SUPERNATURAL SPECIAL
About The Author, Final Fantasy, We See Dead People, Verily Veritas, and Love Potion № 116

BOOM AND BUST
How the financial crisis has liquidated the dreams of would-be bankers.
By James Downie

PLAYING FOR KEEPS: The philosophers of St. Nicholas Park

Also: Alan Brinkley, Republicans, and Music on Campus
The Blue and White

Vol. XV

The Blue and White crashes the Butler Marxist’s salon.

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Famam Extendimus Factis

No. II

Features

Boon and Bust

How the financial crisis has liquidated the dreams of would-be bankers.

The New Dealer

A conversation with University Provost Alan Brinkley.

Playing for Keeps

The smack-talking, check-mating philosophers of St. Nicholas Park.

A Return to Normalcy

The College Republicans scale down their ground offense.

A Lounge of Their Own

Columbia’s amateur pianists explain themselves.

Criticism

Le Voyage de Babar

A review of the Morgan Library & Museum exhibition.

Is This Thing On?

Columbia turns down the volume on the campus music scene.
A fine line may separate the supernatural from the deeply creepy, but for most of the year the denizens of Morningside Heights and Columbia fall squarely into the latter category. Take, for example, the recent experience of a B&W staffer as she walked through Riverside Park. Spying two women pushing strollers, she overtook them and peered into the prams, expecting to see a couple of chubby babies. Instead she met with the cold, wet noses and bared teeth of two elderly, unwashed Pekingese. The scene was unnatural, but not unusual in a neighborhood whose primary landowner used to be the Bloomingdale insane asylum.

Thus, in the spirit of All Hallows Eve, we devote The Blue and White’s October issue to the search for Columbia’s supernatural ghouls and ghosts, none of which can be found on the accursed walls of Ricky’s.

We begin where all mythology is made: Butler Library, where Alexandra Muhler crashes the Butler Marxist’s salon, learns that he is not in fact a Marxist, and provides for your edification his theory of the Cool and the Uncool (p.10). Next, Alexander Statman takes you to the Fort Tryon Medieval Festival (p.12), where proponents of the medieval surrendered to the forces of the fantastical years ago. The result is a heady mix of Goths, fantasy buffs, and medievalists gathering on the same ground, drinking mead.

True to our reputation for rigorous research, the editors of this publication also went ghost hunting. We may not have scoured the land, but we worked the phones. Our respondents were unanimous. “Columbia has no ghosts,” they said, no banshees or poltergeists. This is a real pity, and we dutifully offer our suggestions for individuals who should be haunting this campus (p.13).

But for all these circuses, the October issue has some bread. James Downie investigates how the Masters of the Universe in training are reacting to the financial crisis (p.15). Sasha de Vogel’s account of the reasons why Columbia’s music scene is on its last legs (p.33), and who put it there, will make you rethink paying those Student Life Fees.

Friends, times of upheaval call for desperate measures...to be taken by other people. Plant your Victory Garden and make your Halloween costume out of John Jay napkins, if you must. But the real issue is in your hands.

Anna Phillips
Editor-in-Chief
Dear first-years who have been at Columbia for nearly two months: test your knowledge of the local dialect by using the Columbia lexicon Word Bank words to fill in the sentences below. Not all words are used.

Word Bank: problematize, Flex, Harlem, Deluxe, fetishize, postmodernism, Derrida, construct, dialectic, Orientalism, Hegel, one half of Chromeo, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

1. My favorite quote on Facebook? It’s from _______. Eliot’s the only American poet I can stand, and he’s essentially British.
2. No, _______ is not scary at all. I go to Kitchenette all the time.
3. I already explained this to you at the Pastry Shop, but self-abstraction is the only way to _______ the self, and, therefore, the text.
4. Professor Vandenberg doesn’t actually like _______, better to take the modernism class first semester instead.
5. I was sort of done with my _______ phase by the time 12th grade ended. Now, I just find it all so funny, you know?
6. Gender is a _______.
7. Is there a Columbia-centric _______ between River and East Campus? I don’t know, but I do know the question has all the makings of an intellectually rigorous University Writing piece.
8. I see James Franco and _______ in Butler all the time.

"FLEX"-ING YOUR VOCABULARY MUSCLES

Match the actual, honest-to-God Ricky’s costume to the professor most likely to dress the part on Halloween! Correct answers will reveal themselves on October 31st, but our predictions are below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COSTUME</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Two-Piece Black/Red Ultimate Bachelor</td>
<td>A. Jill Shapiro, Biological anthropology lecturer</td>
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<td>2. Cain the Vampire Tyrant</td>
<td>B. Jill Muller, Lecturer of Victorian literature and culture</td>
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<td>3. Count Bloodthirst</td>
<td>C. Anders Stephanson, the James P. Shenton Professor of the Core Curriculum</td>
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<td>4. Navy Shipmate Cutie</td>
<td>D. Suzanne Saïd, Professor of Greek Tragedy and Comedy</td>
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<td>5. B.C. Babe Leopard</td>
<td>E. Robert McCaughey, the Ann Whitney Olin Professor of History and Barnard First Year English Professor of “The Beautiful Sea” seminar</td>
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<td>6. Sexy Josephine</td>
<td>F. Cristen Scully Kromm, Assistant Dean of Community Development/ Director of Residential Programs</td>
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<td>7. South Sea Siren</td>
<td>G. Jack McGourty, Associate Dean of SEAS, lead instructor in Gateway Lab course</td>
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<td>8. Tales of Old London: Victorian Harlot</td>
<td>H. Deborah Valenze, Professor of Modern European History</td>
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Compiled by Jon Hill and Juli N. Weiner
Illustrations by Allison A. Halff
A sk the average student bolting to Art Hum to direct you to the nearest zebra finches and she might suggest the Bronx Zoo. But she would be wrong—the halls of one humanities building hold more than drowsy students—wee beastsies sit behind many doors.

Far from the uptown Medical Center, where chimp-costumed PETA demonstrators target high-profile animal testing labs, several small populations of animal research subjects reside in obscurity in their on-campus abodes. “We have to protect them from people who do not understand or appreciate the value of studying animals and may try to put their welfare at risk,” said psychology professor Sarah Woolley, who requested that The Blue and White not print the exact locations of these mini-populations.

One such clandestine lab, now defunct, is the “Fly Room,” which Nobel Prize-winning scientist Thomas Hunt Morgan used for his groundbreaking drosophila fruit fly experiments. In the 1930s, Morgan made the stunning breakthrough of linking genes to hereditary traits and evolution. Today, other rooms host a variety of animal subjects for biology and psychology research teams’ use.

On a recent tour of the labs, Woolley stepped into what one veterinarian affectionately calls “the projects,” where researchers study how zebra finches learn the mating songs of their fathers. Not unlike New York City’s public housing residents, the zebra finches reside in high-rise stacks of cages that leave little room for the researchers to walk about. However, zebra finches do not have to concern themselves with rent—a notable advantage.

Other animal labs, such as those with mice and rats, are less inviting and more odorous. Will Swaney, a post-doctoral student who does research in the lab, strapped on a face mask before entering the mice room. An eerie red light illuminated the space, forcing the nocturnal mice to switch their sleep schedules to accommodate the researchers. The frog room—demarcated by a door sign that says, simply, “Frogs”—is similarly arranged.

Proceeding into the rat room, the smell improved. Dr. Swaney commented that these residents were much smarter. “See how they noticed that we came in the room?” Indeed, many of the rats scurried along the cages, sniffing at their visitors. Perhaps one day they will achieve immortal glory in a 12-page feature in Science Magazine. For the moment, though, the rats continue their lives, scurrying around their cloistered world, while the rest of campus bustles on, ignorant of the menagerie that thrives behind closed doors.

—Barry Weinberg

According to the cashier, the mochi mystery is listed on Pinkberry’s online menu. Why isn’t it on the in-store menu, or alongside the strawberries, cereals, and yogurt chips at the counter? “I don’t know. Everyone orders them. They just know.”

The Pinkberry man is not intrigued by mochi’s mysterious origin, and the server who dishes out yogurt pulls the rice cakes from their hiding place under the counter with little fanfare. The website, however, shows a list of toppings including Fruity Pebbles and pineapple rings, but makes no note of the gummy mochi.

Manhattan has always rewarded those in-the-know—the “regulars”—with secrets unavailable to the general public. In the case of unpublished menu items, the Internet can stand in for street savvy: user reviews on food sites like Yelp.com hint at off-menu dishes and drinks. Still, most of the undisclosed food can only be discovered through word of mouth.

Take Hamilton Deli’s ABC Special, a chicken salad sandwich smothered in mayo and melted ched-
dar on greasy buttered toast. Or Tom’s “Broadway Shake,” a tasty combo of coffee and chocolate that isn’t listed on the menu with the diner’s other creamy options.

But there are even greater secrets: not just items but entire menus hidden from the casual customer. Columbia Cottage is rumored to provide a separate menu to those who request it in Chinese—not a translation of the English menu, but an entirely different and, reportedly, better one. Curious, *The Blue and White* asked politely for the menu in Chinese, and was presented with an English menu with translations on the side. After inquiring, the truth-seeker unceremoniously had her tablecloth swiped from under her plate, in classic Cottage fashion.

Morningside still awaits the promise of Won Dee Siam, a Thai restaurant with two locations in Manhattan that is slated to open a third on 107th and Amsterdam. The restaurant offers a Thai-language menu featuring meals of catfish and mango deemed too daring for the more conservative of Manhattanite stomachs.

However, mysteries remain: at a recent visit to the Mexican chain Chipotle on Broadway, Willie Neiswanger, SEAS’12, ordered a steak quesadilla, something the overhead menu doesn’t list. “I got it in Portland all the time. I guess they have it here too.”

—Amanda Pickering

Smart Colombians never choose classes without tapping into the hive mind of their peers. But before the advent of CULPA.info, they had its pen-and-ink incarnation: a paperback register of student-written professor reviews.

The *Barnard-Columbia Course Guide*, compiled by the college’s now-defunct Ted Kremer Society, saved students from choosing classes in a vacuum from 1963 until it ceased annual publication in the 1990s. And the 227-page 1970 edition, recently discovered in the old files of Columbia’s French Department, is an impressive undertaking.

Despite the lack of computer assistance, the course guide’s reviews are far more quantitative than CULPA’s trove on each professor. Students assigned nine numerical ratings to each professor and course based on statistical analysis of more than 8,000 student questionnaires distributed in more than 200 Columbia and Barnard classes—while also leaving space for qualitative judgment.

“He is a combination of a brilliant scientist and a Pied Piper,” wrote one student in a biology class taught by Cyrus Levinthal, the late molecular biologist who later in the 1970s pioneered the use of computers to display protein models.

The guide’s editors wrote all the descriptions and analysis of the courses, synthesizing only the most helpful student responses into coherent paragraphs. Negative feedback about instructors does appear, but in muted form.

“No one can argue with Professor de Bary’s command of the subject matter,” reads a pointed review of distinguished Oriental Studies scholar William de Bary. “No one can argue with him either. He is ‘incredibly authoritarian,’ pompous, and intimidates everyone, including the other instructor. ‘He dismissed students’ comments with godlike superiority, not critical insight.’

But besides the expression of student sentiment, the book is also a window onto how much higher education has changed since the course guide’s publication. Departments like Computer Science and African-American Studies are nowhere to be found, while departments like Geography and Human Development are extant. A much greater percentage of instructors listed in its pages are tenured professors, and female instructors are rare enough to be exotic: “Mrs. Drake is definitely stimulating,” starts a German instructor review. “When she comes in in that blue pants suit it’s too much.”

