

DEADLY ROUTE
RACING TO FLEE
CALIFORNIA FIRES

PAGE 7 | WORLD



VIENNA MOOD
WES ANDERSON
PUTS ON A SHOW

PAGE 14 | CULTURE



YELLOW AND GREEN
ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUSES
CLEANER BUT COSTLY

PAGE 9 | BUSINESS

The New York Times

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Memories of a war that wasn't a war

Hampton Sides

OPINION

SANTA FE, N.M. Although more than 320,000 Americans served in the Korean War — and more than 33,000 were killed in action — it is still our Forgotten War, a kind of also-ran in our historical consciousness.

Perhaps it's because the war ended in stalemate. The closing battle lines were more or less where they started, along the 38th Parallel. "We died for a tie," Korean War vets sometimes say, and there's something deeply unsatisfying about that narrative. We Americans understand military victory, and we've come to understand loss, but we can't quite get our heads around a draw.

The men who bled and died in Korea are now taking their bows. They have certainly not forgotten Korea, and they

The Korean War was not "officially" a war. But its veterans should not be ignored.

are rightly proud of their accomplishments there. They stopped a naked act of Communist aggression and opposed three malevolent dictators — Stalin, Mao and Kim — while helping South Korea take wing as a democracy.

Many Korean War veterans seem mystified that aside from endless reruns of "MASH," their deeds have been given such short shrift in our national culture.

A few months ago, I had the good fortune to visit South Korea with a large group of American veterans. The trip was part of a generous program, led by the South Korean government, to formally thank these now old men who helped save this tiny country from destruction and set it on the road to what it is now — a modern, technologically advanced society and a staunch American ally, with the world's 11th-largest economy.

The South Koreans lavished them with free flights, five-star hotels, air-conditioned coaches, bullet train excursions. At the DMZ, across snarls of concertina wire, we gazed upon the police state that South Korea might have become. We were dazzled by the coruscating metropolis of Seoul, which, the last time these men saw it, lay smoldering in ruins. The veterans seemed tremendously moved to learn firsthand: They aren't forgotten after all.

By and large, though, these stoic, thick-skinned men have come to accept that their achievements will probably always play second fiddle to those of *SIDES*, PAGE 13

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



SERGEY PONOMAREV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Swallowed by sand A house in the fishing village of Shoyna, Russia, where local residents say more than 20 homes have been completely buried under dunes. Overfishing has depleted stocks in the once-lively fishing port, and the disruption of the area's ecosystem may have brought the sand in. *PAGE 3*

Saudis talked of assassinations

WASHINGTON

Before killing of journalist, officials discussed tactic for use against Iranians

BY MARK MAZZETTI, RONEN BERGMAN AND DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

Top Saudi intelligence officials close to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman asked a small group of businessmen last year about using private companies to assassinate Iranian enemies of the kingdom, according to three people familiar with the discussions.

The Saudis inquired at a time when Prince Mohammed, then the deputy crown prince and defense minister, was consolidating power and directing his advisers to escalate military and intelligence operations outside the kingdom. Their discussions, more than a year before the killing of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, indicate that top Saudi officials have considered assassinations since the beginning of Prince Mohammed's ascent.

Saudi officials have portrayed Mr. Khashoggi's death as a rogue killing or-

dered by an official who has since been fired. But that official, Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Assiri, was present for a meeting in March 2017 in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, where the businessmen pitched a \$2 billion plan to use private intelligence operatives to try to sabotage the Iranian economy.

During the discussion, part of a series of meetings where the men tried to win Saudi funding for their plan, General Assiri's top aides inquired about killing Qasem Suleimani, the leader of the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and a man considered a determined enemy of Saudi Arabia.

The interest in assassinations, covert operations and military campaigns like the war in Yemen — overseen by Prince Mohammed — is a change for the kingdom, which historically has avoided an adventurous foreign policy that could create instability and imperil Saudi Arabia's comfortable position as one of the world's largest oil suppliers.

As for the businessmen, who had intelligence backgrounds, they saw their Iran plan both as a lucrative source of income and as a way to cripple a country that they and the Saudis considered a profound threat. George Nader, a Lebanese-American businessman, arranged the meeting. He had met previously with Prince Mohammed, and had



GIUSEPPE CACACE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was consolidating power at a time when top Saudi officials considered using private companies to assassinate political enemies.

pitched the Iran plan to Trump administration officials.

Another participant in the meetings was Joel Zamel, an Israeli with deep ties to his country's intelligence and security agencies.

Both Mr. Nader and Mr. Zamel are witnesses in the investigation by Robert

S. Mueller III, the special counsel leading the inquiry into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, and prosecutors have asked them about their discussions with American and Saudi officials about the Iran proposal. It is unclear how this line of inquiry fits *SAUDIS*, PAGE 6

Missile sites suggest deceit by North Korea

WASHINGTON

Existence contradicts Trump's assertion that nuclear threat is contained

BY DAVID E. SANGER AND WILLIAM J. BROAD

North Korea is moving ahead with its ballistic missile program at 16 hidden bases that have been identified in new commercial satellite images, a network long known to American intelligence agencies but left undiscussed as President Trump claims to have neutralized the North's nuclear threat.

The satellite images suggest that the North has been engaged in a great deception: It has offered to dismantle a major launching site — a step it began, then halted — while continuing to make improvements at more than a dozen others that would bolster launches of conventional and nuclear warheads.

The existence of the ballistic missile bases, which North Korea has never acknowledged, contradicts Mr. Trump's assertion that his landmark diplomacy is leading to the elimination of a nuclear and missile program that the North had warned could devastate the United States. "We are in no rush," Mr. Trump said of talks with the North at a news conference on Wednesday, after Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives. "The sanctions are on. The missiles have stopped. The rockets have stopped. The hostages are home."

His statement was true in just one sense. Mr. Trump appeared to be referring to the halt of missile flight tests, which have not occurred in nearly a year. But American intelligence officials say that the North's production of nuclear material, of new nuclear weapons and of missiles that can be placed on mobile launchers and hidden in mountains at the secret bases has continued.

And the sanctions are collapsing, in part because North Korea has leveraged its new, softer-sounding relationship with Washington and its stated commitment to eventual denuclearization, to resume trade with Russia and China.

Moreover, an American program to track those mobile missiles with a new generation of small, inexpensive satellites, disclosed by The New York Times more than a year ago, is stalled. The Pentagon once hoped to have the first satellites over North Korea by now, giving it early warning if the mobile missiles were rolled out of mountain tunnels and prepared for launch.

But because of a series of budget and bureaucratic disputes, the early warning system, begun by the Obama administration and handed off to the Trump administration, has yet to go into operation. Current and former officials, who said they could not publicly discuss the program because it is heavily classified, *NORTH KOREA*, PAGE 4

Dating game with billionaires as contestants



TARA WALTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kiran and Jyoti Matharoo in Toronto. They sought social media fame by flaunting gifts received from Nigerian billionaires but found themselves locked up abroad in 2016.

Pursuit of wealthy men leads two sisters to global riches, scandal and arrest

BY DAN LEVIN

After years of romances with a series of fabulously wealthy Nigerian boyfriends, the flamboyant Canadian sisters Jyoti and Kiran Matharoo needed somewhere to store the pricey spoils of their dating careers. So they converted a bedroom in their Toronto home into a large walk-in closet that resembles a luxury boutique.

An entire wall is lined with more than 70 pairs of designer high-heeled shoes. Glass wardrobes display dozens of handbags and purses from brands like Hermès, Celine, Gucci and Saint Laurent. Equally pricey clothing is draped from hangers and fills trunks stacked to the ceiling.

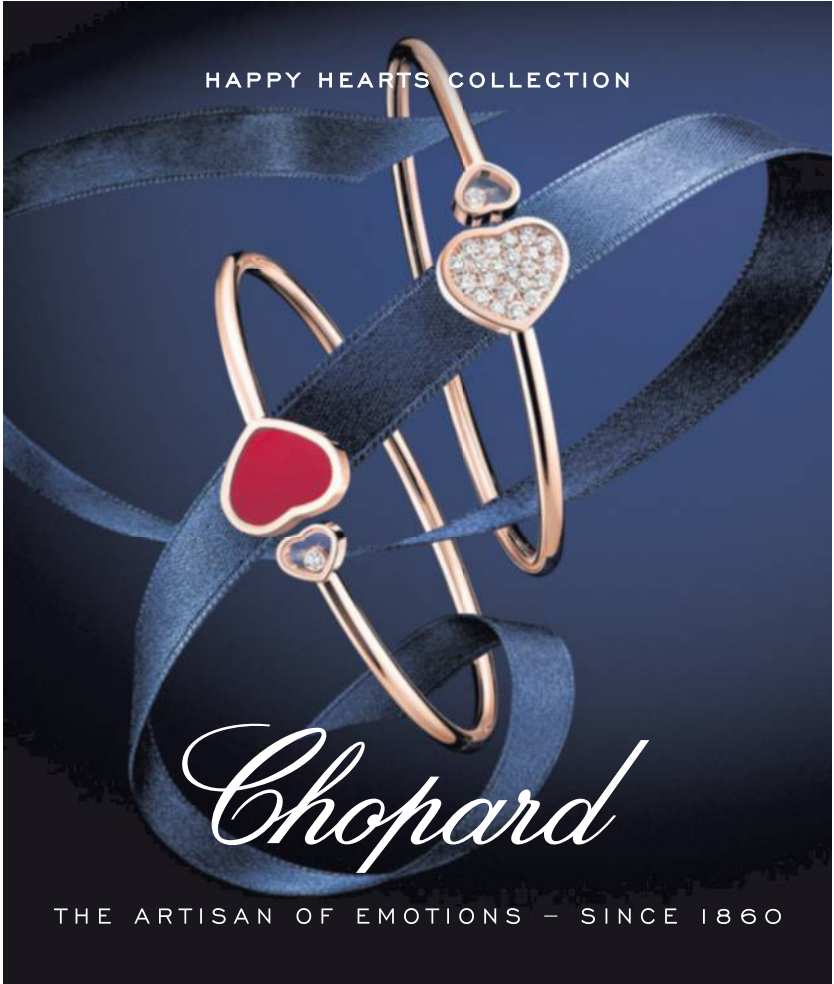
There are separate drawers for belts, rings, earrings, bracelets, silver necklaces and gold ones. They own a col-

lection of rose gold and diamond-encrusted watches easily worth several cars. And the white Mercedes-Benz sedan parked outside? It's their third paid for by a wealthy paramour, they said.

Did they pay for any of this stuff? "Not really, no," said Jyoti, 34. Her sister responded similarly. "The only time I go shopping is when someone gives me their credit card," said Kiran, 32.

Armed with this luxury haul, the Matharoos have tried to copy the modern art of idle glamour pioneered by Paris Hilton and perfected by Kim Kardashian West. They followed the play-book so effectively that they are sometimes called the "Canadian Kardashians" for their devotion to spandex bodysuits, private jet travel, Christian Louboutin and social media.

But if their reality-television muses are famous for being shamelessly rich, the Matharoos became notorious after their unapologetic pursuit of material excess backfired, exploding into a messy international scandal involving one of the world's richest men, a *SISTERS*, PAGE 2



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PAGE TWO

Dating game with billionaires as contestants

SISTERS, FROM PAGE 1

cious gossip website, stints in Nigerian and Italian custody and a battle to clear their names with Interpol, the global police organization.

“IT ALL HAPPENED SO FAST”

The Matharoo sisters never intended to become a cautionary tale about the perils of social media influence. They were born and raised in Toronto by middle-class parents who had immigrated from India. The sisters’ lives changed abruptly 10 years ago, when Jyoti, fresh out of college, met a Nigerian petroleum magnate.

“He’s not a rapper with expensive watches,” said Jyoti. “It’s generations and generations of money.”

He flew both sisters on private jets to France and Greece and eventually to Nigeria, a destination they did not disclose to their strict parents. When they landed, a convoy of Mercedes-Benz G-Class S.U.V.s drove them to his home, a heavily marbled mansion with a pool and a litany of servants. Kiran lazed away poolside while Jyoti accompanied her lover to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to play polo with a prince.

“It all happened so fast,” Jyoti said. “There wasn’t even a moment for us to be like, ‘Is this really happening?’”

Within a few months, she said, he had bought her a condominium in Toronto and begun giving her a monthly \$10,000 stipend so she would not have to work.

This affair was not to be a forever love, though. Over the years, the sisters globe-trotted with a succession of paramours. In particular, both sisters traveled frequently to Nigeria and said that dating wealthy men there was easy. “Once they find out you have a sister, it’s over,” Kiran said. “We don’t find them. They find us.”

They also began to document their lavish adventures on social media: yachting in the Bahamas, shopping sprees in Paris and Dubai, flying on private jets and sunbathing in Saint-Tropez and Spain. In the photos, they are invariably adorned in swag — Hermès handbags, shoes by Alaïa, watches by Audemars Piguet.

Neither would say exactly how many billionaires they had dated. “If you say more than one, you’re automatically considered a gold digger,” said Jyoti, though she acknowledged that the number was higher than one. “I’m attracted by the power of who they are, what they do and what position they are on the Forbes billionaire list.”

Kiran described herself as an old-fashioned girl who simply likes to be courted.

“If you want to date me, you have to spoil me,” she said.

In brandishing this high-end brand of pampered independence, the sisters seemed to delight in rejecting society’s expectations of women’s roles. “Marriage and alimony are acceptable, but being single and letting a guy give you things is not,” Jyoti said. “You have to own it. I don’t feel like I’m a piece of property.”

The Matharoos’ growing notoriety, fueled largely by Instagram, made them particular favorites of Nigeria’s gossip blogs, which tracked their rumored relationships with the sort of savage coverage normally reserved for troubled royals. “Indian twin-menace: Jyoti & Kiran Matharoo,” one headline declared in 2016: “Why billionaire housewives dread them.”

The sisters received more scorn from social media commenters.

“The road to Hell is paved with Birkin bags, promiscuity, sloth, Instagram photos, and vanity,” a commenter posted on a gossip blog thread titled “High Paid Escorts/Prostitutes: Jyoti & Kiran Matharoo.” This thread runs for 220 pages — “more than some celebrities,” Kiran said, with pride.



Clockwise from top: Jyoti, foreground, and Kiran Matharoo in Toronto walking their groceries back to their car in March after one of their more modest shopping trips; a sampling of the designer shoes in the sisters’ walk-in closet, which resembles a luxury boutique; and Kiran with a personalized choker from one of several jewelry drawers they share at their Toronto home.

THE SISTERS GET ARRESTED

When the dark side of the fantasy arrived — this was in Lagos, Nigeria, in December 2016 — it was as sudden as it was severe.

A few days after the Matharoos had returned to Nigeria, they were awakened by a loud knocking at their hotel room door. A group of men burst in and told the women they had to come to the police station. Some of the men, who turned out to be plainclothes police officers, took photos of the sisters in their bathrobes. These soon appeared online. The sisters asked to see a warrant and a badge but got no response.

“I told them I’m going to call my embassy, but when I started dialing, one guy grabbed the phone out of my hand,” Jyoti said. “They said if we don’t get dressed, they were going to carry us out just like that.”

“We thought we were being kidnapped,” Kiran said.

At the police station, the officers kept asking if the sisters owned a gossip website that had been spreading scandalous rumors about Nigerian elites — and about the sisters themselves. This site was among the blogs that had described them as prostitutes. “We couldn’t help but laugh, because the whole thing was so ridiculous,” Jyoti said.

From there, the sisters said they were

driven in a van to another police station, this one belonging to Nigeria’s Special Anti-Robbery Squad, a branch of the police notorious for corruption and using torture to extract confessions, according to a 2016 report by Amnesty International. They were taken to a dimly lit office where an officer, seated behind a wooden desk, demanded they write statements admitting that they owned the gossip website.

“The site was in Nigerian pidgin,” Jyoti said. “We can’t speak pidgin, so of course we refused.”

After hours of arguing, officers pushed the tearful sisters into what they described as a rat-infested jail cell filled with a dozen women, a few pieces of foam for beds and a hole in the floor for a toilet. The next day, they said, officers brought them back to their hotel room, and took their passports, electronics and Nigerian currency worth more than \$11,000 from the safe.

The women were then driven to a hotel by the airport and locked in a room with bars on the windows and guards outside the door. They said some of the men demanded bribes. “It was like we were held hostage,” Kiran said.

All told, the sisters were detained for 18 days.

They were accused of cyberstalking and threatening to kidnap wealthy Ni-

gerians, including one of Kiran’s ex-boyfriends, Femi Otedola, a politically powerful oil tycoon whose net worth was \$1.8 billion in 2016, according to Forbes magazine.

While they were in detention, the sisters said the police brought them to the home of Mr. Otedola, who warned that he could have them imprisoned for 10 years — or worse — if they refused to cooperate.

Desperate to leave Nigeria, and getting no help from the Canadian Embassy, the Matharoos feared they were running out of options. Then, they said, an associate of Mr. Otedola’s arrived at their makeshift jail cell with an offer: If they apologized to Mr. Otedola on video, they could get their passports back and fly home to Canada.

“I felt this was our only chance,” Jyoti said. Standing against a wall in their room as the man’s assistant filmed, Jyoti read a confession off her phone, admitting that the pair ran the website and apologizing to Mr. Otedola and his family. The man never returned with their passports.

The video was posted online the next day and swiftly attracted international media coverage, destroying the sisters’ carefully crafted reputations as fashion-obsessed ingénues.

“We got everything we wanted by

asking nicely,” Kiran said, dismissing the confession video. “Why would we ruin that?”

Kiran said Mr. Otedola was furious that she had spurned his entreaties to rekindle their relationship, and used them as scapegoats to deflect attention from the website’s embarrassing rumors. Mr. Otedola did not respond to interview requests.

About a week after they posted bail, the sisters flew to Toronto with emergency travel documents that Canadian officials issued after they determined the women faced no travel restrictions and that “there was a significant risk to their physical safety,” an immigration official said in an email. The sisters said Canadian diplomats walked them to the plane.

Back home, the Matharoos initially stayed off social media. But fed up with the public humiliation, they began speaking out to Canadian media and posting information about their detention on their lifestyle blog. “I couldn’t take it anymore,” Jyoti said. “We had to set things straight.”

Going public had devastating consequences. A few months later, in September 2017, American customs officials based at Toronto Pearson International Airport told Jyoti she could not travel to the United States because there was an outstanding warrant for her arrest.

A week later, Kiran flew to Venice, Italy, to go furniture shopping. She was waiting for her luggage at the airport when Italian customs officers locked her in a room with no food, water or explanation. “I was crying and crying,” she said. Eight hours later, officials told her that she was under provisional arrest. “They said, ‘There’s a flag on your passport from Interpol,’” she said.

She spent the next 40 days in jail, awaiting extradition to Nigeria, according to Italian court documents. European Union laws prohibit extradition to countries with poor human-rights records, so it’s likely she shouldn’t have been held at all.

But Nigeria never filed the extradition paperwork, and Kiran was allowed to fly home to Canada. (Italy’s Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.)

Philip Adebowale, the Nigerian police official who detained the sisters in Lagos and issued the warrant that resulted in Kiran’s arrest, said that he had not colluded with Mr. Otedola and had not demanded bribes. Asked why Nigeria failed to request Kiran’s extradition, he first said the Italian police “allowed these girls to dupe them,” and then blamed bureaucratic errors. “If I sent them my boys, we would have cleared everything up,” Mr. Adebowale said.

Once Kiran returned to Canada, the sisters began pleading with Interpol to purge their names from its database of red notices (alerts akin to international arrest warrants) issued at the request of its 190 member countries.

In 2017, the agency said it issued more than 13,000 red notices, up from 1,277 in 2002. Only a small fraction of the notices are made public.

Normally, Interpol goes after murderers and drug traffickers, not women fond of posting cleavage shots on Instagram. “You can’t trust countries like Nigeria or Belarus not to misuse the criminal justice system and Interpol to advance corruption,” said Jago Russell, the head of Fair Trials International, a rights group based in London that has pushed Interpol to implement stronger safeguards.

DRESSING WELL IS BEST REVENGE

While they waited for Interpol to review their cases, the Matharoos tried to keep out of the spotlight. “We mostly just moped around lonely and depressed,” Jyoti said. “I couldn’t get myself to focus on anything until they dropped it.”

Even then, the sisters sought to capitalize on their notoriety. On some days, they would grab a camera and drive to a deserted warehouse with just enough industrial grit to be edgy.

On Instagram, Jyoti hawked sponsored high heels, hair extensions and spray tans. Kiran developed an online food consulting brand.

Their work paid off. In June, an American man living in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and who followed Jyoti on Instagram contacted her about starting a fashion line. He planned to visit them in Canada. Then, in August, the sisters received a package from Interpol’s independent appeals commission.

Inside was a letter informing them that Interpol had deleted their names from its database. The Matharoos had won.

Jyoti had him book her a plane ticket to Dubai in September. “I was like, ‘Screw Toronto, I need to get out of here,’” she said.

What began as a business trip swiftly grew into a romance, with a stay on a private island and fashion brainstorming sessions over candlelight dinners. One evening, Jyoti wore a tight orange dress she had asked Kiran — a talented seamstress — to make for the trip. Impressed, the man, whom the sisters declined to identify to protect his privacy,

“I told them I’m going to call my embassy, but when I started dialing, one guy grabbed the phone out of my hand.”

sent the sisters to immediately find manufacturers in Los Angeles. There, the Matharoos rekindled their love affairs with private jets and pools in Beverly Hills. Jyoti modeled on her Instagram in a neon bikini and other outfits her sister made. Direct messages started pouring into her Instagram with requests for the clothes. They are now in the midst of setting up their fashion line, SPCTRMstudio.

“I’m so relieved we can get back to our normal life,” Jyoti said. But they haven’t, quite. Recently Jyoti arrived at the Toronto airport with a plane ticket to Houston, only to find herself interrogated by United States customs officials.

“They were grilling me, like, ‘So, are you a prostitute? When was the last time you had a boyfriend?’” she said. “I said, ‘I didn’t know being single was a crime.’ I was so mad. Then I started crying.”

The Matharoos also said they have been inundated with messages from women asking for guidance on finding a billionaire sugar daddy. “Surely you can shed some tips on how to become a kept woman who is still doing her thing,” read a typical message sent to Kiran’s Snapchat. For those wondering, they have some advice.

Don’t be greedy. “When he asks what kind of car you want, don’t ask for a Rolls-Royce,” Jyoti said.

Second, observe proper “jetiquette” by dressing conservatively on his Cessna. “You don’t want to look like some guy hired a hooker for a weekend,” Kiran said.

And, obviously, when he hands you thousands of dollars for a luxury shopping spree, bring him back some change.

But if their brushes with incarceration have taught the sisters any new lessons, it’s that they shouldn’t bother. Men and their money are not worth the trouble. “There’s always going to be a guy saying, ‘Let me spoil you,’ who wants to fly us somewhere,” Jyoti said. “For once we want to just focus on ourselves.”

Emmanuel Akinwotu contributed reporting from Abuja, Nigeria, and Elisabetta Povoledo from Rome.

Soviet-era painter known for defying the authorities

OSKAR RABIN
1928-2018

BY NEIL GENZLINGER

Oskar Rabin, a painter who was at the center of a group of dissident artists that defied the Soviet authorities in the 1960s and ‘70s, died on Wednesday in Florence, Italy. He was 90.

Alexander Smoljanski, a filmmaker who with Evgeny Tsymbal had just completed a documentary about Mr. Rabin, announced the death on Facebook.

Mr. Rabin had been in Florence for an exhibition of his work at the Florentine branch of the I. Repin St. Petersburg Art Academy. It opened the day after his death.

RIA Novosti, the Russian state news agency, said the cause was a heart attack. Mr. Smoljanski’s Facebook post said Mr. Rabin had been under treatment at a Florentine clinic for a hip injury.

Mr. Rabin painted still lifes and landscapes, often imbuing them with wry critiques of Soviet life, but his fame rested as much on his defiance as on his artistic ability.

In 1974 he was among the organizers of an outdoor exhibition in Moscow by so-called nonconforming artists — those who were denied exhibitions in recognized galleries and museums because they refused to limit themselves to the officially sanctioned style of the day, Socialist realism, which emphasized hero-

ic scenes and sculptures and left no room for impressionism or abstraction or unpleasant subjects. The artists met an unrelenting resistance.

“When they gathered in an open lot on September 15,” Hedrick Smith, who was then a reporter in Moscow for The New York Times, wrote in his 1976 book “The Russians,” “they were brutally dispersed by plainclothes police dressed as workers and operating bulldozers and dump trucks.”

By some accounts, the police plucked Mr. Rabin from the upper reaches of a bulldozer he had clung to as it advanced on him. The aborted art show has ever since been known as the Bulldozer Exhibition.

The international reaction was so strong that a few months later the Soviets allowed another show by the non-conforming artists, but the tensions remained. Mr. Rabin continued to incur official wrath and endure the occasional arrest.

In 1978 officials encouraged him to take a trip to Paris; while he was there they stripped him of his citizenship. He lived in Paris the rest of his life, even though he became celebrated in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

“The Russia-themed pictures that I sometimes paint even now are not nostalgic,” he wrote in “Three Lives,” a 1986 memoir. “These are pictures-cum-recollections — just a memory about the past. For no matter what sort of past it was, you cannot erase it from your heart.”

