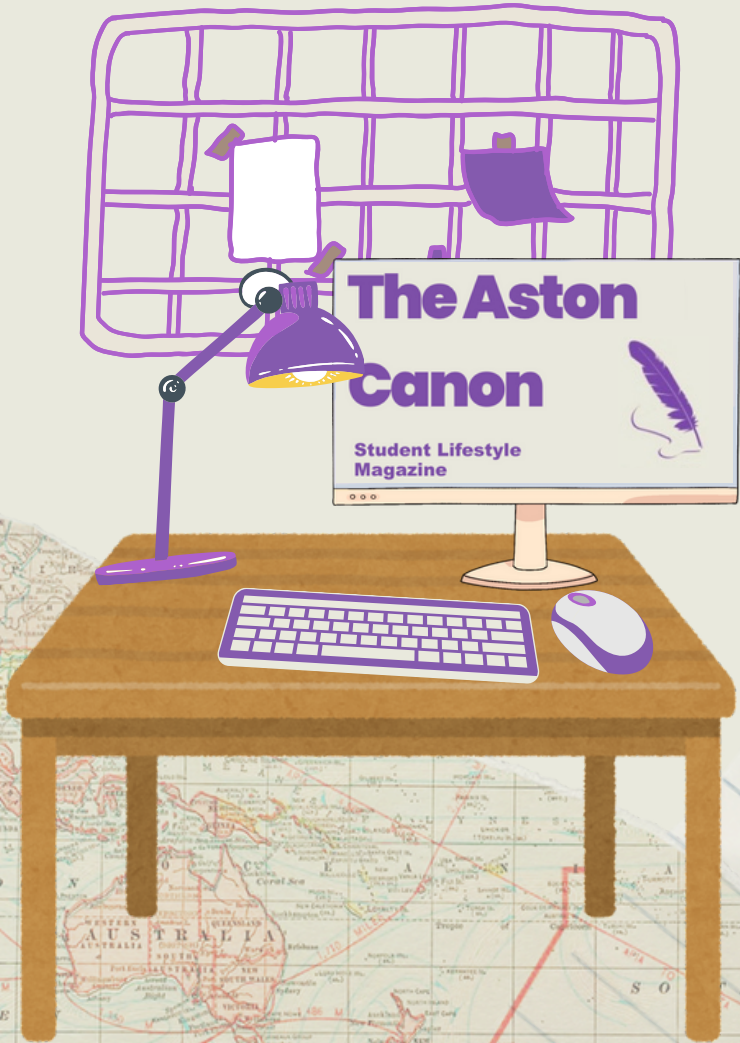


# The Aston Canon

## Student Lifestyle Magazine

AUTUMN  
2025



CREATED BY ASTON UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS  
FOR ASTON UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS



# The Aston Canon Is Back

Welcome back to The Aston Canon! We're very excited for this year after testing out running the magazine last academic year. Following a little reconfiguring, we are back and better with seasonal issues containing media reviews, travel tips, current affairs, student lifestyle pieces and more.

A big thank you to our society for their commitment and contributions for this issue and everyone involved in the magazine and a special thank you to our secretary Ella for her hard work organising all our submissions!

This issue sees some of our writers from last year continue series', inspire you with their travelling journals and review latest media releases. As well as our new writers producing pieces on autumn fashion trends and fiction tropes in literature and film.

If you'd like to get involved with the magazine or have a submission you'd like to be featured (this can be anything from a poem you've written, charity work or your sports club's latest match report) please get in touch with us by email [theastoncanon@gmail.com](mailto:theastoncanon@gmail.com) or on Instagram [@officialastoncanon](https://www.instagram.com/officialastoncanon)

- Nawal, President of The Aston Canon





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# ***INTERESTED IN WRITING FOR OUR WINTER ISSUE?***

**We are always looking for more students to get involved in the magazine, if you would like to be a part of The Aston Canon in any way please get in touch with us by email [theastoncanon@gmail.com](mailto:theastoncanon@gmail.com) or on Instagram [@officialastoncanon](https://www.instagram.com/officialastoncanon)**

**Our Winter issue will be out late December and needs you!**

**We hope you enjoy reading!**



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# Around the Campus in 5 minutes flat: Making the most as a Commuter

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**Tired of making laps around the campus every break? Wish you could just go home? Don't! Today I'm going to list off a bunch of tips for commuters, and you will sit there and listen.**

According to the [National Student Accommodation Survey 2025](#), 15% of students nationwide are living with parents and guardians, compared to 12% in 2020. Furthermore, the average distance from campus (across all students) has increased from 21 minutes to 26 in that time. This tells us that more people are commuting from home.

While commuting, it may feel like you're just wasting time while travelling. However, I come bearing good news; you can be productive! Listed below are some tips based on what form of transport you get:

- Train: If you can get to a table, keep working on coursework, or revise for upcoming exams. Otherwise, read below.
- Bus: Buy a pair of headphones (please) and listen to some lecture recordings. Or if you don't get travel sick, read over any notes or use the time to crack down on some required reading.
- Car: Drivers, please don't attempt any of that. Doing so will make you crash and crashing hurts.

Ideally though, it's always better to study on campus. [A paper published by Sandeep Kaur \(2025\)](#) explores how digital technology, environmental noise, and psychological stressors impair student focus. He also claims that home-based learners face more distractions than campus-based ones.

Fortunately, Aston provides many study spaces in the library and in the Main Building.

Group study spaces are also available to [book online](#) (though I'd recommend booking those in advance). And if you want to explore the city more, the Library of Birmingham (a mere 25 minutes' walk from the Main Building) makes a nice change of scenery. Spending a day within the wilderness that is the Birmingham City Centre has been said to be tiresome, inane, and a wee bit 'cack-handed'. This is why you should come prepared:

- First off, bring your phone charger – There's plenty of places to charge devices on campus and even within the town centre.
- Second, bring your own lunch where possible – doing so can save you money, time waiting in queues, and your carbon footprint (according to [a study by The University of Manchester](#)).
- Finally, be prepared for anything. Bring your brolly, pack that paracetamol, carry some change. You never know when you might get a migraine while donating to charity in the rain.

Whether you've learned something new today or the only thing you gained was a chuckle, I hope I've calmed some nerves you might have about commuting to uni. Just keep studying, keep talking to people and be grateful you're not having to share a fridge with someone who thinks it's a place to grow a new type of bacteria.

# 5 Seconds of Summer return to prove that “EVERYONE’S A STAR!”

**On the 14th of November 2025, 5 Seconds of Summer returned with their newest studio album “EVERYONE’S A STAR!” and it is the beginning of a new era for the Australian pop rock band.**

Fans have been waiting for the 5 Seconds of Summer to return to the studio since “5SOS5” in 2022, and this latest release certainly delivered. This is the band’s first release under their new label, Republic Records, and it definitely shows that they wanted to reinvent themselves with this, without losing who they are at their core.

The album allows itself to give the fans a genuine understanding of what 5 Seconds of Summer have been dealing with being in the spotlight for the last 11 years. With “Boyband” being a tongue-in-cheek, satirical approach to being perceived as a “boyband” and “No. 1 Obsession” showing that, as much as they know they are being glorified, they thrive off of it. The members’ (Ashton Irwin, Calum Hood, Luke Hemmings and Michael Clifford) solo work truly matured their sound, which they took into this new album.

This is the band’s shortest studio album by a considerable margin, clocking in at 36 minutes compared to “5SOS5,” which takes an hour and 3 minutes to listen to in its entirety. This could have made the album feel less complete than the others in 5 Seconds of Summer’s repertoire, being just over half the duration of the previous instalment, but it escapes this fate, giving us a well-rounded perspective of what it is to be a celebrity. Every song has a purpose in the album, and the variety of sounds gives something for both old and new fans to enjoy. It has the pop punk elements of the older

albums with a refreshing twist reminiscent of their newer pieces, truly making this the album the ultimate representation of who 5 Seconds of Summer are as a band.

The album opens with the first half of the album being upbeat and energetic and the second half slowing down, allowing listeners to experience the comedown from a high much like that depicted in the song “NOT OK”, further deepening their connection to the band’s experiences. A chronological listen through of the album is highly recommended.