Still, some generational continuity can be found in the guide’s reviews of Columbia’s oldest and most well-known names. Besides de Bary, currently active professors listed include Eric Foner (4.8), James Beck (4.6), David Rosand (4.2), Nicholas Turro (4.1), and David Sidorsky (3.4). Emeritus Professor Jacques Barzun also receives a write-up, and the late English Professor Edward Said (4.4) gets a full page to himself.

—Jon Hill
Peter Gallotta

Peter Gallotta, CC’09, navigates the stormy seas of identity politics with a pink martini and a carefree swish of his auburn hair—“sassy chestnut,” according to the dye bottle. He’s among the ranks of club leaders who’ve become the group they lead, and no one is quite sure what happened in the era immediately before Gallotta assumed the presidency of the Columbia Queer Alliance during his junior year. His status is apparent just by clicking on the front page of the CQA web site, which features Gallotta in a russet wig, gold tiara, red lipstick and green party dress staring defiantly at the camera, arm outstretched as if to ask, “Got a problem with me?”

But Gallotta remembers the pre-Gallotta scene quite well. “When I got to campus, the community was six people in the Stephen Donaldson Lounge,” he says. “The first Queer Sushi that I strolled into had maybe a handful of people.” What was worse, during his first year, a string of bias incidents struck campus, the most notorious of which involved students scrawling anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic slurs on the walls of a Ruggles suite. The incidents left him deeply troubled and disillusioned, but defiant. “I didn’t think the queer community was of value” two years ago, he says. “I like to think we’ve made a dent in that.”

Most would say they have. Building on the modest gains of his predecessors, Gallotta politicized, broadened, and socialized the campus LGBTQ community—no small feat for the oldest college queer group in the nation. In the past three years, he oversaw the re-birth of First Fridays, ushered in Queer Awareness Month with an enormous rainbow balloon arch over Alma Mater, and built new ties between CQA and the religious and ethnic groups on campus. He mentions a post-Ahmadinejad teach-in on homosexuality in Islam as one of his most important achievements.

On his watch, the University opened a gay-themed level of the Intercultural Resource Center, the Q House, and hired an LGBTQ advisor. Gallotta’s beaming face greets prospective students who read his profile in the “Our Columbia” marketing booklet. Columbia has rewarded him in kind—he has a King’s Crown Copper Horizon Award, the King’s Crown Silver Award and, he adds facetiously, “a Butler Library Award for most nights spent passed out on the third floor.”

The second of three sons in a strict Roman Catholic household (his mother sings “Happy Birthday” to Jesus every Christmas), it’s fair to say that he stands out. His brothers—who reside at the opposite side of the Kinsey scale from him—went to Jesuit colleges in Boston. Gallotta—who attended the prestigious, all-male Regis High School in Manhattan on a full grant—chose to attend Columbia and major in History & Theory of Architecture and Comparative Ethnic Studies.

Gallotta didn’t come to college to find a new identity or retire an old one. He has a smile and a nod for the dozens who greet him as he walks across campus. “Halloo,” he coos to each one, elongating the “oo” in a singsong cadence. When he argues, he bobs his head rapidly, and when he agrees with you he’ll tell you with a spirited “Absolutely!” Despite the supernatural pink glow of his cheeks, he does not wear makeup, except at costume parties. He’s just that pretty.

His circle of friends includes one former mayor’s daughter—a connection that resulted in semi-scandalous photographs unearthed by the political blog Wonkette—and one presidential candidate’s daughter, with whom he shared many late-night slices of Koronet’s pizza.

Though his achievements with the CQA have been immense—the budget doubled under his leadership in

Campus Characters

You might not know the following figures—but you should. In Campus Characters, The Blue and White introduces you to a handful of Columbians who are up to interesting and extraordinary things, and whose stories beg to be shared. If you’d like to suggest a Campus Character, send us an e-mail at bweditors@columbia.edu.
order to fund its huge growth in programming—he has also infused the scene with uninhibited playfulness and fun. Critics who say events like First Friday—where security guards watch as lines of young men shimmy and shake against each other—might be too playful just don’t get it. “To be perfectly honest, this is a sexual identity that we’re organizing around,” he says. But, he adds, “We’re doing it for that person who’s scared. Really, you never know the tangible effects this can have.”

— Katie Reedy

ARIEL ZUCKER

During high school, Ariel Zucker, CC’09, decided to get dreadlocks. “I had a barbecue and invited around nine people to help over spring break.” Several years later, Zucker’s thick golden ropes reach the small of her back and are bejeweled with the sea beads and elephant figurines that she’s gathered in her world travels. “They’re pretty much the only reason I’m a campus character,” she joked, both humble about her personality and proud of her dramatic appearance.

Zucker plays the part of the flower child, but she only takes it so far. “My most hippie tendency is my love of rivers,” she said. “I can just sit and stare for hours.” On Saturday nights, she might be found at St. Nick’s pub dancing to the drums of the West African music, gyrating and swaying along with the locals. On Fridays, she makes spiced cider for her neighbors in Potluck House.

She doesn’t quite fit the hippie mold. “People always come up to me and ask if I want to smoke, but I just don’t need drugs to make me happy.” And happy she is, without appearing bubbly or insincere. Her boyfriend, Akash Gupta, CC’09, pointed out that her love of nature is no cloying affectation. “You can see that the city wears her down after awhile,” he said. “Being choked off from vegetation affects her emotionally to the point where she becomes slightly watery-eyed from seeing a tree.”

Zucker’s father is a biology professor at the University of California in Berkeley, and she initially planned to take up his mantle and major in environmental biology. But her scientific interests are complemented by a hard-core pragmatism that has led her to become, as one study mate said, “a very methodical economist.”

“I’m really interested in how resources are distributed, and why, and making that more equitable without communism,” she said. Before coming to Columbia, she spent a gap year in Costa Rica and Tanzania, following high school travels to Botswana and South Africa. Her experiences led to coursework in Swahili, a mastery of some forms of African dance, and aspirations to work for the Clinton Foundation in Rwanda.

The appeal of socially engaged work is natural for Zucker—her Potluck housemates describe her as “completely generous.” “She’s always cooking and offering food,” said one. Zucker credits her parents with her penchant for giving. They raised her with the philosophy that “if you spoil a child they won’t turn out spoiled.” She has a trust fund, but instead of using the money to purchase bags and bobbles, she is paying for a Tanzanian orphan’s college tuition—“He’s in his third year!” she said.

Zucker practices her peculiarly active brand of activism with large and small gestures. She often gives up her evenings to participate in an EcoReps waste reform program that she spearheaded, in which designated plate scrapers shovel leftover food into trash bins to show John Jay diners how much they’ve wasted. She can also take partial credit for improvements to the University’s recycling programs, which have expanded exponentially in her years at Columbia. Her unbending focus on the environment leads some people to see her as standoffish and intense. Get into a debate with her about poverty in Africa, and you had better know your stuff.

“She might actually get something done whereas many idealists won’t,” a former Contemporary Civilization classmate pointed out. In addition to everything else she does, she runs marathons, practices Brazilian capoeira, and ballroom dances. When she enters a room, everything seems to fall into balance. As her friend Caroline Robertson, CC’09, points out, “It’s hard to fit it all together. You know when you’re walking outside, like in a forest, and you feel really centered? Ariel is like that all the time. She is outside. All the time.”
On Thursday nights, the crowd in Butler Café is small and dispersed. From a central table in the quiet lounge, one voice booms, fighting its way out of the biggest, most billowing beard in the room. The Butler Marxist is holding court.

Though he insists he does visit other cafés and libraries throughout the city, his nightly appearance in Butler is practically guaranteed. With his mane of dandruff-laden black hair, leather-fringed apparel, and extra-long thumbnails, he has become famous, and is the subject of rampant speculation by the café’s less vocal locals. This lounge loiterer remains a mystery even to longtime observers.

He is just as suspicious of you as you are of him. “A lot of people can’t tell the difference between spirits and real people,” he explains. “So the first time you see a person they might be an apparition. Then, you start to ask some questions, and if they respond appropriately, then you realize that they’re not just spirits, but an actuality.”

For the purposes of this publication, the Marxist will remain a step removed from actuality. He’s bound by non-disclosure agreements with two corporate clients, you see. No identifying marks, no names, and much biographical vagueness. To the readers of The Blue and White, he wishes to be known only as the Author.

The Author also considered adopting the alias the Moviemaker. In fact, he is a mid-90s graduate of Columbia’s film school, and the bevy of characters who surround him are also alumni, for the most part. His girlfriend, the Economist, recently completed a degree in the College after eight years of study. She met the Author about two years ago—in the café, of course.

The crew has grown formidably from spontaneous meetings, much like the Economist and the Author’s union. “They all glom around the Author,” explains the Economist. There are regular appearances by the portly, mustachioed Architect, the aged China Scholar, and a giggly man whose unwieldy pseudonym is the-Black-and-the-White. The salon is informal, and includes countless more Sociologists, Area Specialists, Ecologists, Theorists, and,  

Illustration by Lorraine White
intriguingly, established Professors.

But this is certainly no cult of the Author. “All my associates have their own opinions, and we have all kinds of wild disagreements,” he counters. Their group is driven by the spirit of intellectual inquiry, in the continental style, and could not exist without the lounge. “Where is a 24/7 café-salon that New York runs?” he wonders. “Columbia runs the Butler,” he says, as if the Butler were an after-hours cocktail bar.

Apparently, it is unusual to find such a vital café culture in an American research institution, but a lot of bibliothèques, as they call them in Europe, have this kind of place, says the Author. Just a decade ago, the lounge in Butler was a math and science library. It was a “dead space,” laments the Architect.

When the Author and his comrades are in session, the room comes alive. Over the murmur of keystrokes and idle gossip, the Author expounds on his subject of inquiry, a theory of the Cool and the Uncool. “What about the Uncouth?” interjects the Black-and-the-White, before sliding away with a silly laugh. Here, the academic discourse is fierce, but the punning is fiercer.

As his associates mosey off, the Author turns to the hard work at hand. He extracts his books from an enormous, radiation-proof (so he says) Swiss Army knapsack, then stacks the table with volumes of Benjamin, Pushkin, Cervantes, Proust, de Sade—all in their respective original languages. Tonight, he will require the assistance of no fewer than three pocket dictionaries.

Other than English, he speaks a minimum of seven languages, including Yaqui, the language of his American Indian ancestors. He picked up Yaqui by participating in religious ceremonies, but he didn’t grow up in the tribe’s Sonoran desert homeland—he’s a Los Angeles native. At UCLA, he minored in Slavic Studies and learned Russian. This, the autodidact insists, segued quite naturally into a working knowledge of German, Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanish.

The Author’s fluency in Russian may explain some of the lounge gossip that encircles him. Is he, as his moniker suggests, a Marxist? Darker rumors suggest he is a revisionist historian of the Stalinist camp.

There’s no doubt he’s a contrarian. “You convince me of horrible things!” accuses the Economist. But she’s hinting at something milder than a pro-Stalin agenda. “As a form of personal entertainment, he finds very disturbing newspaper articles and makes me read them,” she confides.

The long answer to the Stalin question is difficult to muddle through. The short answer is no—he concedes that genocide is the extinction of Cool. In the lexicon of a man devoted to the study of the Cool, this is a stronger assertion than it might seem.

Sure, he has studied Marx and Stalin extensively, but there’s little he hasn’t studied.