Oskar Yakovlevich Rabin (whose

name is, variously, also given as “Oscar” and “Rabine”) was born on Jan. 2, 1928, in Moscow. His parents were both doctors, and both died of illnesses when he was a boy; an orphan, he spent the years of World War II living in children’s dorms.

In 1944 he was sent to live with an aunt in the Latvian city of Riga. He trained at an art academy there, then studied at, but was expelled from, the Surikov Art Institute in Moscow.

It was in the mid-1950s that he fell in with a group of artists and intellectuals that was creating artworks and writings outside the sanctioned parameters. By 1958 he and his wife, Valentina Kropivnitskaya, also an artist, were living in a camp barracks in the Lianozovo District near Moscow, their home a frequent gathering spot for the renegades, who became known as the Lianozovo Group.

“Its participants were united, not by some common artistic ideology,” the art collector Alexander Glezer wrote in 1995, “but rather by their uncompromising stand in the fight for freedom of expression and the right to display their works to their compatriots.”

Mr. Rabin’s paintings tended toward the expressionistic and were decidedly unheroic, putting him at odds with the official definition of art.

“Rabin depicted dreary everyday reality,” Natalia Kolodzei, executive director of the Kolodzei Art Foundation and an expert in the art of Russia and the former Soviet Union, said by email. “Dilapi-



Oskar Rabin, a dissident artist who defied Soviet rejection of impressionism and abstraction, at a museum exhibition of some of his paintings in New Jersey in 1984.

dated hovels, suburban slums, neglected cemeteries, religious symbols, street signs, and newspapers full of personal and narrative significance.”

One work from 1968, “Still Life With Fish and Pravda,” featured a glass and a dead fish atop crumpled pages of Pravda, the official Communist Party newspaper, a provocatively ambiguous fragment of a headline showing.

In his book, he expressed mock indignation that such a painting was deemed not to fit the sanctioned realism of the

time. “I was reproached for my still lifes, for vodka bottles and for a herring sitting on a newspaper,” he wrote. “But haven’t you ever drunk vodka with a herring? At all the feasts, including the official ones, one drinks vodka.”

Such cheeky works, and his outspokenness, made Mr. Rabin a prominent figure among the nonconforming artists.

“Middle-aged and essentially hairless, Rabin developed the incongruous status of a bald rock star,” John McPhee

World

Vanishing under the dunes

RUSSIA DISPATCH
SHOYNA, RUSSIA

A village swallowed by sand that may be a result of overfishing

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT
BY SERGEY PONOMAREV

Shoyna, a Russian fishing village on the frigid shores of the White Sea, is slowly vanishing under sand that engulfs entire houses, their roofs just barely visible above the dunes.

For young children, it's a magical place: Their whole world is a sandbox, with natural slides everywhere. For everyone else, life in this barren landscape — most likely a man-made environmental disaster — can be a daily grind.

Anna Golubtsova lives on the second floor of her home. The ground floor turned into an unwelcome beach.

“We'll have to hire a bulldozer to push the sand back, and again next year,” said Ms. Golubtsova. “We have to do it lest the snow piling up on top of the sand buries us to our roof.”

A nearby house was so overtaken by the dunes its residents had to go in and out through the attic.

Local residents say more than 20 houses have been completely buried under the sand. Boardwalks take the place of sidewalks on the village streets.

In the years after World War II, Shoyna was a thriving fishing port, with old Soviet newsreels telling stories of the fishermen here heroically exceeding their production targets.

But overfishing not only depleted local stocks; it probably ruined the area's ecosystem.

Trawlers scraped the sea floor clean of silt and seaweed. And with nothing to hold the sand in place anymore, waves started washing it ashore, each of the trillions of grains a reminder of the reckless depredation of the seas.

This disruption of the seabed, perhaps combined with a natural change in the bed of the river that flows through Shoyna and into the White Sea, is the best suspect to blame for the sand invasion, said Sergey Uvarov, the marine



Left, a rusty fishing vessel on the shore helps to shield homes from crashing waves in Shoyna, Russia. Right, Aleksandr Isupov, an aerologist, preparing to monitor the village's weather conditions, which can often be extreme.



biodiversity project coordinator for the World Wildlife Fund in Russia. But no formal environmental studies of the remote region have been conducted.

In the summertime, small airplanes, and the occasional helicopter, are the only way to reach Shoyna.

Evdokiya Sakharova, 81, serves as an informal greeter at the sandy landing strip.

In her youth, the now desert-like area was filled with grassy meadows where cows would be taken to pasture, and villagers had their own little farms next to their homes.

“I remember the village when it was full of life, not sand,” she said.

During its heyday as a fishing port, Shoyna's quay could barely fit the more than 70 fishing vessels coming in and out every day. At its height, the village's population was over 800; today it's home to 285 people.

The emptying out didn't happen all at once.

First the fish processing plant closed, then the brickworks. The farms held on for a while.

“We kept planting vegetables, fertilizing the soil and sweeping away the sand advancing from the shore,” Ms. Sakharova said. “Until it became pointless.”

The people in this village, where trails left by ATVs, humans and dogs criss-cross the sand between the houses, don't expect much in terms of amenities. The village has no sewage system, and water has to be carried from wells. Houses are heated with firewood or coal.

Food supplies in Shoyna's only store cost almost twice as much as in the nearest town, and many residents turn for sustenance to the natural areas outside the village where the sand has not yet reached.

Arctic cloudberry grows in the tundra. Harvesting it is backbreaking labor, but it's both delicious and lucrative. Locals sell it to middlemen, and it ultimately fetches almost as much as red caviar in city stores.

Debates about staying or moving along have been going on for decades: “I remember the village when it was full of life, not sand.”

In the fall, wild geese can be hunted and enough meat stored to last the winter. Sometimes nomadic reindeer herders stop by, exchanging meat for other goods.

Small-scale fishing still takes place throughout the year; in the summer for food and in the winter for trade. It's quite a way to the nearest market, however.

Fish has to be hauled along a frozen river on snowmobiles for eight to 10 hours to the nearest town, Mezen.

Shoyna runs on its own schedule.

If you need bread, you have to place an order at a bakery open four days a week. At the village's bathhouse, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are reserved for women, Thursdays and Fridays for men.

“There's little entertainment out here,” said Karina Kotkina, an intern at the local meteorological station. “We're lucky to have internet connection.”

Every Saturday there's a dance night at the local community center frequented by the few young people still living in the village, as well as soldiers from the nearby military base.

“I still can't forgive my commander for letting me go on a leave to the village 23 years ago,” joked a former soldier, Viktor Schepakov, who now works at the

village's diesel power station. “This is when I met my future wife and decided to stay in Shoyna.”

Debates about staying in Shoyna or moving along have been going on for decades.

Resettlement can be subsidized under an assistance program for residents of far northern regions.

Many young people do leave to study, work and travel. But some of those who have bolted come back after a while: It can be hard to adapt to urban life after years spent in the village.

“Shoyna drags you in,” said Pavel Kotkin, 21. “I spent four years studying in the city and came back. I love Shoyna and want to spend my life here.”

But what about the sand? “I can't do without it,” Mr. Kotkin said. “My feet hurt after walking on asphalt.”

Nigina Beroeva contributed reporting.

Activists missing in China

BEIJING

Communist Party appears to be increasing efforts to quash rights movement

BY JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

At least a dozen young activists who took part in a national campaign for workers' rights in China are missing, friends said, in what appeared to be an effort by the government to silence one of the most visible student protests in years.

Unidentified men in at least five Chinese cities rounded up the activists, who are recent graduates of elite universities, over the past few days, the friends of the activists said Sunday. The men beat several activists before pushing them into cars and driving away, the friends said.

The activists, describing themselves as ardent communists who fervently believe in the ideals of Marx and Mao, have waged an unusual campaign against inequality and corporate greed that has gained traction at some of China's top schools.

The campaign has put the ruling Communist Party, which prides itself as a socialist guardian of workers' rights, in an awkward position. Now, in line with President Xi Jinping's efforts to curtail dissent and political organizing, the party appears to be redoubling efforts to quash the movement.

Patrick Poon, a researcher at Amnesty International in Hong Kong, said the crackdown would provide “another bad image” for China's leaders, noting that they once seemed more tolerant of labor activism.

“We call on the authorities to immediately release the students and supporters, and allow an independent investiga-



Zhang Shengye was said to have been beaten and dragged into a car.

tion of what is happening to them,” Mr. Poon said.

It was unclear what happened to the activists, who were rounded up in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Wuhan. Calls to the police on Sunday were not immediately answered.

In Beijing, students at Peking University said that unidentified men arrived on campus around 10 p.m. Friday in pursuit of Zhang Shengye, a recent graduate of the school who was a prominent voice in the activists' campaign. Mr. Zhang had been organizing efforts to find activists who were previously detained by the authorities but whose locations are unknown, students said.

Mr. Zhang was beaten and dragged into a car, said Yu Tianfu, 22, a history student at Peking University who was studying in a nearby cafe.

Mr. Yu said in a social media post on Sunday that he was also hurt in the episode. He said that the men had thrown him to the ground, covered his mouth and kicked his head.

“Who are you? Why are you doing this?” Mr. Yu said he asked the men.

“I'll beat you more if you dare shout again,” one of the men responded, according to Mr. Yu.

Reached by phone on Sunday, Mr. Yu said he stood by his account but declined

to comment further. In his post, he said he was still in disbelief.

“What kind of privilege do they have to completely disregard the law and civil rights?” Mr. Yu wrote. “How dare they unscrupulously and arrogantly beat up students and kidnap one at Peking University?”

The disappearance of the activists is the latest flash point in a long-running battle between activists and the authorities.

The campaign for workers' rights began in the summer, when dozens of young people descended on Huizhou, a city in southern China, to organize demonstrations in support of factory workers who said they were being treated like slaves.

After several weeks of protests and a vibrant social media campaign, the police detained dozens of workers and activists. More than two months later, several remain in detention.

More recently, student activists have tried to organize protests on a variety of issues, including allegations of abuse of workers at a Chinese supplier for Apple and miners grappling with black lung disease.

But the authorities have tried to block them from organizing.

At Nanjing University in eastern China, several students were assaulted and taken away this month after holding a protest to denounce university officials for blocking them from registering an official group for student Marxists.

In Beijing, students at Renmin University say they were held under house arrest and monitored because of their participation in the protests over the summer in Huizhou.

Cornell University announced last month that it was ending a collaboration with Renmin because of the crackdown on students.

The protesters had hoped that the party might tolerate their calls for social justice if they embraced leftist ideals and Mr. Xi. The government has encouraged the study of Marx, Mao and Lenin, and the Communist Party has long had a reputation as a defender of the working class.

But the party has moved quickly to stop the movement from spreading, seemingly worried that the protests might threaten its hold on civil society.

Geoffrey Crothall, the communications director of China Labor Bulletin, a Hong Kong advocacy group, said that Chinese leaders were “digging an even bigger hole for themselves” by continuing to harass the activists. He said the outcry could have been avoided if the authorities had listened to the workers in Huizhou.

“There would have been no protests, no arrests and no acts of nationwide solidarity from students and Maoist groups across the country,” Mr. Crothall said.

Zoe Mou contributed research.



CHAUMET
PARIS

— L'art de la joaillerie depuis 1780 —



The campus of Peking University in Beijing, where Mr. Zhang recently graduated. He had been organizing efforts to find previously detained activists.

WORLD

A sister’s unstoppable crusade for justice

PROFILE
ROME

Brother’s death in custody of the police made a rights activist out of Ilaria Cucchi

BY ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

Before her brother Stefano died in the prison wing of a Rome hospital on Oct. 22, 2009, Ilaria Cucchi lived what she described as a “normalissima” life, as a model wife and working mother of two.

That all changed after she saw her brother’s body stretched out on a morgue slab, his face emaciated, his eyes ringed by dark purple bruises. It was immediately clear to her that he had been beaten after his arrest a week earlier — with a stash of hashish and cocaine that he said were for personal use — and that he might have died as a result.

In that moment, she has said countless times in countless interviews and public encounters over the past nine years, looking at the “tortured corpse” of her brother, Ms. Cucchi vowed to establish how he had been allowed to die “in solitude and indifference.”

That quest — undertaken with unshakable determination — has transformed Ms. Cucchi into one of Italy’s best-known and admired human rights crusaders. In her search for truth, she has coolly faced down antagonistic prosecutors, law enforcement officials, politicians and news media outlets.

But still, after nine years, 13 separate trials and the attendant publicity — there is even a film about her brother’s final days — such is the challenge of navigating Italy’s multilayered judicial system that the truth of what happened has not yet fully emerged.

“People constantly stop and thank me on the street,” she said in an interview in her comfortable Rome apartment this week. “Before, I’d think, ‘Why are you thanking me?’ Now, I realize that they recognize what I am doing, what my family has endured. It’s the frustration we all feel when we come up against hostile institutions.”

Ms. Cucchi’s public appearances draw hundreds, even thousands, of supporters at events, and she has been feted with commendations and awards. She has become a fixture on television talk shows, her appearances often coinciding with a spike in ratings. A Neapolitan street artist recently immortalized her along with Che Guevara and the Argentine soccer legend Diego Maradona, who played seven seasons in Naples.

“You are the modern Antigone of our times,” a popular talk show host, Fabio Fazio, told Ms. Cucchi in a recent interview, referring to the figure in Greek mythology who seeks a proper burial for her brother, Polynices.

Italians have also responded to her indignation at her brother’s death in the custody of institutions — law enforcement, legal and medical — that exist to protect citizens.

“He died amid the indifference of others,” Ms. Cucchi said during a break on Wednesday at yet another court hearing. “Stefano was seen by 150 people in the week between his arrest and his death — we counted — and all of them pretended not to see him,” she said. “Not only did they not act out of human compassion, but none did their duty as public officials.”



Ilaria Cucchi with a photo of her brother Stefano. Her nine-year quest for the truth about his death in the custody of Carabinieri police officers has taken her on a labyrinthine trip through Italy’s justice system.

Some of those 150 people — medical staff members, social workers, prison guards, lawyers, prosecutors and judges, as well as the Carabinieri officers who first arrested and detained him — have already been tried in relation to his death. But in nearly all of those cases a final judgment has not been reached. In part, that is because prosecutors and Ms. Cucchi have challenged almost every acquittal, and new investigations have opened more leads.

Ms. Cucchi, who is 44, sat attentively throughout Wednesday’s daylong hearing, as she and her parents have done untold times during all those trials. “We’ve never missed a hearing. Not even with a fever,” she said.

The courtroom was packed with television cameras and print reporters, as well as ordinary Romans attracted to the high-visibility case. Ms. Cucchi did not flinch when one witness, a male nurse, described finding her brother dead in his hospital bed during a routine morning call. She did, however, seek out her parents, sitting in the back row of the courtroom, whose suffering through the years has been discernible, she said.

“It’s their son” being talked about, she said.

Ilaria Cucchi never expected to end up as one of Italy’s most famous human rights activists. After high school she worked for her father, a surveyor, before taking a course to become a condominium administrator. She married her high school sweetheart and had two children, Valerio, now 16, and Giulia, 10. “I was happy,” she said.

But Stefano’s death and the years of legal battles have turned her life upside down. She separated from her husband, and is now romantically involved with Fabio Anselmo, her family’s lawyer, whom she hired to take her brother’s case. His first piece of advice to her had been to have photographs taken during the autopsy.

Those graphic images, which show evident bruising on Stefano’s face and back, did much to sway public opinion. She has brandished the photos on several occasions to draw attention to the case when it risked slipping into general indifference or when the narrative became distorted because of her brother’s past drug use.

“He died amid the indifference of others. Stefano was seen by 150 people in the week between his arrest and his death.”

In her transformation from mother and wife to public figure, Ms. Cucchi has taken to writing: a book about her brother, a blog in the Italian edition of HuffPost and a Facebook account with more than 387,000 likes that chronicles the ins and outs of the complicated case.

“That’s a lot. It shows that people are tired of a justice system” that does not look out for the powerless, she said. “The state has to stop protecting itself and start protecting citizens.”

She is often suggested as a political hopeful, but after one unsuccessful run for office she claims to have no further aspirations. “I’ve been doing politics, fighting for the rights of the least powerful for the past nine years,” she said.

The trial of the five Carabinieri officers involved in Stefano’s arrest now playing out in a Rome courtroom is colloquially known as the Cucchi-bis trial.

Three of them have been charged with involuntary manslaughter, the other two with slander and making false statements. The trial took an unexpected turn last month when it emerged in court that one of the five had given testimony last summer admitting to having witnessed two fellow officers brutally beating Stefano. It was the public admission that Ms. Cucchi had been waiting and hoping for.

A parallel investigation is underway on a possible cover-up of the crime within the Carabinieri, and prosecutors are looking into accusations of false testimony and falsified documents that are making their way up the chain of command.

If Stefano Cucchi’s case was already well known in Italy, thanks to his sister’s perseverance, it became an even greater cause célèbre after the presentation in August at the Venice Film Festival of “Sulla Mia Pelle,” (“On My Skin”) a dramatization of his final days, directed by Alessio Cremonini.

The film, subsequently distributed by Netflix, unflinchingly chronicles Mr. Cucchi’s ordeal from the day of his ar-

rest to his death, and throughout Italy public showings of the film have become social events — at times, with political overtones. The web was abuzz last week after reports emerged that Carabinieri officers had attended one showing of the film in Calabria and demanded a list of names of those present.

Ms. Cucchi and her family have also been subject to harassment, mostly through social media. She said she had become a habitu  of the local police station, where she regularly files charges against people who have threatened her. “Before, people used to insult Stefano,” she said. “Now that the truth is emerging, they have begun insulting us.”

Ms. Cucchi is optimistic that the current trial, which began last year, will lead to the conviction of the Carabinieri officers. A sentence is expected next year, but appeals are, again, likely to follow.

She says she has great confidence in the prosecutor trying the case, Giovanni Musar , who previously brought mob bosses to trial in southern Italy. “He won’t stop in front of anything,” she said. As it turns out, neither has she.

Missile bases suggest deceit by North Korea

NORTH KOREA, FROM PAGE 1

said there was still hope of launching the satellites, but they offered no timeline.

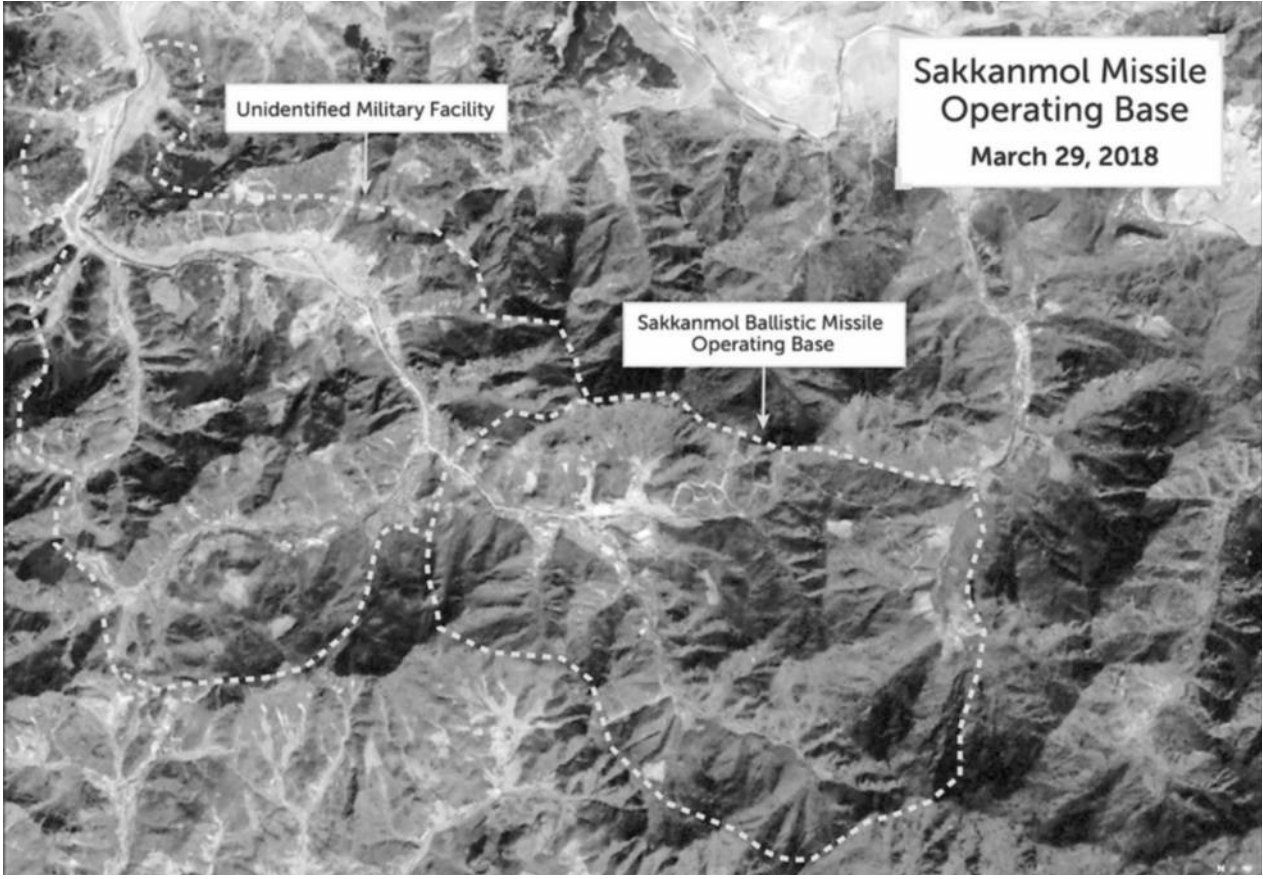
The secret ballistic missile bases were identified in a detailed study that was to be published on Monday by the Beyond Parallel program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a major think tank in Washington.

The program, which focuses on the prospects of North-South integration, is led by Victor Cha, a prominent North Korea expert whom the Trump administration considered appointing as the ambassador to South Korea last year. His name was pulled back when he objected to the White House strategy for dealing with Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader.

A State Department spokesman responded to the findings with a written statement suggesting that the government believed the sites must be dismantled: “President Trump has made clear that should Chairman Kim follow through on his commitments, including complete denuclearization and the elimination of ballistic missile programs, a much brighter future lies ahead for North Korea and its people.” A spokesman for the C.I.A. declined to comment.

The revelation of the bases comes as Mr. Trump’s signature piece of diplomacy, based on his meeting exactly five months ago with Mr. Kim, appears in peril. Publicly, Mr. Trump remains relentlessly optimistic, to the point that he said at a campaign rally that he and Mr. Kim, one of the world’s most brutal dictators, “fell in love.” But last week, talks with the North hit another snag, as it declared that it would not send its chief negotiator to meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in New York to plan the next summit meeting.

Since the initial meeting between Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim, on June 12 in Singa-



A new report profiles a missile base known as Sakkanmol, above, a little more than 50 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone.

pore, the North has yet to take the first step toward denuclearization: providing the United States with a list of its nuclear sites, weapons, production facilities and missile bases. North Korean officials have told Mr. Pompeo that would amount to giving him a “target list.”

American officials have responded that they already have a detailed target

list — one that goes back decades — but want to use the North’s accounting to determine whether it is revealing all the known facilities and moving honestly toward denuclearization.

The new satellite imagery suggests the opposite. “It’s not like these bases have been frozen,” Mr. Cha, the leader of the team that studied the images, said in

an interview. “Work is continuing. What everybody is worried about is that Trump is going to accept a bad deal — they give us a single test site and dismantle a few other things, and in return they get a peace agreement” that formally ends the Korean War.

Mr. Trump, he said, “would then declare victory, say he got more than any

other American president ever got, and the threat would still be there.”

The North Korea experts who have examined the images believe that the North’s motivations are fairly easy to interpret. “It looks like they’re trying to maximize their capabilities,” Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., a co-author of the report and a veteran analyst of satellite images of North Korea, said in an interview. “Any missile at these bases can take a nuclear warhead.”

“The level of effort that North Korea has invested in building these bases and dispersing them is impressive,” he added. “It’s very logical from a survival point of view.”

Weapons experts, as well as Mr. Pompeo, say that North Korea, despite engaging in denuclearization talks, continues to produce the fissile material that fuels nuclear arms. The North is believed to have about 40 to 60 nuclear warheads.

The new report profiles a missile base known as Sakkanmol, a little more than 50 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. It is one of the closest to South Korea. Seoul, the capital, is about 80 miles away, as are American troops.

The report contains a dozen or so satellite images of Sakkanmol — each heavily annotated to show the base checkpoint, headquarters buildings, barracks, security areas, maintenance depots and the entrances to the warrens of underground tunnels that hide mobile missiles and their transporter trucks.

The base runs through a narrow mountain valley over an area of three square miles. Each tunnel entrance, the report says, is protected by a neighboring berm of rock and dirt about 60 feet high and two outward-opening doors about 20 feet wide. They are meant to protect the tunnel entrances from artillery fire and aerial attack.

The report says the Sakkanmol base conceals seven lengthy tunnels that can accommodate up to 18 transporters that move the missiles. Each is typically fitted with one warhead.

