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Top Air Force official warns of Russia-Iran cooperation

By Jon Gambrell
Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's supplying of bomb-carrying drones to Russia could see Moscow help Tehran's program become more lethal, raising risks across the wider Middle East, the top U.S. Air Force commander in the Middle East said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, the head of U.S. Air Force Central, described the danger potentially posed by Russia's "cooperation and collusion" with Iran as extending from the airspace over Syria, while Tehran threatens commercial ships in the waters of the Persian Gulf.

American pilots have already faced what they describe as more aggressive maneuvers from Russian pilots in Syria, while a new deployment of U.S. air power has been sent to protect commercial shipping in the Gulf's key Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of all the world's oil passes.

"I am concerned about the

SEE WARNS ON PAGE 5

Jon Gambrell/AP

Lt. Gen. Alexus Grynkewich speaks at a news conference in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on Wednesday.

Andrew Harnik/AP

President Joe Biden speaks with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. CQ Brown during the 2023 United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony at Falcon Stadium on June 1, at the academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Brown confirmed despite hold

General to lead Joint Chiefs as Senate skirts Tuberville's blockade

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted Wednesday to confirm Air Force Gen. CQ Brown as the next chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff as the chamber began circumventing a seven-month hold on military promotions by Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama.

Brown is the first of three generals Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., planned to push through the Seate in coming days. The second is Gen. Randy George, who was confirmed Thursday as the next Army chief of staff. The third is Gen. Eric Smith, who was nominated to be the next commandant of the Marine Corps.

"The Senate will overwhelmingly vote to confirm them, and these three honorable men will finally be able to assume their positions," Schumer said.

Brown's confirmation broke a deadlock over senior military promotions that still leaves some 300 general and flag officers in limbo. Tuberville instigated his hold in February to force the Pentagon to end its policy of giving leave and travel reimbursement to service members seeking abortions and other reproductive health care.

Pressure to end Tuberville's blockade climbed in recent weeks as Democrats and military officials detailed how frozen promotions and appointments impacted military families and national security. On Tuesday, a veterans group decorated a lawn outside the Senate with signs displaying the names and photos of the stalled nominees.

Tuberville continues to obstruct the unanimous voice vote process

SEE BROWN ON PAGE 5

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$4.260	$4.828	$5.157	$5.015
Change in price	+5.6 cents	+7.9 cents	+8.1 cents	+9.3 cents
Netherlands	..	$5.052	$5.318	$5.488
Change in price	..	+6.1 cents	+5.5 cents	+9.1 cents
U.K.	..	$4.764	$5.093	$4.951
Change in price	..	+7.9 cents	+8.1 cents	+9.3 cents
Azores	..	..	$5.046	..
Change in price	..	..	+8.1 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.845	$5.024*
Change in price	..	..	+8.1 cents	No change

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Sept. 22. The change in prices is from Sept. 15.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.819	..	$4.679
Change in price	..	+8.0 cents	..	+9.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.929	..	..	$4.679
Change in price	+6.0 cents	..	..	+9.0 cents
South Korea	$3.949	..	$4.849	$4.709
Change in price	+5.0 cents	..	+8.0 cents	+10.0 cents
Guam	$3.939**	$4.509	$4.829	..
Change in price	+6.0 cents	+8.0 cents	+8.0 cents	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
Pacific prices for the week of Sept. 22-28

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Sept. 22)	$1.04
British pound (Sept. 22)	$1.20
Japanese yen (Sept. 22)	144.00
South Korean won (Sept. 22)	1303.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Britain (Pound)	1.2262
Canada (Dollar)	1.3515
China (Yuan)	7.3090
Denmark (Krone)	7.0053
Egypt (Pound)	3.9000
Euro	0.9396
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8213
Hungary (Forint)	363.83
Israel (Shekel)	3.8147
Japan (Yen)	147.86
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3090
Norway (Krone)	10.6930
Philippines (Peso)	56.94
Poland (Zloty)	4.34
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7510
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3695
South Korea (Won)	1344.99
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9061
Thailand (Baht)	36.23
Turkey (NewLira)	27.1186

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.49
30-year bond	4.44

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

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MILITARY

Japan orders Okinawa to resume airfield work

Cabinet minister gives governor until Wednesday to approve design changes at Schwab

By Matthew M. Burke and Mari Higa
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Japanese Cabinet minister this week gave Okinawa's governor until Wednesday to approve design changes for a coastal airfield planned to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma or face further legal action from Tokyo.

Tetsuo Saito, the minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism, on Tuesday notified Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki by letter that the prefecture must approve the changes for a Marine Corps runway under construction at Oura Bay in northeastern Okinawa, a spokesman from the prefectural Department of Civil Engineering and Construction said by phone Thursday.

Tamaki can either approve fresh permits, deny them on new grounds or ignore the request, the spokesman said. If the governor denies the permits again, Tokyo will again order approval. If Tamaki continues to resist, Tokyo may file suit, the spokesman said.

"We are looking at these three options and considering what measures to take," the spokesman said. "The final decision will be made by Gov. Tamaki."

Some government officials in Japan may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Tamaki's refusal to sign off on construction changes in November 2021 kicked off a protracted legal fight that ended Sept. 4 when Japan's Supreme Court ordered him to approve the permits.

Tamaki argued that the soft seabed in the construction zone posed a hazard and that Tokyo had failed to consider the environmental impact on the critically endangered dugong, a cousin of the manatee protected by Japanese law.

The airfield being built at the Marine base Camp Schwab is meant to replace MCAS Futenma in urban Ginowan. That base, surrounded by city neighborhoods, is considered inherently dangerous by some Japanese officials.

Tamaki's failure to approve the permitting "significantly harms public interest," Saito's letter states, according to the spokesman.

The land ministry hopes Tamaki approves the plan, a spokesman from its Water and Disaster Management Bureau said by phone Thursday. He declined to discuss what steps the government would take if Tamaki failed to approve the permits.

The runway project dates to 1995 when two Marines and a Navy corpsman kidnapped and raped a 12-year-old girl. During the mass protests that followed, Ginowan residents called for closing MCAS Futenma.

Schwab was chosen in 1997 and a plan unveiled in 2006. Former Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima approved the project in 2013 and reclamation of the site began five years later.

Successive Okinawa governors have mounted legal challenges meant to slow or kill the project, which was only 14% complete as of May. Out of 13 lawsuits filed, the prefecture has lost seven, four have been withdrawn and two are ongoing, one in Naha District Court and the other in Fukuoka High Court.