The Economist offers a parallel vindication of her own work. Though she is employed by a major financial institution, she has what she deems “big time” ethical concerns about standard accounting practices. Nevertheless, she explains, “if someone’s blood is poisoned, the answer is not to try and drain all their blood.” Rather, she continues, “if you’re going to fix something from the outside, you still have to know how it works.”

This does not mean that the Author is an activist. Neither is he a simple researcher or philosopher. “You might call me,” he proposes, “a critical artist.” Like Sartre, he is weaving his critical theory into novel form. Three years after a joint book-and-movie deal fell through, he’s embarking on a final draft with the help of an editor from a publishing house he won’t name.

The novel is about two twins at the center of an international cult and pop sensation, he explains. His theory directs the plot as the characters grapple with the Cool in various ways, and they try their own approaches to the Cool, some naïve, some savvy, and in that Cool is created a Cool revolution, basically.” With the help of an international crime syndicate, the twins launch a Europop gag on an unsuspecting world.

As our present world unsuspectingly awaits the novel’s publication, the Author digs into his cushioned booth. He knows you see him, and invites you to join. “I’m a crazy guy,” he admits. Let loose, his cackle echoes through the lounge.
Foul is fair and fair is foul at Fort Tryon’s Medieval Festival.

By Alexander Statman

It is illegal to carry an unsheathed broadsword in the State of New York. It’s the medieval weapon equivalent of an open container law: the blade of any sword cannot be accessible, so it has to be carried in a box, or sheathed tight with a zip tie. They’ll take care of it for you at the Fort Tryon Medieval Festival, where you can buy a sword with Visa or MasterCard.

Every fall, the park perched above the Hudson River is transported back to... some era, it’s hard to tell which one. “Sword-wielding Ways of Life” might be a better theme than “Medieval,” as festival-goers flock to the Cloisters in celebration of a diverse array of historical eras. Roman gladiators joust a thousand years too late, Caribbean pirates drink mead four hundred years too early, and goth kids look on from a distance, unsure of where they fit into the ahistorical, fantastical non-continuum.

Some attendees—those dressed as Robin Hood, Merlin, a Vandal or Viking—do come close to “true” medieval style. But many costumes have nothing to do with history at all; the medieval festival features tangles of colorfully dyed hair and the largest collection of devil-horn headbands this side of Halloween. Wear a pair of spectacles, and you’ll be asked if you are dressed as Harry Potter. Rarer still are the select few who appear as if they stepped out of the Canterbury Tales: the lone monk, and the bums who walk up off Amsterdam for free cheese samples. They’re about as close as anyone gets to historical accuracy.

The wealth of anachronisms probably explains why you won’t find anyone from the Columbia faculty in attendance (unless they’re hidden under an abbot’s cowl). In Morningside Heights, where professors dedicate their lives to the study of times past, the very idea of a festival where peasants cavort with goblins under the banner of the Medieval is sacrilegious. When the subject of the festival is broached it’s as though our professors have taken a monastic vow of silence. Out of several professors contacted, the most any of them had to say about the medieval festival was “I don’t want to rain on that parade.”

The festival’s vendors certainly don’t share professors’ fetishization of historical detail. Take, for instance, the two men selling functional models of medieval siege equipment. Their ballistae, trebuchets, and catapults could have laid siege to a substantial Lego castle, as they all had a full magazine of mini-marshmallows. But the men at the booth didn’t design their product, and the architect used no source at all: he’s a carpenter by trade, and he knows how to make toys shoot projectiles.

“Yeah, he looks at pictures of catapults,” they said of the miniatures’ creator. “Not sure where he gets them, though.”

But most vendors have, at the very least, some interest in the era, however broadly defined. “I love the medieval period. I love dragons, Celtic, all that stuff,” says K.S. Heller, who mans an artists’ shop along the main market road. Her paintings feature subjects ranging from sexy vampires to sexy Roman empresses. “I’m the ADHD of art,” Heller explains. She sells her work mostly at sci-fi and fantasy conventions because she sees herself as “mostly a sci-fi artist, when it comes down to it.”

No one seems to attend the Medieval Festival without some sense of irony—even young children. One such boy approached a man playing a recorder: “I got one of those from school!” he said. The bard handed the child the instrument and challenged him to play a tune. He declined—the fantasy could only go so far.

Illustration by Wendan Li
We See Dead People

A casting call for Morningside Heights ghost stories.

BY THE STAFF OF THE BLUE AND WHITE

Unlike many universities, Columbia has no ghosts—we simply lack a campus spirit. When asked whether any apparitions haunted our environs, historian Eric Foner said: “I have not heard any Columbia ghost stories, but there are certainly stories of live graduate students haunting the Butler stacks.” The professor’s remark was not far from reality and, in the spirit of All Hallows Eve, The Blue and White presents a cast of supernatural characters for your amusement.

The General and Mrs. Grant

The always-attention hungry Ulysses S. Grant likes to venture out of his mausoleum to wave at the double-decker tour buses on the “Uptown Loop.” When that loses its thrill, he meanders down to College Walk to ask visiting Virginians if they know who’s buried in Grant’s Tomb. “Not me!” he bellows, just as pleased with his joke the fifteenth time as the first. Later that night, a fretful, spectral Mrs. Grant finds him slumped behind St. Paul’s Chapel, drowning his sorrows and draining his hip flask.

Edward Said

Friday nights, you’ll find SIPA students engaged in furious bouts of finger jousting in their secret basement gym. But that’s not what justifies the ten Euro admission fee. At halftime, look to the front of the bleachers where mascot “Dead Ed” Said rallies the crowd with a rousing cheer of “Hey-hey! Ho-ho! Your judgmental cultural apparatus that presupposes the objectivity of colonial discourse has got to go!”

Tongue-tied Tim

Roaming through Philosophy Hall, appearing through a professor’s closed doors after office hours are over, is poor Tim, the Boy Who Wandered Too Far into His Own Thoughts. “I… I…” he sputters, unable to utter the words that might translate the marvelous theories he entertains in the alcoves of his mind. His intrinsic finality will never be realized; no faithful librarian will ever order his oeuvres on an august shelf.

“Teleologically, you’re a sad case,” is all his besieged professor can muster.

Jane Jacobs

Like the Statue of Liberty, the vengeful ghost of Jane Jacobs carries a book in her left hand—it’s her own, The Death and Life of Great American Cities. The expansionists call her Bloody Mary, sulking as she hollers her shrill screed against the University’s threat of eminent domain. Her right hand tows a massive chain, decorated with the loot of Manhattanville; in her wake, entire bodegas and gas stations screech as she drags them along the sidewalk.

Panic Attack Paul

Paul from Connecticut was eager to ditch Danbury for the big city, but he never forgot how his mother had wept over his shoulder, begging him “just never go into Morningside Park at night.” But within a month of move-in, he grew enamored of a T.A. Late one night, he ventured toward her wrong-side-of-the-park apartment, boom box perched on his shoulder in a totally awesome John Cusack reference. His mother’s imperative echoing in his mind, he shook so violently from fear that the stereo knocked him unconscious, then down the flight of steps. At night, his friendly ghost lurks in the park, escorting nervous students back to the Heights.

Federico García Lorca

Even in life, Federico García Lorca made a dashing ghost, his old-fashioned bow tie drooping with the weight of romantic angst and his dark eyes swimming with tortured dejection. He’s doomed to relive his miserable 1929 stint in GS, wandering in a fruitless search for true companionship. But the campus rebels are too tame for this martyr of the Spanish Civil War, and the campus literati won’t stop trying corner him into attending Postcrypt meetings. What’s a ghost to do? •
The hardest thing for a man to find at Columbia is love. It seems like those who are successful have some sort of supernatural ability. So you should beat them at their own game. The Way of the Adept is long and torturous, but a few basic techniques are not hard to master. Here are some tips from the *Operation des sept expris des Planets*, an eighteenth century magician’s guide, to get you started. Unfortunately, these philtres only work on women.

The first is probably the easiest; all you need is a little acting skill. Surprise that girl from Latin class with an offer to cast her horoscope. You will forecast for her the date of her marriage. Tell her you cannot predict the future unless she looks directly into your eyes. When you’ve caught her gaze, say the magic words: “Kafe, Kasita non Kafela et publia filii omnibus suis.” If you maintain eye contact, you may now “command the female and she will obey you in all your desire.”

Although warm beer may be sufficient potion for some amorous endeavors, you may need a different kind of beverage to win a lady most fair. Here is the Operation’s only philtre that uses ingredients available in Central Park. Begin with a healthy dose of your own blood, dried and powdered. Grind in the powdered heart of a dove, the liver of a sparrow, the womb of a swallow, and the kidney of a hare, in equal proportion. Sprinkle the compound into her goblet, and she will be yours.

If Latin and bird entrails are loathsome to you, here’s a last recourse. Just cut out this “Pentacle to Gain Love” and stick it in your pocket. The inscription says: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...And they shall be one flesh.” That’s what you want.

—By Alexander Statman

*Illustrations by Stephen Davan and Allison Halff*
Boom and Bust

How the financial crisis has liquidated the dreams of would-be bankers.

BY JAMES DOWNIE

On September 15th, the Center for Career Education’s announcement for the Fall Career Fair asked, “Looking for a great career? Recognize Google, AIG, Teach for America, ConEd, US Department of Justice? These are a fraction of the companies that will be attending CCE’s Fall Career Fair.” The next day, AIG’s stock plummeted 95 percent in one day of trading, and by the end of September 16th, AIG was at the mercy of the federal government.

It’s investment banking season—the interview suits are an immediate giveaway. Every fall, aspiring financiers cross campus in their business best as they scurry off to meetings that will determine whether they gain entrance to the industry’s and city’s privileged elite. A survey conducted in 2005 by the Center for Career Education (CCE) found that one fourth of all graduates reported that they were applying for finance jobs, many of them with the industry’s boldface names: Goldman, Lehman, Merrill, Bear. A healthy 58 percent of the resume-toting masses landed these coveted positions.

I-banking—which became the catchall for any job in finance—has, throughout the years, amassed a mystique built from tales of gargantuan signing bonuses, company ski vacations, and bottomless expense accounts. Its initiates lived by the perilous mantra: work hard and play harder. They were, in the words of Tom Wolfe, the Masters of the Universe.

A January 2007 story in The Eye—accompanied by a cover image of a handsome young man on a cell phone with a martini, flanked by two female stiletto-shod legs—gave voice to the mythology. In it, a pseudonymous senior told tales of intense days and coke-dusted nights fueled by wads of cash. This is not the life most bankers live, but it’s the one that pervades the popular imagination.

Undeniably, there were—and still are—tremendous perks. “It’s a very intense life” filled with “high-pressure situations,” said Thommen Ollapally, CC’08, who now works in the wealth management division of Morgan Stanley. “With that comes a certain flamboyance and with the large amounts of money comes even more,” he said.

New hires become accustomed to making the most of their limited free time. “It was high-flying, and long hours,” said one senior who worked last summer at Merrill Lynch. “You’re gonna go out and spend as much as money as possible. A lot of kids I hung out with were into the nice lounges, where you could not have otherwise gone.” A favorite game during lunch was credit card roulette, a game that involves a waiter randomly selecting a credit card—and thereby, its unlucky owner—to determine whose turn it is to pay for lunch.

“Many students,” said one senior, “felt like it was the ultimate job.” Now, that swagger has slowed to a shamble. The five largest independent investment banks in the United States are gone, or are shells of what they once were, and the jobless can rattle off the names of the bankrupt, converted, or bought. No longer a fairytale existence, the culture of finance may be perishing as investment banking joins the ranks of other professions in which “entry level” jobs are barely available at all.