If tensions rose, the report says, the missiles would be transported from the base to prearranged launching sites. The mobile launchers can move quickly — they can be ready to fire in under an hour — which is why the United States has been trying to get the small satellites into the sky for early warning. The satellites have a special kind of sensor using “synthetic aperture radar” that cuts through clouds.

“Any missile at these bases can take a nuclear warhead.”

The current, multibillion-dollar constellation of large satellites that keeps an eye on North Korea is often out of position, and officials say the country’s ballistic missile sites are under surveillance less than 30 percent of the time. (The exact figure is classified.)

A map of North Korea in the report shows three belts of missile bases that vary from short-range tactical emplacements, to sites with midrange missiles that could strike most of South Korea, Japan and American bases in the Pacific, to strategic ones for missiles that threaten to reach American shores.

The strategic bases appear to be home to the intercontinental ballistic missiles that North Korea test-fired in 2017, alarming the world.

The North’s tests, while demonstrating significant progress, did not prove that it had solved all the technical problems inherent in launching a nuclear warhead that could reach the continental United States.

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WORLD

Canada urges teenagers to say no to marijuana

THORNBURY, ONTARIO

Legalization raises concern about the effects of the drug on the growing brain

BY CATHERINE PORTER

Parents and grandparents jammed the small hall of Thornbury, a sleepy ski town north of Toronto, to glean tips on how to talk to their teenagers about the potential harms of marijuana.

Held less than a week before Canada was set to legalize cannabis, the public health session had a message for parents: Marijuana would be legal for adults, but it was not safe for young people.

And parents needed to instill in their children the idea that pot could be dangerous.

“It’s been proven the brain doesn’t stop growing until you are 25, and yet we’re legally selling it to people at 19,” Jenny Hanley, an addictions counselor, said as she left the meeting. “What the hell is our government thinking?”

Canada last month became the second country to make it legal for adults to buy, grow and consume small amounts of marijuana. But it also made it a crime to give it to anyone younger than 19 or 18, depending on the province, and set a penalty of up to 14 years in prison for doing so.

At the same time, the government began an \$83 million public education campaign, much of it aimed at Canadian youths, that warns of pot’s dangers.

But persuading teenagers not to see legalization as a green light to use marijuana will be difficult, experts say, not to mention that past antidrug efforts have offered little evidence of success.

And when it comes to marijuana and the teenage brain, the science is far from clear.

Officials had argued that regulating the cannabis market, and cracking down on illegal sellers, would reduce its soaring use among Canadian teenagers, who, according to a 2013 Unicef report, already use it more than young people anywhere else in the world.

“The most disingenuous element of legalization is that it will keep it out of the hands of children,” said Dr. Benedikt Fischer, a senior scientist at the Center for Addiction and Mental Health in To-



Jenny Hanley with 19-year-old Jared Kaye at the Hanley family farm in Flesherton, Ontario. Mr. Kaye and another teenage addict live at the Hanley home.

ronto. “It is a big experiment, in many ways.”

Still, officials are optimistic.

“A lot of young people have the notion this is a very benign substance of no risk — it’s organic, it’s natural and it’s medicine,” said Bill Blair, the country’s minister in charge of marijuana legalization, and formerly the Toronto police chief.

“When you start giving people the facts to replace the mythology and misinformation, people make smarter and better decisions,” he added.

But, as parents are discovering, sifting through the science and guiding their teenagers is tricky.

Lounging on a bench at the back of the Thornbury session was Jared Kaye. He smoked marijuana for the first time at age 9 while also bingeing on alcohol, and then added harder drugs. He started rehab at 15 and became homeless.

He and another teenage addict were taken in by Ms. Hanley to live in her home near Flesherton, Ontario.

“I hurt my family a lot,” said Mr. Kaye, now 19. “I did nothing but hurt myself.”

Paul Thompson, a businessman from Stratford who attended the session while in town on vacation, sees marijuana as less dangerous.

When his 21-year-old son was ar-

rested a couple of years ago on marijuana charges, Mr. Thompson decided to provide him with marijuana himself, to ensure it was not laced with other drugs.

“I think alcohol causes far greater harms,” said Mr. Thompson, a divorced father of three. “I don’t believe cannabis is addictive. People who are addicted have deeper problems.”

The confounding thing is that both men were correct.

Studies have shown that marijuana use in adolescents can impair brain function for some time after the cannabis has left their bodies, and a concern raised by some experts is that

many adolescents use cannabis to self-medicate for anxiety or depression.

Most scientists agree the risk to young brains is greatest for those who start smoking at age 12 or younger, smoke regularly and choose high-potency marijuana. Smoking is also dangerous for young people with family histories of serious mental illness, like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

But for young people who start lightly experimenting with the drug at a later age, the risks of long-term damage to their growing brains are reduced.

“It’s a reasonable statement to say it could have impact on the developing

brain,” said Matthew Hill, a neuroscientist with the University of Calgary who has studied cannabinoids for 18 years. “That’s not the same thing as saying it definitively will.”

“The evidence is not as consistent and compelling as some people like to spin it,” he added.

While some studies found that regular cannabis use by adolescents changed brain structure and long-term cognitive functioning, follow-up studies disputed those findings and concluded that alcohol use, cigarette smoking and family background were the main drivers in I.Q. reduction. A recent analysis of 69 studies on young, frequent cannabis users, published in JAMA Psychiatry, found that the negative effects on cognitive functioning dissipated after 72 drug-free hours.

“Cannabis is correlated with lots of things,” said James MacKillop, the co-director of McMaster University’s medicinal cannabis research center in Hamilton. “Teasing out whether it’s causally related is a much more complicated thing.”

“If you are using cannabis when you are 12 or 13, then there are probably lots of other things going on,” he continued. “There might be poor parental oversight, more early life stress or family disorganization.”

To make matters more confusing, there are no certain strategies to stop young people from trying cannabis.

Some public health units have adopted a harm-reduction strategy, urging teenagers to take more “cannabis-free” days and not drive stoned. Others are preaching abstinence.

“Because it’s legal, it’s not safe,” said Dr. Paul Roumeliotis, the medical officer of health for Eastern Ontario. “That’s our real message.”

With all the discussion about cannabis in Canada as legalization day approached, many parents were alarmed to discover how acceptable it had become among the country’s youths. According to a recent census bureau report, 32.7 percent of teenagers had smoked marijuana in the previous three months, for example.

Mr. Kaye said he thought parents should take an individual approach. His advice seemed more like a guide for parents than a drug-prevention plan.

“Be open with your kids,” he said. “Try to have a close relationship so they are comfortable telling you what they tried and what their friends are doing.”

Saudis talked of hiring killers

SAUDIS, FROM PAGE 1

into Mr. Mueller’s broader inquiry. In 2016, a company owned by Mr. Zamel, Psy-Group, had pitched the Trump campaign on a social media manipulation plan.

A spokesman for the Saudi government declined to comment, as did lawyers for both Mr. Nader and Mr. Zamel.

During the March 2017 meeting about the plan to sabotage Iran’s economy, according to the three people familiar with the discussions, the Saudis asked the businessmen whether they also “conducted kinetics” — lethal operations — saying they were interested in killing senior Iranian officials. The businessmen hesitated, saying they would need to consult their lawyer.

The lawyer flatly rejected the plan, and the businessmen told the Saudis they would not take part in any assassinations. Mr. Nader told the Saudis about a London-based company run by former British special operations troops that might take on the contract. It is unclear which company he suggested.

Before he was ousted last month, General Assiri was considered one of Prince Mohammed’s closest advisers, a man whose sharp ascent tracked the rise of the young crown prince. In 2016, he became the public face of Saudi Arabia’s campaign in Yemen, giving briefings about the state of the war. He traveled frequently to Washington, where Saudi-paid lobbyists brought him to think tanks to give optimistic assessments about the campaign’s progress and he extolled the Saudi concern for the welfare of civilians.

By 2017, however, the Saudi campaign that General Assiri oversaw in Yemen had ground into a military stalemate and, despite his assurances, a humanitarian catastrophe. But his patron, Prince Mohammed, also consolidated his power over all of the kingdom’s security apparatuses, and he promoted General Assiri to the deputy head of the kingdom’s spy agency, the General Intelligence Directorate.

Western analysts believe that Prince Mohammed moved General Assiri there in part to keep an eye on the spy chief, Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah al-Humaidan, known as Abu Ali, who was close to Western intelligence agencies and suspected of harboring loyalties to one of the crown prince’s royal rivals.

General Assiri was dismissed last month when the Saudi government acknowledged Mr. Khashoggi’s killing and said he had organized the operation. On Saturday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said his government had handed over a recording of Mr. Khashoggi’s killing to the United States, Saudi Arabia, Britain and France, pressuring President Trump to more harshly punish the Saudis over the murder.

The plan by Mr. Nader and Mr. Zamel



Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Assiri of Saudi Arabia attended a meeting in 2017 at which Saudi officials inquired about killing Qasem Suleimani, a top military official in Iran.

dates to the beginning of 2016, when they started discussing an ambitious campaign of economic warfare against Iran similar to one waged by Israel and the United States during the past decade aimed at coercing Iran to end its nuclear program. They sketched out operations like revealing hidden global assets of the Quds Force; creating fake social media accounts in Farsi to foment unrest in Iran; financing Iranian opposition groups; and publicizing accusations, real or fictitious, against senior Iranian officials to turn them against one another.

Mr. Nader is an adviser to the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates, a country that, along with Saudi Arabia and Israel, has identified Iran as the primary threat to stability in the Middle East.

Both he and Mr. Zamel believed that Hillary Clinton’s anticipated victory in the 2016 election meant a continuation of the Iran nuclear deal signed by President Barack Obama — and little appetite in Washington for a concerted campaign to cripple the Iranian economy. So, they decided to pitch the plan to Saudi and Emirati officials, even submitting a proposal to General Assiri during a meeting in Belgium.

The election of Donald J. Trump changed their calculus, and shortly after, Mr. Nader and Mr. Zamel traveled to New York to sell both Trump transition officials and Saudi generals on their Iran plan.

Mr. Nader’s initiative to try to topple the Iranian economy was first reported in May by The New York Times. His discussions in New York with General Assiri and other Saudi officials were reported last month by The Daily Beast.

Mr. Nader and Mr. Zamel enlisted Erik Prince, the former head of Blackwater and an adviser to the Trump tran-

sition team. They had already discussed elements of their plan with Mr. Prince, in a meeting when they learned of his own paramilitary proposals that he planned to try to sell to the Saudis.

A spokesman for Mr. Prince declined to comment.

In a suite on one of the top floors of the Mandarin Oriental hotel in New York, Mr. Zamel and Mr. Nader spoke to General Assiri and his aides about their Iran plan.

The Saudis were interested in the idea but said it was so provocative and potentially destabilizing that they wanted to get the approval of the incoming Trump administration before Saudi Arabia paid for the campaign.

After Mr. Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, Mr. Nader met frequently with White House officials to discuss the economic sabotage plan.

General Assiri’s interest in assassinations was unsurprising but unrepresentative of official policy, said one Saudi familiar with the inquiry into the Khashoggi killing. The investigation has shown the general to be a grandiose and ambitious novice to intelligence who sought to impress the crown prince with unauthorized schemes for black operations, the person said.

But General Assiri’s well-known closeness to the crown prince — the general often joined Prince Mohammed for meetings in Riyadh with visiting American officials — might make it difficult for the prince’s supporters to distance him from the proposals, just as the same connections have helped convince Western intelligence agencies that the prince must have known about the plot against Mr. Khashoggi.

Mark Mazzetti reported from Washington, Ronen Bergman from Tel Aviv and David D. Kirkpatrick from London.

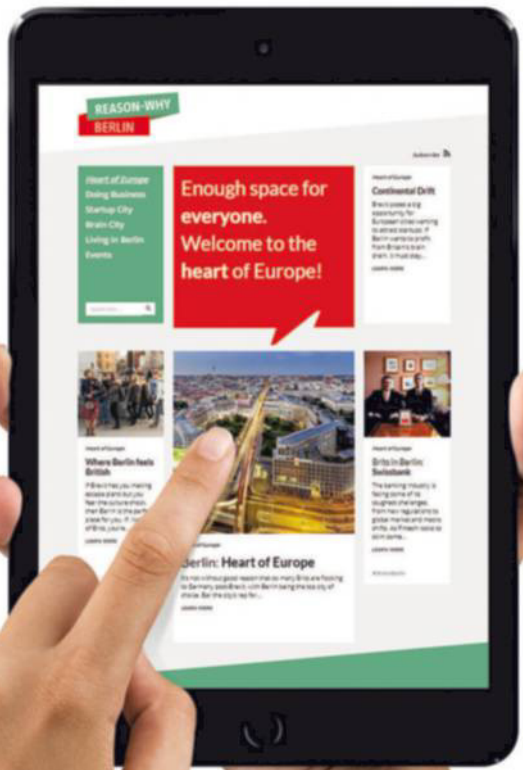
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Forced out by deadly fire, then trapped in traffic

PARADISE, CALIF.

Some have died fleeing in their cars as infernos have stricken California

BY JACK NICAS, THOMAS FULLER AND TIM ARANGO

Thousands of residents in the wooded town of Paradise did what they were told to do when the morning skies turned dark and an inferno raged across the hills: They got in their cars and fled. What happened next was the vehicular equivalent of a stampede, packing the roads to a standstill.

In the hours after the devastating wildfire broke out around Paradise last Thursday morning, tree-lined streets in the town swiftly became tunnels of fire, blocked by fallen power lines and burning timber. Frantic residents, encircled by choking dense smoke and swirling embers, ran out of gas and ditched their cars. Fire crews, struggling to reach the town, used giant earthmovers to plow abandoned vehicles off the road as if they were snowdrifts after a blizzard.

By Sunday night, the Camp Fire had matched the deadliest in California history, the Griffith Park Fire of 1933, with 29 fatalities. Seven of the victims in Paradise died in their vehicles.

Farther south near Los Angeles, where another vast fire continued its destruction, a mass evacuation was also all but halted at times by snarled roads. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said that two bodies had been found severely burned inside a stopped vehicle on a long, narrow driveway in Malibu.



JIM WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

At a news conference on Sunday, Sheriff Kory L. Honea of Butte County said that 228 people were still unaccounted for in Northern California; state officials said they were not aware of anyone missing in connection to fires in the south. Statewide, about 149,000 people were still under orders to leave their homes.

Again and again in California's battle with wildfires, roads have emerged as a major vulnerability for those escaping.

There was only one way out of Paradise for residents fleeing the fire, the four-lane road known as Skyway, which quickly became paralyzed by traffic, a situation similar to what residents of Malibu endured along the Pacific Coast Highway, another choke point.

Lauri Kester, a caretaker for the elderly in Paradise, said it had taken an hour to drive three miles on Thursday as the firestorm ripped through the town.

"There were cars behind, cars in front



NOAH BERGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sheriff's deputies, above, recovered the remains of a victim of the Camp Fire in Paradise, Calif. Below left, Lauri Kester with her dog, Biscuit, at an evacuation center in Chico, Calif. After she got stuck in traffic, Ms. Kester said, a police officer told her to abandon her car and flee on foot. Below right, some of the many cars abandoned in Paradise.



JIM WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

and fire on both sides," Ms. Kester said. A police officer running past her told her to abandon her Subaru.

So Ms. Kester, 52, ran down the road with her dog, Biscuit, in her arms. "I thought, 'This is not how I want to die,'" Ms. Kester recalled on Sunday morning in Chico, 15 miles west of Paradise, smoking a cigarette on a folding chair outside a gold-domed church sheltering refugees. "It was hot, it was smoky and — this sounds like such an exaggeration, but — it was apocalyptic."

California was still battling three major fires on Sunday: the Camp Fire, which exploded across 111,000 acres and is still raging in the forests near Paradise, and two fires west of Los Angeles. With the dry Santa Ana winds gusting westward through the hills of Malibu toward the coast, firefighters battling the Woolsey Fire in Southern California were preparing for it to get worse over the next few days. The Hill Fire, which is

farther inland, was about 70 percent contained.

"We are really just in the middle of this protracted weather event and this fire siege," Chief Ken Pimlott of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said at a news conference on Sunday night.

As wildfires have grown in size and ferocity in recent years, identifying escape routes has become a priority.

The mayor of Paradise, Jody Jones, is a traffic specialist who spent years

working as a regional manager for the state's Department of Transportation.

After a wildfire tore through the area in 2008, Paradise put together a detailed plan, hoping to make emergency evacuations swift and orderly, with residents leaving according to their neighborhoods.

"We actually practiced this about a year and a half ago," Ms. Jones said.

Yet on Thursday morning, when the fire approached with intense speed, any idea of an orderly evacuation fell apart.

"I don't know that you could build the infrastructure to evacuate an entire town that quickly," Ms. Jones said. "I just don't know if that's possible."

Ms. Jones was running an errand in the northern end of Paradise, and her own escape was a transportation planner's nightmare: The drive to Chico, which normally takes 20 minutes, was a four-hour crawl to safety, with flames engulfing both sides of the road.

And it is not just Paradise that is in this situation, the mayor said. Many Cal-

ifornia towns, especially those near wildlands, are vulnerable.

"It could happen anywhere," she said. "It seems like we have more natural disasters now that come at us quicker and affect large numbers of people at the same time. There's no easy solution for it."

Firefighters said they were dumbstruck by the speed of the fire.

"Everything was igniting at once," said Scott McLean, the deputy chief of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "Swirling winds, swirling embers, fire on both sides of the roads. I lost count how many times I ran over downed power lines."

"These are signs that the fires we are dealing with are so ferocious," Mr. McLean said.

In Paradise, the evacuation was further complicated by the large number of older residents. Paradise is a popular retirement destination, and many had a more difficult time getting out.

The evacuation was also complicated by the topography of the town. In the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, Paradise's main connection to the outside world is Skyway, a highway that runs along a ridge, making escape even more dangerous.

The Paradise police chief, Eric Reinbold, who lost his home in the blaze, said the terrain and traffic flow had played a role in several of the deaths.

Four people were found dead in their cars in a neighborhood of Paradise with steep terrain.

"The particular area is out on a finger of a ridge, where there is a canyon on both sides," Chief Reinbold said. "It's dense brush, dense trees. It's one way in, one way out, so it's very possible that the fire was just so intense that there was no way of avoiding that when trying to leave."

On Sunday, Paradise was ringed with miles of scorched earth. Inside the town were the charred remains of gas stations, hair salons and tattoo parlors. The Paradise Inn was mostly debris, save for a sign, and one restaurant was recognizable only by the arrangement of metal-frame chairs left standing. Hundreds of abandoned cars filled parking lots and the sides of the road.

Sheriff Honea of Butte County said that search-and-rescue teams were scouring the areas they could reach — some were still inaccessible because of fire danger — and gathering more human remains.

"We are very early in our efforts," he said. "There is still a great deal of work to do."

Sheriff Honea said the region was still reeling from a high number of missing-person reports. The Sheriff's Department had received more than 500 calls and, after searching local shelters, had located about 100 people.

Harris Miller, 83, standing in the parking lot of the Vintage Grocers in Malibu, its doors shuttered, said he had defied the evacuation order and stayed behind. "I survived all this," he said. "But there's no electricity. And there's no plan for electricity for a week, they say."

Much of the damage from the fire in Malibu is in Point Dume, a section of the coast that has typically been safe because it is on the ocean side of the Pacific Coast Highway. But this time, the fire jumped the road and tore through the canyons, destroying many homes. "Some big beautiful homes that have been there forever," Mr. Miller said.

Jack Nicas reported from Paradise, Calif., Thomas Fuller from San Francisco and Tim Arango from Malibu. Scott Bransford contributed reporting from Chico, Calif., and Mihir Zaveri and Matt Stevens from New York.

Californians wonder if state's tough gun laws are enough

LOS ANGELES

After latest mass killing, activists and politicians ask if more can be done

BY TIM ARANGO AND JENNIFER MEDINA

After a mass killing in Santa Barbara in 2014, California passed a law that let police officers and family members seek restraining orders to seize guns from troubled people. A year later, a shooting rampage in San Bernardino led to voters' approving a ballot proposition to outlaw expanded magazines for guns and require background checks for buying ammunition.

The state has also banned assault weapons and regulates ammunition sales — all part of a wave of gun regulation that began a quarter century ago with a mass murder at a San Francisco law firm.

California may have the toughest gun control laws in the United States, but that still did not prevent the latest mass killing — a shooting on Wednesday that left 12 people dead at the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks.

Investigators are still combing through the background of the gunman, who was found dead after the shooting. But gun control activists and politicians in the state are already weighing what more can be done, and whether existing measures could have prevented the killing.

The attack came just after California elected a new governor, Gavin Newsom, and eyes are on him to see how he responds.

Mr. Newsom is seen as even more aggressive on gun restrictions than his predecessor, Gov. Jerry Brown, and some experts say the state could see the passage of even tougher laws. As lieutenant governor, Mr. Newsom led the effort after the San Bernardino killings to pass the ballot proposition on high-capacity magazines and background checks — a measure that has not been enacted yet because of a court challenge.

With Mr. Brown out of the state last week, and Mr. Newsom serving as acting governor, the mass shooting became the first crisis he faced after being elected Tuesday night.

"The response is not just prayers," Mr. Newsom said at a news conference on Thursday in Sacramento. "The response cannot just be excuses. The response sure as hell cannot be more guns."

Survivors and family members of those who have been killed in gun violence are also calling for stronger measures. On Thursday, Susan Orfanos, whose son survived a mass shooting in Las Vegas last year only to die in the Borderline, told a New York Times reporter: "He didn't come home last night, and the two words I want you to write are: gun control. Right now — so that no one else goes through this. Can you do that? Can you do that for me? Gun control."

As California has become more liberal in recent decades, and especially after

President Trump was elected, gun control is one of several issues — along with climate change, immigration and health care — that have placed the state firmly in opposition to the federal government. In the wake of mass killings, the state's political leaders often find themselves pushing for more gun control within California while speaking out against the federal government's unwillingness to take up the issue, and against the National Rifle Association's positions.

"The National Rifle Association — I'll say this — is bankrupt, morally, and they need to be held to account to their rhetoric and their actions," Mr. Newsom said.

Mr. Newsom did not offer specific new measures that he would push for, but he did say that he would have signed some gun control bills that Mr. Brown had vetoed in recent years. Among those were bills that would have expanded restraining orders, to allow co-workers, school employees and mental health providers to ask courts to take away guns from someone.

Even with the country's toughest gun laws, California has still had the most deaths from mass shootings since 1982, according to a database compiled by Mother Jones — 128 people killed. Florida, with roughly half the population of California, has the second most deaths from mass shootings over that time, 118 killed.

But California also has the highest population in the country, and no one knows how many mass shootings may have been prevented by the gun laws already in place in the state.

"What matters is not just the count but the rate," said Dr. Garen Wintemute,



ANDREW BURTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

California has some of the strictest gun laws in the United States but has had the most deaths from mass shootings since 1982. Still, it has substantially cut its gun-death rate.

an emergency room physician who also leads the University of California Firearm Violence Research Center, which was created in the aftermath of the San Bernardino massacre to study how to prevent mass shootings. "And California's rate is about half that of Florida's."

Most gun deaths are not from mass shootings, and the focus of the gun control movement is on reducing the overall number of gun deaths — in homicides, suicides and accidents. By that measure, California has been successful: It has cut its gun-death rate in half over the last 25 years, and California is among the states with the lowest rates,

with 7.9 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2016, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Despite its reputation as tough on guns, there are pockets of support for easing controls, especially in rural, inland areas, and there are still plenty of gun owners in the state. California has the second most registered guns in the country — more than 340,000, which is second to Texas, according to statistics published by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. But on a per capita basis, California ranks low, 44th, with 8.71 guns per 1,000 people.

Ian D. Long, the gunman in the Thou-

sand Oaks shooting, and a Marine who had served in Afghanistan, drew the attention of police officers in April when they were called to his house for a domestic disturbance. Mental health specialists were called in, and discussed with him his military service and possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder, but determined he was not dangerous enough to detain him and force him to receive treatment.

The episode raised the question of whether someone should have sought a restraining order to keep him away from guns. "My issue with Thousand Oaks is implementing the gun violence restraining order we already have in place," said Allison Anderman, managing attorney at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, an advocacy group in San Francisco. "The shooter was undeniably a candidate for a gun violence restraining order, and for whatever reason the Ventura County Sheriff's Department did not try to obtain one."

Mr. Long also apparently used an extended magazine on his Glock 21 .45-caliber handgun, a device that California voters banned in 2016. The measure has stalled in the courts after a lawsuit from the N.R.A.

In the aftermath of the Thousand Oaks shooting, activists are pushing to expand background checks and widen the circle of people who can seek gun restraining orders. Dr. Wintemute, the emergency room physician, said he was pushing to make a history of alcohol abuse a criterion to prohibit someone from buying a gun. "I think we'll see interest in tightening up California's background check procedures," he said.

Business



Rocket Lab's Electron was launched from New Zealand on Sunday. The 56-foot-tall rocket can carry a 500-pound payload. On this flight it carried a clutch of tiny satellites.