The project, originally slated for completion by 2014, will now take until at least 2032 and cost the Japanese government $6.9 billion, at last estimates.

Cesar Salazar Jr./U.S. Army

U.S. Army Pfc. Bishop Durham, a grenadier with the 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, trains with Latvian and Polish troops in Adazi, Latvia, on Sept. 16.

101st brigade headed to Europe

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army will send another infantry brigade and division headquarters to Eastern Europe in the coming months, meaning that the Pentagon is sticking with a larger force presence established after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Ky., will deploy 3,400 soldiers to replace the division's 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team this fall, the Army announced Wednesday. An Army statement did not specify the installations where the troops would be based.

Additionally, about 200 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division headquarters at Fort Liberty, N.C., will replace a 10th Mountain Division headquarters that has been operating out of Romania.

"The deployments are one-for-one unit replacements and will not change the overall U.S. force posture in the region," the Army said.

There was an ongoing debate in the Pentagon about whether to replace soldiers deployed to Europe at all, NBC News reported earlier this month.

Some U.S. officials argued that those troops and funds could be used elsewhere, NBC reported, citing unidentified defense officials.

Maj. Gen. Brett Sylvia, commander of the 101st Airborne Division, said Wednesday that the mission to reinforce NATO's eastern flank "remains vital to maintaining security on the European continent."

The 3rd BCT will maneuver along NATO's eastern flank, carrying out exercises with other U.S. and allied units.

The infantrymen and the division headquarters overseeing them give U.S. Army Europe and Africa a larger presence in southeastern Europe and the broader Black Sea region.

Many of the other rotational units now in Europe are concentrated more in the north, with Poland serving as a main operational hub for an armored brigade and various headquarters elements.

The U.S. has roughly 100,000 troops in Europe, up from around 80,000 operating on the Continent shortly ahead of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022.

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Air Force commander removed from position due to 'loss of confidence'

By Doug G. Ware
Stars and Stripes

A commander in the Air Force's Global Strike Command, which is responsible for supporting nuclear deterrence and carrying out worldwide U.S. strike operations, has been removed from his position after only a few weeks in the job, officials said Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Brian Milner, who led the 9th Bomb Squadron, was relieved of command Monday, according to officials at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas.

Base officials did not elaborate on why Milner was dismissed but said he was "removed from his leadership position due to a loss of confidence in his ability to complete the assigned duties."

Lt. Col. Ryan Stillwell assumed command as the permanent replacement, a base spokesperson said.

Stillwell was formerly director of operations for the 9th Bomb Squadron, which is assigned to the 7th Operations Group at Dyess. The squadron maintains the supersonic Rockwell B-1B Lancer heavy bomber.

Milner's tenure as commander of the squadron did not last long. He took the job in July and was the 9th Bomb Squadron's first Black commander.

"If becoming a commander inspires at least one person, whether or not they're a minority, I have done something important," Milner said July 13, not long after he took over the role. "Becoming a squadron commander … has become my greatest achievement."

Due to federal privacy laws, military commanders are often removed under broad claims of "loss in confidence" in their abilities. In June, officials cited the phrase in relieving Navy Cmdr. Jeffrey Applebaugh and Army Col. Jonathan Chung from their duties. In August, Navy Capt. Paul Choate, commanding officer of the service's Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic in Virginia, was dismissed for the same reason.

Air Force officials did not indicate whether there was any misconduct related to Milner's removal.

Built during World War II, Dyess Air Force Base is a few miles from Abilene in north-central Texas and about 150 miles southwest of Fort Worth. About 13,000 personnel — troops and civilians — are stationed at the base.

Leon Redfern/U.S. Air Force

Air Force Lt. Col. Brian Milner was relieved of command of the 9th Bomb Squadron at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

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MILITARY

TAYLOR SLATER/U.S. Air Force

Air Force Staff Sgt. William Johnson, left, Airman 1st Class Gabrielle Oropesa and Senior Airman Carlos Reye feed a pull string into a duct rodder while replacing underground cable at Yokota Air Base, Japan, last month.

Troops' light bulb moment a flying success at Yokota

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — When July 4 lightning doused the lights that control vehicular traffic across the south end of the runway at this airlift hub in western Tokyo, the repairs demanded more than a trip to the hardware store.

Yokota Air Base, home of the 374th Airlift Wing and headquarters of 5th Air Force and U.S. Forces Japan, may be the only U.S. military airfield where automobile traffic crosses a portion of an active runway. A set of three traffic lights controls the route across the runway south overrun by indicating yellow to proceed and red to stop, with an accompanying alarm bell, while aircraft approach or depart.

The company that installed the light system in June 1997 no longer exists, Tech Sgt. Johnathan Cox, the noncommissioned officer for inspections and evaluations at the 374th Operation Support Squadron, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

With no information available to repair the system, Cox, of Muskegon, Mich., and his collaborators turned to YokoWerx, a 2-year-old, award-winning innovation cell at Yokota, to work the problem.

"From my perspective, what I witnessed happening was this organic collaboration that happened super-fast, because everybody is affected by it," Adrien Sinclair, the YokoWerx chief operating officer, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

The missing lights altered the routine at Yokota, where the day starts for many with a morning commute via two-lane McGuire Avenue from east side homes across the runway overrun to offices and shops on the airfield's opposite side. Human "augmentees" sitting inside vehicles substituted for the inoperable lights, stepping into the roadway to stand in furnace-like July and August heat to stop traffic until the runway was clear.

Tech. Sgt. Joshua Toellner, a volunteer at YokoWerx, heard that Cox was looking for help repairing the disabled lights. On Aug. 15, Toellner put Cox in touch with Staff Sgt. William Johnson at the 374th Contracting Squadron, and Cox, Toellner and Johnson together designed a fix, Cox said.

YokoWerx on Davis Street on the base provided the space for the three airmen to brainstorm and organize the project.

"YokoWerx can come in and make rapid changes," Johnson, a Waco, Texas, native, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday. "That's what innovation is, a rapid immediate kind of change. So, that's what this cell is empowered to do."

Using spare parts and a 3D printer at YokoWerx, Cox created circuitry in a box to power the light system. The box was installed in the air traffic control tower, where controllers use it like a switch to control the traffic lights. The system required the 374th Civil Engineering Squadron to lay 3,000 feet of copper cable underground between the tower and the three light installations, Cox said.