When Peter Law, CC’08, landed an internship at Bear Stearns the summer after his junior year, the onslaught of morbid jokes about the bank’s imminent fate had already begun. “In May 2007, we had two hedge funds blow up, so Bear was seen as the weakest on Wall Street, and there was a lot of gallows humor about that,” Law said. In March 2008, two months before Law’s graduation, things started get-
“I noticed the stock was very volatile, and I knew something was up,” he said. Two weeks later, Bear Stearns went bankrupt and Law was dismissed. “I was out of a job. I was kind of shocked,” he said. It was two months before graduation. He managed to land a job at a hedge fund in Greenwich, Connecticut, but he was one of the lucky ones. “I wouldn’t want to be at a large investment bank now,” he said.

Scott, CC’08, has worked at Merrill Lynch, which was bought by Bank of America on September 15th, since graduating. When he first began to hear about the crisis, he reacted with “a little bit of disbelief.” The security that he and his colleagues had felt when they started, the security that attracts so many Columbia undergrads to finance, had vaporized. “A lot of us saw Merrill as indestructible, even when the first bits of the credit crunch were starting to appear. But when they got bought out, it really shook people’s confidence.”

Undergraduates have also felt the fallout. Many finance firms have frozen hiring, leaving those poised to enter the profession with nowhere to work. Whereas banks habitually hired their summer interns and then relied on recruiters to hire a handful of applicants, the banks are now restricting job offers to their intern pools only—and even interns who work hard and get good end-of-summer reviews aren’t getting offers. It’s not personal, it’s business.

“I’m very fortunate,” said Mei Feng Zhang, BC’10, the co-president of the Barnard chapter of 85 Broads (named after Goldman Sachs’ address at 85 Broad Street), an organization that aims to connect female students with New York-based female mentors. Zhang was offered a job at Morgan Stanley, thanks to her sophomore year internship with them, and she knows that she is the rare exception this year. “Lots of classmates have talked to me about their future, worrying about what’s next. I definitely have friends who are reconsidering,” Zhang said. She expects that 85 Broads, which is not even a specifically finance-oriented organization, will see more students requesting mentoring help.

As Wall Street takes a historic dive, students have been flocking to the Career Center for advice and help. Attendance at the Career Fair was up 80 percent this year, and overall CCE has seen a 23 percent increase in student attendance at its many events and frequent office hours. The Center has responded by expanding its programming and outreach. Within a week of the collapse of AIG and other powerful firms, and even before the career fair, CCE organized an alumni session called “Job Searching in A Tough Economy.”

CCE is not panicking, nor is it ready to actively move away from the finance sector. “We have seen a contraction in the market but not a wide scale withdrawal from recruiting as some may have feared or
expected,” said CCE Director Kavita Sharma, sharing a quiet hope with her undergraduate and graduate clients. But while it is true that finance recruiters from major firms still come to campus, some are sent for the purpose of maintaining a relationship with the University, or to build name recognition, rather than to hire undergraduates.

Given the market for jobs in finance, CCE has begun to consider and encourage alternate routes. For instance, the Center plans to host a workshop called “Choosing Graduate School,” and it now encourages more students to look outside of New York City for jobs. In October, the only finance-related information sessions have been for UBS and Goldman Sachs’s Asian divisions. IT and consulting have taken the place of finance as October’s most well-represented industries, and firms like Booz Allen Hamilton, Kurt Salmon Associates, and Novantas draw sizable crowds.

Many undergraduates are also keeping their options open, particularly as seniors approach the time during which the more competitive sectors are looking to start hiring. “At this point, I’m very glad I’ve kept options outside of finance,” said a senior who asked to be kept anonymous, as she’s in the middle of job hunting. Non-seniors, who have spent less time considering their options, are bewildered by the sudden change. Before a session on interviewing held by the alumni group 116 to Wall Street, one sophomore said to another, “Do you think any of this will really help?”

The pull of the larger finance market is still strong. Most have kept the idea of a finance job on the front burner, even as they acknowledge that their prospects have dimmed. “It’s a tougher market out there, of course,” said another senior, “and I know that. But you have to hope that you’re not the new job they’ve cut.” Ultimately, the monetary rewards of a finance job—and the high-rolling lifestyle it allows—remain too appealing for students to ignore.

Graduates haven’t felt the immediate heat as those on the brink of graduation. While Scott has kept his job, one of his roommates’ spots at Lehman Brothers is up in the air after the firm declared bankruptcy and sold its valuable assets to Barclays. Some of these recent graduates’ expectations have fallen as fast as the stocks have. “It’s really changed people’s perspective on jobs,” Scott said. “They’re going from looking for the best job to looking just for a job.”

For those who still have jobs, the atmosphere is miserable. Yearly bonuses have been cut, in some cases, to one-third of their typical levels. There’s also an ominous hush, as a slowdown in business means there’s not enough work to go around. “People show up and they do nothing all day, and that’s pretty disconcerting,” Law said. But at this point, nobody’s jumping ship—in part because there’s nowhere to go. “People are going to hunker down and wait and see, and just hang on to the job we have for now,” Scott said.

All this makes for a weird feeling of suspended animation as survivors wait for the ax to fall—banks still look and feel like banks, after all. “It hasn’t changed that much,” said Ollapally, “because there’s still a lot of money floating around.”

“Generally, most people I know from work seem to be spending as usual, throwing money at things such as clothes, expensive meals, as though nothing has happened,” Scott said. “Personally, I have put off buying more work clothes. I want to make sure that I make it through the Bank of America and Merrill Lynch merger before I go out and spend hundreds of dollars on new suits, shirts, and pants that I may not need.”

Those who have yet to graduate continue to buy these suits and wear them to meet company representatives who’ve run out of jobs to give. They still buy Blackberrys for jobs they may not get. Banking culture and the glow of a future with perks and instant respect has faded, but only because Wall Street gave up on investment banking before Colombians did. Its legacy sustains their fragile confidence, still cushioned by Columbia’s walls. “Even though it now looks like I’ll have trouble as well, I’m just hoping for the best,” said Chris, a junior. “It’s crazy out there now.”
The New Dealer

In University Provost Alan Brinkley’s office in Low Library, a Kara Walker print and a series of black and white snapshots of dejected New York subway riders face each other across the black leather seats of the reception area. For a New Deal historian and ardent progressive, these images of American suffering are not surprising, even in such tony surroundings. Brinkley, who will step down from his position as Provost at the end of the academic year to focus on teaching and research, sat down with The Blue and White to discuss the economic meltdown, his past five years as Provost, and why the U.S. needs liberals.

THE BLUE AND WHITE: In The New Republic’s blog The Plank, you recently wrote: “in my lifetime I have seen nothing that resembles the 1930s more than the present moment.” As a historian of the Great Depression, what do you think of the current situation?

Alan Brinkley: I don’t think we’re headed into a depression like the Depression of the 1930s. I think the American economy is too big and too diversified and, though it doesn’t look like it at the moment, too protected by fail-safes like the [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation] for there to be the total economic collapse that the Great Depression produced.

But I think this is certainly the most dangerous moment since 1929 or 1932 for our economy, and there are lots of ways it could go, and I’m no better able to predict than anyone else, but I think this is an extraordinarily dangerous moment. And there are many things about the current moment that are almost identical to the stock market crash in 1929, which was a result, to a large degree, of exactly what has been so damaging to the mortgage market today, which is reckless and unsupportable debt that was premised on permanently rising values. That’s what caused the stock market crash and that’s what caused the subprime crisis.

B&W: Is that a peculiarity of American capitalism? Of capitalism in general?

AB: I think it’s a peculiarity of capitalism, not of American capitalism, because there have been similar meltdowns in many other countries over the years, the most notable probably being Japan, which had one of the worst financial meltdowns of any nation since the 30s and still hasn’t recovered after almost 20 years.

B&W: Will this be the dissolution of society as we know it?

AB: The safety nets are going to be under a lot of strain if things deteriorate really dramatically, if we have 15, 20 percent unemployment as we did during the Great Depression. The safety nets are unemployment insurance, and other things, and presumably those safety nets will be funded but it’ll be extremely difficult. We’re already running such enormous deficits that the costs of the bailout, and, if it were to happen, McCain’s proposal of buying up bad mortgages, added to the cost of the war... We are in a terrible fiscal crisis in addition to being in a financial crisis, and those two things together make for a very dangerous mix.

B&W: Do you think the Democratic Party will act as it did in the 1930s?

AB: Well a crisis of this magnitude is a great danger, but it’s also a great opportunity, as Franklin Roosevelt demonstrated, and even though he never really ended the Great Depression, he was able to do a lot of things that could never have happened had there not been a sense of crisis and fear that allowed the people to trust a leader in the way they trusted Roosevelt. Of course, we don’t know who will be elected, we don’t know what the circumstances will be by January 20th, and we don’t really know an enormous amount about what Obama would do, just as no one knew what Roosevelt would do when he
entered office. So yes, this is a moment that could give a new president an extraordinary opportunity to make dramatic changes.

*B&W: With many American schools expanding in the Gulf States and elsewhere, what is the future of the university abroad?

AB: All major universities including Columbia have been looking at the phenomenon of globalization and thinking about how the university should address globalization and incorporate it into what we do. There’s a tremendous appetite among rising nations and regions for American universities, which are thought to be the best in the world, and I think as a whole that’s correct. We have not wanted to set up a Columbia in Dubai, as they have asked us to do, or in Abu Dhabi, as NYU is doing.

I don’t want to criticize what other universities are doing, but I don’t think that’s an appropriate or workable way for us to engage with the world. It’s very risky to open up a satellite university with our name on it. It’s a danger to—a word I don’t like in this context—to the brand of the University. We should not be making huge academic commitments because we’re likely to be paid well for them. I think we’ve taken a more cautious approach to this than other places have.

*B&W: But is there something inherently different about setting up a school in Abu Dhabi versus, say, Rome?

AB: No, I don’t think there’s a difference inherently... We’re thinking of opening centers in other parts of the world that will be centers to sort of help faculty engage with regions. We’re considering centers in Beijing and Amman, Jordan, so I don’t have any objection to having a presence in other parts of the world.

*B&W: Given the trend of globalization, what is the future of American history as an area of study?

AB: In my own department, there has been a tremendous movement towards international history. There is now an undergraduate program in international history; we have a significant number of faculty who think of themselves explicitly as international history scholars. We have a joint program with the London School of Economics in international history. This is a very healthy and welcome trend, but that doesn’t mean we abandon the study of particular places. That’s another part of history that still requires attention.

Even American history—which has been a very provincial field of history in a way—has not looked out except in the study of foreign policy in the way we think about at our own history. And that needs to change too, and I think that is changing. I think there will always be an appetite for American
history, at least in the United States, although there is an appetite for American history in other parts of the world as well.

B&W: What do you mean by looking out?

AB: I think historians of the United States like historians of any part of the world should be thinking about the ways a global phenomenon affects individual countries. So the Great Depression was not just an American phenomenon, it was a global phenomenon. It was one of the reasons for WWII. Even though when I teach the Great Depression I don’t do this that much myself, I think teaching the New Deal, teaching the Great Depression, should be put in an international context, at least to some degree.

B&W: Can you tell me about your work with The Century Foundation?

AB: It is a policy foundation, it’s very explicitly sort of liberal and progressive, and it doesn’t take any partisan positions, but it does take positions on policies. I’m the chairman of the board for Century, which really means I’m just part of the oversight for the institution. I don’t really do anything for them, although I write sometimes for them. I don’t think that’s incompatible with this job [as Provost]. I don’t think you check your principles at the door when you come in for a job like this, you just try not to conflate the position I hold at the university with the ideas I hold personally.