Starting small in space

Company’s modest mission is seen as a giant leap for private rocket enterprises

BY KENNETH CHANG

A small rocket from a little-known company lifted off on Sunday from the east coast of New Zealand, carrying a clutch of tiny satellites. That modest event — the first commercial launching by an American-New Zealand company known as Rocket Lab — could be the beginning of a new era in the space business, where countless small rockets take off from spaceports around the world. This miniaturization of rockets and spacecraft places outer space within reach of a broader swath of the economy.

The rocket, called the Electron, is a mere sliver compared with the giant rockets that Elon Musk, of SpaceX, and Jeffrey P. Bezos, of Blue Origin, envisage using to send people into the solar system. The Electron is just 56 feet tall and can carry only 500 pounds into space.

But Rocket Lab is aiming for markets closer to home.

“We’re FedEx,” said Peter Beck, the New Zealand-born founder and chief executive of Rocket Lab. “We’re a little man that delivers a parcel to your door.”

Behind Rocket Lab, a host of start-up companies are also jockeying to provide transportation to space for a growing number of small satellites. The payloads include constellations of telecommunications satellites that would provide the world with ubiquitous internet access.

The payload of this mission, which Rocket Lab whimsically named “It’s Business Time,” offered a glimpse of this future: two ship-tracking satellites for Spire Global; a small climate- and environment-monitoring satellite for GeoOptics; a small probe built by high school students in Irvine, Calif., and a demonstration version of a drag sail that would pull defunct satellites out of orbit.

BUSINESS IS GETTING SMALLER

Rockets are shrinking because satellites are shrinking.

In the past, hulking telecommunications satellites hovered 22,000 miles above the Equator in what is known as a geosynchronous orbit, where a satellite continuously remains over the same spot on Earth. Because launching a satellite was so expensive, it made sense to pack as much as possible into each one.

Advances in technology and computer chips have enabled smaller satellites to perform the same tasks as their predecessors. And constellations of hundreds or thousands of small satellites, orbiting at lower altitudes that are easier to reach, can mimic the capabilities

once possible only from a fixed geosynchronous position.

“It’s really a shift in the market,” Mr. Beck said. “What once took the size of a car is now the size of a microwave oven, and with exactly the same kind of capabilities.”

Some companies already have launched swarms of satellites to make observations of Earth. Next up are the promised space-based internet systems like OneWeb and SpaceX’s Starlink.

Until now, small spacecraft typically hitched a rocket ride alongside a larger satellite. That trip is cheaper but inconvenient, because the schedule is set by the main customer. If the big satellite is delayed, the smaller ones stay on the ground, too. “You just can’t go to business like that,” Mr. Beck said.

The Electron, Mr. Beck said, is capable of lifting more than 60 percent of the spacecraft that headed to orbit last year. By contrast, space analysts wonder how much of a market exists for a behemoth like SpaceX’s Falcon Heavy, which had its first spectacular launch in February.

A Falcon Heavy can lift a payload 300 times heavier than a Rocket Lab Electron, but it costs \$90 million compared with the Electron’s \$5 million. Whereas SpaceX’s standard Falcon 9 rocket has no shortage of customers, the Heavy has only announced a half-dozen customers for the years to come.

The United States military — a prima-

ry customer for large launch vehicles — is also rethinking its spy satellites. The system would be more resilient, some analysts think, if its capabilities were spread among many smaller satellites. Smaller satellites would be easier and quicker to replace, and an enemy would have a harder time destroying all of them.

PIT STOPS IN THE SPACE RACE

SpaceX could have cornered this market a decade ago.

Its first rocket, the Falcon 1, was designed to lift about 1,500 pounds. But after two successful launches, SpaceX abandoned it, focusing on the much larger Falcon 9 to serve NASA’s needs to carry cargo and, eventually, astronauts to the International Space Station.

Jim Cantrell, one of the first employees of SpaceX, said he did not understand that decision and left the company. In 2015, he started Vector Launch Inc., with headquarters in Tucson, Ariz. Its goal is to make the Model T of rockets — small, cheap, mass-produced.

Vector claims that it can send its rockets into orbit from almost any place it can set up its mobile launch platform, which is basically a heavily modified trailer. That trailer was inspired by Mr. Cantrell’s hobby, auto racing, and many of the company’s employees come from the racing world, too.

ROCKETS, PAGE 9

Big day for Alibaba, but party may not last

SHANGHAI

Yearly shopping festival could be hurt by slowing of China economic growth

BY RAYMOND ZHONG

After 24 hours of frenzied buying and selling and weeks of advertising and promotions, the Alibaba Group announced that its sales hit another titanic high on Singles Day, the Nov. 11 shopping festival that the Chinese e-commerce behemoth cooked up a decade ago.

But this time, with China’s vast economy slowing, the party was held with icebergs in sight from the deck.

Alibaba, China’s biggest online shopping company, kicked off the country’s biggest shopping day with its usual ostentation. Its Saturday night gala event in Shanghai featured the singer Mariah Carey, the retired basketball star Allen Iverson and Miranda Kerr, the Australian supermodel. A Chinese girl group performed a song called “Wanna Buy Wanna Buy” as backup dancers pushed shopping carts bearing the logo of Aldi, the German discount grocer.

Alibaba said it had racked up \$30.8 billion in sales, as measured by its own homegrown metric, gross merchandise value. That handily topped last year’s \$25.3 billion.

But all around China, gloom and uncertainty are the word.

Economic growth is slowing, and the country’s hundreds of millions of middle-class shoppers seem to be holding on more tightly to their pocketbooks. Tech companies are antsy about the government’s more interventionist attitude toward big business. The tariff fight with the United States is casting a pall not simply over trade, but over China’s future writ large. This month, Alibaba cut its sales forecast for the year ending in March by around 5 percent, citing the wobbly economy and the trade war.

Meanwhile, some young Chinese shoppers seem less enthusiastic this year about celebrating manic consumerism.

Yang Sun, a 26-year-old from Xi’an, said that the Singles Day discounts were no longer good enough to persuade her to wait all year to buy the things she wanted.

Wang Xin, 24, an engineer in Shanghai, said he had rediscovered the joys of shopping offline. “Singles Day just doesn’t hold that much appeal for me,” Mr. Wang said.

Asked about the current mood among Chinese consumers, Joseph C. Tsai, Alibaba’s executive vice chairman, told reporters on Sunday that Alibaba should be understood in the context of the epochal rise of China’s middle class. “That trend is not going to stop, trade war or no trade war,” he said. “Any kind of short-term economic effects, we believe, will be cyclical.”

Alibaba is not like Amazon in that it is not a retailer. It merely provides the digital shelves and aisles for other merchants to sell their goods. But in its relentless ambition, Alibaba may be Amazon’s only global equal. Both companies want to fulfill their customers’ every desire and need.

Already, people order dinner on Alibaba’s takeout app, buy groceries from Alibaba’s supermarkets, watch movies produced by Alibaba, navigate with Alibaba’s smartphone maps and rent computing power from Alibaba’s servers. And the company wants to do more. It recently opened an unstaffed hotel. It is making its own computer chips. It wants to promote African economic development and end world hunger.

The business case for all this empire-building, Alibaba says, is that the company’s pools of commercial data give it a leg up in anything that requires understanding customers or merchants.

But Wall Street is still waiting for results and has grown skeptical in the meantime of the costs of expanding into new areas. Alibaba’s shares have lost nearly one-third of their value since June.

Singles Day 2018 showed that Alibaba remains, if nothing else, China’s king of

hype. During the broadcast event, the M.C.s periodically encouraged people watching at home to open up their phones and check out the great deals. As acrobats with Cirque du Soleil twirled in midair, the logo of Kukahome, a Chinese furniture maker, shone brightly behind them.

At one point, the performer Liu Wei rapped out the specs of a new model of Skoda sport utility vehicle.

Anna Lin, a 25-year-old who works in finance in Shanghai, said she was feeling more lukewarm about the whole thing than in years past. Singles Day is now just one of many big shopping festivals each year, she said.

Plus, Ms. Lin said, the Singles Day promotions have become increasingly baroque. This year, there were coupons for specific items and brands, coupons that were available only at certain times of day, and coupons that appeared randomly and could be grabbed only by playing a game. Gathering friends into a team could help you collect even more coupons.

“That’s too much work,” Ms. Lin said. “It also isn’t worth it when you realize that after you’ve done all that, all you’ve got is 10 to 15 percent off, or even less.”

The comedian Papi Jiang captured the feeling in a video skit that went viral last year. In the sketch, Ms. Jiang tries to wade through a mess of convoluted Singles Day promotions. She scribbles formulas on heaps of paper and a blackboard. She throws her phone on the floor multiple times. She tries to do the calculations on an abacus, before realizing that she doesn’t know how to use an abacus.

“My time is more valuable than that,” Ms. Lin said. “I honestly think all the math is a way to hide the fact that there isn’t much of a discount.”

Singles Day 2018 showed that Alibaba remains, if nothing else, the undisputed king of hype in the country.

Alibaba does not lack for other methods of subtle persuasion on Singles Day. If you had opened your Taobao shopping app on Sunday, you would have seen how your spending that day ranked against that of other people in your area.

The company’s methods for ginning up excitement have come under scrutiny before.

Two years ago, Alibaba said that the United States Securities and Exchange Commission was investigating the company for the way it reports Singles Day sales. The company’s preferred metric, gross merchandise value, is supposed to represent the amount of money that changes hands on its platforms. But there is no standardized way of calculating it.

The company has since de-emphasized the number. But the episode illustrated the way that Alibaba sees itself — as a company that breaks the mold.

Ever since Alibaba listed its shares in New York four years ago, the company has used a sense of manifest destiny to beguile investors, stock analysts and an eager news media. China was on the long road to middle-class prosperity, the company said, and Alibaba had the biggest tollbooth. A bet on Alibaba was a bet on China itself.

Last year, when the data firm CB Insights asked people to vote for the company they would invest in and hold for 10 years, Alibaba was the winner, beating out every American tech giant as well as Saudi Aramco and Goldman Sachs.

No one expects Alibaba to generate whopper Singles Day sales growth numbers every year for eternity.

At some point, when growth starts decelerating quickly, the event could change, to focus on one week’s sales instead of one day’s, or on something else entirely.

Alibaba’s track record suggests that when the time comes, it will have no trouble pulling off another act of conjuring.

“I’m not worried about Alibaba at all,” said Steven Zhu, an analyst in Shanghai with the research firm Pacific Epoch. “These guys are really good at creating things from nothing.”

Carolyn Zhang contributed research.

Rule would cut workers in on gig economy riches

BY DAVID GELLES

The gig economy has created economic opportunities for millions of people. Uber and Lyft have empowered everyday drivers to become paid chauffeurs. Airbnb has made homeowners hoteliers. And TaskRabbit has opened new markets for handymen and other laborers.

But much of the wealth created by these companies is not passed along to workers through conventional wages, but to a small number of insiders who own stock.

Uber is eyeing an initial public offering that would value the company at \$120 billion. Airbnb was valued at \$31 billion last year. Lyft was recently valued at \$15 billion. TaskRabbit was bought by Ikea last year for an undisclosed amount. In each case, employees and investors reap the vast majority of those profits, while the gig economy workers — arguably the ones creating much of the value for these companies — can’t partake in those winnings. That’s because they are contractors, not regular employees, and federal securities law restricts private companies from issuing shares to such workers.

That may soon change. Earlier this year, the Securities and Exchange Commission requested public comments on potential updates to the American laws that govern who can receive stock in private companies.

Among the possible modifications to the law — known as Rule 701 — is a change that could have far-reaching implications for how gig economy workers are compensated.

In considering a change, the S.E.C. is tacitly acknowledging that for all the value gig economy companies are creating, they are also, in some ways, contributing to the stark income inequality that is roiling American society.

Though contractors provide much of



JASON HENRY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Postmates contractor picking up an order in San Francisco. Postmates, a food delivery start-up, is among the companies that said they support giving workers equity.

the labor for these tech companies, the S.E.C. noted that gig economy workers were not traditional employees who enjoyed conventional benefits and wages.

“Individuals participating in these arrangements do not enter into traditional employment relationships, and thus may not be ‘employees’ eligible to receive securities,” the S.E.C. wrote, going on to ask whether nonemployees should also be eligible to receive stock.

Companies were supportive of the idea. Uber, Airbnb and Postmates, a food delivery start-up, all chimed in, saying they would welcome the change.

“Providing equity would allow partners to share in the growth of the company, which could lead to enhanced earning and saving opportunities for the partner and for the generations ahead,” Uber’s head of federal affairs, Danielle Burr, said in a letter to the S.E.C.

Rob Chesnut, Airbnb general counsel,

echoed the sentiments in his comments to the S.E.C. “As a sharing economy marketplace, Airbnb succeeds when these hosts succeed,” he wrote. “We believe that enabling private companies to grant hosts and other sharing economy participants equity in the company from an earlier stage would further align incentives between such companies and their sharing economy participants to the benefit of both.”

Postmates said it hoped it could grant equity to its contractors. “While we are proud that our fleet earns significantly higher than minimum wage across jurisdictions, we are also committed to the long term upward mobility of our Postmates,” company executives wrote, using company jargon for its gig workers. Even gig workers chimed in.

“Permitting Uber contractors to own stock in the firm would be another measure which would allow a large group of

people on the lower economic rung of society to make significant strides toward the greater wealth and financial security enjoyed by the middle class,” wrote Brian Sament, who identified himself as an “UberEats delivery guy.”

Yet even if gig economy workers did have access to equity, there is no guarantee that it would solve their financial woes. Though it’s not clear if such equity grants would replace or reduce wages, labor experts say that relying on private company stock is risky, especially for workers lacking financial security.

“Equity is not wages, it’s risky,” said Louis Hyman, a professor at Cornell University and author of “Temp,” a recent book on the labor market. “For people who need to have a steady paycheck, this is not the answer.”

Should the S.E.C. move ahead with such a plan, there are plenty of details still to be sorted out, including the tax treatment of such equity grants. If gig economy workers receive private company stock without any way to sell it, they could be liable for taxes on those gains, without having any easy way to pay those taxes. The S.E.C. could also need to modify other rules that stipulate that if companies distribute stock to more than 2,000 people who are not employees, such as accredited investors, they need to adhere to more rigorous public reporting requirements. And in one of the rare instances when a company tried to do something similar, it failed spectacularly.

Junio, an Uber competitor, offered its drivers restricted stock units that were supposed to convert into lucrative equity. But when Junio was sold to another company, Gett, last year, the program was scrapped, and the equity was virtually worthless. And even before that happened, Junio was considering whether its program might have to be voided because of scrutiny from the S.E.C.



MARK SCHEFFELBEIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

An automated package sorter in Beijing. Alibaba racked up \$30.8 billion in sales on Singles Day, as measured by its own metric, gross merchandise value.

School buses that sing and don't pollute

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y.

New York State district has 5 electric vehicles, but they cost \$365,000 apiece

BY BRAD PLUMER

"Some of the kids call it the singing bus," said Juliessa Diclo Cruz, 10, as she rode in back of one of New York State's first electric school buses on a chilly October morning.

It was easy to see why. The rumbling diesel engines on conventional yellow school buses can be heard a block away. But the five new battery-powered buses in White Plains, which went into service this fall, run so quietly that they have to play a four-tone melody for safety as they roam the streets.

The school district's five singing buses cost \$365,000 apiece, more than three times the price of a new diesel bus with modern pollution controls, and are still a rarity. Of the roughly 480,000 school buses in the United States, only a few hundred are fully electric.

But that's slowly changing. State officials are looking to limit children's exposure to harmful exhaust from older diesel buses. There is also growing concern about the carbon emissions that drive global warming. At the same time, the price of electric buses, while still out of reach for most school districts, keeps falling as technology improves.

"We see this as the beginning of something that's very cutting edge," said Joseph Baker, senior vice president of operations at National Express, the company that operates the school buses in White Plains. "We often joke that someday these White Plains buses will be in a museum."

Similar experiments are proliferating across the country. California has already spent millions of dollars to help budget-strapped school districts purchase dozens of new electric buses, while New York and Massachusetts have funded their own smaller projects.

Many cities, including Los Angeles and Seattle, have also begun purchasing electric buses for their mass transit fleets.

Those efforts could soon get a lift from an unlikely source.

In 2016, after Volkswagen was caught cheating on emissions tests for its diesel engines, the company agreed to pay \$2.9 billion into state funds to help clean up the excess nitrogen oxide pollution its diesel cars had put into the air.

Now, some environmental groups are lobbying states to use this money to re-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BYRON SMITH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, an electric bus at a school in White Plains, N.Y.; right, an electric bus in a White Plains neighborhood. The school district's pilot program relies on a state grant and a partnership with the local electric utility.

place their older diesel school buses with electric ones. So far, Illinois has set aside \$10.8 million for electric school buses. Indiana has set aside \$2.9 million. New York is planning to fund 400 new school buses, with some expected to be electric.

Critics have charged that spending millions on a relatively small number of expensive electric buses is an inefficient way to clean up air pollution, and that states could reduce pollution more cheaply by focusing on cleaner diesel technology for buses, trucks, locomotives and tugboats.

But electric-bus proponents counter that early investments will prompt manufacturers to ramp up production, pushing prices down further until the buses can compete without subsidies, providing a new tool for tackling climate change. The cost of lithium-ion batteries has fallen 19 percent every time production doubles, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

In the meantime, school administrators are carefully monitoring early projects to make sure the buses have sufficient range and run reliably.

As Bayard Guerson, 50, drove one of the new buses through White Plains to pick up elementary school students one morning last month, he checked the digital console on his dashboard showing

how much charge he had left: 56 miles' worth. It was more than enough to travel the 19 miles of his morning routes before he'd plug in the vehicle to recharge for the afternoon.

"I could go the whole day without charging," he said. "But it's like your cellphone: better to charge all the time."

As charging stations become more common across the state, worries about range could dissipate. For now, though, the White Plains district is mainly using its electric buses for its shortest school routes. And administrators are hesitant to use them for out-of-town field trips, like one to the Bronx Zoo, about 16 miles away in New York City.

On dependability, officials in White Plains give the buses, which were made by Lion Electric, a Quebec-based company, a passing grade. "So far, so good," said Sergio Alfonso, the district's director of transportation. "We always expect issues with new technology, but we haven't seen anything out of the ordinary yet."

In 2016, in contrast, three school districts in Massachusetts bought three buses from Lion Electric under a state-funded pilot project. The buses had repeated battery and software failures, and parts often had to be shipped to Canada for repairs, putting the vehicles out of commission for lengthy spells.

"So far, so good. We always expect issues with new technology, but we haven't seen anything out of the ordinary yet."

Lion Electric says it has learned from those early missteps and is training mechanics in White Plains and helping to establish a service center nearby in New Jersey for more serious problems.

White Plains was only able to afford its five buses with outside help. National Express received a state grant that offset \$120,000 of the cost of each vehicle. The company then set up a partnership with Consolidated Edison, the local electric utility, which agreed to chip in another \$100,000 per bus.

In return, Con Ed gets the right to use the buses to help power the grid in the summer, when school is out and the vehicles sit idle. Their batteries would store electricity when demand is low and discharge it during peak hours.

The grid project is one of the first of its kind, and, in theory, could be a way for utilities to help finance electric school buses elsewhere in the state. As New York builds more solar and wind power, it will need lots of new energy storage. The utility plans to test the buses' batteries next summer to see how they hold

up under heavy use and to check whether the economics work.

In California, the Twin Rivers Unified School District in North Sacramento has purchased 16 electric school buses over the past year with a combination of state and local aid.

To date, according to Timothy Shannon, the district's transportation director, the electric buses have cost about 75 percent less to fuel. They use smart chargers to power up during off-peak hours when electricity rates are lower. And, with fewer moving parts, they cost 60 percent less to maintain.

But even with those savings, Mr. Shannon said, the upfront cost of electric buses would have to fall considerably for school districts to consider buying them without outside help.

According to Marc Bédard, the chief executive of Lion Electric, that day could come sooner than many expect.

"Within seven years, we think electric school buses will get to a similar price as diesel," Mr. Bédard said. "But it's all changing so fast. Three years ago, there was a lot of skepticism about whether electric buses were even feasible. Now, we're not talking about whether they're feasible. It's all about how to make the business case work."

For now, not all states are convinced that electric buses are the way to go.

Arizona plans to spend \$38 million of its Volkswagen funds to replace its oldest school buses, but will focus primarily on propane or cleaner diesel technology. In its analysis, the state found it could buy 150 such buses for the cost of fewer than 50 electric buses and eliminate far more pollution overall.

Blue Bird, a bus manufacturer based in Fort Valley, Ga., introduced its first electric models last year in response to the growing California market. In the near future, though, the company said it expects to sell many more propane-fueled buses — which produce fewer greenhouse gases than diesel — because school districts can afford them without subsidies.

Beyond the economic factors, school administrators in White Plains see an intangible value in electric buses: They're educational.

The district has been integrating environmental lessons into its curriculum, offering a farm-to-table elective and encouraging students to compost. The buses represent another teachable moment.

"It's a tremendous learning experience," said Joseph Ricca, superintendent of the White Plains school district. "It's one thing to read about this in a book, it's another to get on and actually ride it."

Iranians fear medicine shortages

American sanctions make pharmaceutical companies reluctant to ship drugs

BY NILO TABRIZY

The strain was evident in Alireza Karimi's voice as he described his struggle to obtain the diazoxide pills his father needs to lower insulin levels and fight pancreatic cancer.

The medicine has to be imported, and until recently that was not a problem. But for the past three months, Mr. Karimi has not been able to find it anywhere, and there is now only one bottle left.

"Now that this medicine isn't here, we're forced to give him only one per day," Mr. Karimi said in an interview over Telegram, a popular messaging app for Iranians. The reduced dosage has created complications, like the threat of convulsions and the need to monitor his father 24 hours a day to make sure his insulin levels do not spike, which could send him into a coma.

Anxieties over the availability of medicine are mounting in Iran with the reimposition this month of sanctions by the United States after President Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal.

Harsh banking restrictions and the threat of secondary sanctions for companies doing business with Iran have made it nearly impossible for foreign pharmaceutical companies to continue working in the country.

Trump administration officials say that the sanctions will not affect trade in humanitarian items, but many are skeptical.

"The fact is that the banks are so terrified by the sanctions that they don't want to do anything with Iran," said Gérard Araud, France's ambassador to the United Nations. "So it means that there is a strong risk that in a few months really there will be a shortage of medicine in Iran."

The Trump administration's "maximum pressure campaign" is starting to remove some of the few avenues that Iran has left to conduct banking for humanitarian items.

One pharmaceutical importer in Iran, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of harassment by the authorities, said the banking sanctions had unnerved many of his European and American clients, who are looking for signals from the United States Treasury about what banks they can work with without risking penalties.

"It creates a problem where even when you have a European company



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A drugstore in Tehran. Many are skeptical about American assurances that trade in humanitarian items will continue.

that wants to sell to Iran, due to the absence of banks being there, payments can't regularly and reliably be made into Europe," said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, an expert in sanctions and humanitarian trade with Bourse and Bazaar in London.

Mr. Batmanghelidj added that the Treasury had been slow or even unwilling to issue licenses authorized by Congress for humanitarian reasons. The licenses allow companies to do business with Iran and other countries that the United States has blacklisted as sponsors of terrorism.

The problems are compounded by Iran's own economic problems, which have led to a severe decline in the nation's currency, the rial, and to steep increases in drug costs, since most are imported. Mr. Karimi said his father's diazoxide pills used to cost roughly \$28 a bottle but the last time he bought them, three months ago, the price had increased to \$43.

In some cases, shortages have been attributed to patients' stockpiling medicines or to the government's efforts to control the supply, knowing that access

"The fact is that the banks are so terrified by the sanctions that they don't want to do anything with Iran."

to hard currency might be difficult in the near future.

Recently, nearly 200 mental health professionals wrote an open letter to the authorities about the declining availability of medicines.

One of the signatories, Dr. Amir Hossein Jalali, a psychiatrist in Tehran, said in an interview over Telegram that "even some domestically produced medicines that need raw materials from outside of the country have also faced a lot of shortages."

He said it was hard to change a patient's medical routine, especially in mental health and chronic illnesses. Finding an effective treatment can be difficult, and even substituting medicine with something from the same chemical family can lead to a deterioration in the patient's condition.

Maryam Peyman, who has multiple

sclerosis, recently went through her last bottle of Orlept, a German medication. For three months she was unable to find any more, or a replacement drug, making it impossible for her to work or even to concentrate.

After three months of extreme discomfort without Orlept, a drug normally used for epilepsy but also prescribed for neurological issues, she finally found a domestically produced alternative, but that is far from ideal.

"Now that I'm using Iranian-made medicine, it gives me headaches and impaired vision," she said. "The German medicine didn't give me any headaches. It increased concentration, and it didn't impact my eyesight."

Mr. Batmanghelidj said that the Trump administration could improve the situation by issuing clear guidelines for pharmaceutical companies doing business with Iran.

"There's been nothing to date other than lip service from Pompeo," he said referring to Mike Pompeo, the American secretary of state. "It's either reflective of infighting in the administration or negligence that's taking place."