The installation took three days, Aug. 25 to 28, and Johnson said he was personally relieved when the lights returned to normal operation after nearly two months. He was one of those people on 12-hour shifts making sure cars safely crossed the overrun.

"I was actually sitting in the truck and that's what motivated me," Johnson said. "I finished my shift, and I was like, I'm done. I don't want to do this. It was very, just, boring."

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9/11 defendant now psychotic, panel concludes

Torture cited in al-Shibh diagnosis

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A military medical panel has concluded that one of the five 9/11 defendants held at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba, has been rendered delusional and psychotic by the torture he underwent years ago while in CIA custody.

The findings heighten uncertainty over whether Ramzi bin al-Shibh, who has long complained he was under attack by invisible rays at Guantanamo, will stand trial. A military judge, Col. Matthew McCall, was expected to rule as soon as Thursday whether al-Shibh's mental issues render him incompetent to take part in the proceedings against him.

Defense lawyers argue that the best hope of al-Shibh, a Yemeni accused of organizing one cell of the Sept. 11, 2001, hijackers, regaining competency to stand trial is a step that some Americans are likely to find distasteful: for him to be provided with post-torture trauma care and no longer subject to solitary confinement.

Al-Shibh's newly disclosed diagnosis — post-traumatic stress disorder with secondary psychotic features — is the latest development to show how the George W. Bush administration's approval of abusive interrogation of alleged al-Qaida attackers is complicating U.S. efforts to try the men more than two decades later.

On Wednesday, al-Shibh's lead attorney, David Bruck, told the courtroom that the diagnosis is creating "a moment of truth" and an opportunity for the country to take into account the harm that was done by allowing torture.

On Sept. 6, the White House said President Joe Biden had declined to approve or deny demands presented by defense lawyers in plea negotiations to settle the case. They were seeking guarantees that all five men would get care for the physical and mental damage of their torture, and would be spared solitary confinement going forward.

Biden was unsettled about accepting terms for the plea from those responsible for the deadliest assault on the United States since Pearl Harbor, a White House National Security Council official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

Defense and prosecution attorneys had been negotiating a possible deal that would have the defendants plead guilty in exchange for being spared the death penalty. Some family members of 9/11 victims objected to the plea negotiations. Conservatives faulted the Biden administration for allowing the negotiations.

Al-Shibh's mental issues meant he was not included in the plea negotiations. Any future plea negotiations are on hold at least until the military commission gets a new presiding military official next month, lawyers said.

No trial date has been set for the five defendants after more than a decade of proceedings. Logistical challenges and legal questions have slowed the commission at Guantanamo. That includes the question of how much evidence has been rendered inadmissible by torture while they were in CIA custody. The case has had a succession of military judges, with the fourth announcing Wednesday that he will retire in April.

The Associated Press monitored the military commission's hearings in Cuba on Wednesday via a relay provided by the Pentagon.

Court-martial on fewer charges delayed for ex-brigade commander

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The court-martial of a former brigade commander at Fort Cavazos will not begin next week as planned after the judge in the case granted more time to the colonel's attorneys to prepare following the dismissal of a sexual misconduct charge.

Col. Jon Meredith faces two counts of conduct unbecoming of an officer that were previously connected to the charge of abusive sexual contact. However, Lt. Gen. Sean Bernabe, commander of III Corps and Fort Cavazos, on Sept. 11 dismissed that charge.

"We will use the time granted by the continuance to continue preparations for a trial that shouldn't even be happening," said Sherry Bunn, Meredith's defense attorney and a former Army lawyer. "In the wake of the government's dismissal of the abusive sexual contact charge — one that shouldn't have been referred in the first place — I'm questioning the need for a general court-martial for a charge that should be addressed at a more appropriate level of disposition."

A new trial date for Meredith will be set two to three months from the original start date of Monday, said Lt. Col. Tania Donovan, spokeswoman for III Corps, which is headquartered at the central Texas Army base.

Meredith, 47, is accused of going to the home of the victim, who is the civilian wife of an Army officer, on July 23, 2022, according to a charge sheet detailing the allegations against the colonel. Meredith knew the woman's husband was away and groped and kissed her, according to the document. All names apart from Meredith's are redacted from the document.

At the time of the incident, Meredith was commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team in the 1st Cavalry Division. He was removed from command in October and arraigned in military court in May.

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MILITARY

Brown: Tuberville denies hold is affecting readiness

FROM PAGE 1

normally used to confirm batches of military promotions but has repeatedly called on Schumer to vote on nominees one by one. The Congressional Research Service estimated that would take at least 700 hours.

Schumer had resisted putting individual nominees up for a floor vote, fearing it would set a damaging precedent, but relented Wednesday after Tuberville signaled he would attempt to force an individual vote on Smith. Schumer described Tuberville's move as "an act of desperation."

"We cannot allow Sen. Tuberville to set the Senate on a path that no senator wants to travel," Schumer said. "We cannot allow Sen. Tuberville to decide which of our dedicated and brave service members get promoted and which get to languish, which military families are able to settle in their new posts and which must remain in limbo."

Tuberville deemed the capitulation by Schumer a "win for the legislative branch of government" and said he reserves the right to again seek a cloture vote on an individual nominee — a procedural step that is typically only invoked by the Senate majority leader.

"There is nothing wrong with a floor vote on these nominations," Tuberville said.

"I ran for Senate so I could vote on behalf of the people of the state of Alabama. I didn't come up here just to outsource my job to the Pentagon or the White House yet that's exactly what Democrats want to do," he said.

He dismissed concerns his hold was hurting military readiness and said Schumer is ultimately responsible for letting the logjam of nominees grow to its current size. Still, Tuberville voted Wednesday against a cloture motion to end debate on Brown's nomination as well as the final vote to confirm him.

"Nothing demonstrates that Sen. Tuberville is the sole cause of this crisis better than his vote against cloture on Gen. CQ Brown today," said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It's really quite something that he was willing to file a cloture motion earlier today, and ended up voting against a cloture motion a few hours later."

Brown was approved by the Senate panel, of which Tuberville is a member, during the summer. He will become just the second Black man, after Colin Powell, to serve as the president's most senior military adviser when Army Gen. Mark Milley retires at the end of the month.

George, meanwhile, was approved Thursday in a 96-1 vote, with one Republican senator objecting.