B&W: What do you mean by “explicitly liberal and progressive?” What needs progress?

AB: I think there are a lot of things that need more progress. For someone like me, who believes we need a much more progressive view of American life and American government, we need to have a better infrastructure, an intellectual infrastructure, if progressive ideas are going to become more central to the way Americans think about the future.

We need to have a better infrastructure, an intellectual infrastructure, if progressive ideas are going to become more central to the way Americans think about the future.

B&W: It seems that the Republican Party has established a standard that “normal people” are conservative. Could the progressive movement convince people that normal people are progressive?

AB: One of the things that I’ve tried to do as a historian is to encourage scholars to take conservatism seriously, to not think of it as a form of cranky resentment. These are real ideas, very sophisticated ideas, and very smart people are conservatives, and there are conservative ideas that probably are worth embracing for liberals. So we shouldn’t treat disagreement as a moral judgment on people.

But in any ideological world, there are also going to be irresponsible people, crazy people—there are certainly plenty of crazy people on the left, they’re just not running the government—but I think we’ve seen in the last eight years especially an unleashing of reckless ideas, unaccountable ideas, and people who have been encouraged to abandon a lot of principles that we should all share. I think that’s what’s made the last eight years a damaging period for our
country and for the world.

_B&W_: Are these reckless ideas coming from the population or the government?

AB: I mean, it’s not just government, it’s also ideas that get into public life in a way that they shouldn’t be. I think of things like suspension of habeas corpus, abandoning the Geneva Conventions, the use of torture, these really shameful events in our recent history that no one should support, liberal or conservative. Any moral personal person should believe that these are things that are not worthy of what the United States should stand for, or any part of the world should stand for. In a climate of danger and fear, you shouldn’t be surprised people are taking reckless positions. But you would hope that the leadership of the country would be a bulwark against these fears and passions and not a facilitator as the government has been at times in the eight years.

_B&W_: As Provost, is there anything you’ve learned about what happens in institutional decision-making?

AB: I do think I’ve learned a lot. I don’t want to suggest that managing a university is the equivalent of managing a country, but it’s true that organizations and leadership organizations in particular all do have some things in common. Among the things I’ve learned, there are things that I sort of knew intellectually but never experienced. Leadership requires compromise, it requires collaboration, it requires taking into account not just goals and ideals but realities, it requires being sensitive to the financial and other capabilities of an organization.

So, you know, I’m the Provost not the President, so I’m not a free agent to do anything I want, but even if I were President, I would feel, as I think the president does feel, that anything of real importance that we do has to have some kind of consensus among the leaders of the University, and among the faculty and the students of the University.

’B&W: What do you consider to be your achievements as Provost?

AB: The greatest achievement of the last six years is the Manhattanville project, which of course has a long way to go, but I think it’s pretty assured. This was not my achievement; it was the achievement of a huge number of people, and above all the achievement of the president. It was his vision and his commitment that moved us into this effort that many people thought was beyond our capacity, was much too big to take on. President Bollinger didn’t feel that way, and this is probably the most important thing the University has done in a century.

I’m very proud of the diversity initiative, which has had a big effect on the faculty, a very positive effect. I’ve tried to find ways to improve the quality of life for faculty. We have a quality of life committee that I’ve set up, which is working very hard to make the life of faculty better in many ways, and I hope that this will be the beginning of a long and continued commitment to the needs of faculty.

I think the Undergraduate Education Task Force, although it will be a while before the results of it actually have an impact, has the capacity to be a very important vehicle for enhancing undergraduate education. We’ll just have to see over the next several years whether the proposals will be successful, and I think there’s a good chance that they will.

_B&W_: Have you seen the Facebook group “Alan Brinkley is My Boyfriend”?

AB: [Laughs.] I’ve never seen it, but I’m aware of it. I have a college textbook that a lot of AP high school classes use.

_B&W_: It’s all high school students!

AB: Yes, I know. They’ve never even seen me, but they know my name.

_“In a climate of danger and fear, you shouldn’t be surprised people are taking reckless positions.”_

Interviewed by Katie Reedy
Playing for Keeps

The smack-talking, check-mating philosophers of St. Nicholas Park.

BY COOGAN BRENNAN

"Fair exchange ain’t no robbery,” Swami Jay intoned to a nearby circle of men in the park who were discussing the basic principles of chess. His hands rested on a Buddha-like belly, his bearded chin punching each word. Jay was outside the circle of men, but his aphorism momentarily silenced the conversation. He grunted once, possibly pleased with the reception of his wisdom, and then turned his attention back to the boom box set up in front of him.

Around him were five picnic tables covered with cloth chess boards, their owners—or borrowers—perched all around playing the game of kings. Swami Jay was one of a few sheikhs presiding over this chess madrasa, which was established many years ago at West 139th and St. Nicholas Boulevard. His name came from the respect he’s earned for being in the neighborhood for so long and from his limitless knowledge of the game. The “fair exchange” philosophy has been referenced before, and the chess players in St. Nick’s are steeped in lore, a code of behavior passed down through generations.

As I approached the park, I saw two men absorbed in a speed game. It was Caleb and Dave, both strong players, although in this game Caleb cleaned up. Greg, another player, acted as a mediator of sorts, explaining the dynamics of the game to onlookers.

"Caleb hits hard, but you hit hard too, Dave! You know you do!” Dave didn’t stir while Caleb pulled his black Yankees cap further over his eyes. Both surveyed the board and ignored the commentary from the peanut gallery huddled around them in the darkening park. Caleb pushed a pawn and hit the clock.

Each play in chess expresses a greater idea. A series of moves can become a conversation: a player may parry an attack launched by another, realize the weakness in the combination of moves, and reciprocate his own attack. It is, in one player’s words, “bloodless warfare” and one of the best nonviolent expressions of emotion the world knows. In feudal times, as David Shenk explained in his book The Immortal Game, chess—which is of Persian and Indian origin—was used as a diplomatic tool, a way for kings to settle disputes without spilling blood.

I've recently begun playing chess again in St. Nick’s Park. A friend introduced me to the players a few months ago and, although I was the only white person in the park, the group was warm and receptive. Still, I felt uncomfortable. Only by sitting and..."
watching and spending time there have I realized another core principle of chess: it’s not about winning so much as playing well.

Sometimes the odds are stacked too high to win. The NYPD began entering the park more frequently during my time there. At first, the explanation was that Barbara Bush was visiting the old estate of Alexander Hamilton, located in the park. Then came the conspiracy theory that Mayor Bloomberg wanted to flex muscle by “cleaning up the streets” before the third-term legislation came to a vote. Either way, the park was getting hot and too full of cops for comfort.

The park’s chess scene has been in existence for at least 30 years. It has seen the neighborhood’s decay, felt the effects of former Mayor Giuliani’s crackdown in the 1990s, and noticed the encroachment of recent gentrification. Park denizens speculate ominously about Columbia’s plan to annex Harlem and bulldoze City College.

One afternoon, Greg turned to me. “What happened to your glasses?” he said. My spectacles were damaged. I told him I had scratched them in a fight. “A fight?” he responded. “What were you doing fighting? You’re a chess player man! Just resign and play another game!” It was almost as good as Swami Jay’s statement of fair exchange: a commitment to nonviolence. That’s not to say there is no intimidation at the park, it’s just a different kind.

Hypermodernism, a style of play pioneered by the late Bobby Fischer, dominates the theoretical underpinnings of many games at the park. It works on the psychology of the opponent, breaking him down through a series of frustrating and seemingly pointless moves and attacks. “Hypermodernism is like a thorn in your side,” said Swami Jay, “always poking, always attacking.” The school takes into account the traditional moves in a game, then plays against them. It’s a self-aware, post-modern approach to the chess board that can unnerve traditional and amateur players.

Hypermodern chess is kind of like street basketball: full of smack that means more than it sounds like. “Check-schmeck, mayn!” cried my friend Ahmad, a player known best for his games outside of Card-O-Mat on Broadway, as he moved his queen into position, attacking his opponent’s king. “Always call check! It might be mate!” shouted Maurice, a tall, lanky man moving his pawn closer to the king and finishing with, “Scheistenberg! That was a good move! Damn!”

“We used to be scared of Dave, man. You know?” continued Greg, turning his attention back to the game. His voice got progressively louder. “I ain’t scared anymore! Dave’s all sitting there and crying,” after losing the game to Caleb. “All I could do was give him a tissue! We ain’t scared of Dave anymore.” Caleb, one of the strongest players at the park, was dressed in a smooth black leather jacket, black cap and black pants. It was cold out; we were all wearing multiple layers.

The police entered the park in a group of six. They had raided the bathroom before and many of the chess players had been served summons. No one thought they would crack down as hard as they did. It was a strong check: Swami Jay was arrested on possession and intent to sell marijuana (but was later released), and Lou was found to owe the city two years for a previous warrant.

Word traveled quickly that the cops were clamping down on the park. While before I had felt welcome and comfortable, I now felt as though some of the men suspected me of being involved in the increased police activity. “What the fuck is that white boy doing here?” men would yell behind my back. I began to feel like a fish—someone hustled in chess only for money, not for enjoyment of the game. No one would give me a break, and I began to feel ostracized from a group I had once considered fraternal.

There’s no end in sight for the police clean-up of St. Nick’s park. While the chess men are brilliant, they are seen in the public lens as a nuisance. Critics of the welfare state would even point to the park as an argument for the end of public aid. Ironically, many of the men who come to the park are professionals: doctors, lawyers, and business executives.

Ahmad, each time he’s threatened with checkmate, loudly orders his opponent to “Back up and live, G!” He says this again and again, his hands and arms outstretched. It might be one of the most important mantras I’ve learned at St. Nick’s: never give a beating you wouldn’t be willing to take. Ahmad rocks in his chair and turned his head to the side as if to ask, Why even try to beat me?
“This truth was given me,” bellowed the prophet’s baritone in a mixture of hurried and drawn out syllables that oscillated from mezzo forte to a resonating fortissimo for the words ‘truth’ and ‘me,’ “by the pheasant king who was formed first.”

Have after a weird world is formed it revealed to be a story and have Man be her descendent and have man form the creatures which are the storytellers.

Fecundity. Horizon. Song.

I understand the verb ‘to conquer’ only as a word; it has no practical connotation for me.

They having an ovular existence outside of the egg, though egg there never was. Connected by breezes both feeding and giving shape. Being engulfed in an airy film. A film leaving no access but through the Eyes.

Every weekday afternoon saw the same routine: around five-thirty I would finish cross-country practice, change, gather with a few friends and walk the three blocks from Gonzaga Catholic High School to the Union Station metro-stop in Northwest D.C. We all felt very urban with that daily routine, even though almost every one of us lived in the suburbs. We all had stories about falling asleep on the train, missing our stop, and waking up in a “sketchy area;” of getting lost in a bad part of town late at night; or of almost getting – or actually getting – a mugged. Such stories were part of the mystique of city life for us, a life we pretended to lead even though we were suburbanites since birth. But despite all our talk, we knew we weren’t actually city slickers. We Italian and Irish-Catholic kids were white. The typical Washingtonian is black.

Sori watches him because watching is what girls in love do. She doesn’t speak to him because he makes for a paltry conversationalist. She remembers this much about him, and his hands.

He still didn’t speak to her. Neither would his face. If he was the type of father she’d wanted, he might have said something profound. Sometimes she forgets the only thing she wanted him to say was Sori Sori Sori, tell me an ice cream story.