Small rocket companies set stage for a giant leap

ROCKETS, FROM PAGE 8

The company is still aiming to meet its goal of getting the first of its Vector-R rockets to orbit this year, but Mr. Cantrell admitted that the schedule might slip again, into early 2019. The flight termination system — the piece of hardware that disables the rocket if anything goes wrong — is late in arriving.

"There are a lot of little things," Mr. Cantrell said. "It drives you crazy."

A prototype was planned for suborbital launch from Mojave, Calif., in September, but it encountered a glitch and the test was called off. The crew put the rocket in a racecar trailer and drove it to Vector's testing site at Pinal Airpark, a small airport a half-hour outside of Tucson that is surrounded by 350 acres of shrubby desert.

Vector built test stands for firings of individual engines as well as completed rocket stages. During a reporter's recent visit to the site, engineers were troubleshooting the launch problems of both the prototype rocket and a developmental version of its upper-stage engine.

Soon the team will head to the Pacific Spaceport Complex, on Alaska's Kodiak Island, for the first orbital launch. Next year, Mr. Cantrell said, the company hopes to put a dozen rockets into space.

Within a few years, he added, it could be launching 100 times a year, not just from Kodiak but also from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California and Wallops Island in Virginia, where Rocket Lab agreed in October to build its second launch complex. Vector is also looking for additional launch sites, including one by the Sea of Cortez in Mexico.

RESURRECTED ROCKETRY

Tom Markusic, another veteran of SpaceX's early days, also sees an opportunity in getting smaller satellites to space.

"I didn't feel there was a properly sized launch company to address that market," he said.

Mr. Markusic said that the need for stronger antennas and cameras would ultimately prompt the construction of slightly bigger small satellites, and that it would be beneficial to be able to launch several at a time.

He started Firefly in 2014, aiming to build a rocket, Alpha, that would lift a 900-pound payload to orbit.

The company grew to 150 employees and won a NASA contract. But a European investor backed out. An American investor also became skittish, Mr. Markusic said, after a SpaceX rocket ex-

ploded on the launchpad in 2016. Firefly shut down, and the employees lost their jobs.

At an auction, a Ukraine-born entrepreneur, Max Polyakov, one of Firefly's investors, resurrected the company. Mr. Markusic took the opportunity to rethink the Alpha rocket, which is now able to launch more than 2,000 pounds.

"Alpha is basically Falcon 1 with some better technology," he said.

Mr. Markusic said his competition was not the smaller rockets of Rocket Lab, Vector or Virgin Orbit but foreign competitors like a government-subsidized rocket from India and commercial endeavors in China. But he complimented Rocket Lab. "They're ahead of everyone else," he said. "I think they deserve a lot of credit."

Firefly plans to launch its first Alpha rocket in December 2019.

RIDING THE BUS TO ORBIT

Not everyone is convinced that the market for small satellites will be as robust as predicted.

"That equation has weaknesses at every step," said Carissa Christensen, founder and chief executive of Bryce Space and Technology, an aerospace consulting firm.

Three-quarters of venture capital-financed companies fail, she said, and the same will likely happen to the companies aiming to put up the small satellites. She also is skeptical that space-based internet will win against ground-based alternatives.

"Publicly, there's no compelling business plans," she said.

That means that the market for small rockets could implode for lack of business. She said a key to survival would be to tap into the needs of the United States government, especially the military. Virgin Orbit, Vector and Rocket Lab were the current front-runners, she said.

The small rocket companies also have to compete with Spaceflight Industries, a Seattle company that resells empty space on larger rockets that is not taken up by the main payload. In addition, Spaceflight is looking to purchase entire rockets launched by other companies, including Rocket Lab, and selling the payload space to a range of companies heading to a similar orbit.

The first such flight, using a SpaceX Falcon 9, is to launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base this month carrying 70 satellites, in what the company compares to a bus ride into orbit.

Michael Roston contributed reporting.

TECH

Social re-engineering, from Myanmar to Germany

Tech We're Using

BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

How do New York Times journalists use technology in their jobs and in their personal lives? Max Fisher, a reporter based in London who co-writes The Interpreter column and newsletter, discussed the tech he's using.

You travel all around the world for your Interpreter columns. What is your tech setup while you're on the road?

Mostly, I try to follow my colleague Sheera Frenkel's security advice. Two laptops and two phones, one of each just for sensitive stuff, which get fully wiped and reloaded after each trip. Everything goes in my Patagonia Headway, the greatest travel bag in human history.

Lots of countries block or monitor certain sites, so I use VPNs, which route all traffic through an anonymous server in another country. And I tether my laptop to my phone so I can avoid sketchy Wi-Fi.

I also need to keep myself sane. So I keep my Kindle fully loaded and always pack my noise-canceling, wireless headphones, the Wirecutter-recommended Sony H.ear. Even if I'm stuck in some edge-of-the-world hotel, living off of granola bars, I can always recharge by escaping for an hour into a Grateful Dead show or the second act of "Doctor Zhivago."

In which country did you find the way people use technology the most surprising and why?

I first went to Myanmar in early 2014, when the country was opening up, and there was no such thing as personal technology. Not even brick phones.

When I went back in late 2017, I could hardly believe it was the same country. Everybody had his or her nose in a smartphone, often logged in



Max Fisher, who has written about social media's effects, working with his Interpreter co-writer, Amanda Taub, in London, where he is based. He always packs his wireless, noise-canceling Sony H.ear headphones, above right, and two phones — one just for sensitive information. His loaded Kindle also provides a welcome distraction when he is abroad.

to Facebook. You'd meet with the same sources at the same roadside cafe, but now they'd drop a stack of iPhones on the table next to the tea.

It was like the purest possible experiment in what the same society looks like with or without modern consumer technology. Most people loved it, but it also helped drive genocidal violence against the Rohingya minority, empower military hard-liners and spin up riots.

People sometimes talk about this showing that Myanmar wasn't "ready" to come online so rapidly. But it looked to me like the same distorting effect of social media I'd seen in any other country. Maybe the change was just

more obvious because it happened so rapidly and Myanmar was already pretty messed up.

You've lately been writing a lot about the effects of social media on the world. What have been some of your major takeaways?

We think of any danger as coming from misuse — scammers, hackers, state-sponsored misinformation — but we're starting to understand the risks that come from these platforms working exactly as designed. Facebook, YouTube and others use algorithms to identify and promote content that will keep us engaged, which turns out to amplify some of our worst impulses.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN QUINTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

killer robot sent to find Sarah Connor, it's a sophisticated set of programs ruthlessly pursuing our attention. And exploiting our most human frailties to do it.

Facebook's terrorizing me into mourning a breakup hardly matters. But, for a lot of users, unhealthy-but-irresistible content can come in more consequential forms. Like a viral rumor or a statement of hate we might otherwise know to avoid.

Where do you think this might all lead us?

I spend a lot of my time asking people this. What is the aggregate effect of routing an ever-growing share of hu-

A robot mind answers your mail

ON TECHNOLOGY
FROM THE MAGAZINE

BY JOHN HERRMAN

In 1996, Microsoft unleashed Clippit, better known as Clippy, on users of Microsoft Office. The legendarily irritating mascot-helper spent the following years hovering around the edges of documents, blinking dumbly under his lascivious eyebrows and blurring out, "It looks like you're writing a letter," until the company sidelined him in 2001, officially recognized as a mistake.

Clippy's problems were manifold. He announced his presence, via a personified avatar, to tell us something that we already knew (or that should have been obvious in the first place) and then proudly offered us little in the way of actual help. He sat and watched us and learned nothing, and repeated himself. He said too much and did too little.

Nevertheless, over 20 years later, the spawn of Clippy are hiding everywhere, guessing what we're trying to do and offering to help. But Clippy's successors are doing their best to avoid his mistakes. Most of the time they are faceless, and if they speak, they do so in a disembodied but humanlike voice. They tend to wait to be asked for help, rather than telling us what they think they know unprompted. And when they do offer help, they tend to be more subtle, more accurate or both. They have perhaps more in common with Clippy's unassuming partners, like Spelling and Grammar Check or AutoCorrect, which spoke through red underlines or small actions carried out on reasonable assumptions (who would intentionally type "teh"?). These tools have followed us and our clumsy fingers to our new smartphones, where they have become both more assertive and more useful, correcting us and only occasionally requiring us to correct them back, and learning all the while.

What does the tech industry want to assist us with now? Email. If you use Gmail, you've probably interacted with either Smart Reply or Smart Compose, whether or not you know them by name. Google introduced Smart Reply in 2015, and Smart Compose began rolling out this year.

Both, in execution, are self-explanatory. Smart Reply suggests canned responses to inbound emails, based on the company's best guess at what most emailers might be about to type. The suggestions are short, peppy and often adequate, at least as a start. Sometimes their tone prompts unhappy realizations about what Gmail sees in us. The frequency with which they use exclamation marks emphasizes just how peculiar the language of professional email communication has become ("Sounds great!" "Very cool!" "Love it!"). Smart Compose, in contrast, offers word and phrase suggestions, based on similar judgments, as the user types in real time. You write "Take a look," and ghostly text might appear to its right: "and let me know what you think." Its assumptions are more personalized, and they feel that

way because it is constantly, visibly, guessing what you're thinking.

Smart Compose and Smart Reply are, at their core, artificial-intelligence technologies: They are programmed to perform tasks, but also to adapt. To start, Smart Reply was trained on publicly available bodies of email text. (Among the most widely used for such projects is the cache of some 500,000 emails collected during the discovery phase of the Enron investigation.) "What makes machine learning different from regular programming is you look at corpses of data to make guesses about things," says Paul Lambert, a product manager for Gmail. "You create a model."

Once that model was trained to deal with some of the more obvious idiosyncrasies of email communications — corporate disclaimers and phrases like "Sent from Outlook" — Google began training it on anonymized text from actual Gmail users. Phrases that appear frequently enough come under consideration for inclusion in Smart Reply. This, too, requires cleanup. Early testers reported seeing "I love you" as a suggested response to work emails.



PATRICK SEMANSKY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Google is helping relieve the knowledge workers of the world of the drudgery of email by showing how inhuman it was.

Armed with this catalog of phrases — currently more than 20,000, according to the company — the model can then start incorporating more contextual clues: What was the subject of the email? Is the email asking a question? Is it expressing a happy sentiment, or is it offering condolences? Phrases are scored based on their utility — how much typing they save, basically — as well as the A.I.'s confidence in the prediction. Both features then take into account how people use them.

If, for example, it suggests a certain completion, and enough users take it, that one will be more likely to appear in the future. If a canned reply is never used, this is a signal that it should be purged; if it is frequently used, it will show up more often. This could, in theory, create feedback loops: common phrases becoming more common as they're offered back to users, winning a sort of election for the best way to say "O.K." with polite verbosity, and even training users, A.I.-like, to use them elsewhere. Such a dynamic would take root only where a behavior is already substantially automated — typed, at work, more as a learned performance rather than as an expression of will, or even an idea. Smart Compose is, in other words, good at isolating the ways we've already been programmed — by work, by social

convention, by communication tools — and taking them off our hands.

Using these features is a bit like minding a machine that is trying to learn how to do what you do for a living. And even if it's the part of the job you wish you didn't have to do, it still prompts uncomfortable thoughts of replacement — or, if not replacement, then something close to it.

It is not remotely implausible that in the near future, a tremendous amount of communication could be conducted in tandem with an A.I. But constant sweeping changes in office communication — from speaking and writing to phones and printing to emailing and instant messaging — do not tell a tidy tale of increased efficiency or decreased workload, even as they represent progress. Already, an undefined but undeniable portion of workplace email amounts to human self-automation: an uncanny form of communication where clichés aren't shunned so much as recognized for their usefulness; where a tone of polite enthusiasm is taken to its exclamatory extreme to mash any ambivalence you may have about, say, "circling back later." One can visualize in the near future hundred-email chains between colleagues unfurling from a single human starting point, composed of nothing but routinized replies. Depending on what your current inbox looks like, this might not require much imagination at all. A study conducted in 2016 by researchers at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business in Canada tried to understand the role email had come to play in the modern office. They surveyed "highly educated baby boomer or Gen X" subjects who were mostly "managers or professionals" working in office jobs and found that they spend on average a full third of their workweeks "processing" email. Whatever their titles, they are — like many office workers — to a large extent professional emailers. Even if their roles are otherwise highly specialized, in this significant way they are not. They are their own assistants.

In 1930, John Maynard Keynes wrote that, thanks to new efficiencies, workers of the future could expect "three-hour shifts or a 15-hour week." He guessed that this would happen within a century. Automation and the abundance it produced has indeed led to countless economic changes, but it did not negate or replace the entire order.

Asked for evidence of the success of this newest tool, Google says that Smart Compose is already "saving people a billion characters of typing each week." This statistic supports one half of what Keynes might have predicted at the dawn of automated communication — the abundance and the glut — but is tellingly silent on the other half, the same half he couldn't quite see the first time. Self-automation can free us only to the extent that it actually belongs to us. We can be sure of only one thing that will result from automating email: It will create more of it.

John Herrman is a technology reporter for The Times.

Can a computer write a novel?

BERKELEY, CALIF.

An author's software take his text snippets and runs with the ideas

BY DAVID STREITFELD

Robin Sloan has a collaborator on his new novel: a computer.

The idea that a novelist is someone struggling alone in a room, equipped with nothing more than determination and inspiration, could soon be obsolete. Mr. Sloan is writing his book with the help of home-brewed software that finishes his sentences with the push of a tab key.

It's probably too early to add "novelist" to the long list of jobs that artificial intelligence will eliminate. But if you watch Mr. Sloan at work, it is quickly clear that programming is on the verge of redefining creativity.

Mr. Sloan, who won acclaim for his debut, "Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore," composes by writing snippets of text, which he sends to himself as messages and then works over into longer passages. His new novel, which is still untitled, is set in a near-future California where nature is resurgent. The other day, the writer made this note: "The bison are back. Herds 50 miles long."

In his cluttered man-cave of an office in an industrial park here, he is now expanding this slender notion. He writes: *The bison are gathered around the canyon*. . . . What comes next? He hits tab. The computer makes a noise like "pock," analyzes the last few sentences, and adds the phrase "by the bare sky."

Mr. Sloan likes it. "That's kind of fantastic," he said. "Would I have written 'bare sky' by myself? Maybe, maybe not."

He moves on: *The bison have been traveling for two years back and forth*. . . . Tab, pock. The computer suggests *between the main range of the city*.

"That wasn't what I was thinking at all, but it's interesting," the writer said.



PETER PRATO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Robin Sloan, in his office in the Murray Street Media Lab in Berkeley, Calif. He is using a computer program he created to help write a novel set in the near future.

man social relations through engagement-maximizing algorithms?

Maybe the effect is broadly negative. Maybe it's broadly positive. Probably it's mixed. But it is almost certainly profoundly disruptive in ways that we may spend the rest of our lives trying to understand.

Whether they set out to or not, these companies are conducting the largest social re-engineering experiment in human history, and no one has the slightest clue what the consequences are.

In the meantime, I've turned off Facebook push alerts and have reinstated a longstanding practice of avoiding any activity that would train an algorithm in what makes me click. I use sites like YouTube only anonymously and with my browser in incognito mode. (Separately, like my colleague Nellie Bowles, I set my screens to grayscale.)

It's not that I fear some devastating privacy breach or misuse of my data. Rather, these platforms are incredibly sophisticated at learning our habits and keeping us engaged in ways that are not necessarily healthy for us or our communities.

Outside work, is there a gadget or software or some other tech tool that you or your family loves using? Why?

I do a lot of cycling, so my iPhone is stuffed with various weather and transit apps. Google Maps has mostly replaced the GPS gadgets and old-fashioned bicycle maps. The only app of those worth recommending, London Air, tracks London's air quality.

To give social media some credit, some of my favorite serialized entertainment of any kind is the Twitter feed of Nicole Cliffe, a writer for various publications, which could exist and feel so personal only on a platform like Twitter. My sister and I regularly send each other tweets of hers, like a recent story about her mother's quest to reclaim stolen marijuana plants. They're funny and well written, as well as unfailingly kind and warm.

Opinion

Saudi Arabia is misusing Mecca

In the aftermath of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder, the kingdom has exploited the podium of the Grand Mosque. It’s using its imams to sanctify the rulers and their actions.



CHRISTINA HAGERFORS

Khaled M. Abou El Fadl

The rulers of Saudi Arabia derive much of their legitimacy and prestige in the Muslim world from their control and upkeep of the Grand Mosque and the Kaaba in Mecca and the mosque of Prophet Muhammad in Medina. King Salman, like the rulers before him, wears the title of the “Khadim al-H aramayn as-Sarifayn,” which is translated as the “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” or, more precisely, “The Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries.” Despite the humility of the royal title, the Saudi monarchy has a long history of exploiting the podium of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by using its imams to praise, sanctify and defend the rulers and their actions.

In the aftermath of the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, as the world’s accusatory gaze was transfixed on Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi monarchy has again used the Grand Mosque to defend and deify the crown prince in a manner that makes its legitimacy and control of Mecca and Medina morally troubling like never before.

On Oct. 19, Sheikh Abdulrahman al-Sudais, the officially appointed imam of the Grand Mosque and the highest religious authority in the kingdom, delivered his Friday sermon from a written script. Friday sermons at the Grand Mosque are broadcast live on cable networks and social media sites, watched with great reverence by mil-

lions of Muslims and carry a great deal of moral and religious authority. Imam Sudais delivered a troubling sermon, violating the sanctity of the sacred space he occupied. He referenced a saying attributed to Prophet Muhammad that once every century, God sends a mujtahid, a great reformer to reclaim or reinvigorate the faith. He explained that the mujtahid is needed to address the unique challenges of each age.

He proceeded to extol Prince Mohammed bin Salman as a divine gift to Muslims and implied that the crown prince was the mujtahid sent by God to revive the Islamic faith in our age. “The path of reform and modernization in this blessed land . . . through the care and attention from its young, ambitious, divinely inspired reformer crown prince, continues to blaze forward guided by his vision of innovation and insightful modernism, despite all the failed pressures and threats,” the imam declared, from the podium where Prophet Muhammad delivered his last sermon.

Invoking the debate following the Khashoggi murder, Imam Sudais warned Muslims against believing ill-intended media rumors and innuendos that sought to cast doubt on the great Muslim leader. He described the conspiracies against the crown prince as intended to destroy Islam and Muslims, warning that “all threats against his modernizing reforms are bound not only to fail, but will threaten international security, peace and stability.”

He cautioned that the attacks against “these blessed lands” are a provocation and offense to more than a billion Muslims. Imam Sudais used the word

“muhaddath,” or “uniquely and singularly gifted” to describe Prince Mohammed. “Muhaddath” was the title given by Prophet Muhammad to Umar Ibn al-Khattab, his companion and the second caliph of Islam. The imam implicitly compared the crown prince to Caliph Umar.

Imam Sudais prayed for God to protect Prince Mohammed against the international conspiracies being woven against him by the enemies of Islam, the malingerers and hypocrites, and concluded that it was the solemn duty of all Muslims to support and obey the king

A lot has changed since Prince Mohammed’s rise to power.

Mosque so brazenly to serve the monarchy. No imam of the Grand Mosque had ever anointed a Saudi ruler as the mujtahid of the age or dared to imply as much.

The sermons in Mecca and Medina are read from a script, which is approved beforehand by Saudi security forces. While the king appoints a leading imam for the Grand Mosque and the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, each imam has a number of officially appointed deputies who rotate in leading prayers and delivering sermons.

For decades, the sermons delivered in Mecca and Medina have been pietistic, dogmatic and predictable. They have always concluded with a prayer for the Saudi royals, but the imams

would not attribute sacred qualities to the monarchy and insisted that the rulers should be obeyed only to the extent that they obey God.

A lot has changed since Prince Mohammed’s rise to power. The crown prince has imprisoned hundreds of prominent Saudi imams who have shown even a modicum of resistance—including very prominent and influential jurists such as Sheikh Saleh al-Talib and Sheikh Bandar Bin Aziz Bilila, former imams of the Grand Mosque. Saudi prosecutors have sought the death penalty for Salman al-Awdah, a prominent, reformist cleric who was arrested last September. Some reports claim that another prominent cleric, Sheikh Suleiman Daweesh, who was arrested in April 2016, has died in a Saudi prison after being tortured.

The only imams who seem to be allowed to lead prayers and give sermons at the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina are those who have agreed to go along with whatever the crown prince wants. Some influential Saudi scholars such as Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Al Rayes went as far as saying in a lecture that even if the Saudi ruler “fornicates in public on television for half an hour each day, you are still required to bring people together around the ruler, not to aggravate people against him.”

Imam Sudais’s recent sermon put Muslims at an axial turning point: Accept the crown prince as the divinely inspired reformer of Islam and believe and accept his words and deeds or you are an enemy of Islam. Muslim scholars reacted to the sermon primarily on social media with disdain and outrage.

Numerous Arabic language comedy shows and talk shows on YouTube reacted with mockery and condemnation.

When an imam of the Grand Mosque calls upon Muslims to obediently accept Prince Mohammed’s incredulous narrative about the murder of Mr. Khashoggi; to accept his abduction, jailing and torture of dissenters, including imprisonment of several revered Islamic scholars; to ignore his pitiless and cruel war in Yemen, his undermining the democratic dreams in the Arab world, his support for the oppressive dictatorship in Egypt, it makes it impossible to accept the imam’s categorization of the crown prince as a divinely inspired reformer. The sanctified podium of the prophet in Mecca is being desecrated and defiled.

The control of Mecca and Medina has enabled the clerical establishment and the monarchy flush with oil money to extend their literalist and rigid interpretations of Islam beyond the borders of the kingdom. Most Muslims will always prefer a tolerant and ethically conscientious Islam to the variant championed by the crown prince and the acquiescent Saudi clergy.

By using the Grand Mosque to whitewash acts of despotism and oppression, Prince Mohammed has placed the very legitimacy of the Saudi control and guardianship of the holy places of Mecca and Medina in question.

KHALED M. ABOU EL FADL is a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the author of “Reasoning With God: Reclaiming Shari’ah in the Modern Age.”

It’s time to make video games safe for children

Video games, streaming sites and esports are plagued with trolls.

Won Sang Choi

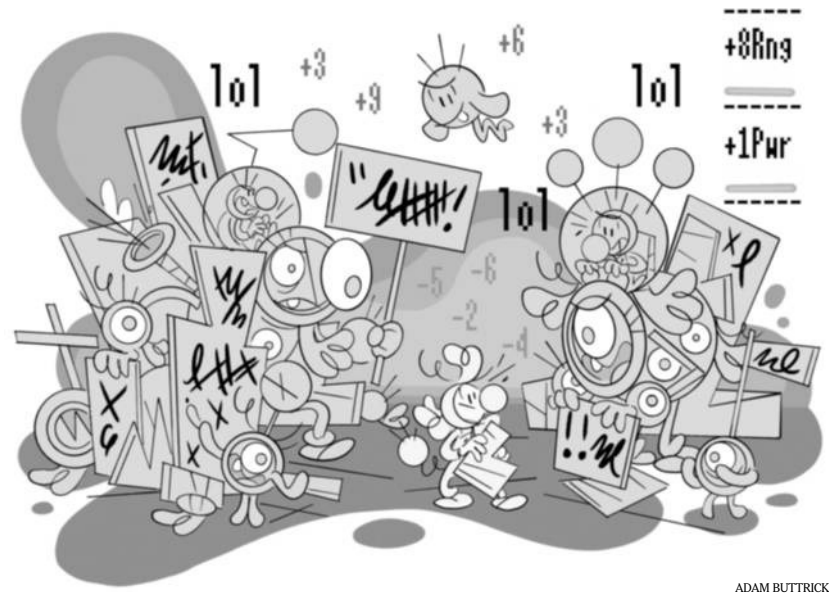
Imagine that your daughter is playing Fortnite, and a troll in another country joins the game and begins sexually harassing her. Imagine that your son is watching his favorite video gamer live-stream an esports game, and the streamer begins to shout obscenities.

Disruptive behavior like this has become routine in video games. The system that guides the appropriateness of content on these platforms is obsolete, and children who play video games are exposed to inappropriate and abusive behavior. To fix this, and make video games safe for children, we need a new content rating system for the esports era.

With the rise of esports, video

games are no longer just a hobby, as they were in my elementary school days when I used to play Super Mario on my Super Nintendo. In esports, professional gamers compete in video game leagues and tournaments like the Overwatch League and the International DOTA2 Championships, where the prize money can reach into the millions of dollars.

The esports industry wants legitimacy in the world of sports, and it’s succeeding. Video games are evolving to a place where they are treated like athletic sports, and the gamers treated like athletes. Pro gamers sign yearly contracts with teams and practice for hours and hours to enhance their skills and build team strategies. Those who make it to the top enjoy worldwide fame, like South Korean pro gamer Lee Sang-hyeok, known as Faker, who has been called “esports’ Michael Jordan.”



ADAM BUTTRICK

At the Asian Games 2018 in Indonesia, six video games were played as a demonstration sport. At the next Asian Games, in four years, gamers will be awarded medals. Even officials of the 2024 Paris Olympics are considering video gaming as a demonstration sport.

The final games at the League of Legends World Championship in 2018, which ended last weekend, attracted more than 200 million viewers. This year, thanks to streaming sites like Twitch and YouTube, game live-streaming will have an audience of 380 million viewers worldwide.