The singles released before this album made sure that everyone knew that this was a different 5 Seconds of Summer album than what fans were used to. By having “NOT OK”, “Boyband” and “Telephone Busy” be the singles that represent the album, it helped build hype as well as hiding the vulnerability and mellowness present in the second half of the album. Therefore, the second half of the album is an unexpected yet welcome surprise for listeners.

This album certainly makes me excited for the future of 5 Seconds of Summer and highlights the potential of this era being one of their strongest. I look forward to seeing what they produce next in this next phase of the band’s life.



# ALL THINGS AUTUMN:

## Pumpkin Pie Recipe

**I love baking and even though I do not bake as much as I used to or would like to, I thought I would share a successful pumpkin pie recipe with you. I love immersing into each season, and this year pumpkins were at the heart of autumn for me!! From pumpkin soup, to carving pumpkins, and baking pumpkin pie.**

Off the cuff, I am letting you in on a secret because I haven't declared this out loud before but one of my favourite recipe books is by Jane Patisserie. I don't have many go to bakers but since discovering her baking recipes, I have not looked back since. This year, I was particularly motivated to bake a pumpkin pie. Whenever I am on Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok to romanticise life, especially as each new season approaches us. During the autumn period, including Halloween, social media always shows me the same three aesthetic things. These are: crispy leaves that may be orangey brown or a bright red, an iced coffee inspired by the autumnal vibes, and pumpkin pie! So, 2025 was the year I baked and tasted pumpkin pie for the first time ever.

The ingredients I am about to share are not from my own recipe, all recipe and ingredient credits go to Jane Patisserie. I will leave a direct link to the recipe at the end of my article! Personally, I doubled up on the pastry ingredients to have more pastry to work with for the outer case as well as extra for later decoration.

### Ingredients:

#### Pastry:

- 350g plain flour.
- 200g unsalted butter.
- 2 tbsp icing sugar.
- 2 egg (yolks).

#### Filling:

- 425g pumpkin puree (which I ordered from Amazon because stores near me were all sold out!).
- 100g maple syrup.
- 50g caster sugar.
- 1 tsp mixed spice.
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon (I love cinnamon so I added a little more for good measure).
- 3 eggs.
- 150ml evaporated milk.

Don't forget a 23cm tart tin!!

[CLICK HERE FOR THE RECIPE!!](#)



*Featured images taken by the author.*

# Alexa...Play “Where You Lead” By Carole King

## Balancing comfort, confidence, and trend inspiration: a real look at first-year fashion in Autumn 2025.

Starting university in autumn has a certain magic. The campus is buzzing with new faces, fresh routines, and that subtle pressure of: “Will anyone notice if I wear the same jumper twice this week?”

TikTok and fashion magazines make it even trickier. Scroll through a GRWM video, and suddenly everyone is rocking chunky knitwear, and a pair of flared jeans, while your Instagram feed is sprinkled with Y2K gothic vibes, trying to step into Elena Gilbert’s shoes. Magazines like Hello! Fashion is predicting a theatrical, drama-filled season: think hoop silhouettes, cage skirts, and “Leather Britney” nostalgia.

But here’s the reality: most first years are caught somewhere between wanting to impress, feeling inspired by trends, and simply staying warm while running between lectures. Autumn 2025 fashion may be dramatic in theory, but on campus, it’s all about balancing style with comfort, and maybe a little bit of strategic laziness.

If you leaf through the glossy pages of Hello! Fashion this season, you’re entering a world of drama. Structured capes sweep across editorial spreads, satin ruffles twirl under moody studio lights, and cage skirts echo an almost theatrical romance. Jewel tones dominate: deep wine reds, emerald greens, rich browns, and occasional bursts of chartreuse. Accessories? Think pearls stacked on wrists and around

necks, and bows perched precariously on collars. Designers are clearly flirting with early 2000s nostalgia: lace, shaggy coats, and leather ensembles channeling iconic pop-star vibes. TikTok has also codified a “fantasy romance” aesthetic that blends modern-day Coquette with darkly moody florals and flowing silhouettes. But while runway might feel like a costume drama, students often take a softer, wearable approach. Those hoop skirts? Nice in theory, but likely swapped for a midi skirt or a structured dress. Satin and ruffles get mini upgrades: a fitted shirt paired with a layered necklace stack, instead of head-to-toe accessories. In short, magazines push extreme inspiration, but real-life campus style tends to translate the theatrics into something practical.

On the ground, first-years approach fashion in three main ways: comfort-first, style-lovers, and a hybrid of both. Surveyed students repeatedly mentioned prioritising cosy, wearable pieces over trend-heavy outfits. Oversized batwing or trench coats, fluffy jumpers, scarves and Ugg-style boots dominated the wish lists. Woolly dresses, patterned long sleeves, autumn jackets, and versatile jewellery were also popular. One first-year student reflected,

***“I wanted to show up looking cute, but by week two I just needed something I could throw on and run to lectures without freezing”.***

Style-lovers still exist, and they’re easy to spot. They’ll sneak in ties within their jean belt hoops,



# Alexa...Play “Where You Lead” By Carole King

leg warmers over their boots, or fill their wrists with a variety of bracelets, vintage and homemade. They might follow TikTok aesthetics religiously, or have a Pinterest board filled with inspiration.

Most students fall somewhere in between. They'll invest in one or two statement pieces, but balance them with comfort.

*“I like a scarf or cute coat to make the outfit feel complete, but honestly, it's the jumper that keeps me sane during morning lectures”, says another fresher.*

On campus, you'll notice polka dots popping up, oversized coats swinging from lecture halls, and an abundance of smart-casual, modern simple outfits.

Why do freshers dress the way they do? The answer is a mix of environment, social influence, and psychology.

University is a space of freedom, but also of logistics. Long walks across campus, chilly weather, early morning lectures, and unpredictable library hours all make comfort a priority. You can't exactly sprint to your 9 a.m. seminar in a full black tie ensemble, no matter how editorially perfect it looks.

TikTok and Instagram, however, are major motivators, and occasional sources of stress. GRWM routines, aesthetic mood boards, and clean-girl or coquette trends flood feeds.

Students often want to emulate what they see: dressing up becomes a form of experimentation,



*Featured images taken by the author.*

self-expression, or simply keeping up with social media. There's a subtle FOMO element too, those kitten heels might not be practical, but they're aspirational.

Psychology also plays a role. The concept of enclothed cognition suggests what we wear affects how we feel and behave. Dressing up can boost your self confidence and levels of motivation.

# Alexa...Play “Where You Lead” By Carole King

One fresher noted,

*‘When I actually make the effort to match my outfit, I feel more put together and productive’.*

Conversely, dressing down reduces anxiety, enhances comfort, and helps students focus on studies without the extra mental load of maintaining a complex wardrobe. In other words, clothes aren’t just about style, they subtly shape behaviour and mood.

The outfits students choose can influence more than just their appearance, they affect routines, participation, and even productivity. Dressing up often encourages students to spend more time on campus, attend study groups, and participate actively in class. Feeling confident in an outfit can make a student more likely to engage in discussions or approach peers.

On the flip side, prioritising comfort allows for efficiency and mental clarity. A cosy jumper, warm boots, and a practical coat makes commuting across campus and library marathons manageable. Students juggling early lectures and long study sessions often lean on wearable outfits that support focus, rather than outfits that demand constant maintenance or adjustment. Even hybrid choices, like pairing a statement top with baggy jeans and a comfortable shoe, let students navigate both worlds: staying stylish enough to feel confident, while remaining functional enough to survive the semester. Autumn 2025 fashion for first-years is less about runway-perfect ensembles and more about balancing trends, social media inspiration,

and practical needs. Students navigate between extravagant editorial visions and real-world campus life, translating drama into wearable, comforting, and expressive outfits.

The key takeaway? University fashion is a personal playground. Some students love dressing up, some favour comfort, and most find a middle ground. Whether it’s a henley shirt under an oversized coat, chunky boots paired with a denim skirt, or simply a reliable jumper and scarf, outfits become tools for self-expression, confidence, and functionality. Runway trends and TikTok aesthetics may inspire, but ultimately, first-years are mastering the art of looking good, feeling comfortable, and surviving the beautiful chaos of autumn on campus.