He had been simultaneously serving as the service's vice chief of staff, a position that he has held since 2022, as well as the acting chief of staff since the August retirement of Gen. James McConville.

Smith is also performing dual roles as assistant commandant of the Marine Corps and acting commandant following the retirement of Gen. David Berger in July. He was set to be confirmed later Thursday afternoon.

Warns: Officials: Russia may owe Iran favor after being provided with drones

FROM PAGE 1

growing relationship between Russia and Iran and the drones being supplied to Russia," Grynkewich told journalists during a news conference at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi. "Who would have ever thought that the Russian Federation would need to go to Iran for military capabilities, and yet we're there. That means that Russia actually owes Iran something. I'm concerned about the level of collaboration that might happen."

Iran's mission to the United Nations and the Russian Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Tehran has offered conflicting explanations about the drones Russia has used to target Ukraine during its war on the country, at times denying arming Moscow while also saying it provided some before the war on Ukraine began. Western nations, Ukraine and experts who have forensically examined the drones link them back to Iran and say their vast number deployed on the battlefield show a constant resupplying by Tehran.

Grynkewich said he was worried that Russian upgrades to Iran's drone technology could "backcast" to Tehran, making those bomb-carrying devices even more dangerous. And by Russia owing Iran for the munitions, it could return the favor by dialing up the pressure on American pilots who still fly over Syria and Iraq as part of a mission to target the remnants of the Islamic State.

"There could be some amount of cooperation and collusion between Russia and Iran that's playing out here in Syria. We'll see where that goes," Grynkewich said. "It is something that we watch very closely. That burgeoning relationship is of a military concern to me."

Meanwhile, Russian pilots over recent months have been aggressive in flying close to both manned F-35 fighter jets and drones over Syria. The Air Force publicly showed a Russian pilot dumping fuel on a drone and trying to set it alight with flares.

But Grynkewich described some of that behavior as dialing back in recent weeks.

"I'm not attributing causality to the fact that we called them out, but by showing the unprofessional nature of their behavior since that time, they do still intercept our MQ-9 (drones) from time to time, but it is in a much safer manner," he said. "I would still characterize it as unprofessional because it is not in accordance with established rules that we have where we stay certain distances apart, but it is safe at this time."

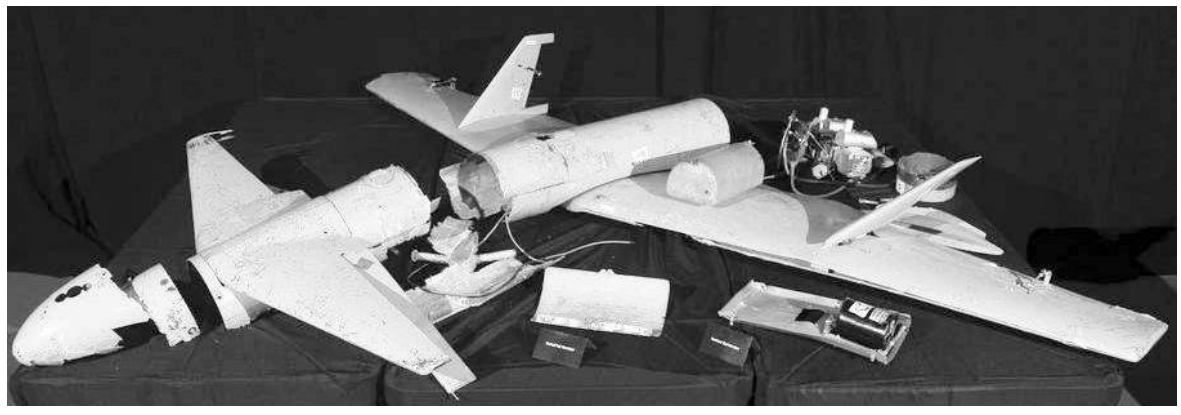
The U.S. and Russia still operate what America calls a "deconfliction line" to make sure their aircraft don't run into each other or come too close.

Grynkewich described 90% of the calls as routine, though 10% can involve issues where the countries vigorously dispute each others' actions over Syria, which still remains mired in its yearslong war.

"You do get into some heated exchanges," Grynkewich said. "Those exchanges, while heated, are always professional between the two sides."

Meanwhile in Syria, Grynkewich said that "hundreds" of fighters from the Russian mercenary group Wagner still operate in the country, even after their leader Yevgeny Prigozhin died in a mysterious, fiery plane crash following his march on Moscow challenging Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We have seen, as you might expect, some tension between those forces and the Russian forces that are there," Grynkewich said. "For the most part, it appears that they have come to some sort of an agreement ... (and) they'll continue to operate together to meet the objectives of the Russian Federation there in Syria."



EJ HERSOM/Defense Department

Components from an Iranian drone in 2018. Companies and seven people were blacklisted by the U.S. this week over claims they aided in Tehran's development of drones.

Foreign firms sanctioned for Iran aid

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Four companies and seven people based in Iran, China, Russia, and Turkey were added to a U.S. blacklist this week over accusations that they aided in the development of Tehran's aerial drone program.

A multinational network used aliases to hide shipments and financial transactions supporting the production and sale of drones such as Iran's Shahed models, a Treasury Department statement Tuesday said.

The Shahed-136 is a loitering munition drone that U.S. and Ukrainian officials say is being provided to Russia for attacks on Ukrainian cities.

"Iran's continued, deliberate proliferation of its (unmanned aerial vehicles) enables Russia, its proxies in the Middle East, and other destabilizing actors to undermine global stability," Treasury Undersecretary Brian Nelson said in the statement.

This week's sanctions blacklisted Iran-based Shahin Co., which the Treasury Department says is an alias of Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Co., an already sanctioned drone manufacturer.

Also included in the sanctions are three men associated with that company: Mehdi Gogerdchian, Hamidreza Noori and Husayn A'ini.

A company based in China, Shenzhen Jiasibo Technology, as well as two men, Su Chunpeng and Dong Wenbo, were also sanctioned.

The U.S. accused them of helping provide aerospace-grade radar altimeter systems, GPS and VHF antennas, sensors and other hardware to Iran.

Delta-Aero, Aerosila and Star, companies based in Russia, were sanctioned based on claims they provided aircraft tires and helped with testing.

Two men based in Turkey, Mehmet Tokdemir and Alaaddin Aykut, were blacklisted for helping exchange money to facilitate deals and bypass sanctions.