Esports platforms and video games are plagued by trolls. As esports are rising to the same worldwide standing as athletics, and gamers are treated as athletes, the level of sportsmanship within video games is lagging far

CHOI, PAGE 13

OPINION

The New York Times

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AMERICA NEEDS A BIGGER HOUSE

Why is it still operating with a Congress built for the early days of the 20th century?

We're nearly two decades into the 21st century, so why is America still operating with a House of Representatives built for the start of the 20th?

The House's current size — 435 representatives — was set in 1911, when there were fewer than one-third as many people living in the United States as there are now. At the time, each member of Congress represented an average of about 200,000 people. In 2018, that number is almost 750,000.

That would shock the Constitution's framers, who set a baseline of 30,000 constituents per representative and intended for the House to grow along with the population. The possibility that it might not — that Congress would fail to add new seats and that district populations would expand out of control — led James Madison to propose what would have been the original First Amendment: a formula explicitly tying the size of the House to the total number of Americans.

The amendment failed, but Congress still expanded the House throughout the first half of the nation's existence. The House of Representatives had 65 members when it was first seated in 1789, and it grew in every decade but one until 1920, when it became frozen in time.

Today, the House is far too small, and that poses a big danger to American democracy.

For starters, how does a single lawmaker stay in touch with the concerns of three-quarters of a million people? The answer is she doesn't. Research shows that representatives of larger districts are more likely to take political positions at odds with what a majority of their constituents want. These representatives are also ripe targets for lobbyists and special interests, whose money enables them to campaign at scale, often with misleading messages. So special interests are more likely than regular voters to influence policy positions and votes.

Second, the cap on the number of House members leads to districts with wildly varying populations. Montana and Wyoming each have one representative, but Montana's population — 1.05 million — is nearly twice the size of Wyoming's. Meanwhile, Rhode Island, which has roughly the same population as Montana, gets two seats. These discrepancies violate the basic constitutional principle of one-person-one-vote, causing voters to be unequally represented in the chamber that was designed to offset the Senate, where every state gets two seats regardless of population.

Third, the size of the House determines the shape of the Electoral College, because a state's electoral votes are equal to its congressional delegation. This is one of the many reasons the college is an unfair and antiquated mechanism: States that are already underrepresented in Congress have a weaker voice in choosing the president, again violating the principle that each citizen should have an equal vote.

There's virtually no evidence that a larger House would be less effective at governing. It is true that individual representatives would find their influence diluted by the addition of more members, but that's not an argument against expansion. Nor would growing the House cost too much. Salaries for lawmakers and their staffs would total less than one million dollars per representative — which means a couple hundred representatives could be added for the price of, say, five F-14 fighter jets.

Most important, expanding the House would mean not just a government with more representatives, but one that is literally more representative — including more people from perennially underrepresented groups, like women and minorities, and making for a fuller and richer legislative debate.

What is the optimal number of House seats?

The fact is that America is now far out of step with most modern democracies, where national legislatures naturally conform to a clear pattern: Their size is roughly the cube root of the country's population. Denmark, for instance, has a population of 5.77 million. The cube root of that is 179, which happens to be the size of the Folketing, Denmark's Parliament.

This isn't some crazy Scandinavian notion. In fact, the House of Representatives adhered fairly well to the so-called cube-root law throughout American history — until 1911. Applying that law to America's estimated population in 2020 would expand the House to 593 members, after subtracting the 100 members of the Senate.

That would mean adding 158 members. To some, this might sound like 158 too many. But it's an essential first step in making the "People's House" — and American government broadly — more reflective of American society today.

I will miss you, German schools

Firoozeh Dumas

After almost six years in Munich, my family and I will soon be returning to California, and there are a few things I already know I will miss. I am not talking about the obvious (fresh pretzels, fresh pretzels with cheese, fresh pretzels with cheese and pumpkin seeds, no potholes, universal health care) but the less known differences that come with spending time in schools.

We are fortunate to live in a part of Munich with top-notch public schools, similar to where we lived in America. We pay a few percentage points more in taxes than we paid in California, but holy Betsy DeVos, do we get more!

Our daughter's elementary school, which she graduated from a few years ago, offered a rich curriculum, from math and sciences to arts and languages. After school, in addition to the more traditional offerings of chess, theater and computers, she could take circus lessons, where children learned to juggle, walk on a tightrope and ride a unicycle. Since her school did not have a pool, students were bused every week to a nearby sports club for swim lessons, at no extra charge.

The school also offered a weeklong enrichment program that varied year to year. One year, students spent five days visiting sports clubs, each day being introduced by experts to sports such as fencing, ice hockey and volleyball. Once a real circus came to her school for a week and trained the students, who then put on a performance. We did have to contribute \$25 per student for that, since constructing an actual circus tent was costly.

We have also paid for extras like trips to museums (about \$4 each) and \$250 for a weeklong class trip to Austria intended to foster independence (a highlight was that each child did a short walk alone at night in a field), but that's it. On the few occasions when the school organized fund-raising efforts, the recipients were in other countries.

Based on their academic performance in fourth grade, children in Germany are divided into three tracks. I do not agree with this system but high-performing children benefit greatly. The top track qualifies for "gymnasium," the most advanced secondary school, with a curriculum that prepares students for higher education. The gleaming facilities of our daughter's gymnasium, complete with sports halls, music rooms and a library housing ancient books, rivals those of any top university. Did I mention that higher education is free?

The schools I attended growing up in California were nothing like this. I was in middle school when Proposition 13, a law meant to ease residents' tax burden, passed in 1978. The impact on the state's school budgets was immediate.

I still remember art, music and language programs being gutted seemingly overnight, and counselors and librarians disappearing. As a parent, I assumed that for schools to get what they needed, we would have to pay significantly more in taxes, and who wants that? Parents are expected to donate time and money to make up for what the government can't provide. In addition to raising funds for our own schools, I and many others raised money for schools in areas with fewer resources. It was the little Dutch boy and the dike, but for every hole we plugged, a dozen more appeared.

My daughter's school offered circus lessons. Now I'll have to sell gift wrap to keep the gym lights on.

consists of waving our child out the door as she walks to the nearby tram. It took me years to get used to the sight of tiny children with huge backpacks sitting by themselves on the train.

Now that I have lived in a society with a much better alternative, I realize that the idea of a city where children can practice independence from an early age requires a social contract: A certain number of people have to participate in order to achieve success.

I don't know if we can replicate this independence in America, not just because of the lack of transit in most places but also because of the anxiety intertwined with the idea of a child going anywhere alone. The system here in Munich has also left me with more time, not to mention dignity. Have I had to accompany my child door to door to sell overpriced wrapping paper to save a school program? Thank the good Lord, no. Have I had to cringe and repeatedly ask family and friends to sponsor walkathons, danceathons, readathons or car-washathons? No. People are no longer avoiding my phone calls. (Note to friends in America: Those phone calls will start again. Please answer. Also, do you need any wrapping paper?)

As I prepare to return to California, I am looking forward to seeing my family and reuniting with dear friends, many of whom I met while chaperoning, organizing auctions, selling cupcakes, supervising the playground and doing lice checks. I will undoubtedly take part in fund-raising for my child's new school, but please forgive me if my homemade cupcakes taste like resentment frosted with betrayal and sprinkled with exasperation. Unfortunately, I've now enjoyed a system where for a little more in taxes, I get a lot more in services. And that leaves a bitter aftertaste.

FIROOZEH DUMAS is the author of "Funny in Farsi" and "It Ain't So Awful, Falafel."



ELENI KALORIKOTI

Raking leaves on a windy day

Margaret Renkl

Contributing Writer

NASHVILLE Leaf blowers are like giant whining insects that have moved into your skull. They are swarming just behind your eyes, drilling deep inside your teeth. Leaf blowers have ruined autumn with their insistent whine and their noxious fumes, and they are everywhere. You may believe it is futile to resist them, but you still can. In almost every situation where something is loud, obnoxious and seemingly ubiquitous, resistance is an option.

Head to the weathered shed in your backyard and fiddle with the rusty padlock until it finally yields. Reach into the corner where you keep the shovel and the posthole digger and the pruning shears. From that jumble of wonderful tools requiring no gasoline, pull out a rake. Quite some time has elapsed since you last used the rake, and its tines may be a bit crooked now, bent here and there along the row. Never mind, the rake will do. Making do is part of the point.

Think of how the rake reminds you of the comb your mother tugged gently through your clean hair after a bath. Think of the way your mother smelled as she leaned close to untangle the snarls. Remember how your damp hair held the rows the comb left behind, like new-planted peanuts in your grandfather's fields. That's what the grass will look like after you've cleared it of leaves.

Take care to lift the rake a little when you arrive at the raised roots of the maple trees and the margins of the

yard where the lawn mower can't reach beneath the tangle of honeysuckle. Don't push too far into those hidden spaces beneath woody shrubs or the hollows between tree roots. This is where small crawling things are hiding, sheltering under the damp leaves. When the birds finally return in springtime, these little stirring creatures will be a feast for their nestlings. Whatever it might feel like on this damp November day, remind yourself that springtime is coming.

Don't let the wind become a frustration to you. This is not the time for insisting on perfection. We are making do now, remember? In a forest, fallen leaves compost themselves to feed the trees. The leaves you miss in raking will molder and rot through the winter,

generating their own heat and protecting large trees and small creatures alike. Think of your desultory raking as a way to feed the trees, as an investment in the urban forest.

After the midterm elections, a liberal ponders futility — and arrives at hope.

long-ago taste of mud pies and the smell of centipedes.

While you're breathing in the scent of the ancient soil, listen for the squirrels. They will be fussing at you from

the treetops, scolding you for turning up the dirt they have claimed for their own planting. All autumn long, the squirrels have been sowing nuts and acorns across the landscape. Take a moment to wonder, leaning on your rake, how many forests the squirrels' thumbless hands have planted in all the busy autumns of their kind.

Now, see? For a moment you have managed to forget the leaf blowers! You have failed to note the sounds of traffic on the nearby street where everyone is in a hurry and always drives too fast. For a moment, too, you have forgotten your worries — your own small worries and the bigger worries of the world.

Remember that one day soon the wind will die down, the tree limbs will be bare, and the small creatures that live beneath the leaf litter will burrow deep into the cold ground. For now, give yourself over to what is happening in the sky. Watch the leaves unloose themselves from their branches and deliver themselves to the wind. Watch the wind, which you cannot see, catch and lift the leaves, which you can see. Watch the wind catch them, lift them, drop them and lift them again. Again and again and again.

Before you go inside, take a leaf into your hand. Put it on your desk or next to your bed. Keep it nearby, through whatever troubles the long winter brings. It will help you remember that nothing is ever truly over. It will help you remember what the wind always teaches us in autumn: that just because you can't see something doesn't mean it isn't there.

MARGARET RENKL covers flora, fauna, politics and culture in the U.S. South.



Making video games safe for kids

CHOI, FROM PAGE 11

In the League of Legends, I can form a virtual team with players around the world in less than five minutes and play against millions of others. As soon as the match starts, someone types a message in the chatbox. “Feel like trolling,” the anonymous person says, and everyone else on the team knows what’s coming next. Soon, the troll who was supposed to be your teammate kills himself in the game and types obscenities — misspelled to avoid text filters — which flash across the screen. There’s nothing that my teammates or I can do about the troll. I tell the anonymous troll that I’ll report him. “LOL!” he says. I start another game, only to be trolled again.

The same toxicity plagues streaming sites like Twitch and YouTube, where people watch other gamers play. One pro gamer was playing a live public match on a Korean national TV channel, where thousands of children were watching. Forty seconds into the stream, his anonymous opponent typed a string of obscenities into the chatbox for all to see. In another stream, the N-word was used about 60 times. In another instance, a streamer used explicit and homophobic language when talking to a gay pro gamer.

Four years ago, in what became known as Gamergate, anonymous online miscreants harassed women in the video game industry, drawing worldwide outrage well before the #MeToo movement began. Today, 48 percent of gamers are women, and some — like Kim Se-yeon, known as Geguri, the first female gamer in the Overwatch League — make it to the pro level. But trolls pester female gamers with obscene, sexist and misogynistic language, without any consequences. In the world of gaming, there are no rules.

The most troubling aspect of this is that most games are intended for

children and young adults. Approximately 64 million children in the United States play video games. We don’t allow our children to watch things on television that contain this kind of language or behavior, and we certainly don’t want them to think that the language and behavior of the trolls is acceptable.

My family moved to the United States two years ago from South Korea. My 3-year-old daughter loves learning English through YouTube videos and by playing puzzle video games. I fear that she’ll be exposed to this toxicity soon, unless we eliminate trolls, put a new ratings system into place and demand better of the video-gaming industry. There are very real dangers to be feared: In June, a 7-year-old girl’s avatar was sexually assaulted in a Roblox game.

The regulations and ratings systems now in place are not doing enough to stop the trolls. If an Elmo character shouts the F-word or kills his teammates in a game, it doesn’t affect the game’s rating, as provided by the industry’s self-regulating organization, the Entertainment Software Rating Board. The E.S.R.B. reviews how violent and sexual game content is, but not how toxic the gamers are becoming in the games. The Federal Trade Commission says on its website that “you may be able to block the player, or notify a game’s publisher or online service.” While I’ve blocked and reported hundreds of trolls to the video game companies, I’ve never heard back.

Even though this problem is widespread and many of the trolls live outside the United States, the F.T.C. and the rating board can take steps to make video game communities less

toxic.

First, they need to clearly define what is and is not acceptable in video games and streaming sites. Video games should be rated based on the amount of trolling that happens, and streaming sites should be rated just as video games are. Streaming channels should be dynamically filtered based on the user. Children under a certain age should not be able to see videos that use explicit language or sexual visuals.

Second, the F.T.C. should run extensive tests on video games and streaming sites to understand the toxicity and trolling of gaming communities. To do so, it can work with gamers across the country to collect data, as well as work with game companies and streaming sites.

Third, the F.T.C. should require game companies and streaming sites to share public reports on how they are managing and preventing toxicity across their platforms. Whenever trolling occurs — especially in children’s games — the users and their parents should be notified, and the games or platforms should be required to address the trolling and share the steps that were taken to stop or prevent it.

The F.T.C. can apply these rules to companies outside of the United States that want to sell their products here, where 178 million players generate \$30.4 billion in revenue every year.

Parents also need to shoulder some of the responsibility. In the United States, 91 percent of children ages 2 to 17 play video games. We need to protect our children by deleting the toxic games from their personal computers, consoles and phones. We need to share their stories online to expose the problem. It’s time to make the online world safe for them.

WON SANG CHOI is an esports fan who recently received an M.B.A. from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Remembering the forgotten war

SIDES, FROM PAGE 1

World War II, the marquee event their uncles and older brothers and cousins — the “Greatest Generation” — fought.

Recently I’ve gotten to know one of these Korean War veterans. His name is Franklin Chapman, known as Jack; he’s a retired college security chief and part Cherokee Indian who lives here in Santa Fe. In December 1950, on a subzero night in the mountain wilds near North Korea’s Chosin Reservoir, Mr. Chapman’s convoy, part of the Seventh Infantry Division, came under withering attack by the Chinese. Nearby, the American operator of a 75-millimeter recoilless rifle, mounted on the back of a truck, lost his nerve and abandoned his post in a panic.

A captain stomped among the men, demanding a volunteer to take over the gun. Private Chapman, a 17-year-old string bean from Oklahoma, raised his hand. To this day, he doesn’t know why. “Maybe I was brave,” he told me. “Maybe I was stupid.”

Climbing aboard the truck, Private

Chapman could see hundreds of Chinese pressing in, with bugles blaring and bullets sputtering across the snow. He swiveled the big gun and fired.

Manning a weapon as lethal as this, Private Chapman knew it was only a matter of time before the Chinese found him. They shot him in the left arm, then the right leg, then the right arm. A medic treated his wounds, and Private Chapman climbed back on the truck.

This time he was hit in the hip, then took numerous pieces of shrapnel. He had just finished reloading when a bullet struck his forehead, embedding itself in his skull. It knocked him off the truck, rendering him unconscious. The Chinese overran his unit and cut it to pieces. The engagement, known as the Battle of

Hellfire Valley, had ended.

Hours later, Private Chapman awoke to find himself with 10 other captives, hunched on the dirt floor of a farmhouse. Chinese guards marched them on mountain trails for 19 days until they reached a place called Kanggye, near the Manchurian border. Private Chapman languished there for nearly three years.

When he returned from the war, no parades or celebrations greeted him. He received no medals for his extraordinary bravery. His heroics weren’t written up in newspapers or magazines. He quietly went about his life. He joined the Air Force and served for nearly 16 years. When he kept having debilitating headaches, a surgeon removed the bullet lodged in his skull. He keeps it as a relic.

Mr. Chapman, who is 85 and mostly homebound, suffers from neuropathy in his feet from frostbite, a common malady among Korean War veterans. His body is a miscellany of aches from his war wounds and his years in the prison camps. He has also experienced PTSD, although through most of his life the condition wasn’t dignified with a name. It seems somehow apt, for a Korean veteran, that he now suffers from severe memory loss. Sometimes he can’t recognize his own daughter. But his recollections of his war experiences are stark and vivid.

Men like Jack Chapman are gradually exiting our stage. They’re unassuming, uncomplaining men who answered the call and fought for a principle, long ago and far from home, in a war that was not “officially” a war — a war that curiously became a dormant account in our public memory bank. Stalwart and humble old soldiers like Jack Chapman are the reason, as this Veterans Day passes, we should make the Korean War the Remembered War.

HAMPTON SIDES is the author, most recently, of “On Desperate Ground: The Marines at the Reservoir, the Korean War’s Greatest Battle.”

Who’s the real American psycho?



Maureen Dowd

WASHINGTON Donald Trump is running wild — and running scared.

He’s such a menace that it’s tempting to cheer any vituperative critic and grab any handy truncheon. But villainizing Trump should not entail sanitizing other malefactors.

And we should acknowledge that the president is right on one point: For neocons, journalists, authors, political hacks and pundits, there is a financial incentive to demonize the president, not to mention an instant halo effect. Only Trump could get the pussy-hat crowd to fill Times Square to protest Jeff Sessions’s firing.

We make the president the devil spawn and he makes us the enemy of the people and everybody wins. Or do they? To what extent is lucrative Trump hysteria warping our discourse?

Trump may not be sweaty and swarthy, but he makes a good bad guy. As with Nixon and Watergate, the correct moral response and the lavish remunerative rewards neatly dovetail.

Even for Washington, the capital of do-overs and the soulless swamp where horrendous mistakes never prevent you from cashing in and getting another security clearance, this is a repellent spectacle. War criminals-turned-liberal heroes are festooned with book and TV contracts, podcasts and op-ed perches.

Those who sold us the “cakewalk” Iraq war and the outrageously unprepared Sarah Palin and torture as “enhanced interrogation,” those who left the Middle East shattered with a cascading refugee crisis and a rising ISIS, and those who midwived the birth of the Tea Party are washing away their sins in a basin of Trump hate.

The very same Republicans who eroded America’s moral authority in the 2000s are, staggeringly, being treated as the new guardians of America’s moral authority.

They bellow that Trump is a blight on democracy. But where were these patriots when the Bush administration was deceiving us with a cooked-up war in Iraq?

Michelle Obama has written in her memoir that she will never forgive Trump for pushing the birther movement. Yet the Pygmalsions of Palin, who backed Trump on the birther filth, are now among the most celebrated voices in Michelle’s party.

The architects and enablers of the Iraq war and Abu Ghraib are still being listened to on foreign policy, both inside the administration (John Bolton and Gina Haspel) and out. Never-Trumper Eliot Cohen wrote the Washington Post op-ed after the election telling conservatives not to work for Trump; Max Boot, who urged an invasion of Iraq whether or not Saddam was involved in 9/11, is now a CNN analyst, Post columnist and the author of a new book bashing Trump; John Yoo, who wrote the unconstitutional torture memo, is suddenly concerned that Trump’s appointment of his ghastly acting attorney general is unconstitutional.

MSNBC is awash in nostalgia for Ronald Reagan and W.

So it’s a good moment for Adam McKay, the inventive director of “The Big Short,” to enter the debate with a movie that raises the question: Is insidious destruction of our democracy by a bureaucratic samurai with the soothing voice of a boys’ school headmaster even more dangerous than

a self-destructive buffoon ripping up our values in plain sight?

How do you like your norms broken? Over Twitter or in a torture memo? By a tinpot demagogue stomping on checks and balances he can’t even fathom or a shadowy authoritarian expertly and quietly dismantling checks and balances he knows are sacred?

McKay grappled with the W.-Cheney debacle in 2009, when he co-wrote a black comedy with Will Ferrell called “You’re Welcome America. A Final Night With George W Bush.” In the Broadway hit, Ferrell’s W. dismissed waterboarding as a Bliss spa treatment and confided that he had once discovered Cheney locked in an embrace with a giant goat devil in a room full of pentagrams.

When McKay was home with the flu three years ago, he grabbed a book and began reading up on Cheney. He ended up writing and directing “Vice,” a film that uses real-life imagery, witty cinematic asides and cultural touchstones to explore the irreparable damage Cheney



Christian Bale as Dick Cheney in Adam McKay’s new film, “Vice.”

did to the planet, and how his blunders and plunders led to many of our current crises.

With an echo of his Batman growl, Christian Bale brilliantly shape-shifts into another American psycho, the lumbering, scheming vice president who easily manipulates the naïve and insecure W., deliciously played by Sam Rockwell. While W. strives to impress his father, Cheney strives to impress his wife, Lynne, commandingly portrayed by Amy Adams.

Before we had Trump’s swarm of bloodsucking lobbyists gutting government regulations from within, we had Cheney’s. Before Trump brazenly used the White House to boost his brand, we had Cheney wallowing in emoluments: He let his energy industry pals shape energy policy; he pushed to invade Iraq, giving no-bid contracts to his former employer, Halliburton, and helping his Big Oil cronies reap the spoils in Iraq.

The movie opens at Christmas, but it’s no sugary Hallmark fable. It’s a harrowing cautionary tale showing that democracy can be sabotaged even more diabolically by a trusted insider, respected by most of the press, than by a clownish outsider, disdained by most of the press.

After a screening of “Vice” on Thursday, I asked McKay which of our two right-wing Dementors was worse, Cheney or Trump.

“Here’s the question,” he said. “Would you rather have a professional assassin after you or a frothing maniac with a meat cleaver? I’d rather have a maniac with a meat cleaver after me, so I think Cheney is way worse. And also, if you look at the body count, more than 600,000 people died in Iraq. It’s not even close, right?”