# The Long Walk: Does it keep up with the pace, or is it dragging its feet?

**The latest Stephen King piece to be adapted to the big screen came out in cinemas this summer, but does it live up to the original narrative?**

## **WARNING, SPOILERS AHEAD**

Stephen King's novel 'The Long Walk,' first published in 1979 under the pseudonym Richard Bachman, quickly found its place as an early yet influential work among both King enthusiasts and dystopian fiction fans. The anticipation around its film adaptation was high, especially given King's involvement. However, some creative choices may unsettle long-time fans of the book.

The film takes place in an alternate version of America where poverty and grief have ruined the country. So much so that males over 18 apply to compete in a countrywide competition called "The Long Walk", where they walk across the country until only one contestant remains. Each competitor has 3 warnings that they receive every time they drop under 3 miles per hour (this was dropped from the 4 miles per hour stated in the book). Failure to pick up the pace after receiving their third and final warning results in the man receiving their "ticket". The viewers quickly learn what a "ticket" is when the first person to get three gets shot in the head graphically. This sets the tone for the rest of the film.

The true heart of the film is the relationship that forms between the competitors. As the concept

of the film is pretty straightforward, it is just a load of guys who are walking until they cannot anymore; it is so important that the characters have chemistry - thankfully, this cast delivers. As there are just over 50 competitors, the film only really has time to flesh out our main cast of recruits: Ray Garratty (Cooper Hoffman), Peter McVries (David Jonsson), Hank Olsen (Ben Wang), Art Baker (Tut Nyuot), Gary Barkovitch (Charlie Plummer), Richard Harkness (Jordan Gonzalez), Billy Stebbins (Garrett Wareing) and Collie Parker (Joshua Odjick). Despite this large ensemble, it is truly the relationship between the "4 Musketeers" Garraty, McVries, Olson, and Baker that makes the viewer feel as though they were walking alongside these characters, building a friendship with them. This sense of unity and inclusion only makes certain members of the group's deaths all the more harrowing. Truly, I do not think I will ever hear the phrase "I did it wrong" the same way again.

Seeing the boys slowly lose faith that they will survive makes the audience have that ever-so-unpleasant reminder that only one can make it out alive, with each member suffering a brutal fate that is only amplified by the film's incredible effects. As much as it is graphic in nature, I believe that the effects on these films are incredible. The first shot to face someone gets is shown explicitly to ensure that audience members and the competitors have signed up for. If gore is not what you look for in entertainment, I am sure you are aware by now,

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# The Long Walk: Does it keep up with the pace, or is it dragging its feet?

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but this is probably not the film for you. It gets more graphic as it goes on, with someone snapping their ankle and continuing to walk on it, an explicit situation with a spoon and many more instances you can find out when you watch the film.

As great as it is, it is not a perfect book adaptation. There have been a fair few changes made that make sense for a film adaptation, such as halving the book's 100 competing boys and combining certain characters' storylines so you connect with them deeply rather than half knowing a lot of random characters to not convolute the plot. All being said, though, as someone who read the original book, the ending change caught me off guard. The order in which the last three men standing are changed means that the last portion of the film is whiplash for those familiar with the book. Nonetheless, it is an interesting ending for book fans and those going into the story for the first time alike. The way this film uses misdirection to make us think we know who is going to win is deeply effective.

Overall, I believe that this adaptation is one of the stronger attempts to adapt King's work, with it largely keeping the plot the same as the book but adapting it to be suited more to the film format. Due to its harrowing nature and emphasis on death, it may not be for everyone, but if dystopia is your thing, I am sure you will find this well worth the watch.



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# State to State guide to the USA: From the East coast to the West coast

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Every couple of years me and family go out to USA and tick off a new state each time. One of my personal bucket list dreams is to eventually tick off all 50 states. Every new location I go to becomes a new favourite, so I wanted to write a guide to share my recommendations and stories.

**Boston, Massachusetts:**

*“When I’m in Boston, I always feel like I’m home,”*  
*said Mr. Tiant. “I almost cry, I feel so good.”*

## History:

Boston is by far my favourite place in the USA so far, so much so that I am booking a ticket to go again this year.

I’ll start with a little history; Boston played a significant role in the American revolution and the early growth of America’s nation with the famous freedom trail being a staple of Boston’s history. The trail starts in the Boston Common, America’s oldest park. You then follow onto the Massachusetts state house which has such a rich history of American politics.

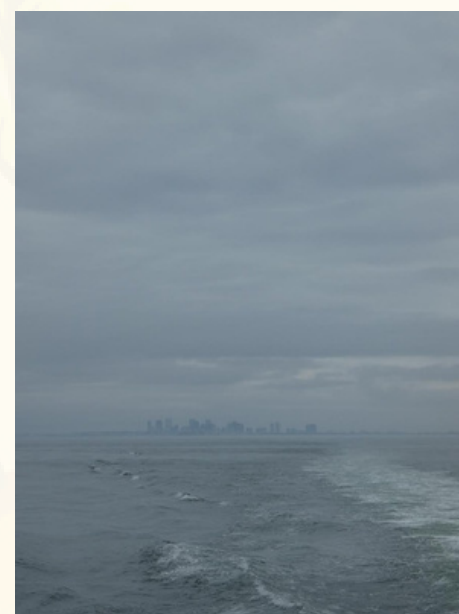


*Featured images taken by the author.*

It is so fascinating seeing the differences in American government and politics compared to the UK and the architecture in this building is stunning, plus ideal for a photoshoot and history lesson all in one. Then move into the bookstore section, Boston is full of bookstores that contain rare and older editions of books and is a must for history lovers. I found one of the first editions of the Alexander Hamilton biography which inspired Lin Manuel Miranda’s renowned musical Hamilton.

There are a vast range of museums to choose from, we choose the one opposite the Quincy Market. The museum told the history of the slave trade in Boston and other USA states, it was such an emotional exhibition telling the personal stories of slave survivors. Another landmark is in the centre of the square you can stand at the site of the Boston massacre site.

Then you reach landmark of the USS Constitution which is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world. You can go on the boat, look at the bunkers and walk around see how they lived on the boat.



*Featured images taken by the author.*



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End the trail the perfect way at Bunker Hill Monument which has a great view of Boston and benches to rest after the long day. It is site of the Battle of Bunker Hill which was known as one of the bloodiest battles of the American Revolution. On the way, you pass over a bridge with a beautiful view of Boston, seeing the water and boats as well as chatting with the people of Boston along the route. They are the friendliest people, they will take photos for you and have chat, and they love the British accent. You can do the trail yourself following online guides and that way you can take it at your own pace, or you can do group tours Boston is known for the duck boats as these yellow boats that go around the spots with a guide, which also looks like lots of fun.

Another recommendation is to stay at Jeffries point on the east side of Boston and take the boat into north end and central Boston. As it's a quieter place to stay and the boat ride is lovely. We stayed at a great Air bnb which had a nice park called piers park along the water.

## **Food:**

I've already been told I have expensive taste but when in Boston you must try lobster it is the most sublime thing, I've ever tried. It is on the pricier side but so worth it.

They have this market called Quincy market, which is full of fresh seafood and other cuisines. We also tried a S'more ice cream, which was most milky texture of ice cream I've ever tried, a must a try for a sweet tooth.



*Featured images taken by the author.*

## **Schools:**

Lastly, Boston is known for its renowned schools, they have MIT, known for some of most groundbreaking research in the world, as well as the most prestigious university in world, Harvard. Along with being an outstanding school it also is the filming location one of favourite films as a law student, Legally Blonde, filmed on the steps of Harvard, so a must for a photo. Plus, Harvard has its own little town Cambridge which is historic and filled with mostly independent shops and restaurants.

## **Cape Cod, Rhode Island:**

**'Nothing soothes the soul like walk on a cape cod beach'**

Cape cod is the complete summer destination from the lighthouses to the beaches and everything in between.