These monsters walk, talk, behave like humans but they seem so far away. They are only accessible through TV screens, speakers and books. When they die another one springs up and to appeal to the new culture. These monsters are called celebrities.

The monster, being indefinable, is able to travel seamlessly between identities. We have seen Britney the pop princess, the lesbian, the teen icon, the wife, the good mom, the bad mom, the divorcée, the singer, the actress and so many more. The public is always surprised by her and this makes her extremely dangerous.

Just as the Western world successfully associated “Dark skin... with the fires of hell”, the media successfully associates Britney Spears and celebrities in
general with the Hollywood lifestyle.

Here, Letterman is making light of the issue of our society’s taboo subject of homosexuality which Britney demonstrated with Madonna and her promiscuity which is so advanced that even Letterman could be her baby’s daddy!

Yeah, that’s right, Saint Peter. Go ahead. Leave the ring. I’ll snag it, and then you’ll be my little pet for the rest of forever!

If someone does something that’s good for me (like, say, gives me three dollars and fifty cents – hint, hint), I say that to be a good thing. I want you to give me three fifty, so when you do it, you’re a “good” person. But none of you want to give me three fifty because you’re all evil people and I don’t like you.

When I was 14, I was abducted by aliens.
No, I wasn’t.
Yes, I was.
No, I wasn’t.
Does it matter?

Stop pretending like you think I’m conceited...Do you care that I was abducted by aliens? I doubt it.

BOBBY (struggling to get it out): Mom-- Aaron and I are in love.

(A dead silence. George looks up from his paper.)

GEORGE Did this happen on the facebooks?

Aware of the cultural barriers that prevented my students from being knowledgeable of hula, I attempted to teach them an accurate yet simple routine.

I believe that the absence of abstract thinking and the absence of absolute control of their motor skills created the greatest obstacles.

I was thinking about applying the “monster culture” lens to the Joker, and also applying a “hero culture” philosophy to Batman, the hero’s a culture employs reveal just as much as the monsters/villains it employs.
The College Republicans scale down their ground offense.

By Lydia DePillis

It’s the first meeting of the year for the Columbia University College Republicans, and this one feels a little different from your average club kickoff. Kids look around the room nervously. Is this place safe? Are these people like me? It’s Republicans Anonymous.

They look like any other group on campus, with maybe a few more polo shirts per capita. But when the group starts talking about ROTC, or the presidential candidates’ recent visit to campus, it becomes clear what rarities these kids are at Columbia: self-identifying conservatives. They’re the small section that cheers when a Republican scores points in a debate, the kids in your Contemporary Civilization class who really get into Burke and Smith.

“People protest everything here. If it has the GOP name on it, that makes it already subject to debate,” a board member told the assembled newcomers by means of introduction, followed by a discussion of John McCain’s treatment at the hands of liberal students at the ServiceNation forum the week before. “That was refreshing,” a freshman said on her way out.

Those who have been here for a year or more may remember the club differently. They might think of the event with former Attorney General John Ashcroft, vigorously protested by campus liberals, or the fiasco with Minutemen founder Jim Gilchrist, or Republicans eating and holding “HUNGRY?” signs in front of hunger strikers in fall 2007.

With the graduation of former president Chris Kulawik, CC’08, there’s been a changing of the guard, and the New Right is doing things differently. The College Republicans have embarked on a campaign to rebuild their image, and are working with other groups rather than in spite of them. The goal isn’t to win elections, or even convert anyone, but rather to serve as a support group for embattled conservatives—and in response, some who have been holed up for years are now willing to join the club.

The group itself is only a little older than most current students’ Columbia memories. The chapter revived itself in 2003-2004, after a period of semidormancy during the Clinton years. Kulawik, after resuscitating the Columbia College Conservative Club (C4), ran for the presidency on a platform of change following a year during which his predecessor had held few meetings and fewer events. By several accounts, Kulawik defeated his opponent, the incumbent president’s protégé, by bringing in dozens of students who had not regularly attended CR meetings before.

Forbidden by the Republicans’ constitution from leading another political group while serving as president, Kulawik held an e-mail election for C4, in which GS student Victor Cocchia ran unopposed. He was off campus for the duration of his presidency due to health problems, during which time C4 donated its entire allocation to College Republican events.

Effectively, then, Kulawik became the face and the voice of Columbia conservatism. He was always (with a few exceptions) the one to go on TV representing that perspective—his résumé at the end of his junior year included the title of “recurring commentator” on four Fox News shows.

Perhaps the biggest puzzle of the Kulawik presidency is the financing of John Ashcroft’s visit to campus in the fall of 2005. The Republicans’ treasurer for 2006-2007 said that Kulawik refused to divulge how he paid for Ashcroft’s estimated $75,000 to $90,000 speakers fee.

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A Return to Normalcy

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In May 2007 the treasurer and deputy director of operations sent an eight-page memo to Student
Development and Activities Director Robert Taylor accusing Kulawik of mishandling bags of receipts and passing money through his personal bank account. The petitioners then met with Taylor and never heard about it again.

Former board members describe the Republicans’ inner circle as being a happy place—that is, if you agreed with Kulawik, which most people did. “He wasn’t a consensus builder kind of leader,” said Philip Chan, CC’07, the primary author of the memo to Taylor. “He just got his way and pushed and pushed and it didn’t matter if he insulted anyone. He just wanted to develop his own general crusade against the Columbia community.”

Lauren Steinberg, JTS’09, was Kulawik’s executive director (the group’s equivalent of a vice president) during and after the Minutemen debacle, and managed communications for a scandal that made headlines across the country. “The point of the big events was to attract publicity, to attract members,” she said—a philosophy that she increasingly disagreed with as the events continued. “Chris is very conservative... on everything,” said Steinberg, who considers herself very moderate on most issues other than national security. “He felt it was important for him as a leader to be very conservative.”

Kulawik’s philosophy of aggressive conservative activism survives in a personal note on the website of C4, now called the Conservative Forum:

“To further the conservative agenda on the Columbia campus we must, to the best of our ability, compete for the minds of the student body. Accordingly, for our membership to grow and influence to increase, so must our campus presence...Yet, the Columbia Left is a well run organization with ample funding and established alumni connections. We must make it our goal to rival their supremacy.”

Kulawik did not respond to repeated requests to be interviewed for this story. But a consistent complaint runs throughout his Spectator columns, press accounts, and reports from people he dealt with: the group never got enough funding, and was punished by the security costs of bringing conservative speakers to campus. But in his second year as president, Kulawik requested no significant budget increase from SGB, which again gave the College Republicans a smaller allocation than the International Socialist Organization—a point the Republicans still harp on, even though it’s no longer the case. The current board initially requested $14,180 for 2008-2009—an astronomical amount for a student group—and were ultimately allocated about $3,000, still over double what they’d gotten the previous two years.

Current Republicans president Joe Charalel, CC’10, went to high school with Kulawik, but the resemblance ends there. “I’ve never done this before,” said Charalel, 19, upon sitting down for an interview. He’s a math major, and doesn’t get into the kinds of class debates in which a conservative humanities student might become embroiled. When asked, he said he wasn’t sure who he’d most like to see come speak on campus, and declined to name a conservative who most closely embodied his political philosophy.

The one who does most of the
talking for the group is executive director Lauren Salz, BC’11. A vegetarian who spent last summer working on an organic farm in Estonia, Salz’s resume isn’t that of a typical aspiring politico either. But she’s polished and opinionated, with a set of talking points and a concrete agenda. “We don’t exist for the Republican Party. We exist for the conservative community at Columbia,” she said, dressed in an Alaska sweatshirt and one of her signature headbands. When asked why the Republicans wouldn’t be running campaign trips this year like the Democrats, she responded derisively: “Idealists.”

This year, they’re not taking money from outside sources as Kulawik did, preferring instead to cosponsor events with other campus organizations—including a debate on gay issues as a part of Queer Awareness Month. C4—now known as the Conservative Forum—has undergone its own renaissance, and is planning a series of discussions on topics like “What is Conservatism”? Cocchia explains that while three years ago conservatives needed to shake things up, now people know they exist, and their task is shoring up the movement.

Republicans alumni affairs director Jonathan Schwitzer agreed with Cocchia. He said the club should bring speakers of most interest to its members, who he feels would want someone on the more strongly conservative side of the spectrum. Those who have a problem with that, Schwitzer says, don’t have to attend—just as he wouldn’t be interested in hearing someone liberal. “I wouldn’t be interested in what they had to say because I would disagree with what they were saying,” he said. “It’s interesting to have a conversation with someone you agree with.”

Newfound diplomacy aside, the Republicans are primarily out to nurture their own.

Erik Lukas, CC’09, a senior editor at the Columbia Political Review, came to the Republicans’ first meeting of the year with thoughts of getting involved. Later, when the CPR publisher came in to beg Republicans to submit to the magazine’s upcoming issue—they’d had no pitches from conservatives—she seemed surprised to see him there.

Lukas came back for the third meeting. Fed up with the culture war, he’s the kind of kid the new guard is looking for, and the kind they used to repel. Lukas was an Eagle Scout in high school, worked for Democrat Jim Webb’s Virginia Senate campaign in 2006, went to a few Democrats meetings his freshman year, and “pretty much left in disgust.” The campus left’s nostalgia for the 1960s and an anti-military vibe is often is what turns Columbia moderates into conservatives: they might not fully embrace the Republican party platform—at one meeting, an unofficial poll revealed that a majority of those present disapproved of President Bush’s job performance—but they sure can’t stand the other guys.

“It took a few years to realize that’s what I was,” said Lukas. It took him this long to get to a Republicans’ meeting in part because he disagreed with the controversial speaker approach—he didn’t want to be grouped with those who brought Jim Gilchrist to campus.

Landon Tucker, CC’10, also at his first meeting, had a similar conversion experience. He took a class called Lifecycles of Communist Regimes as a sophomore, and said he noticed similarities in today’s economic policy. “Now it’s wrapped in blankets and given mother’s milk, but it’s still the same old hard-core leftist stuff from hundreds of years ago,” he said.

This year, with a new approach, the Republicans have the chance to win the hearts of minds of Columbia’s youngest. They’ve already scored one with Derek Turner, CC’12, who said he was a little nervous about coming to such a bastion of liberal—performance—but they sure can’t stand the other guys.

“They’re not all that bad,” Lukas finishes.\n
"We don’t exist for the Republican Party. We exist for the conservative community at Columbia."
The first Babar, the elegant elephant dressed in a green suit, did not have a name or a green suit. It was a bedtime story that Cecile de Brunhoff invented for her sons, Mathieu and Laurent, in 1930: an orphaned baby elephant flees the jungle for Paris, where he steals some money for a suit and tie, returning to the jungle only after persuasion by his cousins.

Imagery, however, would come to the fore in the series that grew from Cecile de Brunhoff’s tale. After hearing the story from his sons, artist Jean de Brunhoff decided to illustrate his wife’s tale. He also added more characters, such as the Old Lady dressed in a long black gown who gives Babar money to buy his green suit. Jean de Brunhoff wrote and illustrated six books in the Babar series before his death in 1937. In 1946, his son Laurent carried on the series, completing 37 books to date.

On view at the Morgan Library & Museum’s Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors are the drafts and printer-ready watercolors for Jean de Brunhoff’s *Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* (1931) and Laurent de Brunhoff’s *Babar et ce coquin d’Arthur* (1946), the two authors’ first Babar works. Together, these drafts narrate the authors’ deliberations over content, color, form, and composition and the extent to which father and son sought to encourage a keen visual literacy among Babar’s young readers.