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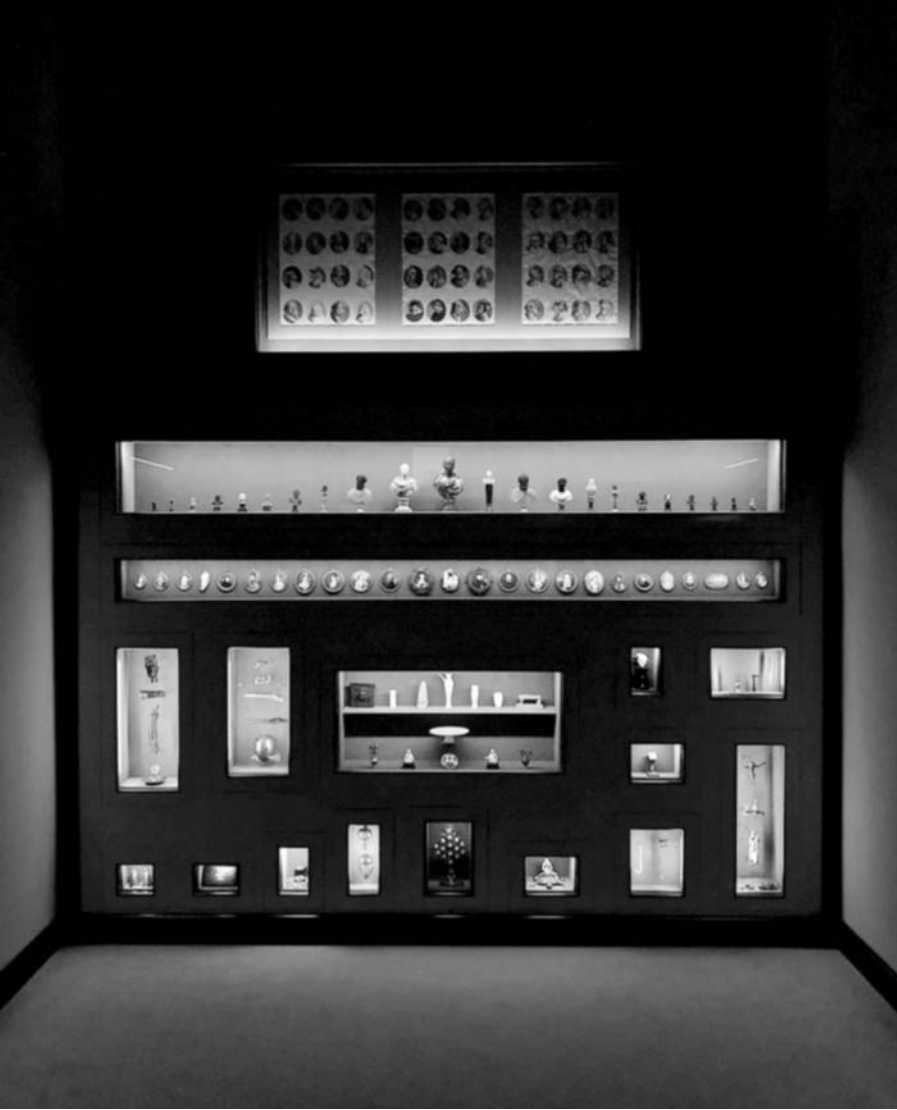
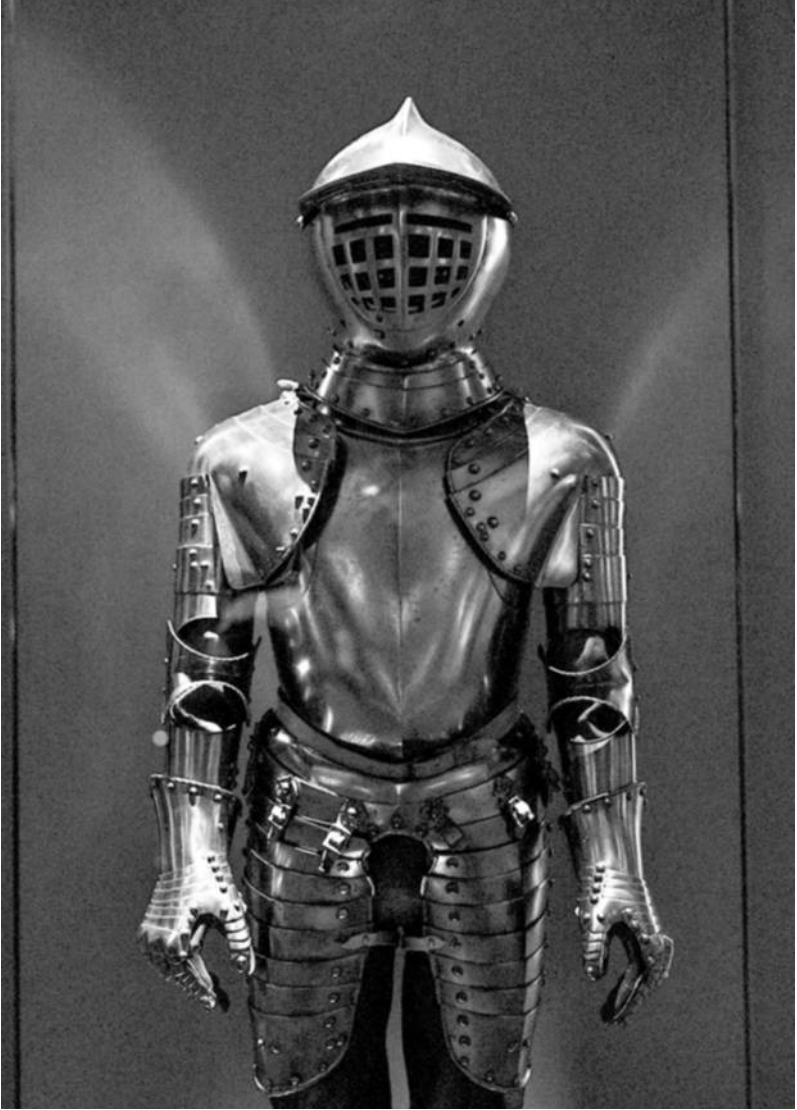
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Culture



Among the displays in the exhibition “Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures”: from left, pieces of child’s armor; select objects from the Kunsthistorisches Museum’s 4.5 million works; and a silk dress from the play “Hedda Gabler.”

Wes Anderson, curator

CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK
VIENNA

The film director is given free rein to mount a show at Austria’s art showplace

BY CODY DELISTRATY

Wes Anderson looked tired. The filmmaker was wearing a red blazer and a striped tie, standing beneath the elaborate 19th-century cupola of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. His partner, the author and designer Juman Malouf, was by his side.

Dozens of friends — the actors Tilda Swinton and Jason Schwartzman; the filmmaker Jake Paltrow; and a pair of lesser-known Coppolas among them — stood around him. Photographers jostled for angles.

It wasn’t a movie premiere, but the exhibition opening for “Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures,” which Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf curated, certainly had the air of one.

Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf were asked to put the show together from objects in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Austria’s largest. When Mr. Anderson stepped up to the microphone to address the guests, it was with the weariness of someone who had gone to battle and come back changed.

His speech was short. “It was probably worth it,” he said, only somewhat jokingly, of the effort it took to curate the exhibition.

In his own speech, Jasper Sharp, the museum’s curator of modern and contemporary art, said putting the show together felt at times “like we were in some kind of insane Japanese game show.”

From the start, Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf had grand aspirations: Mr. Anderson wrote in the exhibition cata-

log that he hoped the show might unlock some new way of seeing not just the museum’s collection, but also “the study of art and antiquity.”

After digging through 4.5 million works — most of which are stored in a warehouse near Vienna’s airport — Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf, who speak little German, created a purely visual show. For the most part, they were interested neither in the provenance or rarity of a piece, nor whether it was the best example of its school or style. Rather, they grouped about 450 objects by color, material and size, in a way that reflected many of Mr. Anderson’s cinematic tricks.

Unexpected challenges quickly sprung up. Things a non-curator would understandably never think about, like the humidity requirements for displaying certain works, or what materials must be used for displays, became stymieing factors. A project that was meant to take two and a half weeks took closer to two and a half years, Mr. Sharp said. “This was an incredible headache for them,” he added.

The show opens with a 17th-century painting by Frans Francken the Younger, in which the artist depicts a “Kunstkammer” — his own collection of sculptures, landscapes, portraits and coins. The implication is clear: This exhibition is Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf’s own cabinet of curiosities.

It’s also a show full of puzzles and jokes. In one room with various boxes and containers — including Austrian military chests, German flute cases, and religious containers for crucifixes and scepters — a long museum display case is empty, as an object in its own right. (“A ‘conceptual vitrine,’” Mr. Sharp said in an interview.)

In a wood-paneled room, Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf have placed a piece of petrified wood that Mr. Sharp estimated was nearly a million years old beneath a painting on maple that partly depicts a piece of wood. These are juxtaposed with a whittled wooden



From top, Wes Anderson, who curated the Viennese show with his partner, the author and designer Juman Malouf, and another of the displays.

sculpture. A material becomes a lens on the evolution of art — from the functional and artless, to the artful pretending toward authenticity, to the decadently useless.

But these puzzles often appear to be

either lacking significance or so surface-level as to be pointless. A room filled with portraits of children dressed as royalty or clergy, which also includes a darkly comical child-size suit of armor, is funny and nostalgic, but its

significance stops there.

In both Mr. Anderson’s films — many of which deal with the imagination of children — and Ms. Malouf’s young-adult novel, “The Trilogy of Two,” the artists manipulate feelings by controlling the characters they created. But in an exhibition, they can handle only existing artworks that have their own histories.

Ms. Malouf, who co-founded the cult fashion label Charlotte Corday, is an exceptional designer in her own right, but it is Mr. Anderson who is more often recognized for a distinct aesthetic. His work has been copied, beloved and aspired to in equal measure (see the popular “Accidentally Wes Anderson” Instagram account). Cura-

Unlike a director moving actors around a set, a museum curator cannot dictate how the works will make a viewer feel.

tion might seem like an easy shift for Mr. Anderson. You could say that his movies are curatorial acts, assembling objects and sets that draw attention to themselves, rather than blending in.

But Mr. Anderson’s onscreen aesthetic is all about creating narratives and moods — of yearning, of melancholy, of passion. Art curation is a fundamentally different pursuit. Unlike a director moving actors around a set, a museum curator cannot dictate how the works will make a viewer feel. Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf seem not to have realized this.

It is only when Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf give up any attempt of mood-making or meaning-finding that the exhibition becomes moving. In a room full of green objects — an emerald, a cigarette case, feathers, bowls, a dress from an Ibsen play — the green appears as so rare and so beautiful that, for a moment, the aesthetic is all that matters.

The 17th-century emerald cut with gold and enamel appears, as Mr. Sharp said, to be “the pot into which the brush was dipped to paint every other object.” And while Mr. Anderson was perhaps stretching it when he wrote in the catalog that the emerald’s placement helps to “call attention to the molecular similarities between hexagonal crystal and Shantung silk” in a nearby dress, this “green room” is the only area in the exhibition that plays no games of mood or feeling. It is the only room in which Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf have decided they could not fully control the objects — that, unlike in movies or novels, the aesthetic has to stand on its own.

At the opening, after the American ambassador to Austria praised the exhibition as “delicious” and the Austrian culture minister gave a few blustering remarks, Mr. Anderson and Ms. Malouf made their way down the museum’s marble staircase.

As Mr. Anderson tried to escape the throngs of autograph and selfie-seekers, I asked him if he’d ever do something like this again. He laughed and touched his hair. “Well . . .,” he said, and left it at that.

It makes sense that he would feel tired and disillusioned. He and Ms. Malouf entered an impossible battle with little armor. To strip works of their titles, history and scholarship and place them into a purely visual context with the hope that they might retain emotional significance was always going to be a challenge.

The desire to flatten and redefine works that were already bursting with their own histories made the show feel like the “Accidentally Wes Anderson” Instagram account: It had Mr. Anderson’s surface-level aesthetic, but none of the underlying narrative or emotion of his movies.

It also felt a bit like the opening evening: overstretched, overwrought and ultimately as hollow as that empty vitrine.

Finding magic in a Schumann rarity

OPERA REVIEW
HAMBURG

Achim Freyer’s production smooths over flaws in the composer’s take on ‘Faust’

BY CORINNA DA FONSECA-WOLLHEIM

One reason Schumann’s “Scenes From Goethe’s ‘Faust’” is so rarely performed is its hybrid shape: part literary oratorio, part opera. Another handicap is his selections.

While other composers drawn to Goethe’s tragedy about a dissatisfied man who makes a pact with the devil have focused on the dark scenes from Part I — Faust’s ruinous love for Gretchen and the destructive vortex of events wrought by Mephistopheles — Schumann set his sights on the epilogue in heaven. Here Goethe imagines a metaphysical tug of war over Faust’s soul that zooms toward redemption in a way that is brainy, sublime and devilishly hard to stage.

An entrancing new production by Achim Freyer for the Hamburg State Opera, though, argues that it’s well

worth trying. Mr. Freyer, an artist and director with a penchant for dense symbolism, takes a restrained approach to this overlooked gem, continuing in repertory through Saturday. He conjures a world that, for all its surreal touches, has a zany beauty that gently smooths over Schumann’s dramatic flaws.

Mr. Freyer places the orchestra, choir, children’s chorus and most of the soloists on stage behind a black scrim. In front of the scrim, atop where the orchestra pit has been covered, actors in dark clothes and green faces move in slow motion, carrying and rearranging objects: a tin drum, a cutout of a church, the blue flower that was a key symbol of German Romanticism.

Between scrim and covered pit, blocking the audience’s view of the conductor, is a stylized copy of “The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog,” Caspar David Friedrich’s painting of a man, seen from behind, looking out over swirling mists. Mr. Freyer’s “Wanderer,” though, is missing its head. By stepping behind the copy, this director’s Faust can merge with the painted seeker — either while gazing through the scrim toward the dark mystery of music, or out at the detritus

of life and, beyond, the judgment of the audience.

As with so many classic works of Romanticism, Friedrich’s image came to be co-opted by the Nazis as a symbol of national exceptionalism. Thus the duality in Faust — knowledge and destruction — blends with the duality of the Romantic mountaineer who is the model of, simultaneously, contemplation and conquest.

The shadowy stage workers creep about cradling objects that sometimes seed a wealth of associations and sometimes pull into focus a narrative thread dropped by Schumann. A fragment of Goethe’s color wheel, a kabbalistic tetragram and two dwarves with a Snow White apple all appear and vanish.

In Schumann’s most operatic scene, with Gretchen praying in church, plagued by guilt, a pantomime of props tells the story. Bloodied rags, a naked baby doll and a pair of wings remind the audience that Gretchen killed her illegitimate child in desperation.

Schumann assembles that scene brilliantly, with the solo soprano (here the glowingly effusive Christina Gansch) offset by a churning orchestra, taunted by Mephisto (Franz-Josef



Christian Gerhaher as Faust, next to a stylized copy of a Caspar David Friedrich painting, in Schumann’s “Scenes From Goethe’s ‘Faust’” at the Hamburg State Opera.

Selig, singing with kid-glove sarcasm). Soon the choir muscles in with a ferocious “Dies irae.”

The composer wields his large forces in a way that doesn’t overpower indi-

vidual voices or the text. In the magisterial baritone Christian Gerhaher, Mr. Freyer found an interpreter able to make Goethe’s densely brilliant lines shine through the music.

Mr. Gerhaher has the power to project clarion vigor where needed. But more often, his voice seems to become a vehicle for the words, with some passages delivered with a tone so lightened of vibrato that it approaches the near-spoken style more commonly heard in modernist works. In the latter part of the evening, when he embodies the allegorical Dr. Marianus, whose worship of the Holy Virgin paves the way for Faust’s redemption, Mr. Gerhaher’s voice turns velvet and weightless.

The final apotheosis is a magnificent blend of soloists, choir and orchestra that pays homage to Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.” By then, Mr. Freyer’s objects have been abstracted into geometric shapes of pure color, while video projections of the faces of Faust and Gretchen drift upward on the scrim.

It would be nice to lift that scrim for the applause, which the ensemble musicians rightfully share with the soloists. The conductor, Kent Nagano, who had led a burnished reading of the exquisite score at one recent performance, came to the front for his bow. But the choir and orchestra remained partially obscured in Mr. Freyer’s realm of music and mystery.

The mess that roared

THEATER REVIEW

An attempt to musicalize ‘King Kong’ produces an irredeemable show

BY JESSE GREEN
AND BEN BRANTLEY

How to take on a one-ton gorilla? Two Times critics went to “King Kong,” the \$35 million, Australian-born musical at the Broadway Theater in New York. Far from Skull Island and the wrath of Kong, they huddled to talk it out.

BEN BRANTLEY Hello, Jesse. Though I’m not in a playful mood this morning — having just seen the spirit-crushing “King Kong” — what if we begin this dialogue with a game? Imagine you are on the street, having just left the theater, and are asked by a television interviewer to describe your response in one word. Well?

JESSE GREEN It can’t be printed here, and I’m not even sure it’s one word. (It starts with “ape.”) So I guess I’ll go with “ugh.”

BRANTLEY I understand what you’re saying. Since screaming is such a big part of the show, mine would be “aaaaaaaargh.”

GREEN We were hoping in reviewing this together that one of us might have something nicer to say than the other one does. But it looks like our opinions rhyme at least as well as most of the lyrics in the show.

BRANTLEY You mean like, “But this is not the end of me / ‘Cause this beast is clemency”?

GREEN When I see a musical drawn from a work in another genre — in this case the 1933 movie and its novelization — one thing I look for is the added value. What is gained in bringing “King Kong” to the stage? Certainly not provocative or insightful songwriting. The score is a hodgepodge of soundtrack-style murk by Marius de Vries and a clutch of no-profile songs by Eddie Perfect, whose score for “Beetlejuice” is heading toward Broadway even as we speak. Did you think the music added anything?

BRANTLEY No, but I think you’re missing the point. The only reason for this “King Kong” to exist is its title character. So before we eviscerate the show, directed and choreographed by Drew McOnie, shall we briefly praise the animatronic ape (designed by Sonny Tilders)?

GREEN Sadly, I have mixed feelings about Kong himself. Certainly he is the most expressive performer onstage, what with the platoon of puppeteers and voice artists bringing him to life. Only they don’t quite get there. Even aside from his long-waisted baby body, there is something logy and jowly about him; he seems like Khrushchev on Thorazine.

BRANTLEY Yeah, I thought of a (barely) animated gargoyle from the Notre Dame cathedral. Disney casting agents, are you listening?

GREEN The adapters of this “King Kong” seem to have two stories they wanted to tell. One is a morality tale about the evil of trapping a living being in a cheap entertainment scheme. To judge from my own misery in the audience, I’d say this is a theme they mastered.

BRANTLEY And the other theme, would that be the equation of ape in captivity



Above, Christiani Pitts as Ann Darrow with the hulking, 20-foot main attraction in “King Kong.” Below, Eric William Morris, foreground left, as Carl Denham, with Ms. Pitts.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

with the oppression of women?

GREEN Yes. A feminist angle is attempted, not very convincingly. When the plucky farm girl Ann Darrow (Christiani Pitts) arrives in Manhattan intent on making it big in showbiz, it’s with an explicit streak of post-liberation consciousness. “At least I’m not some man’s property,” she sings in a song called “Queen of New York.”

BRANTLEY And when Kong — dragged from his native Skull Island to Depression-era New York by the cynical, selfish and typically male showman Carl Denham (Eric William Morris) — has escaped from the theater where he’s been put on exploitative display, she sings a battle hymn of sympathy to him. (“From birth we’ve both been playing a game we cannot win / We’ll never break the lock or ever leave the box the world has put us in.”)

GREEN A car wreck of clichés like that simply can’t put a feminist story across



An artist as big game

BOOK REVIEW

Chalk: The Art and Erasure of Cy Twombly
By Joshua Rivkin. *Illustrated.* 478 pp. Melville House. \$32.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

Spoor is a hunter’s word, for the scent an animal leaves behind in a forest, the scent you track to bag your prey. It might be a biographer’s word, too — the essence of a person that drifts out of his or her diaries and letters, the idiosyncratic, unmistakable traces that a biographer pursues in the archives. Or tries to, at any rate. “Chalk,” by Joshua Rivkin, is what happens when your quarry happens to be a maniac for privacy and prevarication, a one-time army cryptographer whose art rejoices in gnomic ideograms, illegible phrases and inside jokes. The American painter Cy Twombly died in 2011 at 83. For much of his life, he lived quietly in a small Italian town north of Naples, giving only two interviews across the span of his career. When asked about his personal life, he was known to concoct stories — that his parents were Sicilian ceramicists, for example (his family was from



Cy Twombly in Italy in 1957.

ELIZABETH STORES

Lexington, Va., where his father had coached university swimming and golf). Or he might erupt. “I swear if I had to do this over again, I would just do the paintings and never show them,” he said in a 1994 profile in *Vogue*. “I was brought up to think you don’t talk about yourself. I hate all this. Why should I have to talk about the paintings. I do them, isn’t that enough?” Those volutionary paintings. Big as skies, trailing poetry and pornographic doodles. Globes of paint squeezed directly onto the canvas from the tube and dragged across the canvas by hand. Detonations of dripping colors; dirty bedsheets hung up to dry. “A bird

seems to have passed through the impasto with cream-colored screams and bitter claw-marks,” is how the poet and critic Frank O’Hara described the early works. They invite not just admiration but ardor. A woman once took off her clothes and danced naked in front of them; another kissed an all-white panel, leaving a bright lipstick mark (“a rape,” the curator fumed). In me, they evoke the ache of an old, stubborn crush. Rivkin specifies that “Chalk” is not a conventional biography but “something, I hope, stranger and more personal.” Following Twombly’s tracks from Virginia to Italy, he felt “like a man looking for his keys, circling around the same known geography, the same city streets in the hope I’d find something lost and meaningful.” At every stage, he feels eluded. The book becomes a record of obsessive love without any outlet, dead ends, yearning — themes central to Twombly, whose paintings are full of references to doomed lovers, Hero and Leander, Achilles and Patroclus. On one panel of “Coronation of Sesostris,” his epic painting in 10 parts, there is a scrawled line from Sappho that could apply to much of his work: “Eros, weaver of myth, Eros, sweet and bitter, Eros bringer of pain.”

Rivkin travels in Twombly’s footsteps. He conducts scenic interviews with Twombly’s son and peripheral characters (the artist’s estate did not cooperate with the book). He scrapes up what he can, but very little is new, or surprising. The juiciest stories still come from the *Vogue* profile, the most sensitive readings of the work from an essay by Roland Barthes and the sharpest analysis of the man from Edmund White, who has written critically about Twombly’s decision to stay closeted: “I found him to be an elusive, cagey man who mumbled and took back every statement he made, just as he erased so many of the words on his canvases and constantly equivocated about his life and sexuality, standing perpetual guard over his biography.” We get the lineaments of the life we know. Twombly had a starved Virginia childhood. “Once I said to my mother: ‘You would be happy if I just kept well-dressed and good manners,’” he recalled in an interview. “She said: ‘What else is there?’” He spent an unhappy time in the army. Off duty, he would check into a motel in rural Georgia and draw in the dark. He attended Black Mountain College with his lover at the time, the artist Robert Rauschenberg, and later married Tatiana Franchetti, a member of a family of art

patrons. The two stayed together even as Twombly took up with a much younger man, Nicola Del Roscio, who became his lifelong companion and now handles the \$1.5 billion estate. Del Roscio emerges as a lively antagonist in this book. He once had the look of “a Caravaggio youth who took good care of himself,” Arthur Danto wrote. He’s now the beady guardian of his partner’s legacy. Originally open to cooperating with this project, Del Roscio withdrew support after he learned that Rivkin planned to include statements from a chauffeur who worked for Twombly and claimed to have assisted him with the paintings. (Strangely, the chauffeur later denied speaking to Rivkin.) There were letters from lawyers and a flicker of drama. Rivkin does his best Janet Malcolm impression as he considers the question of who owns the facts of a life. But this besotted, often very beautiful book continually loses its way. Rivkin is an anxious writer, with a slightly clammy style (throughout, we are addressed as “dear reader”). He takes cover behind other people’s statements, pelting us with distracting, irrelevant quotes. And where Twombly is concerned, Rivkin makes the occasional wildly intriguing claim — “Twombly is the great imperialist in

meaningfully. Or any story, really — and that’s a bigger problem than the bad score and sluggish 20-foot mario-nette. I find it hard to believe that the book is by Jack Thorne, who won a Tony Award last season for writing “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.”

BRANTLEY Yes, but as far as I can tell, the story — and the music and the gymnastic dancing — are basically just filler until Kong shows up again and looks noble and sorrowful and, occasionally (when Peter Mumford’s lighting is really low), menacing. Didn’t you sense the live performers knew they weren’t the main attraction?

GREEN Mr. McOnie certainly had them working frantically. During the musical numbers, which feel relentless, the ensemble comes off as a troupe of overstimulated mimes playing charades. But here’s my question for you: Was there anything, aside from Kong’s two or three expressions, you actually enjoyed?

BRANTLEY Not really. I kept hoping a higher camp factor might kick in. When poor Ann is taken to Kong’s lair, and makes quips about his housekeeping and bachelor ways, I longed for the reincarnation of Madeline Kahn, who made such blissful hay out of similar material in “Young Frankenstein.”

GREEN The camp here is all accidental. The Skull Island jungle looks like green spaghetti with phlegm balls. (The scenic and projection designer is Peter England.) But the oppressiveness of the music and the over-intensity of the staging never allow you to laugh at, and therefore enjoy, the ludicrousness of the story.

BRANTLEY Agreed. By the way, if you look at accounts of the Australian incarnation of five years ago, which had a book by Craig Lucas, it featured several more characters, including a love interest for Ann. In this version, there are effectively three central human characters: the agency-seeking Ann; the chauvinist, bad-mogul Carl; and (oh, dear) his put-upon, slow-witted, golden-hearted assistant, Lumpy (Erik Lochtefeld).

GREEN The bevy of previous authors discarded in the course of the musical’s development dodged a bullet here. But Mr. Lochtefeld actually manages to give a sincere and human-scale performance, even if most of what he has to say is maudlin hogwash.

BRANTLEY Yes, even the screams lacked eloquence. Fay Wray, the star of the original, is best remembered for her earsplitting howls of terror when she’s in the big guy’s clutches. But our intrepid Ann is incapable of screaming in fear. Instead, she roars, and that’s what attracts her soul mate Kong to her. Unfortunately, I didn’t hear a lot of Katy Perry power in Ms. Pitts’s scream.

GREEN Perhaps we are mistaken in applying arty standards to the cynical product of an ambitious entertainment company that made its name on animatronic arena shows. Character logic may not matter here as much as the intermission sales of the Kongopolitan (vodka, triple sec, cranberry juice and a splash of lime). I looked in vain for the Kong-branded Thorazine.

BRANTLEY Gee, Jesse, it’s enough to make even you long for a margarita, with Jimmy Buffett melodies on the side.

GREEN You are referring to “Escape to Margaritaville,” which until now was my musical theater low point of 2018. Jimmy, I take it all back.

the empire of imperialism” — only to hide his face and retreat into ambiguity, marveling at all we will never know about Twombly. “Mystery is power”; “What’s missing is what matters.” It’s not that such sentiments aren’t true, it’s that they begin to seem self-serving. The flaw of the book becomes its fetish. Vladimir Mayakovsky has a poem titled “Cloud in Trousers,” and that is what Twombly remains in this book. We don’t see the bawdiness, the nasty wit described by his friends, including the photographer Sally Mann and Rauschenberg. In the *Vogue* profile, Twombly takes the writer to a bustling trattoria full of families and tells her to take a particular seat, “So you won’t have to look at the babies.” “Cy’s face I knew by heart. His bird nose and hard jawline,” Rivkin writes. But the “dear reader” longs for a little scrutiny along with the adoration. Perhaps the best biographer must be equal part champion and skeptic — especially when dealing with a subject so skilled at evasion. Among the genuine discoveries in “Chalk” is that Twombly, a frenetic collector, owned a handwritten letter by Monet. “Alas No, I cannot accompany you,” it reads, an attempt to wriggle out of a meeting. It is addressed to a journalist.