# State to State guide to the USA: From the East coast to the West coast

I would recommend getting a hire car to do a roundtrip around the Cape Cod area. We started by seeing a sunset over a pretty lake in Providence where we were staying. The area is peaceful with people walking their dogs, on runs and biking, it is the ultimate setting and weather. Then the following day, we drove over to Brown University, Ivy league university, which is such a pretty campus to walk around. Then we did the Cliff Walk in Newport, which has such a breathtaking walk along the coast and nice to feel the breeze on a warm day. Warning - I would bring water, and snacks as there isn't any along the path.

Newport is such an entertaining place to drive around as it is full of rich people with big mansions. Then my dad found this hidden gem called the Lawn Terrace at Castle Hill which is the best place for sunset and photos.

A must do in Cape Cod is to take the boat early in the morning to Martha's Vineyard, the island where they filmed the Jaws movie.

The bus system is so good, it takes you all around the island, and the boat ride is windy but so worth it. I would visit the iconic beach where they filmed the shark scene then wander into the small towns, they are so picturesque American small charm towns. There are lots of nice viewpoints to look at, lighthouse points and similar vibes throughout the island. Then take the ferry back, I would recommend taking the 2nd last ferry back, so you don't get stuck.

Then on the last day you must visit Chatham Fish

pier to see seals, they are such adorable animals and love to show off for the camera. Lastly, I would visit a beach that you can swim in, a picture-perfect way to end your trip.



*Featured images taken  
by the author.*

## **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:**

**"Pittsburgh entered the core of my heart when I was a boy and cannot be torn out."**

This is the most underrated city on my list, Pittsburgh has a special place in my heart as my mum's family are from there, however there is also a rich culture and community here.

## **Art and Culture:**

Carnegie museum and art gallery features some of the most amazing artwork from the likes of Claude monte and others.

In addition, you can get a 2 in 1 ticket seasonal discount to see both museums, with all the facts and original dinosaur bones there. Fun fact at the Natural Museum in London they have a dinosaur plaster called Dippy which is a replica of a Diplodocus Carnegie skeleton.

They also have a pretty courtyard to have lunch and take in the peace and quiet.



# State to State guide to the USA:

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*Featured images taken by the author.*

### **Sports:**

Sports is such a massive part of American culture with dedicated fans coming from all over the country to visit the stadiums and Pittsburgh holds some well-known teams. The first is the American Football team the Pittsburgh Steeler's.

We took a tour of stadium, which was very interesting they give lots of facts, show the stadium and the trophies.

Another big sport in the USA is baseball and Pittsburgh holds the most breathtaking stadium with a great view of the river and skyline. We took a 2hr tour where they showed: the sports commentators box the changing rooms, the backstage, and everything else I highly recommend.

A fun fact about Pittsburgh sports teams is that they all follow the same colour scheme of black and yellow.

Another fun fact is Pittsburgh city is the inspiration for the Batman Dark Rises trilogy

being known as the steel city. The skyline represents that, and they used some the buildings as helicopter landings for Batman. In addition, in the steelers stadium they filmed a scene from the final movie in the trilogy. This was a star struck moment for myself as a movie buff and Batman being my favourite superhero and Christopher Bale my favourite Batman.

### **Nature:**

They have a picturesque park called Point State Park with a fountain and great views of Pittsburgh along with the iconic yellow bridges which instead of having padlocks on the side have quotes and messages of hope and inspiration. Also, I suggest taking a stroll along the river, it's nice and peaceful on a summer's day.



*Featured images taken by the author.*

### **New York City, NY:**

**"But there is one thing about it—once you have lived in New York and it has become your home, no place else is good enough." - John Steinbeck, Nobel Prize-winner in literature.**



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# State to State guide to the USA:

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I firmly believe that everyone should visit New York at least once in their life as it offers something for everyone.

I did Camp America in my first-year summer and had the best time, one of the best things was the location. My camp was in New York state and 2 hours from the city, so I had the opportunity to go 2 times which is a highlight of my life for sure. For my recommendations I'm going to say the touristy places and a couple hidden gems and say if they're worthwhile in my opinion.

### **Tourist spots:**

1. I would see Times Square at night, during the day it is a bit underwhelming like any other city but at night the whole atmosphere changes and the city comes to life.
2. My favourite place in New York is central park, it lives up to the hype, it's a sanctuary in the mist of chaos which is NYC. It's a lot bigger than people think as it runs through New York, it has great views of the highline. I would recommend going early in the morning especially in the summer, so you don't catch the crowds. A bonus is you get to see the dogwalkers and the wedding photographers which is such a wholesome environment, a great start to the day.
3. The Met steps are a prime place for a photoshoot and give gossip girl vibes. They're also vendors leading up to the museum selling impressive artwork. Again, I urge going early to beat the crowds and enjoy the surroundings. Another pit stop would be the

the Grand Central Station again for Gossip Girl fans and for a quick photoshoot.

4. Brooklyn Bridge although very touristy, is a rite of passage when visiting New York. A funny part is on the bridge the tripod photo booths, play the same part of the empire state of mind song so you just hear the New York part of the song repeatedly across the bridge which can drive you crazy. Another great place for photos and an unbeatable view of New York. I recommend going to Dumbo street it used to be more of a hidden spot but has become a lot more popular. It is known for where Empire State Building is in the middle of the bridge which is an impressive architectural feature to see and get photos.

### **Hidden Gems:**

5. Across the Brooklyn Bridge there is a small beach area which is a nice quiet place to take photos and soak in the atmosphere.
6. Another great spot is China Town, it's just like the movies with the chess tables and the friendly vibes.
7. For a hidden gem across the road from the Met, in the upper east side you can walk along the richer streets see the fashion and the quieter life of New York.
8. Another hidden gem is Washington Square park near the NYC university, it has more student vibes, it has a nice fountain to cool down and a pretty arc.



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### Yosemite National Park:

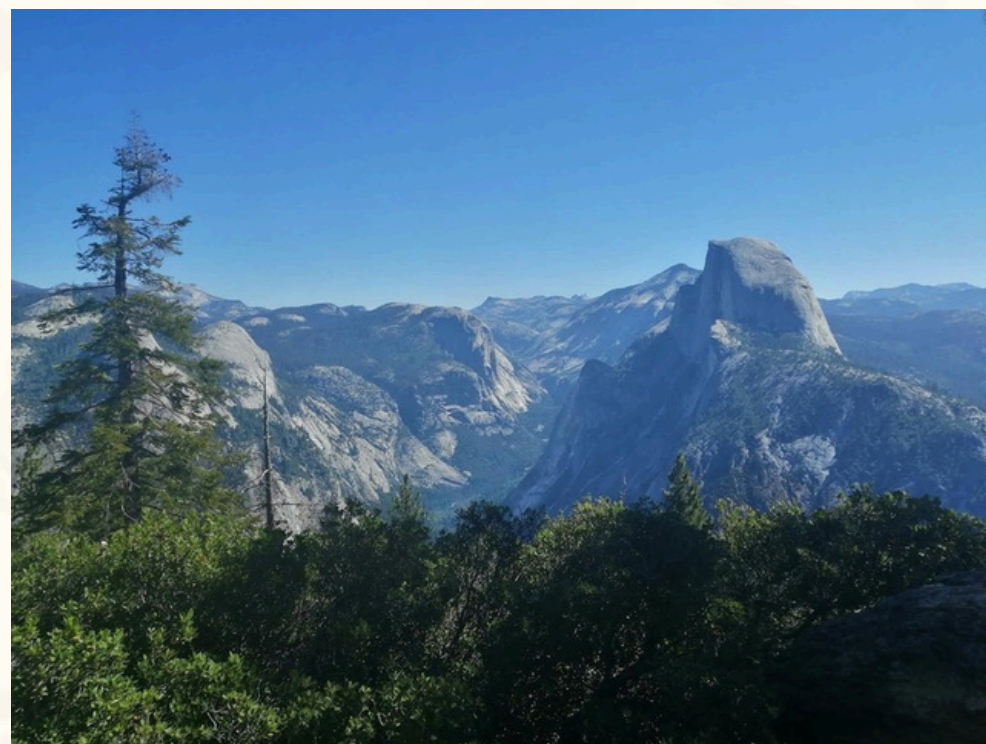
The most spectacular place on earth not just my opinion, it is rated in many guides and journals as the best national park in the world and all the Duke of Edinburgh hiking will pay off here.