The sanctions announcement came a day after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke at the U.N. General Assembly in New York and denied that his country had sent drones to Russia for the Kremlin's war against Ukraine.

Raisi demanded that the U.S. provide proof that Iran gave weapons or drones to the Russians after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

U.S. officials say that Russia and Iran have deepened ties since the invasion and that Chinese manufacturers have increased sales of nonlethal aid to Moscow.

In August, the Defense Intelligence Agency released a report that compared photos of aerial drones recovered from Ukraine and Iraq and concluded that they matched known Iranian models.

Tuesday's sanctions are an extension of sanctions in March, the Treasury Department said.

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PACIFIC

Navy's unmanned surface ships visit Japan

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Two of the U.S. Navy's first autonomous ships arrived at the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet on Monday, a journey across the Pacific that marked several firsts and tested the ships' durability.

Daley

The USV Ranger and USV Mariner, both unmanned surface vessels homeported at Naval Base Ventura County, Calif., arrived at Yokosuka after several weeks of operations in the Indo-Pacific.

The ships over the past month participated in exercises like Large Scale Exercise 2023 — operating in conjunction with the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson and its strike group — while the Navy evaluated the new technology, according to Cmdr. Jeremiah Daley, head of Unmanned Surface Vessel Division One.

"During these operations, we seek to gather new insights into these emerging technologies to provide essential learning opportunities for our leadership to set a course for future unmanned projects and additional prototypes; and eventually full integration into fleet operations," Daley told media at Yokosuka on Thursday.

Alex Wilson/Stars and Stripes

The USV Ranger, an unmanned vessel, completed its first trip to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, with the USV Mariner.

The unmanned vessels' long journey also allowed the Navy to gather data from the ship's autonomous features, and on the durability of the ships' sensor suites, mechanical equipment and other systems, Daley said later aboard the Ranger.

Part of the Navy's Ghost Fleet Overlord program — formerly headed by the Defense Department's Strategic Capabilities Office and aimed at developing autonomous capabilities — the two ships can be crewed or operated remotely. When crewed, the ships typically have both sailors and civilian contractors aboard, according to division spokesman Ensign Pierson Hawkins.

The Ranger and Mariner are the Navy's first and third USVs, respectively, and represent different stages of experimentation. Built by Gulf Craft in Louisiana, the ships are essentially fast supply vessels that would carry cargo or personnel to offshore sites such as oil rigs.

The Strategic Capabilities Office designed Ranger, but Navy input into Mariner's construction allowed it to "integrate a few things into the vessel" and free up space for more technology and other capabilities, according to Daley.

He said he could not elaborate further on the two ships' equipment or capabilities other than that they were "similar."

Daley also couldn't comment on the specifics of past operations, such as their exercise performance the past month, but described the ships as "force multipliers."

Initially designed as "simply a truck" intended for transportation, the ships now specialize in surveillance and reconnaissance in underwater, surface and aerial environments, he said.

In one scenario, a guided-missile destroyer and two USVs could potentially replace three destroyers on a "tactical level," Daley said. The swap would represent a fraction of the cost and manpower needed to field three destroyers.

The ships could also strengthen defenses against weapons such as ballistic missiles, he said, and the Navy is exploring that capability.

Primarily, the ships would allow the Navy to expand its presence in the Pacific.

"Having smaller, capable platforms that can connect tactically" allows manned vessels to operate at farther distances from potential enemies while "keeping the tactical picture and tactical relevancy," he said.

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Bells sound at bases to remember fallen sailors

By Jennessa Davey
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Almost 200 sailors who died on duty throughout the Navy in the past year were honored Thursday morning at the homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet with flowers, kind words and support from fellow sailors and their families.

About 100 people attended the Navy Gold Star Program's Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members event at Kosano Park on the naval base.

The eighth annual Bells Across America, an hourlong ceremony, was held at U.S. bases worldwide. Yokosuka Naval Base, the headquarters of U.S. Naval Forces Japan, marked the event for the third time.

"It's important for us to be there for each other, especially as we remember the service and the sacrifice (of those sailors), but also the sacrifice that continues to be made by their families," base commander Capt. Les Sobol told Stars and Stripes at the event.

Jennessa Davey/Stars and Stripes

Sailors pause for prayer at the annual Navy Gold Star Program's Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members event at the Kosano Park on Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Friday.

The ceremony opened with a chaplain's prayer, followed by words from Sobol. Thirty volunteer sailors standing in formation in their summer white uniforms read the names of 196 fallen sailors from the past year.

Among the names was Petty Officer 2nd Class Miguel Cortes, an aviation ordnanceman at Yokosuka who died Aug. 24 at a local hospital after he collided on his motorcycle with another motorist outside a base gate.

Yuko Bivins, a Gold Star family member at the ceremony, remembered her late husband, Cmdr. Frank Bivins, who died of cancer in 2017, according to his obituary.

"It's been six years since my husband passed away, but coming back here, together with everyone, means a lot, and I can remember my husband and what he has done," she said.

After the reading of fallen sailors' names, Sobol, followed by the sailors, brought a flower to the front of the gathering. Then Gold Star family members came forward and finally anyone else at the ceremony. Taps and a prayer brought the ceremony to an end for another year as sailors and their families paid their respects to Gold Star families.

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S. Korean pilot OK after jet crash

By David Choi
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A South Korean air force KF-16 fighter crashed Thursday morning shortly after takeoff at a base in Seosan city, about 60 miles southwest of Seoul, according to an air force spokesman.

The KF-16 from the 20th Fighter Wing crashed just after at 8:20 a.m. inside Seosan Air Force Base as it departed for a routine flight, the spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone on Thursday. South Korean officials regularly speak to the media on the customary condition of anonymity.

The pilot, the only crew member, ejected from the aircraft and was checked out at a nearby hospital; no other injuries or damage to structures occurred, the spokesman said.

The KF-16 was not involved with a joint flight with the U.S. military at the time of the crash, he added.

The incident marks the second KF-16 crash in less than a year. On Nov. 20, a KF-16 pilot ejected from his aircraft before it crashed on a mountain near Wonju, about 50 miles southeast of Seoul, due to a maintenance error, air force officials said at the time.

KF-16s, a South Korean version of the U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon, regularly drill alongside U.S. fighters. The aircraft flew with South Korean F-35A Lightning IIs and U.S. Fighting Falcons near the peninsula's west coast for a "rapid and flexible response" drill on July 28.