“There’s nothing like talking to a parent who doesn’t know where their child is. There’s nothing like that, and it’s really hard to hang up the phone and forget a conversation like that.”

CAITLIN DICKERSON, Staff Reporter
on reporting on family separation at the border.



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The New York Times

Sports

Hockey honors pioneer as a builder of the game

60 years after integrating the N.H.L., Willie O'Ree enters the Hall of Fame

BY ANDREW KNOLL

Willie O'Ree once had to wait for two police officers to escort him off the ice in Chicago after a benches-clearing brawl, which began when his front teeth were purposely knocked out with the butt end of an opponent's stick.

Another time, he had to be pulled away from a mob of hostile fans at Madison Square Garden who tried to yank him into the stands.

O'Ree, the first black player in the N.H.L., endured a lot over his 24 seasons in professional hockey, most of them in the minor leagues. But he loved the game so dearly that after a puck hit him in the face at age 19, permanently blinding his right eye, he stayed quiet about the disability so that no doctor would rule him unfit to play.

For his contributions to the sport, O'Ree, 83, was to be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame on Monday in the builder category. He is being honored not just for the historical significance of his N.H.L. career, but also for his decades of working with young players all over North America through various youth hockey and outreach programs.

"If you look at what he's done, he kind of opened the door for the rest of us to step in and play," said the former goalie Grant Fuhr, the first of two black players to precede O'Ree into the Hall of Fame (the other is Angela James). "In my world, that's the perfect description: as a builder of the game."

At least 30 black players have dressed to play in the N.H.L. since the 2016-17 season, when a record four black players were named All-Stars. Approximately 90 black players have dressed for at least one game in the league. No longer confined by stereotypes that once narrowly defined their roles, black players are now explosive scorers, shut-down defenders, goalies and everything in between.

"There are more black players to relate with in the N.H.L. than when I was younger," said Jarome Iginla, who in 2001-02 became the N.H.L.'s first black scoring champion.



JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gary Bettman, the N.H.L. commissioner, and Willie O'Ree, who became the league's first black player with the Boston Bruins in 1958.

Still, there have been only three black captains in league history — Iginla with the Calgary Flames, Bryce Salvador with the New Jersey Devils and Dirk Graham in Chicago. Graham, who spent 59 games behind the Blackhawks' bench in 1998-99, remains the N.H.L.'s only black head coach. There also have been two black on-ice officials in the N.H.L., Jay Sharrers and Shandor Alphonso.

"The numbers are pitiful," said Bernice Carnegie, the daughter of Herb Carnegie, a top black player in the 1940s who never reached the N.H.L. "We had many, many, many years to make a difference."

O'Ree, one of 13 siblings, broke the color barrier in 1958, during a two-game stint with the Boston Bruins that went largely unnoticed. In the 1960-61 season,

he competed in 43 games and notched 16 points, arousing greater curiosity, fanfare and, sadly, hatred.

"I heard that N-word so many times that I just let it go in one ear and out the other," O'Ree said. "I never fought because of racial slurs or remarks. I fought because guys speared me, butt-ended me, crosschecked me and things of that nature. Otherwise I would have spent every game in the penalty box."

O'Ree initially played left wing, a challenging position for someone with his limited vision since nearly every pass he received came from his right. A switch to right wing would be a factor in his success in the Western Hockey League, where he won two scoring titles during the 1960s.

"You can do anything you set your

mind to, if you feel strongly in your heart," O'Ree said. "When the doctor told me I'd never play hockey again, I just said, 'I can't accept that.' He didn't know the goals and dreams that I had set for myself, and he didn't know the burning fire that was within me."

A native of Fredericton, New Brunswick, O'Ree has been named to the Order of Canada, the highest honor bestowed on a citizen of that country.

He also played baseball, but exposure to bigtry during a minor league tryout in Georgia helped steer him toward hockey. He twice met Jackie Robinson, who broke baseball's color barrier 11 years before O'Ree entered the N.H.L. The first time, when O'Ree was a teenager, Robinson said that O'Ree was the first black hockey player he had met.

NON SEQUITUR



SUDOKU

No. 1311

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

Fill the grid so that every row, column 3x3 box and shaded 3x3 box contains each of the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once.

For solving tips and more puzzles: www.nytimes.com/sudoku

Solution	No. 1211
9 8 1 6 4 2 3 5 7	
5 7 6 1 9 3 2 8 4	
3 2 4 5 8 7 1 9 6	
7 9 8 3 1 5 4 6 2	
6 4 5 7 2 9 8 1 3	
2 1 3 8 6 4 9 7 5	
4 5 7 9 3 1 6 2 8	
1 6 2 4 7 8 5 3 9	
8 3 9 2 5 6 7 4 1	

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NUEGL

NWEHI

GUCTAH

TAIGRU

Today's Guest JUMBLER is DAVE WHAMOND, creator of REALITY CHECK.

WHEN THE FIRST EXPERIENCED ABDOMINAL SURGERY, IT WAS...

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

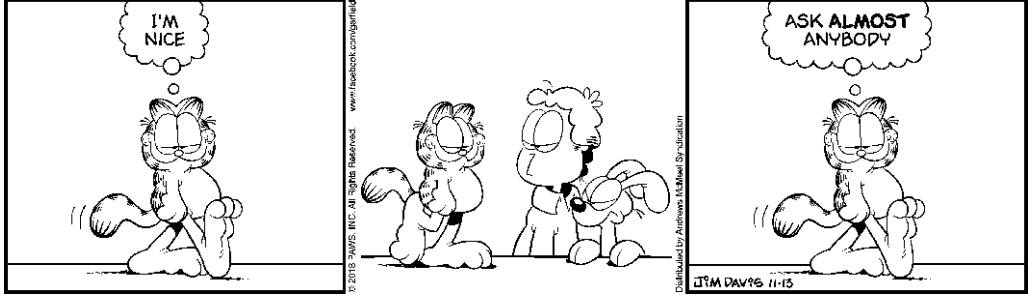
(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: VIPER BASIC DECADE TURKEY Answer: 'Yet again, Keeslerman's mailbox gets — "BUS-TED"

PEANUTS



GARFIELD



WIZARD of ID



KENKEN

3-	1	1-			
		7+			8x
1-					
2÷			2-		

Fill the grids with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For solving tips and more KenKen puzzles: www.nytimes.com/kenken. For Feedback: nytimes@kenken.com

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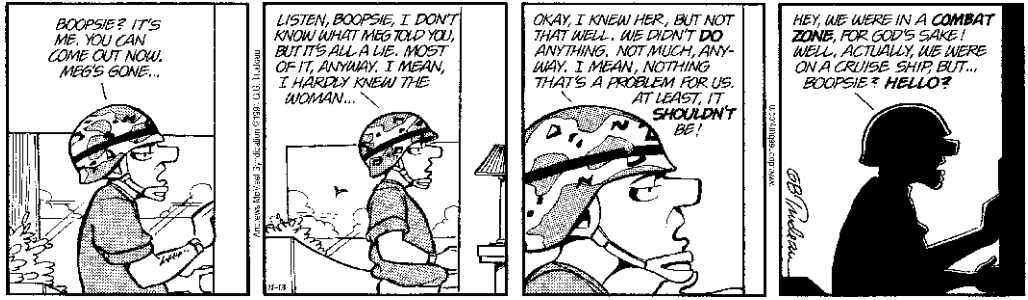
Answers to Previous Puzzles

3÷	11+	2÷	40x		
		2÷		3÷	
4	4-		3÷		
3÷	2÷	3÷	5	1-	
			3-	30x	
10+				5-	

1	4	3	2
3	2	4	1
2	3	1	4
4	1	2	3

1	5	6	3	4	2
5	1	4	2	3	6
2	3	1	4	6	5
4	2	5	6	1	3
6	4	3	5	2	1
3	6	2	1	5	4

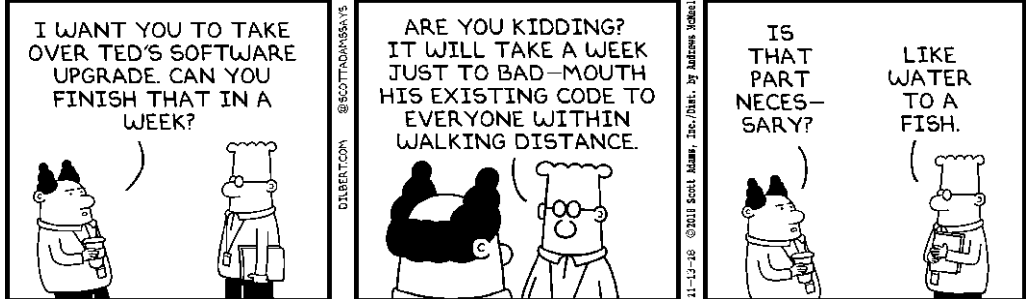
DOONESBURY CLASSIC 1991



CALVIN AND HOBBS



DILBERT



CROSSWORD | Edited by Will Shortz

- Across**

1 Commercial prefix with Turt

6 Inspiring lust

10 Like about half the games on a team's schedule

14 First little pig's building material

15 Rouse

16 Snitched

17 Representatives Sessions (R-TX) and Aguilar (D-CA), for instance?

19 "Famous" cookie name

20 A pop

21 "Ball ___" (Rodgers and Hammerstein show tune)

22 Nauru's capital

24 Sault ___ Marie

25 Why many people visit Napa?
- 28 Key on the left side of a keyboard

29 "Handy" thing to know, for short?

30 RR stop

31 Nurseries?

36 Bud in baseball's Hall of Fame

38 A thou

39 Outlet from the left ventricle

41 "Je t'___" ("I love you": Fr.)

42 Fairy tale baddies

44 What ice trays typically do?

46 Its symbol is Sn

47 Western tribe

49 Overrule

50 President Herbert's wife and mother, e.g.?

54 Company with a mascot named Leo

Solution to November 12 Puzzle

WADE	WNBA	SCRAP
OPHEL	HOER	UHURA
KEELSOVER	CANTS	
STICKA	FORK	INIT
SON	WEE	YES
ALI	PELE	BRO
GAGME	WIT	HAS
OGLE	AAAA	EWAY
FOUNDER	THE	KNIFE
SOU	SADE	SST
ATE	NRA	INT
COMET	OT	HET
ENOLA	PUT	ON
RAJAS	ALOU	LEGO
BLINK	RUNT	LUST

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14					15				16			
17					18				19			
20					21				22	23		
24					25				26			27
					28				29			
31	32	33			34	35			36	37		
38					39				40			41
42					43				44			45
46					47	48			49			
50					51				52	53		
					54				55	56		
					57				58			
60					61	62			63			
64					65				66			
67					68				69			

PUZZLE BY JOHN CIOLFI

- 1 Fire remnants

2 Relative of a mink

3 Query after a knock-down-drag-out fight

4 Reckless, as a decision

5 Fall behind

6 Say on a stack of Bibles

7 Weird Al Yankovic's first hit

8 Classic Jaguar model

9 "Oh, absolutely!"

10 Game company that introduced Breakout

11 Movement that Ms. magazine developed out of

12 Period enjoyed by an introvert

13 Football stats: Abbr.

18 Irrational fear
- 23 Hole punches

25 Followers of mis

26 "___ mañana!"

27 Wise ones

28 Rug rat

31 Alternative to the counter at a diner

32 Cardiologist's X-ray

33 Mathematician Daniel after whom a principle is named

- 34 Words repeated by Lady Macbeth in Act V, Scene 1

35 Word following "Able was I ..."

37 French waters

40 "Gunsmoke" star James

43 Went after, in a way

45 Modern prefix with gender

48 Band with the 1966 #1 hit "Wild Thing," with "the"
- 51 Baroque stringed instruments

52 In the lead

53 Vapors

54 Less bright, as colors

55 Diving bird

56 Monument Valley sights

59 Lav

60 Bygone court org. — or current court org.

62 Half of due

63 Org. based in Fort Meade, Md.

TRAVEL

My very personal taste of racism abroad

ESSAY

BY NICOLE PHILLIP

Up until about five years ago, I didn't have much experience being black outside the United States.

What I mean is, with the exception of a few family vacations in the Caribbean and Mexico, I didn't know what it might feel like to travel while black abroad.

Then I decided to spend the fall semester of my junior year in Florence, Italy.

My roommates during my sophomore year had both studied in Italy and raved about their time. They gushed about the panini from a little shop around the corner from the picturesque villas that housed their study program, and regaled me with stories of fun parties and their Italian romances.

I was ready for that to be my life: fun, food and a European love story.

But I was so caught up in my excitement that I neglected a crucial difference between me, my roommates and the majority of the other students I was studying with abroad.

They were white. I, on the other hand, am an African-American woman with skin the color of dark chocolate and full lips.

In the United States, I was aware of racism in a broad sense, but perhaps because of my age, my eyes weren't fully open to it. My mother seemed to know better, saying things to me like "take off that hoodie" when we walked into stores. When she muttered, "you don't see how they're looking at you," I assumed she was bothered by my fashion choices.

After my semester in Italy, I realized what she meant.

When I arrived at the New York University campus, a 57-acre estate in Florence with lush greenery and rows of olive trees, I was captivated. During orientation, the Italian instructors talked about customs and other important practices to take note of. What I remember most is one woman telling us to be mindful that Italians can be "bold" or "politically incorrect."

That was one way to put it. No one mentioned the possibility of racial encounters and tensions, largely aimed at the rising number of African immigrants.

Before I landed in Italy, I was unaware of the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the country, a main entry point for migrants into Europe. I had not known about the hostility toward the first black government minister in Italy or the racial problems that followed talented Italian soccer players and Daisy Osakue, a black Italian-born star discus thrower whose eye was injured in an egg attack.

For me, it began with passers-by on the street calling me Michelle Obama, Rihanna or Beyoncé — as though I could resemble all three — and the Italian men selling Pinocchio marionettes in the piazza near the famed cathedral, il Duomo, shouting "cioccolatta" (chocolate).

These incidents were minor compared to what happened a few weeks later. I took a trip to Cinque Terre, the five scenic villages on the rugged Ligurian coast in northwestern Italy, with six friends.

I was in my own world on a crowded beach, sitting underneath an umbrella while the other women in my group were by the water, when I noticed an olive-skinned man in swim trunks with a beer in his hand flirting, unsuccessfully, with them. When we were getting up to leave, he approached our group — and he did not seem drunk.

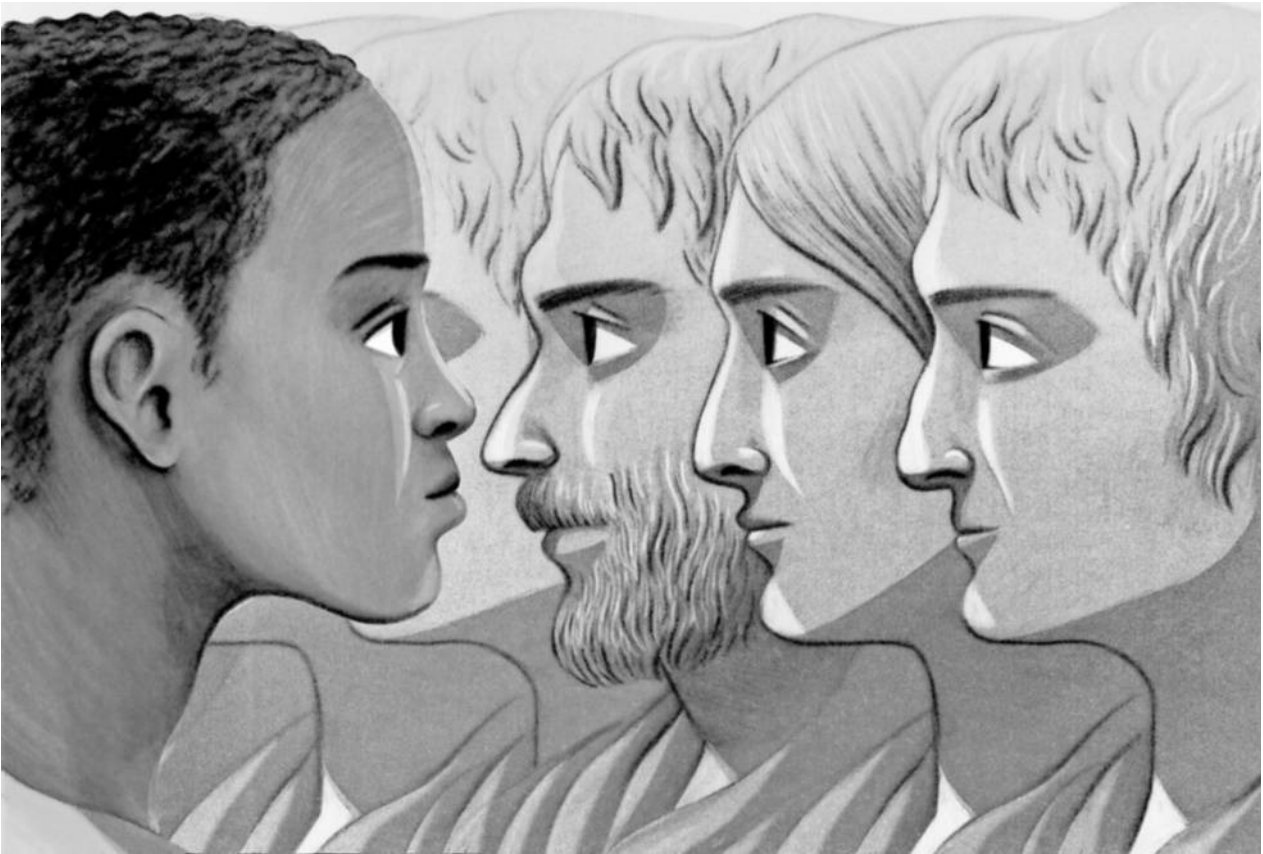
I assumed he was just going to continue bantering, but before I knew it, the rejected suitor started aggressively telling my white friends in Italian-accented English to pick up their trash.

He ignored me and the only other black woman in the group as if we were invisible, but I wasn't struck by this at the time.

After a few heated words were exchanged between them, we all started walking away. As we trudged through the deep sand, I suddenly felt a cold liquid hit the side of my body. When I turned, another splash of beer went directly to my face. The man in the swim trunks was hurling the contents of his bottle on me and the other black woman — only droplets landed on the women he had argued with.

Before I could figure out a response, the other black woman began yelling at him.

The rest of us stood watch for a minute until he grabbed her like a rag doll — she had such a tiny frame, his hand seemed to fully wrap around her



ELENI KALORKOTI

arm. The other women did nothing, so I quickly stepped in. When I gave his arm a solid punch, he finally let her go.

I looked around and saw the sea of white faces staring on the packed beach — not a single one had made a move to help. I then locked eyes with a black man. He appeared to be an African migrant because he was selling beach gear draped from his body, much like other migrants I had seen who usually sold knickknacks or knockoff purses on the street.

We stared at each other for what felt like a full minute and his eyes seemed full of sympathy.

As my group walked away, one of the women made an observation I'll never forget. "Did you hear that? He just called you 'disgusting black women.'"

When I returned to the apartment where I was staying with a fair-skinned Italian woman and her biracial teenage daughter named Ami, I told her, with great emotion, what had happened. She shrugged and said in a mixture of Italian

I wish I could say that was the first time someone had avoided me on the sidewalk in Florence. It was not.

and English, "It happens to Ami," whose father is black.

But I couldn't shrug it off so easily. Several weeks later, as the weather cooled enough for me to wear one of my favorite oversized sweaters and a bean

ie hat, I was walking along a street lined with cafes and shops in Florence, making my way down one of those impossibly narrow sidewalks, head bent over my phone.

As I passed shopkeepers setting out signs and sweeping storefronts that morning, I noticed a short middle-aged white woman with a pixie cut walking a couple feet in front of me with her purse on her shoulder. She quickly stopped and turned around. She looked at me and screamed then pressed her back

against the wall. I looked around in alarm, thinking something had happened, but couldn't figure out what.

She screamed again, and this time, she fled the sidewalk. At this point, I could see the shop owners staring. The woman continued to look at me and shrieked once more. When I asked, "What?" she gasped as if she were both frightened and disgusted that I had the nerve to speak to her. She then shielded herself behind a parked car. I was dumbfounded. So I kept walking, trying to leave my embarrassment on the street behind me. I wish I could say that was the first time someone had avoided me on the sidewalk in this city full of international tourists and students. It was not. But it was, by far, the most blatant.

On my last night in Florence, I was supposed to meet a few of my friends at a bar for farewell drinks. Earlier in the evening, I had a lovely dinner with a group of Italians to whom I had been introduced by a mutual American friend. This was the first time I had truly felt ac

New hotels to keep an eye on

BY SHIVANI VORA

Richard Branson's Virgin Hotels chain arrives in San Francisco, Rosewood raises the stakes in Hong Kong, Nobu makes its debut in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and the Shinola empire continues its brand extension in Detroit.

These are among the more intriguing hotel openings scheduled for the end of 2018 and the first half of 2019.

VIRGIN HOTELS SAN FRANCISCO The 196-room hotel, opening in December, is near Yerba Buena Gardens.

It will have multiple dining and drinking outlets — including the brand's flagship space, Commons Club, which hosts events such as fashion shows and lectures — and one of the few rooftop bars in the city. *Nightly rates from \$215.*

ROSEWOOD HONG KONG This 413-room property, scheduled to open in March, is in the heart of Victoria Dockside, a blossoming food, art and design district on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront. *Nightly rates from \$540.*

THE FIFE ARMS Set in the village of Braemar, Scotland, a few miles from Balmoral Castle, this hotel, was recently restored by the Swiss art couple Iwan and Manuel Wirth. It has 46 rooms, contemporary interiors designed by Russell Sage and a collection of art. *Nightly rates from 250 pounds (about \$327), including breakfast.*

BELMOND CADOGAN The hotel, in the Chelsea neighborhood of London, is scheduled to open in December after a three-year, \$48 million restoration. It is made up of five adjoining townhouses, with many of the original design details (working fireplaces, mosaic floors and wood paneling) kept intact. Guests have access to the square's private garden. *Nightly rates from £470.*

NOMAD LAS VEGAS Scheduled to open on Nov. 14, the hotel is in the Park MGM and has Art Deco-inspired interiors designed by Jacques Garcia. The 293 rooms have oak hardwood floors, beds with leather headboards, original vintage artwork and minibars that were constructed from steamer trunks. *Nightly rates from \$199.*

SIX SENSES BHUTAN There are to be five lodges set in the western and central valleys of the country. Three — Thimphu, Paro and Punakha — will open in November, while the other two — Bumthang and Gangtey — will open in March 2019. *Nightly rates from \$1,500, all inclusive.*

THE HOXTON, CHICAGO Part of a growing chain with global ambitions that's already a huge hit in its home base of London, the Hoxton, Chicago, scheduled for a spring opening, is being constructed in



SIX SENSES



NOMAD LAS VEGAS

Top, the Punakha lodge by Six Senses in Bhutan. Above, the bar at NoMad Las Vegas.

Fulton Market on a site that was formerly home to a carmaker and meat-packer. The 175-room Chicago property will be home to a still-unnamed restaurant and bar, a rooftop pool that will be open to the public and lively public spaces. Guests will get free Wi-Fi and one hour of free international calls. *Nightly rates, which are still being determined, will include breakfast.*

NOBU LOS CABOS The fast-growing hotel collection by Robert DeNiro and the chef Nobu Matsuhisa is finally expected to make its debut in Mexico in the summer of 2019, after first being announced for 2018. The Japanese-beach-house-style property will have 200 rooms, all with ocean views and an aesthetic that will combine contemporary Japanese minimalism with touches from Mexico (think wood-soaking tubs, shoji-inspired closet doors and Japanese lanterns). On site will also be a branch of the Nobu restaurant and a farm-to-table restaurant called Malibu Farm, as well as an Asian-influenced spa. *Nightly rates are still being determined.*

SHINOLA HOTEL The revitalization of downtown Detroit continues with a partnership between the luxury watchmaker Shinola and the real estate firm Bedrock.

They are now teaming up for a hotel in the downtown shopping district. It is scheduled to open in December. The property, which joins two recent additions to downtown Detroit — the hipster hangout of the Foundation Hotel and the Detroit Club, which used to be private — is a combination of two restored buildings that once housed the T.B. Rayl & Co. department store and a Singer sewing-machine store.

It will have 129 rooms, a food and drinks program from the New York City chef Andrew Carmellini and an outdoor beer hall. Most of the furniture and other décor was produced in the United States, and minibars are stocked with beers produced by Michigan breweries. Library Street Collective, a Detroit gallery, is curating the art for the property and plans to showcase a combination of international and local artists. *Nightly rates from \$195.*

The New York Times

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