We went all in and stayed in a cabin in the woods it felt very horror movie esc especially at night hearing scratches we thought were bears but 'apparently' were just hedgehogs.

We arrived at night, which was scary as they're known to have bears, but in the morning, we woke up feeling refreshed with no Wi-Fi, boardgames, walking, family bonding and in touch with nature.

We also, did it map style as you get no signal, we started seeing more Sedona trees which are epic as a 5ft tall individual making me feel tiny but went around hugging them. Then we drove to some viewpoints I recommend having a car or taking the bus as the walks are quiet far from each other.

There is endless number of walks and beauty, here are some I propose for easier trails; Bridal veil falls has constant rainbows cause of the water and the sun combination, the Mirror Lake trail is a nice spot to deep your feet in and cool down. Lastly, I recommend the Glacier point trail viewpoint as you see all the iconic landmarks in one: Half Dome, Yosemite Valley, and the High Sierra peaks. It's a superb spot for panoramic photos. For a more moderate walk I advise the Mist Trail (to Vernal Fall) to see more waterfalls and lastly, I suggest going on a meadows walk as it gives a more overall perspective of the park.



*Featured images taken by the author.*

I would wear bug spray, lots of sunscreen, wear a cap and all that good stuff to protect yourself and go early in morning to beat the peak season rush. Not joking when I say I came back about 4 shades darker.

Moreover, we burnt off all those calories we ate in San Francisco, with 3 walks a day ticked off soo many steps but so worth it and having a little brother trailing a head is a bit embarrassing for the self-confidence as I have a fear of steep paths going down, so I certainly had to conquer that.

### Napa Valley:

The last place I recommend is Napa Valley, known for its small towns and wineries. When we went, I was not of legal drinking age so couldn't do the wine tasting but they're a lot of other things available to do.

Start with the vineyards they are so pretty and interesting hearing the backstory of how wine is produced. A lot of them have animals like peacocks and birds as well as castles and



# State to State guide to the USA:

## From the East coast to the West coast

Broadway occurs. The concept is aspiring musicians for Broadway will sing popular pop songs and musical songs while you eat and they're also servers. They have confetti and use others as audience members while eating this is such a unique experience and only costs the meal price.

10) Lastly, I recommend Staten Island ferry, it's free as a lot of people live there and commute in. You can see the statue of liberty and New York skyline from the water. I would double check the times though we thought we were on the round-trip boat apparently not had to rush from Staten Island to our bus with 5 mins spare.

The environment is so surreal in New York, so many movies are filmed here, it felt like a movie being 19 on my first holiday without my parents, in the most incredible place and endless amounts to do. For music lovers I made this public Spotify playlist about songs that feel like New York:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6JBPKpoAHWXfijKOhPVIUN?si=f0de5b8f50654965>



*Featured images taken by the author.*

**San Francisco, Yosemite, Napa (road trip) - California:**

**"There is nothing in the world that compares to the majesty of Yosemite." - Theodore Roosevelt (former President)**

### San Francisco:

In San Francisco the cardio will be done, they have steepest streets, and the viewpoints require lots of hiking upwards but are rewarding.

The first landmark to see is Lombard Street also known as the crookedest street in world, hilarious to walk down but if you want a challenge, you can drive it warning the patience of a saint is required.

Number one thing I would recommend is visiting Alcatraz prison, where it held the most notorious prisoners including the likes of American gangster Al Capone.

They tell the stories and information of the formation of the prison and dissolution through a audio tour, as well the Famous Escape Attempt (1962). This was one of the most famous events in Alcatraz's history Inmates Frank Morris, and brothers John and Clarence Anglin, made a daring escape from their cells. It was reported that they drilled in their cells, crawled through a vent, and made their way through the prison's walls then reached the water and used makeshift rafts to attempt to escape. They were never found, and their fate remains a mystery, though it is assumed they drowned in the cold waters of the bay. However, it is amusing to ponder the reality where they escaped.

You can take the boat from San Francisco pier, which is so delightful I believe any city that has water should also be experienced on water as it



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# State to State guide to the USA: From the East coast to the West coast

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viewpoints of Napa. The winery houses are nice to walk around and the vineyards, you understand why people would want to get married here with such a great backdrop. Lastly, the small towns are my favourite part they have amazing food and lots of open galleries which play classical violin music they are so astounding and talented, definitely made the trip. Also, an escape from the big city life.

P.S. all the photos except of myself, are mine too, I would love the support I have a photography Instagram account if would like to follow:

[https://www.instagram.com/photo\\_\\_\\_account\\_\\_\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/photo___account___/)



*Featured images taken by the author.*

Thank you for reading, I hope I have given some travel inspiration as it is a big passion of mine as well as writing, so I am happy to provide. I know expense can be a big obstacle to traveling which is why I recommend working while you travel like Camp America or workaway exchanges to earn money and then travel it makes that trip feel even better knowing you worked for it and had a fantastic journey working as well.



# Seriously Richard?...

## TW: Murder & Suicide

**An exploration of why modern dark-academia stories keep returning to one archetype: the boy who desperately wants to belong to a broken system.**



*Featured image courtesy of Jez Timms on [Unsplash](#). No changes were made to this image. Image licence found [here](#).*

Dark academia didn't begin with TikTok moodboards or tartan skirts; it grew out of the early-twentieth-century campus novels where the university was treated like a lost Arcadia. Books like *Brideshead Revisited* painted Oxford as a shimmering paradise, a garden walled off from the messy outside world. But even there, "Et Arcadia Ego", death exists, even in paradise. That line becomes the genre's thesis statement.

And then real life happened. Universities opened their doors, access broadened and suddenly the nostalgia cracked open to reveal centuries of

elitism, colonialism, misogyny, homophobia, and the kind of institutional gatekeeping polite society preferred not to examine.

This is where modern dark academia thrives: in the space between longing for elitist beauty and acknowledging how rotten the foundation is. And right at the centre of that contradiction, again and again, stands a strangely consistent figure.

## *The Richard.*

**Richard Papen: The Outsider Who Romanticises the System**  
**(The Secret History, Donna Tartt)**

If there is a blueprint for the Richard Trope, it's Richard Papen. He is the eternal outsider who wants in so badly it becomes a kind of religion. He lies about money, about his family, about who he is. He performs sophistication the way other people breathe. He narrates his own life like a myth he's desperate to believe in.

What makes him so potent is that he exposes the reader's hypocrisy. We know the Hampden classics clique is toxic, exclusionary, and morally bankrupt, but we still want to sit with them in their velvet library and discuss Dinnysian ecstasy over cigarettes. Richard embodies that shameful impulse: the desire to belong to structures we know are harmful.

His narration functions like a slightly unhinged version of free indirect discourse.

## Seriously Richard?...

You can see the inconsistencies, the cracks, the places where he romanticises Henry and the group to justify every awful thing they do, including murder. Richard is unreliable in the way elitism is unreliable: polished on the surface, rotten underneath.

Henry, for his part, becomes the institution incarnate, brilliant, manipulative, unsustainable. His suicide is as symbolic as it is tragic: the collapse of the structure Richard sacrificed himself to enter.

But Richard survives.

That's the thing about this trope.

The Richard always survives long enough to feel the consequences.

### Robin Swift: The Insider-by-Force Who Turns Against the System (Babel, R.F. Kuang)

Robin isn't named Richard, but structurally? Functionally? Emotionally?

He's the Richard of Babel.

He's the narrator. The chronic outsider. The boy who enters academia through a door he was never meant to touch. His access to Oxford is conditional, gifted by a white father-figure who controls him like a colonial puppet. Robin is acutely aware that he is being looked at, debated, judged, and permitted only so long as he behaves.

That shame, the shame of wanting to belong to the very institution that dehumanises you,

is the beating heart of the novel.

Robin's story becomes the anti-colonial counterpoint to Richard Papen's. Where Richard succumbs to the institution, Robin revolts against it. His eventual patricide isn't melodrama; it's structural: you cannot dismantle a system while benefiting from it.

The Biblical imagery of Babel, language as empire, the tower as a monument to colonial power, frames Robin as a kind of Frankenstein creation. Richard (the father) gives him "life" status, education, only for Robin to destroy him and, symbolically, the tower itself.