MILITARY

US, Japanese troops train to fight in strategic areas

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

Thousands of American and Japanese soldiers have honed their multidomain skills across Japan this month, the commander of U.S. Army Pacific told reporters recently on the Japanese island of Hokkaido.

Orient Shield, which began Sept. 14 and ends Saturday, involves 1,200 U.S. soldiers training alongside 2,300 Japanese troops on Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands, and on its southern islands of Kyushu and Okinawa. The exercise gives soldiers practice in intelligence, information, cyber, electronic warfare and space operations.

"These exercises, and this training, and these rehearsals are critical to strengthening our alliance," Gen. Charles A. Flynn said Wednesday, according to the transcript of a press conference at Yausubetsu Training Area provided Thursday by U.S. Army Japan.

The 1st Multi-Domain Effects Battalion, based at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., which Flynn described as a "targeting brain," is taking part in the drills. The battalion falls under U.S. Army Pacific's 1st Multi-Domain Task Force and is building up to include 500 soldiers next year. It includes sub-units individually focused on all the fields rehearsed during Orient Shield.

The battalion mission is to help U.S. forces enter and operate in strategic parts of the Indo-Pacific, its commander, Lt. Col. Joseph Mroszczyk, told Stars and Stripes at Camp Zama, headquarters of U.S. Army Japan southeast of Tokyo, on Saturday.

China's "anti-access/area denial" strategy uses ballistic and cruise missiles along with air and maritime defense to deter U.S. military operations in the region, according to the Virginia-based Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance.

"China's A2/AD is concentrated around Taiwan and the South China Sea, putting U.S. military forces — such as a Carrier Strike Group — and installations in the region within range of precision-guided cruise and ballistic missiles," the alliance states on its website.

The Pentagon released photographs Wednesday of the Tennessee National Guard firing a High Mobility Artillery Missile System that day at Yausubetsu as part of Orient Shield.

Another Washington-based unit on Hokkaido — the 1st Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division — brought its armored vehicles equipped with mortars to Japan, unit commander Lt. Col. Tom Angstadt told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday.

"During the bilateral platoon live-fire the Japanese were firing 155 mm Howitzers and we were firing 120 mm and 60 mm mortars," he said.

Russia, with its own anti-access/area denial capabilities, according to the missile defense alliance, will view the Hokkaido training as a threat, James Brown, an international affairs expert at Temple University's Japan campus, said in an email Wednesday.

"The Russian government has recently been attempting to portray Japan as being back on the path to militarism and a potential threat to Russia," he said. "I'm not sure it is helpful for Japan and the US to provide fuel for this false narrative."

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Kalina Hyche/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers from 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment fire an AT4 anti-tank weapon during Orient Shield at Kamifurano Training Area, Japan, last week.

DOD to review 'don't ask, don't tell' cases

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Thousands of LGBTQ+ veterans kicked out of the military for their sexuality under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy could see their honor restored under an initiative that the Pentagon unveiled Wednesday.

"Over the past decade, we've tried to make it easier for service members discharged based on their sexual orientation to obtain corrective relief," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement. "In the coming weeks, we will be initiating new outreach campaigns to encourage all service members and veterans who believe they have suffered an error or injustice to seek correction to their military records."

"Don't ask, don't tell" was signed into law in 1993 by President Bill Clinton to allow gay men and lesbians to serve in the military as long as they did not make their sexual orientation public. Those who chose to disclose were discharged.

But the policy was repealed 12 years ago by Congress after forcing about 14,000 service members out of the military during the 17 years that it was in place from 1994 to 2011. Those troops were given other-than-honorable discharges, making them ineligible for many VA benefits, including health care, disability compensation, home loans and burial benefits.

More than 80% of 1,683 veterans who applied for discharge upgrades or records corrections have been granted, according to data provided on the Defense Department's website. Between 1980 and 1993, along with the operating years of "don't ask, don't tell" policy, nearly 33,000 service members received a discharge for "homosexual conduct."

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced two years ago that VA adjudicators, who decide whether to approve veterans' claims for benefits, would no longer consider veterans ineligible because of their discharges for sexual orientation or gender identity. The department would award a veteran his or her benefits unless the person's military record shows another reason that he or she doesn't qualify.

For the first time, the Pentagon will begin reviewing the military records of veterans discharged because of their sexual orientation but have not applied, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said. The Defense Department will start with those discharged during the time of "don't ask, don't tell." The department also will seek to collaborate with the VA and the National Archives, which might have digitized records to help with the review process.

The review has not started and when it will occur is still being determined.

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Vicenza Elementary only DODEA school to get Blue Ribbon status

By Jennifer H. Svan
Stars and Stripes

Vicenza Elementary School in Italy has been recognized as one of the nation's top-performing schools.

Vicenza was one of 353 National Blue Ribbon Schools this year, the Department of Education announced Wednesday, and it's the only Department of Defense Education Activity school on the list of award recipients.

This year is the first time Vicenza has received the honor.

Now in its 40th year, the program recognizes outstanding elementary, middle and high schools based on their overall high academic achievement or success in closing the achievement gap among diverse groups of students.

Vicenza was recognized as an "exemplary high-performing" school, according to DODEA, a category that examines performance on state assessments or national standardized tests.

In its application, Vicenza highlighted a math intervention program called Focused Math, which provides 30 to 45 minutes of additional, data-based instructional time once a week to students who need extra help.

The program has been critical in filling gaps left by remote math or missed class time during the pandemic, the application states.

School officials also mentioned a counseling program to support students.

"Young parents and frequent deployments make it essential that the school is a stable, safe place for children," the Vicenza application said.

At the time it was filed, the school had 570 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade, with a 91% daily attendance rate in the 2021-22 school year.

Vicenza is the only overseas school among this year's winners, which encompassed 46 states and the District of Columbia. California had the most, with 33.

Among public schools, 74% of blue ribbon winners are elementary schools this year. The 2023 recipients are eligible to reapply in five years.

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Elmo and friends star in new 'Sesame Street' videos geared toward aiding military families

Stars and Stripes

Beloved "Sesame Street" characters Elmo, Abby Cadabby and others are featured in new videos aimed at helping military families feel more connected to one another and their community.

Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind "Sesame Street," is launching the videos, which focus on themes such as how to turn a routine errand into special family time, how important community support is for single parents and how making a small effort to participate in community events can be meaningful.