One of the initial steps that Jean de Brunhoff took toward creating the vivid world of Babar was to limit his set of colors. After 11 pages of color trials, he settled on a page squiggled with lines drawn from his final color palette: red, green, and yellow. This chromatic repetition is what lends the Babar books their familiar quality. It accounts for why, years later, readers will recall details like King Babar and Queen Celeste’s yellow hot air balloon, even though their memory of the plot may have faded.

For Jean de Brunhoff, less was always more. Drawing and redrawing poses, he pared down the language and images at every opportunity. In early drafts of Babar and Queen Celeste’s wedding night, Babar has his arm around Celeste’s shoulders. By the final draft they are standing close together, Babar’s arms at his side, conveying their intimacy without the obvious gesture of affection.

There is one page, however, on which Jean de Brunhoff wrote explicitly about Babar’s grief over his mother’s death. Leaning on the ledge of an open window with pale green shutters, Babar remembers his mother and weeps. The scene is all the more affecting because of its contrast with the books’ usual emotional restraint.

The exhibition at the Morgan also prefers to show rather than to tell. You can flip through Jean de Brunhoff’s earliest sketchbook on a touch screen and compare the sketches with the published books. The rugs on the exhibition floor mimic Jean de Brunhoff’s watercolors with a pattern of red, green, and yellow squiggles.

When he began to write and illustrate nine years after Jean’s death, Laurent retained the signatures of his father’s style: the linear quality of the drawings, the brightly colored solid backgrounds, the irregular hand lettering, and the books’ big, stiff backboned structure. With each book, however, Laurent de Brunhoff broadened the world of Babar.

In Babar’s Museum of Art (2003), Laurent de Brunhoff introduced readers to parodies of seminal paintings like Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, breaking with the limits of his father’s original color palette and employing more variations on line quality and shading to convey the details of each work of art. The original style is still perceptible, but because of the new richness in color and setting, the pages are ever more inviting. It seems fitting that, like the series’ progression, Babar and his readers find themselves in an increasingly complicated world.

—Sumaiya Ahmed
Is This Thing On?

Columbia turns down the volume on the campus music scene.

BY SASHA DE VOGEL

The annual spring concert on Low Steps, which occurs during Bacchanal festivities, is the largest and one of the most anticipated cultural events on campus. But last spring, for the first time ever, the concert on the Steps lost its defining characteristic: it took place inside, in the stuffy confines of Roone Arledge Auditorium.

Still worse, it was held on a decidedly anti-rock ‘n’ roll Monday night. The event’s organizers, CU Concerts, were told that there had been a booking conflict with another group that had reserved the Steps. In addition, the audience would be instructed to remain seated throughout the show, during which Brooklyn-based indie rockers Grizzly Bear and The National performed. According to Benny Shaffer, CC’09, one half of CU Concert’s two-person planning board, the seating arrangement “was not our decision.”

The other half of the ill-fated planning committee was Justin Gonçalves, CC’09. He was enraged by Public Safety’s demands, calling them “overly cautious.” “They weren’t about to have a raucous throw-down,” Gonçalves said, noting that the bands invited to play were quite tame. He chalked it up to a deep misunderstanding between students and administrators.

Leo Pedraza, the assistant director for Student Development and Activities Programming and Special Projects, offered a more measured explanation for the shift in venue and tightened restrictions. Speaking through University Public Relations, Pedraza explained that, “given the large numbers of students who attend the spring concert, there were safety concerns and crowd control issues that had to be addressed. This alternate approach to producing the concert does not signal any changes in event policy for these types of events.”

Across Broadway, the administration’s concerns for safety have resulted in similar consequences for student music organizations. WBAR, Barnard’s indie radio station, had trouble securing a location for its annual WBAR-B-Q, its springtime anniversary concert.

Last year’s incarnation of the celebration, during which 15 acts played a ten hour show, culminated with a performance by the noise-rock duo Japandroids. Due to construction on the Vagelos Center, the show was held on Lehman Lawn, and thus had been planned around a city ordinance prohibiting high levels of noise after 10 p.m. Miffed at the large crowd and high volume—or perhaps not partial to the “noise rock” of Japandroids—a neighborhood resident demanded that the WBAR event be shut down. “I told the Japandroid drummer to drum a little lighter and told the woman that I had done the best I could,” said WBAR technical director Shakeer Rahman, CC’09. Japandroids stopped using speakers, and the concert was allowed to continue, but Public Safety kept pressuring WBAR’s staff to end the concert early.

In the midst of the War on Fun—a University-wide crackdown on parties, tougher ID scanning at local bars, and a stricter enforcement of alcohol policies—student music groups and Public Safety have entered into a cold war. As a result, Columbia’s music scene is floundering, and it’s unclear who’s pulled the plug: an administration fearful of litigation or a student scene too disparate and disinterested to work within the system.

September 2007’s Orientation Concert stands in stark contrast to last spring’s underwhelming The National and Grizzly Bear affair. On a sunny day in September, in front of hundreds of standing, screaming students, Vampire Weekend and Clipse performed—with speakers—on Low Steps.

It was all made possible by a budgetary oversight.
that eventually became the largest factor in the decline and fall of CU Concerts. Ignoring the pecking order, Student Development and Activities approved CU Concerts’ budget request of $30,000 without the approval of the Activities Board at Columbia. “That’s never supposed to happen,” said the president of ABC, Samantha John, SEAS’09. “SDA should never sign off on a $30,000 ABC allocation without us approving it, or even telling us about it.”

It was the largest budget allocation ABC granted that year and, because it was such a large investment, ABC began to scrutinize CU Concerts to see where its money had gone. The club’s bureaucracy was absent or in disarray, and after ABC realized the group had neither a constitution nor a set of defined roles for its members, it was promptly dissolved.

What was left of CU Concerts was absorbed by Bacchanal, an organization that is on the receiving end of about one third of ABC’s total yearly budget. As a result of this re-prioritization, there was no fall concert this year. “We wanted to give CU Concerts enough money to have a really good concert and we definitely couldn’t afford to give them enough money for two really good concerts,” John said. “We decided to not give them money for something that had turned out badly recently.”

Difficulty in securing appropriate space and resources affects not only concert promoting organizations, but also student bands, for whom the dearth of space is an existential threat. Though Columbia offers practice space to students playing jazz or classical music, these same venues are largely unavailable to rock bands, especially those of the loud, clashing, and clanging variety. While the Live at Lerner series and Postcrypt events do feature campus music, it’s usually acoustic and relatively mellow. With little institutional support, bands are often forced to practice in their dorm rooms. Campus band The Kitchen Cabinet practices in the lead singer’s Hogan suite, which works because they’re a quiet band, and because they don’t use a full drum set. Other bands that can’t find such pleasant accommodations either don’t practice, or have to pay for rehearsal space, which can be expensive—one band pays $25 per hour for an off-campus practice room, though other places will charge as much as $30 or $40 per hour.

Because the network of musicians at Columbia is so disparate and disinclined to cooperate, many musicians agree that there is little camaraderie between the bands. This makes it difficult to muster the organization and energy necessary to effectively lobby the administration for practice space.

This was not always the case. As a freshman, Justin Gonçalves, a guitarist in the band Raul, participated in the now-defunct Columbia Music Presents under the leadership of Maxwell Foxman, CC’07. Though the flawed but well-intentioned group eventually disbanded—once again, due to a case of fatal disorganization—its mission was to foster cohesion within the Columbia music scene. Gonçalves remembers that thanks to the efforts of CMP, his band was able to practice in Lerner for free, something completely unheard-of today.

Izumi Devalier, CC’07, who played drums in the campus alt-country band The Midnight Hours during her time at Columbia, tried to use her position as Vice President of Columbia College Student Council to support CMP. However, she found that “the student activities office and Lerner were reluctant to entrust [their space] in the hands of the unreliable CMP.”

Students and student groups certainly did not give the administration any reason to trust them: Devalier cited incidents of theft, security issues and noise-level problems as the symptoms, as well as causes, of CMP’s collapse.

WBAR’s event coordinator, Josie Keefe, CC’09, is
the student in charge of booking spaces and bands on campus. She does not expect the job to get any easier with the completion of Barnard’s new student hub, the Vagelos Center, in January 2010. The Vagelos Center is loosely modeled on Columbia’s Lerner Hall, which is ostensibly a center for student life and culture, but booking performances there is almost prohibitively difficult, and more often than not the rooms are filled with corporate events and bar mitzvahs. According to Keefe, student groups who want performance space have to book it three to five months before each semester starts. “We cannot book bands that far in advance because that’s not how the industry works,” she said.

Some student groups and bands have taken refuge in off-campus venues, but the process of finding and paying for those venues can be just as difficult as playing on campus. One remedy can be found in a brownstone on 115th Street, where Alpha Delta Phi has been holding small concerts at their Coffeehaus events for years. The popularity of Vampire Weekend’s shows there earned Coffeehaus a reputation for being one of the best places for music on campus.

“This house is an amazing piece of property and a great resource, so we try to put it out there to benefit as many people as possible in the best way possible,” said ADP’s booking director, Robert Davis, CC’10. Opening ADP’s doors to Columbia’s music fans wasn’t a problem until last year when, after a fire code inspection, the University capped the brownstone’s occupancy at 74 people.

This year, there are a few glimmers of hope. ADP and WBAR are planning on working together to produce shows in the coming year. The Kitchen Cabinet, which is by most accounts the heirs to Vampire Weekend’s “big band on campus” legacy, played there several times last year and continues to draw crowds at venues on and off campus.

According to Carling Bateman, BC’10, the vice president of ADP, by far the biggest show the society ever hosted was February 2007’s Mini-lision, which was held in collaboration with another now-defunct concert-promoting organization called Collision. ADP was packed to the rafters with bands, DJs, and an open mic. Art supplies were stationed throughout the building to encourage people to indulge their creative tendencies.

In 2006, Collision brought an estimated 1,000 people, most of them Columbia students, to the Brooklyn Lyceum for a blowout featuring an art show, dance performances, experimental acts, and beer. Rachel Lindsay, CC’09, helped stage the final Collision event in 2006. She described the project’s goal as encouraging Columbia students to “be a community in some way that was based on creative activities that are never showcased on campus.” Without school funding, Collision’s management, which depended upon parental loans and fundraising to finance the party, found it difficult to keep Collision afloat, and it has not resurfaced since 2006.

At the end of the day, waiting around for protocols to relax and financial lifeboats to appear will only further dissolve Columbia’s musical community. Keefe takes responsibility for the state of campus concerts and encourages everyone else to do the same. “If the scene was better two or three years ago, who’s to blame for that? The people who are here now.”
In a soft October night, and nimbus formations of self-indulgent curvature were billowing in from across the River Hudson. Your hero, Verily Veritas, had dabbed in opiates and their various distillations during the preceding afternoon. He had taken a subsequent siesta on the sidewalk outside the storied brownstone that houses the Society of St. Anthony’s—West Egg near West End, as V.V. often delighted in intoning.

Your hero had drifted in and out of the stream of consciousness, as he watched the beautiful and the damned wandering in and out of that aforementioned brownstone—in the room the women come and go, talking of Los Angelo. And later, thoughts still in disarray, and motor skills devoid of their dispensation, Verily took to the banks of the mighty river Hudson.

He lay in repose for some time, impossible to tell really, save for the savage sun’s violent descent onto the Isle’s neighbor, that sorrowful Commonwealth of New Jersey. Truth be told, V.V. much preferred the Bailiwick of Jersey—O, ancient sands! The orange Augusts your hero had spent on his skiff in Minquiers!—to this nouveau beach.