He is the only "Richard" who refuses to die for the institution.

**Instead, he brings it down with him.**

### Richard Cameron: The Loyalist Who Protects the System (Dead Poets Society)

If Richard Papen is the aspirational outsider and Robin Swift is the revolutionary outsider, then Richard Cameron is the obedient insider, the boy who will absolutely tell on you the moment things get mildly risky.

Cameron isn't evil, he's scared. Scared of failure, of punishment, of being on the wrong side of authority. He performs obedience the way Richard Papen performs elegance. He is what happens when you internalise the institution so deeply you become an extension of it.



# Seriously Richard?...

Every story about rebellion needs a betrayer, and Cameron plays the role with almost religious devotion. His confession and cooperation with the administration don't just ruin the Dead Poets; they allow the institution to reassert control.

Cameron is what the system looks like when it works perfectly; a student so loyal to the rules he's willing to sacrifice his peers to preserve them.

## Richard Stirling: The Golden Boy Who Breaks the System (If We Were Villains, M.L.Rio)

Now for the outlier.

Richard Stirling is not an outsider. He is not insecure. He is not desperate to belong. He is the belonging. The heir to a theatre dynasty. The on-stage king who becomes a tyrant off-stage too.

This is what If We Were Villains feels more like a campus novel than dark academia: its world is a sealed theatrical terrarium where the real world doesn't intrude until things get violent.

Richard's power is the kind that corrodes quietly and then all at once. He bullies, dominates, manipulates, and pushes everyone to their breaking point. He doesn't fit the roles the group assigns him, he doesn't fit the Shakespearean tragic order at all. And in classical fashion, the character who doesn't fit must be removed.

His death (or near-death) shatters the illusion of the safe, enclosed academic space.

Suddenly the world floods in: consequences, police, guilt, adulthood.

Richard Stirling is the Richard who forces the story to grow up.

## **So What Is the Richard Trope?**

Across these wildly different stories, four patterns emerge:

### **The Outsider/Insider Paradox:**

- Papen: outsider who begs to be insider.
- Cameron: insider terrified of becoming outsider.
- Swift: outsider granted insider status through conditional, colonial approval.
- Stirling: ultimate insider whose power corrupts everything around him.

### **The Man Shaped by the Institution:**

Every Richard is an embodiment of institutional power:

- Papen as an aspirant.
- Cameron as a disciple.
- Swift as a weapon.
- Stirling as a tyrant.

### **The Catalyst for Collapse:**

A Richard is always the hinge the tragedy turns on:

- Papen - murder.
- Cameron - betrayal.
- Swift - revolution.
- Stirling - violence.

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# Seriously Richard?...

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## Performing Belonging:

All four characters perform their roles:

- Papen performs elegance.
- Cameron performs obedience.
- Stirling performs dominance.
- Robin performs assimilation

In other words: A Richard is the character who reveals what it costs to belong to an elitist system, and what breaks when the cost becomes too high.

*He is the pressure point that makes the entire ivory crack. And in that crack, the whole genre lives.*

## Why the Richard Trope Matters Now

We live in a time when the old academic fantasies, the ivy covered walls, the tutorials, the candlelit libraries, are openly recognised as products of exclusivity and systemic injustice. And yet people still fantasise about them.

That tension, wanting a world we know is corrupt, is the engine of dark academia.

This is why the Richard trope hits so hard.

He is the character who shows us that belonging is never free.

That someone always pays for prestige.

That the beautiful world is built on ugliness.

A Richard is not the hero.

He is not the villain.

He is the mechanism.



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# Women in Business: Claire Andrews

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**Throughout this academic year I will be writing a series of articles promoting the celebration and liberation of women in their chosen professional field. I hope to encourage my peers to pursue the occupation they desire and to fight against the inequalities we are presented with through sharing the lives of aspirational women.**

For my first article I had the pleasure of speaking with Claire Andrews once again. Last year I wrote an article for The Aston Canon on the current 'Climate Catastrophe'<sup>1</sup>, where Mrs Andrews featured. <sup>1</sup> She was a senior lawyer in the Enforcement and Prosecution team for the Environmental Agency, and a (now retired) qualified solicitor who also worked for Birmingham City Council. For context and for those interested in the Environmental Agency, it focuses on Environmental Law and regulates all things to do with the environment including land, water and air. It is a QUANGO meaning it is part government grant supported but also a non-profit organisation. The agency, and more specifically Mrs Andrews, worked with voluntary agencies and mentored students from difficult backgrounds to help them get into the legal profession. Mrs Andrews retired early at 55, but it took around 10 years of studying and working as a legal assistant before she qualified as a solicitor. The journey to becoming a solicitor now requires the SQE, which takes around a year to study for and two years of qualifying work experience. <sup>2</sup>

When Mrs Andrews began studying and looking for work she knew the path she wanted to go down - environmental law. Finding something you're passionate about and meeting likeminded people makes your career "very worthwhile".

## A description of Mrs Andrews' role:

"My main role before retiring was as a senior lawyer in the enforcement and prosecution team. As well as advising enforcement officers on investigations such as how to gather and retain evidence and what evidence we need to prove a case, I reviewed files and determined whether there was sufficient evidence to anticipate a successful prosecution. I would do the paperwork lay the informations in court (drafting charges and getting them to court). After all the paperwork I would manage the file, liaise with officers and either take the case to court myself either guilty or not guilty pleas (if not guilty then conduct the trial) if more serious and the case was to go to crown court rather than magistrates. I would instruct counsel (a Barrister) who would take the case and I would do the paperwork, running around etc. I also had an advisory role advising officers on certain areas of environmental law, attending meetings etc. The types of cases I took were water pollution from for example farming practices escape of slurry etc or escape of chemicals or oil from businesses or escapes from sewage works - human effluent etc from companies such as Severn Trent Water Ltd. Other cases related to waste regulation such as large deposits of waste/rubbish and other

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# Women in Business: Claire Andrews

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activities without licences or in breach of conditions etc. In the early days I carried out fishing without licence prosecutions and other fisheries related cases so the areas were very varied.”

## **Mrs Andrews’ Key goals:**

“When I started studying law and was looking for work I wanted to do environmental law so was lucky to have the job that I wanted to do. Obviously large fines were good and usually the way bosses decided whether you did a good job but in reality just getting a good conviction and hopefully creating a deterrent to prevent others doing the same or make the businesses rethink their actions was a good outcome. The work was varied and interesting. You got to meet some very passionate people either investigating or prosecuting, it made the job very worthwhile. Doing my bit for the environment was my key goal.”

## **Advice for aspiring environmental law solicitors:**

“There are many ways to get to where you want to be. I started working at Birmingham City Council and studied part time. I enjoyed studying law so started looking for a job in this area. I got a legal assistant job for starters and studied for probably 10 years in total getting my degree etc before I qualified as a Solicitor. Things don’t always follow a smooth path. Get experience and enjoy what you do.

Also you might think you want to do one area of law but might actually find that area is not what you really want to do. Keep your options open, nothing is failure any route or even complete turnaround is fine. When I was younger I definitely got overlooked for jobs because I was a woman (not where I ended up though) I saw incompetent young men being promoted over me which actually spurred me on to achieve what I did.”

<sup>1</sup> <https://theastoncanon.wixsite.com/my-site-2>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/qa/>



# TO BECOME LIQUID

**This article challenges typical notions of identity, self-expression and perspective.**

Do you want to relieve yourself from the anxiety wrapped around every one of life's decisions? It's easy, just be yourself.

But nobody ever teaches you how to be yourself. How can I be myself when philosophers can't agree on what a self really is? What if "myself" is a serial killer: should I still be myself?

**"Beauty begins the moment you decide to be yourself" – Coco Chanel.**

Children find identity through imitation. It's a great strategy- and there's value in doing that as an adult. You want to paint? Put on some Bob Ross and paint the happy little trees. Poetry? Not my strong suit, but I know poetryfoundation.org has a nice Poem of the Day section. But when does imitation come at the cost of yourself? How do I find my passion? Am I truly an artist exercising free-will, or just a dirty copycat art thief?