"Feeling isolated can happen to anyone, but this is especially true for our military families," Jeanette Betancourt, a Sesame Workshop executive, said in a statement Thursday. "We're proud to support our military and their families with new resources in the times they need us most."

The videos are free and available in English and Spanish at sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy makes case for support in Washington

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a whirlwind return visit to Washington on Thursday to shore up U.S. support for Ukraine, delivering an upbeat message on the war's progress while facing new questions about the flow of American dollars that for 19 months has helped keep his troops in the fight against Russian forces.

Zelenskyy, in long-sleeve olive drab, came to the Capitol with a firm message in private talks with Republican and Democratic leaders. The Ukrainians have a solid war plan, and "they are winning," lawmakers quoted him as assuring them, at a time that the world is watching Western support for Kyiv.

He was also planning to speak with military leaders at the Pentagon and was to meet with President Joe Biden at the White House.

House Republican leaders had promised tough questions for Zelenskyy on his plans for winning Ukraine's counteroffensive against invading Russian forces, as the war moves closer to the two-year mark and marks months without major breakthroughs in Russia's heavily mined lines.

Zelenskyy "conceded that it's tough, very tough to overcome entrenched defenses," Independent Sen. Angus King said. "They believe they will make slow but steady progress, but it's not going to be quick."

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who faces tough opposition on support for Ukraine among followers aligned with former President Donald Trump, notably chose not to join in greeting the Ukrainian president before the cameras. That left House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries to escort Zelenskyy into the Capitol.

But Republican Rep. Mike Turner, the chairman of the House Select Intelligence Committee, said Zelenskyy in his meeting with House lawmakers "gave us details on the offensive that were very positive and his long-term goals and objectives. People in the room appreciated and supported it."

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Foreign Affairs Chairman Michael McCaul played down Republican dissent about continuing to support Ukraine with money and arms, saying, "The majority of the majority support this."

But McCaul stressed lawmakers needed confidence that there was a clear strategy for victory.

"War of attrition is not going to win this," McCaul said. "That's what Putin wants," he said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin. "He wants to break the will of the American people and the Europeans."

CARLOS BONGIOANNI/Stars and Stripes

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy walks with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, right, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell as they head to the Senate Chamber on Thursday.

It is Zelenskyy's second visit to Washington since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and comes as Biden's request to Congress for an additional $24 billion for Ukraine's military and humanitarian needs is hanging in the balance.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby called the Ukrainian president "our best messenger" in persuading U.S. lawmakers to keep vital U.S. money and weapons coming.

"It's really important for members of Congress to be able to hear directly from the president about what he's facing in this counteroffensive," Kirby told reporters Wednesday, "and how he's achieving his goals, and what he needs to continue to achieve those goals."

Zelenskyy's visit comes with U.S. and world government leaders watching as Ukrainian forces struggle to take back territory that Russia gained over the past year. Their progress in the next month or so before the rains come and the ground turns to mud could be critical to rousing additional global support over the winter. Putin, who believes he can outlast allied backing for Kyiv, will be ready to capitalize if he sees Ukraine is running low on air defense or other weapons.

Administration officials were set to announce another $325 million Thursday in what's known as presidential drawdown assistance for Ukraine. The package will include dual-purpose improved conventional munitions, or cluster munitions, and ammunition for HIMARS.

Since the start of the war, most members of Congress supported approving four rounds of aid to Ukraine, totaling about $113 billion, viewing defense of the country and its democracy as an imperative, especially when it comes to containing Putin. Some of that money went toward replenishing U.S. military equipment sent to the front lines.

Russia strikes cities from east to west

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian missiles and artillery pounded cities across Ukraine early Thursday, sparking fires, killing at least three people and trapping others under the rubble of destroyed buildings, authorities said, as Poland said it would stop providing weapons to its ally amid a trade dispute.

The early-morning wave of missile strikes on what's known as the International Day of Peace was Russia's largest in over a month, and came as world leaders meet at United Nations General Assembly in New York. In a speech there, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denounced Russia as "a terrorist state."

Air raid sirens sounded repeatedly across Ukraine, as Russia launched dozens of missiles and, near the front lines, likely used shorter-range artillery to pound the southern city of Kherson. Three people were killed in Kherson Thursday and at least four injured after a residential building was hit, the Defense Ministry said on social media.

Seven people were injured in Kyiv, including a 9-year-old girl, Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said, as missile strikes blew out windows in buildings and cars and left fires burning around crumpled metal wreckage.

The Ukrainian Air Force said it had intercepted 36 of 43 cruise missiles launched deep into Ukraine. Kharkiv, closer to the front lines, was struck with S-300 missiles.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said it targeted Ukrainian arms factories and radio-technical intelligence centers with precision-guided missiles and drones. It said, without providing details, that "the strike achieved the objectives and all targets were hit." It was not possible to confirm that claim.

At least six strikes damaged civilian infrastructure in the Slobidskyi district of Kharkiv, said regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. The city's mayor added that two people had been hospitalized.

At least 10 people were injured and at least one person was rescued from under rubble in Cherkasy, in central Ukraine, according to Ihor Klymenko, minister of internal affairs of Ukraine. Up to 23 people may still be buried under rubble, said Cherkasy regional Governor Ihor Taburets. Rescue services were working to clear the debris.

An industrial zone was hit in the western region of Lviv, damaging buildings and starting a fire, but no information on casualties was immediately available, Klymenko added.

Regional Gov. Vitalii Koval reported strikes in the city of Rivne in the northwest region of the same name, without immediately providing details.

Ukrainian armed forces said they attacked a military airport near the city of Saka in Russian-annexed Crimea.

Russia said 22 drones were taken down overnight by air defense systems, 19 above Crimea and three others in the Kursk, Belgorod and Oryol regions near Ukraine.

The defense ministry did not say whether there were any casualties.

Poland stops sending its weapons to Ukraine

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Poland will no longer supply weapons to Ukraine, saying that it needs to focus more on arming itself against potential Russian aggression.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Wednesday on Polish television that the decision coincided with a diplomatic dispute between Warsaw and Kyiv over grain imports.

"We are no longer transferring weapons to Ukraine because we are now arming Poland with more modern weapons," Morawiecki said.

Poland's decision to halt weapon shipments does not appear to affect the country's role as the primary distribution network for getting U.S. and other allied weaponry into Ukraine.

