The Mom and Pops of the Business

Local Professional Wrestlers Talk About Why the Independents are Important

By Matt Hirsch

When you think of Professional Wrestling, chances are, one of the first names that comes to mind is Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. And for good reason. He’s become a Hollywood megastar and was the highest paid actor in 2019. Or possibly names like John Cena, “Stone Cold” Steve Austin and Hulk Hogan. These entertainers who have transcended the squared circle to become pop culture icons all have their legacies tied to the titan of the Professional Wrestling industry, World Wrestling Entertainment. WWE is Pro Wrestling, you can’t have one without the other. At least, that’s what CEO and owner Vince McMahon would probably tell you. However, there is a whole world outside of the Connecticut based company where Pro Wrestling exists in its most uninhibited form, known simply as the Independents.

The Independents, also known as the Indies, is a network of smaller Wrestling promotions that spans the entire globe. These companies rent out places like church auditoriums, school gymnasiums and bingo halls to put on shows for a couple hundred dedicated fans. In fact, the story of performing in these venues to eventually go on and make it to WWE has become a cliché in the business. The dedicated people who literally offer their blood, sweat and tears to the Indies often wear their scars like a badge of honor to show that they paid their dues. People like Dave McCall and Nate Carter, a tag-team from West Philadelphia, are known simply as The Rep. They’re the current Capitol Wrestling

Tag Team Champions and have nearly twenty years of experience between the two of them. They’ve spent their entire careers in the Independents.

“It’s opportunity. Everybody wants to go to WWE because for the longest it was the only place to make a living doing this,” said Carter. “Everybody got in the business to make a living. But if you’re out here grinding like you’re supposed to be, it’s hard work, but you can get it.” McCall said, “It’s the perfect place to get started on your career. Instead of being under a system the entire time, learn how to talk to people. You’ll run into some bulls**t situations, but it tests your grit. It lets you know where you stand and how to handle yourself. And I love it for that reason.” These performers are road warriors. They drive hundreds of miles from show to show, often in the span of one night. They usually don’t make great money, have no insurance and barely get to spend time at home. To be a wrestler in the Indies means dedicating your entire life to the business. It’s a labor of love like no other.

Not every performer in the business takes the role of wrestler though. There are so many vital positions in the industry and they all have their unique rolls to fill. One such performer goes by the moniker of Coach Mikey. Mikey is the lovable “coach” of Rob Killjoy and Lance Lude, and together they’re known as the Ugly Ducklings. This rag-tag team and their bird-based gimmick is beloved by the fans that know them. And though they’re as goofy and light-hearted as you’d think, the trio are all incredibly talented.

“Independent Wrestling means exactly what the word is, it’s wrestling that we’re doing independently with no backing and no driving force,” said Mikey. “It’s just people helping other people to make wrestling a better place.”

In WWE, chances are that the wrestlers you see in the main event are six-plus-foot tall behemoths that stand head and shoulders above everyone around them. They’re larger than life in every facet of the phrase and command an audience on charisma alone. Though, an emphasis is usually placed on the physical size of these performers. It’s rare that someone under six feet tall will make it to the main event. There are exceptions to the rule, like Rey Mysterio, but it’s exceedingly uncommon. However, there’s no such limitation placed on wrestlers in the Independents. It’s all about how well they can connect with the crowd. And one performer who personifies that notion is “Colossal” Mike Law. Law stands around five foot seven in reality, but has the presence of a giant. His heart in the ring and somewhat self-deprecating sense of humor has endeared him to the fans that have seen him perform.

“Independent Wrestling is really the grassroots of Professional Wrestling. I know it’s so commonly said, but it really is where you’re going to see some of the stars that you get the chance to see on TV, but you get to see them before they get there,” said Law. “I tell people, if you support the independents, it’s so powerful because this is like the mom and pops instead of the Walmarts.”



Photo by Matt Hirsch

Indie wrestling blood, sweat and tears are worn as a badge of honor.