Alternatively, you could listen to some Alan Watts, get up to date with your Taoism and learn to stop needing so many answers. Just be yourself.

**"This above all: To thine own self be true" – William Shakespeare.**

There's a romantic notion of nature being the teacher- losing yourself in the woods but ultimately FINDING yourself. That's what the US Marines do- they break you down and rebuild you from the dirt in the silhouette of an M16. Don't be yourself, that's boring. Be MORE. SHAVE YOUR HEAD AND SHOOT THE GUN. BE A MARINE.

Is finding yourself getting back in touch with your inner child, or becoming something entirely new? Perhaps it is being paid \$2500 per month by the US Marine Corps to become ideologically possessed. Some would argue that it is paying an ex-marine \$9 per month to consume his ideologically possessed podcast. I know a lot of those guys.

Or you could be a humanist and declare on top of a mountain that that this current version of you right now is enough. Although I will laugh at you. And the philosophy community will also laugh. But who cares- happiness is a choice, after all.

**"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken" – Oscar Wilde.**

This scattered article is trying to say that being yourself is a learned skill. How do you get to know yourself when you are stuck within yourself all the time?

Carl Jung famously stated that we choose to believe so that we may relieve our anxiety of death. He also believed in the idea of several different identities living inside of your head, like ghosts. His wackiness is a hard pill to swallow, but I have a big mouth.

It seems to me the two rational ways to successfully reflect are:

1. Define yourself by your services to others and go through somewhat of an ego death. Socrates approves of this one.
2. Split yourself into several versions and jump between them to analyse the others. Your conscious and subconscious. Your anima, persona and shadow self. Your superego, ego and id. It's brought me a lot of patience and

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## TO BECOME LIQUID

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self-understanding to view myself this way.

**“Follow your inner moonlight; don't hide the madness.” - Allen Ginsberg.**

I've recently been volunteering with the homeless and there's no real pattern on why some people end up on the street and why some people get to spend their Friday afternoon writing a gratuitous article. There was an international study that found we are far more alike in our personalities than people typically expect- the corrupting tribalism of social media, politics, you know the drill. We often forget just how connected by common experiences we are.

Finding your identity doesn't have to mean marking out a tiny spot in the billions of people to claim as your own- it's building bridges to other people's inner worlds. When you can understand yourself better, you will be able to understand others, too- and be a better friend, lover, comrade, whatever your thing is.



# Now you see me: Now you don't.



## WARNING SPOILER AHEAD.

**After a decade of anticipation, the third instalment of the Now You See Me franchise finally hits our screens – and it arrives with more flair, more tricks, and a fresh lineup of characters ready to shake things up. As a longtime fan of the movies, I can confidently say: the wait was worth it.**

After a decade of anticipation, the third instalment of the Now You See Me franchise finally hits our screens – and it arrives with more flair, more tricks, and a fresh lineup of characters ready to shake things up. As a longtime fan of the movies, I can confidently say: the wait was worth it.

We're reunited with familiar favourites: ringleader Daneil Atlas (Jesse Eisenberg), mentalist Merritt McKinney (Woody Harrelson), card maestro Jack Wilder (Dave Franco), and escape artist Henley Reeves (Isla Fisher). Joining them is an energetic new trio of magicians – Bosco (Dominic Sessa), June (Ariana Greenblatt), and Charlie (Justice Smith) – who add a welcome burst of fresh energy to the Horsemen dynamic.

One of the standout choices of the movie is the introduction of a formidable female antagonist, Veronika Vanderberg, played with icy precision by Rosamund Pike. Calculating, clever and always one step ahead, Veronika challenges the Horsemen in ways we haven't seen before – outsmarting them repeatedly, and stylishly.

Blending the returning cast with new faces is always a gamble, but the film handles it with surprising finesse. The chemistry snaps immediately: Atlas steps into an unexpected father-figure role with newcomers, the original four bicker like the dysfunctional family we adore, and the new trio brings a spark of chaotic charm that revitalises the group. The humour lands, the tension builds, and the dynamics feel alive.

The film's signature twists and turns deliver in full force. Just when you're sure you've figured something out, the rug gets pulled – in classic Horsemen fashion. The globe-trotting set pieces add panache, - from Formula 1-style driving in Abu Dhabi to the atmospheric streets of Antwerp, and the illusionist dream escape room showdown in France.

And of course, the spectacle. Whether it's the intense 'box of sand doom' sequence or June taking down multiple full-grown officers with ease, the choreography keeps the adrenaline high. The final reveal ties everything together in a satisfying bow.

My only critique – to push to that 5 star is simple: is more Mark Ruffalo and Morgan Freeman, and honestly, a long runtime. When a film is this fun, you never want it to end.

If you're planning a cinema trip or movie night, make it Now You See Me: Now You Don't.

P.S. One of my favourite artists, Reneé Rapp, closes the film with her track Lucky – a perfect encapsulation of the franchise's heist-driven heart.



# The Rise of AI and Technology: A Turning Point

**2025 marks a pivotal year in technology, as artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly shifts from an experimental application into deeply integrated systems that helps business, science, and everyday life.**

## **Embodied AI and Robotics:**

The most physical manifestation of AI's advance is in the rise of embodied AI. Leading tech firms — such as Google, Meta, OpenAI, and Amazon — are investing in robots that are no longer just automated arms but thinking, physically capable agents (Le Monde, 2025).

-Google DeepMind has launched Gemini Robotics models in collaboration with robotics companies like Apptronik and Boston Dynamics, designed to let robots perform real-world tasks. These robots demonstrate real-world dexterity, agility, and generalization, supporting tasks from industrial assembly to domestic chores. (Reuters, 2025).

## **(Reuters, 2025):**

-In academia, research into multi-agent embodied systems is surging. Agents can now collaborate, adapt and learn in dynamic environments.

-The combination of LLM style reasoning with models, help robots predict and plan in more human-like ways.

-Meanwhile, Figure AI, a humanoid robot startup, is scaling up. It has announced BotQ, a manufacturing facility targeted at producing 12,000 humanoid robots per year. These developments suggest that 2025 could be the year of a “robotics inflection point,” where physical

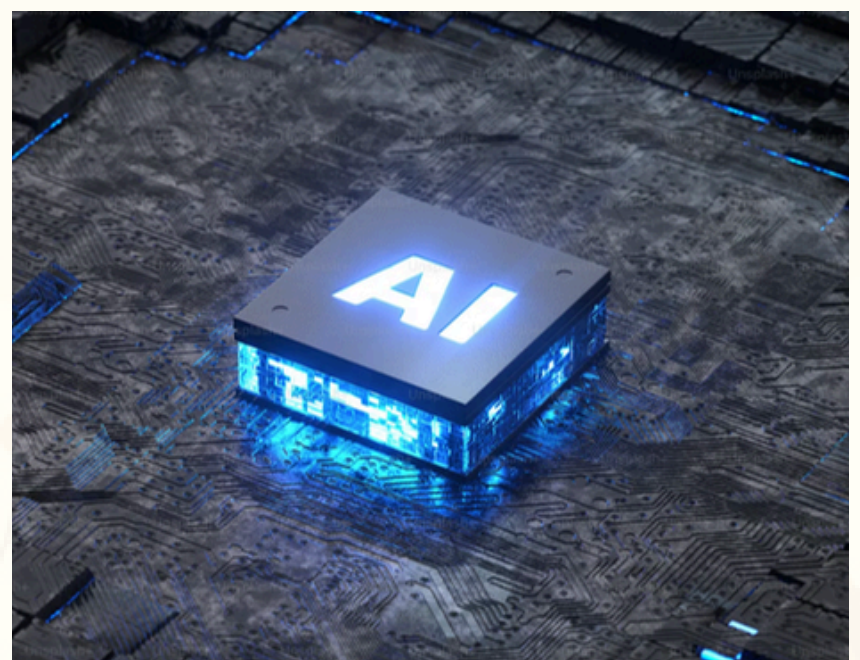
-AI becomes far more commercially viable.

**Sustainability & Efficiency: Making AI Greener**

With the rise of AI and great computational power comes with great energy consumption, a challenge that the AI industry is yet to tackle.