The night, which had abused the sky of all light, cast itself around your hero in the Ptolemaic tradition with which V.V. prefers to align himself, as the stars’ shape do align with the acts of the great gods on high. And high Verily must have been, for in that moment, an apparition revealed itself unto him.

The soulless shadow arose from the edge of the riverbank and glossed the ground with wisps of noxious effluvium. “Vaczlava Veritasna!” V.V. recognized the spirit at once. Vaczlava, a paternal Grandmother modified and mollified by innumerable “Greats.” Vaczlava had been a handmaiden to Catherine II, but her virulent temper and an ongoing affair with the Green Fairy had earned her the reputation of being something of an inebriated despot—though no less enlightened for it!

Verily, her apt (and dilated) pupil, sat in rapt attention, awaiting his ancestor’s age-old incantations. Would Vaczlava reveal to V.V. another canto in the illustrious epic of the Veritas bloodline? Would she know the identity of the grave-yard tourist in the Hades chapter of Ulysses? (Was it Mr. Duffy?! Were this true, Verily had a taxidermy white tiger cub waiting for him in Bombay, which your hero will refer to as Mumbai until his very death.)

In tones like the echoes of the Hermitage’s walls of purloined amber, Vaczlava said everything and nothing. “Bourreau de couer—alas, tempus omnia sed memorias privat!” she boomed. For perhaps the first time in his life, V.V. had to pause a moment to unravel Vaczlava’s declensions; her lingua franca was his lingua fractured.

The ancient siren screeched again, her words a mixture of Euskaran puns, Etruscan in-jokes, and, dammit, Verily was certain he had heard Esperanto. “Vaczlava Veritasna! Deign to speak in French? Or, if the need arises for unsurpassed vulgarity, English?” But your hero’s ancestral apparition would make no such concession.

V.V., he of tepid temperament—present company excluded, most clearly—suddenly found himself the proprietor of a great mass of anger within his soul. Why had this poor ghost presented herself to Verily? And after an apparent fall from the Tower of Babel, during which it seemed like she had hit every balustrade on the way down.

Why pun and pontificate, in dialects disparate and strange? For isn’t the very project of language the transmission of ideas? Verily knew not, and he stumbled out of his reverie with aplomb. V.V. turned up his nose and turned his back on Vaczlava, praying to the deities that none in her lineage would have been so damned as to inherit this phylogeny of cowardly obfuscation. They had not, he was certain of it.

—Verily Veritas
A Lounge of Their Own

BY JULI N. WEINER

A mateur pianist Xiaoyin Chan, a fourth year biology Ph.D. candidate, prefers to practice on a piano at the medical school that was previously owned by Rachmaninoff. For the meantime, he’s resigned himself to the grand piano directly outside the Lerner Party Space.

A student checking his email at the nearby computer looked over at Chan, whose fingers were drumming violence and life into the keys, and rolled his eyes. If Chan noticed, he didn’t react. “Sometimes people get mad,” he said. One practice session in the Philosophy lounge culminated in a man approaching Chan and telling him that his playing was “so angry” that he was having trouble reading the newspaper. “Usually, when stuff like that happens, I’ll leave,” he said.

The legitimacy of a pianist’s right to play is a question that echoes through piano lounges—and their environs—all over campus. The tension crescendos during finals, when musicians and studiers seek solace in notes. Practice-room pianos have a reputation for being unresponsive to fingers. They are upright pianos, which have frames and strings that extend vertically, and often create flatter sounds than the high-demand grands that sit in John Jay, Wallach, Wien, and Lerner.

A stuffy practice room in East Campus or Broadway does a poor job of replicating a recital space. The large, dry piano lounges offer a much better approximation of a performance setting, even if the audience is more likely to give nasty looks than roses.

Regarding the matter of playing in lounges, two schools of thought are dominant in the pianist community: Responsive and Justifiably Solipsistic. Responsives, like Chan, are empathetic to the plight of the studier. Sometimes Chan will avoid practicing in the Lerner Piano Lounge during finals. He’ll stick to the dreaded private practice rooms, even though he believes the public pianos are better.

Pre-med student Eden Marx, GS, undoubtedly falls into the Justifiably Solipsistic camp. “There’s almost always someone playing in here,” said Marx, who had just finished a slow and plaintive recital of Coldplay’s “The Scientist” in the Lerner lounge. “That’s why I feel comfortable.” When Marx notices lounge cohabitants shooting him unappreciative glances, he says he imagines that they’re giving him looks of gratitude.

Some pianists don’t have to imagine and are lucky enough to stumble on an appreciative audience. As Chopin’s Piano Concerto #1 in e minor dominated all sounds and moods in the Lerner Piano Lounge, Aida Sadr, CC’11, looked up from notebooks sprawled across a plush chair. She fluttered her eyelashes in the direction of the music, which had reached *allegro maestoso*—“I’m so impressed!” she gushed. “Sometimes I clap afterwards.”

The concerto came to an end as pianist Alex Zhong, CC’10, switched between supervising his fingers and checking in with his music book, the pages of which were covered in yellow Post-It notes. “I don’t like inflicting pain onto others,” he said of his public practicing. In the event of unkind glances, he said he’ll usually just quiet down.

Zhong’s experiences with public performance have been, for the most part, positive and encouraging. He said that sometimes admirers will approach him afterward and strike up a conversation about what he has just played. “I make friends this way,” he said.

Sadr and her companion, John McGovern, CC’11, had trouble believing that anyone’s practicing could make students angry. They consider the music beneficial to the atmosphere of their work environment. “It’s not like this is a library,” McGovern stated matter-of-factly. “Like, this is a piano lounge.”

Illustration by Shaina Rubin
Measure for Measure

Translations

Professor Mendelson says that girls used to judge whether or not boys loved them by their poems:
if he loves you, his poem will be sloppy. There will be no meter.
He will not know an anapest from an ostrich because of the color of your eyes.

But if it is metric. If he writes like
fucking Shakespeare - so long lives this, and this
gives life to thee - then, well, he’s a douche.
Too focused on iambs to know that you’re a vegan. Leave the burger joint now.

Now boys write no poems. Or if they do I don’t know about it; the closest I get are vaguely flirty emails. Emails are not the right medium for poetry. Emails are also not the right medium for flirting. Flirting is about body language. Double entendres. I’ll double your entendre. Ahahaha we watch the same TV show! Let’s watch it together! Etc.

No one writes
I like the way your elbow flies up when you brush your teeth – it’s how I know you play the violin, it’s how I know you’re a creature of habit and I like your habits. Like the way you braid your wet hair in pigtails or chew pens until ink clings to your lips like blue tomato sauce. And that time I put a band-aid on your bleeding thumb I thought I could feel your heartbeat and I’d like to feel it more, if that’s okay.

—Hannah Lepow
surprised forever
by the tongues of
women I have known,
smaller always
than one sees in movies,
always delicate
and bleak,

I solicit the opinion
of the butcher,
his cool meat palace
a refuge from the
curdled stank outside—
he is an expert
on tongues;

they are a gift
of the black goat,
he says, the lot—
rewarded for asking
naught in some transaction—
his tattoos and his pustules
glisten with pearly joy.

I order some liver
and leave.

—Billy Goldstein
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CAMPUS GOSSIP

A Teach for America spokesman visited Jian Yang’s Molecular and Cellular Neurobiology course to convince budding scientists to join his ranks.

TFA guy: Hi everyone, I’d just like to tell you a little about myself and about Teach for America. As an undergrad I went to Yale...
Student: Boooo!
TFA guy: And while at Yale I majored in political science...
Half the class: Boooooo!

[TFA guy looks around from writing on the blackboard, a grin on his face.]
Professor Yang: They have never booed me before!

Teach for America: Making good work sneer-worthy since 1990.

BOTTLE SERVICE

Walking down frat row at around 12:30 one afternoon, a correspondent from The Blue and White witnessed three fraternity brothers holding red Solo cups exhorting another gentleman—the mailman—to drink. They chanted “chug, chug, chug, chug!” After only a little hesitation, he downed the whole cup, and then took a hold of his U.S.-government issued letter-carrier, and was gone.

Before campus felt the effects of a late summer rainstorm, Barnard was kind enough to email its students an easy-to-use Rain Primer. Insider tricks for staying dry include keeping the windows closed and avoiding going outside:

“Please know that the Facilities staff are already preparing our campus for this nasty weather, and there are a few things you can do to minimize the impact on you, and save you from having to be outside in the rain:

If you are in need of any medication, please call-in your refills for pick-up tomorrow morning.

If you or your suitemates are in need of any specific food, make a trip to your grocery store of choice before tomorrow afternoon...

If winds become heavy, please do not sit next to your window.

Make sure that you have NO items in your window or on the window sill that can fall outside or inside and cause damage or injury...

If you are traveling, please give yourself plenty of extra time to reach your destination - subway and bus schedules may run behind during times of heavy rain.

Residential Life, Public Safety and Facilities will all have staff on campus and able to respond to any issues that may arise. Have a good weekend and stay safe and dry!”

On a mid-October morning, fliers all around campus included a picture of a woman with a baseball bat sneaking up on two half-dressed lovers. Underneath the picture it read:

NEED TO WHACK SOMEBODY ??
(LOVERS, BUSINESS PARTNERS, INSURANCE
FRAUDS...

PROFESSIONAL, RELIABLE, LOCAL, LONG DISTANCE, LAST MINUTE, AFFORDABLE RATES FOR EVERYBODY!!!!!!

The tear-off tabs at the bottom advertised www.TrueArtistForRebels.com, which, sadly, does not exist.

A SECRET NOTE FROM THE META-COMMITTEE:

“DEADLINE EXTENDED! APPLY FOR THE SECRET SGA APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE!!

The Appointments committee acts as an advisory committee to the SGA Representative Council, advising them on whom to appoint to SGA Representative Council, Class Council and Committee positions. This is a secret committee.”

Shh!

STRESSBUSTERS STRIKE BACK

Overheard outside the Student Government Office:
Boy: “The last woman who massaged me gave me back herpes.”
Girl: “Back herpes? That doesn’t exist.”
Boy: “That’s what she said.”
Girl: “Oh, I get it, ‘That’s what she said!’”
Boy, plainly: “No, that’s what she said.”

INTRO. TO THERMODYNAMICS

Woman: “I want to get a thermometer and set up a website, so anyone who’s here can just enter the temperature and it’ll be called, like, Butler Weather. And basically in summer, it’ll be like, 50 degrees.”

Her bearded friend: “New York has extremely cold summers and extremely hot winters. Well, based on the heating and cooling in Butler.”

Two undergraduate girls sitting near the sundial are discussing the advantages of calorie-counting.
Girl: “I am so glad my friends eat way more than me! It makes me feel so much better about myself?”

Her friend: “Yeah, I eat so much more than you...I eat like exponentially more than you.”

Girl: “All of the girls in my high school were way skinnier than me.... People at Columbia eat a lot.”

Columbia’s been a different place since all the female students took up the Malthus diet.

IT WAS DOWN HIS PANTS

Recently, the inhabitants of Potluck House were forced to take the law into their own hands. After a night of buffet-centric revelry, a “sweaty” and “drunk” man entered the brownstone. The housemates conferred among themselves and realized no one had invited him. They scoured the house until they finally tracked him down—he was peeking out from behind a shower curtain, concealing an assortment of laptops and iPods under his jacket. No doubt armed with ladles and farm-share gourds, the would-be-victims surrounded the would-be-thief, emptied his pockets, and awaited the arrival of the police. But the story had a somewhat sordid ending: the last missing iPod was not retrieved from the robber’s person until his precinct pat-down.

Wonders... they never cease!