According to the IEEE Tech Predictions Report, data centres are increasingly being optimized for efficiency. Innovations include energy-efficient hardware, intelligent resource management and renewable energy integration (IEEE, 2025). This trend is echoed by Capgemini's research, which highlights the growing importance of sustainable AI and robotics in corporate strategies (Capgemini, 2024).

Furthermore, companies are applying AI itself to sustainability, by using it to predictive models monitor environmental risks, optimize energy grids, and support efficient agriculture. These applications undermine the dual role of AI as both a consumer and protector of resources (AI of the Decade, 2025; Sustainability Report, 2025).



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# The Rise of AI and Technology: A Turning Point

## Governance, Risk, and the Safety Imperative

As AI systems grow more capable, the global conversation about governance and safety has intensified.

In January 2025, the First Independent International AI Safety Report was published, commissioned by 30 nations following the 2023 AI Safety Summit. This report, authored by a consortium of 96 experts led by Yoshua Bengio, outlines major risks — including misuse, loss of control, and inequality — and proposes strategies for mitigation.

Governments and international bodies are increasingly discussing frameworks for explainability, accountability, and oversight. The need for transparency, especially for agentic or physical AI systems, is now broadly recognized (AI of the Decade, 2025; QuantumRise, 2025).

## Socioeconomic Impact: Jobs, Inequality, and Power Dynamics

The sweeping advance of AI in 2025 also raises profound social and economic questions.

- **Job disruption:** Agentic AI and intelligent robotics automate tasks previously reserved for humans, especially in logistics, manufacturing, and data analysis. But rather than simple replacement, there is a shift toward hybrid human-AI teams (AI of the Decade, 2025).
- **Global inequality:** Access to frontier AI is uneven. Nations with advanced AI infrastructure may accelerate ahead, exacerbating geopolitical divides (AronAzarar, 2025).

- **Economic power:** Tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Nvidia are extending their influence across AI, robotics, and quantum. This concentration of capability raises questions of power, governance, and equitable benefit.

## Conclusion

The year 2025 represents a watershed in the evolution of AI. Agentic intelligence, embodied robotics, sustainability-focused infrastructure, quantum integration, and robust governance are no longer distant aspirations — they are active realities.

However, the path forward is not without risk. As we build more powerful, autonomous systems, we must also commit to ethical frameworks, regulatory guardrails, and inclusive access. The choices we make today will shape not only what AI can do, but what it should do.

# The Hidden Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been facing a long, complex, and deeply tragic conflict, with much of the war focused on the eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu. The decades of fighting between rebel group, local militias, the national army and foreign interests have created a humanitarian crisis, where 2,900 people were killed since early January and approximately 700,000 others were forced from their homes and thousands more injured.<sup>1</sup>

## Causes and drivers

Driven by resource competition, ethnic tensions, regional politics and a thirst for power, the conflict between the armed group M23/Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC) and the Congolese army in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has intensified starting from December 2024. MSF. The fighting since then has reached Goma, the capital city of North Kivu, where over 650,000 people have been displaced into camp alongside 2 million residents already living there.<sup>2</sup>

However, the root of this escalation traces much earlier. The rebel group M23, composed mainly of fighter from Rwandophone communities, has been seizing territory and launching major offensive in North Kivu since 2022, leading to the capture of Goma and its airport, where “hundreds” of Congolese soldiers were forced to lay down their weapons.<sup>3</sup> The group has since advance to Bukavu in South Kivu. The main cause to this conflict lies in Cognos vast natural resources. The eastern DRC is rich in materials like coltan, cobalt and gold. Complete control



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over these resources is a huge motivation for the rebel group M23. However, M23, made up of ethnic Tutsis claims it is fighting for the minority rights, while DR Congo’s government argues that they are in seek of exploiting the eastern region’s mineral wealth.<sup>1</sup> Ethnic grievances and the marginalisation of certain groups have further fuelled the violence, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and revenge.

## Humanitarian impact

Currently Congo is facing a massive displacement with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing and abandoning their homes. Many were forced to seek refuge in camps on the outskirts of Congo, but the living conditions are often poor with people subjected to infectious diseases, sexual violence and inadequate living conditions. The UN estimated that 290,000 people were displaced in December 2024, and a further 102,000 people were displaced in 2025 in less than a week.<sup>4</sup>



# The Hidden Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The displacement sites have already failed to meet the need of the displaced families with many camps lacking food, water and basic healthcare. The number of sexual violence in Congo has skyrocketed with MSF teams in Congo estimating an average of 2 people per hour in 2023, and a continued increase in 2024.<sup>4</sup> MSF claim that most of the attacks were connected to the increased presence of armed men in and out of camps.<sup>4</sup>

Infectious diseases like cholera have risen in the past decade due to the unsafe water sources and sanitary problems. Mpox and virus mutations have been on the rise since 2024 and now has reached a stage of public health emergency of international concern.<sup>2</sup>

## Challenges

Attempts to ceasefire and negotiate with M23 have happened with mixed success, the group M23 have allowed 72 hours for civilians to return to their homes, but the fighting has resumed soon after. Regional bodies like UN and African Union have been involved in delivering humanitarian crisis ensuring basic medical needs and aid is met, the shortage of food and water is dealt with and enforcing neutrality while holding each party accountable.<sup>4</sup> However, the risk of further escalation and possible involvement of neighbouring countries remains high, which could destabilise the broader Great Lakes region.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion:

The conflict in DRC is not just a simple one-sided war, it's an amalgamation of conflicts,

deeply rooted in colonialism, resource exploitation, ethnic superiority, geopolitics and underdevelopment. The solution requires much more than military action and acknowledgement, it needs a strong governance, justice and sustained support from both the global community and the Congolese authorities.

## References:

- 1.[DR Congo conflict: Rebels attack army ending lull in fighting - BBC News](#)
- 2.[DR Congo conflict: What you need to know about the crisis](#)
- 3.[Violence erupts in mineral-rich DR Congo as rebels move into key city. Here's what we know | CNN](#)
- 4.[DR Congo: ICC tribunal closely monitoring surge in fighting – DW – 02/05/2025](#)

# The importance of pro-bono work: Women's stories, real change.



*Featured image courtesy from the author.*

Last week, the Girls Human Right Hub – where I proudly serve as Vice President – hosted an event dedicated to a topic that shapes lives far beyond the classroom: the critical importance of pro bono work, especially in supporting women. In collaboration with the Pro Bono and Commercial Awareness Society, our team organised an evening centred on real stories, real challenges, and the real change that committed community action can create.

The highlight of the event was a powerful talk delivered by representatives from Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA). Their presentation shed light on the realities many women face, particularly those experiencing domestic abuse who often struggle to access legal aid, through case studies and frontline insights, they illustrated how early intervention, emotional support and legal guidance can transform a woman's path toward safety and independence.

One of the strongest takeaways of the evening was the reminder that pro bono services fill gaps that the legal system often leaves behind. When legal aid is unavailable, these services offer clarity, empowerment and a fighting chance at justice for individuals who might otherwise have to navigate the system alone.

The session concluded with an open Q&A that proved to be both emotional and essential. Hearing women's lived experiences – often heartbreaking reinforced exactly why organisations like BSWA are indispensable. Their work stands as a testament to how deeply community driven initiatives matter and why they must continue to be supported, amplified and protected.

This event also reminded me of my own experiences with pro bono work during my placement at the Refugee and Migrant Centre, where I served as a legal advisor. That role showed me firsthand how vital these services are for people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, unheard or unsupported. Working in that environment was a powerful confirmation of the impact free legal assistance can have on individuals and family's stability, safety and justice. And the truth is anyone can help. Volunteering, placements, and community engagement are all meaningful ways to contribute. Whether you're a student exploring the legal world or someone passionate about human rights, getting involved in organisations like BSWA or RMC can offer invaluable insight while making a real difference.



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## **The importance of pro-bono work: Women's stories, real change.**

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Our society has many exciting events coming up, including a panel discussion and several end of term activities in December. To stay updated, join the Girl Human Rights Hub via Student Union's website for £3 and follow us on Instagram at [@aston.ghrh](https://www.instagram.com/aston.ghrh)

Together, through awareness, action and compassion, we can amplify women's stories and help drive the change they deserve.