Since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. has moved scores of troops into southeastern Poland to facilitate the flow of arms into the war-torn country.

But the decision, if it holds, would be a dramatic turn of events, considering that Poland has been a primary weapons supplier to Ukraine and one of its staunchest advocates in NATO.

The grain dispute highlights the economic strain Russia's war on Ukraine is having on neighboring states and raises concerns about the durability of military support for Kyiv.

It stems from the closure of Black Sea grain shipment corridors because of threats from Russia. That has forced Ukraine to send exports over land, which in turn has flooded Europe with excess grain.

The surplus has angered farmers in Poland, where the ruling Law and Justice Party government is up for reelection next month. The party's base is strong in rural areas.

"Ukrainian authorities do not understand the degree to which Poland's farming industry has been destabilized. We are protecting Polish farmers," Morawiecki told Polsat News television.

Despite the diplomatic turmoil between Warsaw and Kyiv, allies this week restated that they are committed to Ukraine for the long haul.

On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told world military leaders during a meeting at Ramstein Air Base that partners supporting Ukraine must "continue to dig deep" to arm the country.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

Ukrainian brigade's battle 'through hell'

Unit fights to reclaim village near Bakhmut

BY MSTYSLAV CHERNOV AND LORI HINNANT
Associated Press

ANDRIIVKA, Ukraine — The Russian bullet struck the sergeant just above the left ear. The leader of the Ukrainian platoon was down. Headquarters radioed a battlefield promotion to the private who had called him "brother" — a man known as Courier.

Courier knew the platoon's orders were to move forward through the forest, on the road to Bakhmut. He hesitated for 30 seconds near his mortally wounded commander. Maybe a minute. Then he decided: There would be no turning back. "Forward!" he howled.

He fired toward a trench just ahead until he was sure the Russians inside would never shoot again. Then the men stumbled through the charred spindles of trees toward the village of Andriivka — the objective of the 3rd Assault Brigade since the start of Ukraine's counteroffensive this summer, about 6 miles south of the city of Bakhmut.

The sergeant, Gagarin, and other injured soldiers could only be evacuated after dark, because the Russians were also hunting downed Ukrainians. Days later, as he prepared for Gagarin's funeral, Courier predicted his own future, his pale eyes unfocused.

"This forest is taking our friends away, and this is the worst," he said. "And when I think about how far we still need to move forward ... most likely someday I will be the one to remain lying in the forest, and my friends will just go forward."

This stretch of dead forest — a couple dozen trees wide and a mile long — toward the equally dead village of Andriivka is one of countless like it on the road to Russian-controlled Bakhmut, which has now taken on huge symbolic significance in the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The Associated Press spent two weeks with the brigade for an intimate glimpse into the speed, direction and cost of the counteroffensive, through scenes witnessed in the forest and at rest, in helmet camera footage and drone video.

A lot rides on their progress. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is making his country's case to Washington and to the world this week for more money and more weapons, and must persuade his audience that the counteroffensive is working. Congress is currently weighing President Joe Biden's request to provide as much as $24 billion more in military and humanitarian aid.

UKRAINIAN 3RD ASSAULT BRIGADE/AP

A Ukrainian service member fires a machine gun toward Russian positions near Andriivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Aug. 27.

In an interview with "60 Minutes," Zelenskyy acknowledged the counteroffensive was slow, but added, "It is important that we are moving forward every day and liberating territory." A study earlier this month by the Royal United Service Institute, a London-based think-tank, found that Ukrainian forces are averaging 700-1,200 meters of progress every five days. That gives Russian forces time to dig in and especially to mine territory as they pull back.

The 3rd Assault Brigade, composed entirely of volunteers and considered one of Ukraine's best and most experienced corps, has been fighting almost nonstop in the east since January. The AP is identifying the men by their callsigns, which is both how they identify each other and a military requirement to report in-depth on the unit.

Bakhmut fell to Russia in May, largely due to waves of attacks from mercenary Wagner fighters, including prison conscripts thought to have died by the hundreds. Ukraine has been trying to reclaim it ever since, hoping to deal a major psychological blow to Russia.

But the soldiers sent to carry out the task are relying on largely Soviet-era armored vehicles and older weapons. In the past month, the 3rd Assault Brigade had only been able to move a mile, crossing mines and booby-trapped trenches and dodging artillery, drone-launched grenades and Russian forces within shouting distance.

Andriivka was their goal, as important as any strip of land in Ukraine. And on Sept. 6, the day Courier's commander died, he and his men took over a trash-strewn trench in the middle of the forest and held it for four full days. On either side of them were mined fields that once grew wheat and now sprout only craters.

During moments of rest, he leafed through a diary, written longhand by a Russian soldier: "I've been at war for four weeks already and I miss my mom," Courier read.

Courier asked one of the Russian prisoners who surrendered what he knew about the diary. The Russian replied, "I don't know. I just got here today."

Maybe the author was the Russian whose body Courier propped up to protect himself from incoming fire. Or maybe he was one of the Russians who had shot Gagarin and been killed in turn a few minutes later. Courier didn't know.

But by then, Gagarin was dead. And the forest kept claiming others.

Shepherd, who was wounded in the leg in the morning and had to wait hours for evacuation from the battlefield, was a mask of pain. Chapa too. A grenade struck Spaniard's helmet, and the resulting head injury would leave him helpless. Gary had no obvious injuries but was so shell-shocked he could barely make it through a conversation.

Courier would go to western Ukraine and represent the platoon at Gagarin's funeral. Gagarin, ironically named for the Russian cosmonaut who was the first human in space, was buried in his hometown of Polonne, a 550-mile drive from the battlefield.

As military pallbearers walked uphill toward the churchyard, residents along the way stopped and knelt to honor the dead along flower-lined roads. One of the men carrying the casket remarked on the view from the village cemetery.

"I've done this 56 times," he said grimly. Social media feeds from the brigade show dozens of funeral announcements since the counteroffensive began.

Gagarin's mother sought out Courier, who was among the last to see her son alive. But he finds it hard to talk to civilians these days.

"I feel like there is a gap between civilians and us now," he said. "When the war is over, I will probably just leave to fight elsewhere."

For Courier, war is complicated. He says he enjoys the dopamine rush, when he leaves the "horrible grinder," comes back to headquarters and jumps down from the armored vehicle.

"You look at the sky and you look around, and you understand that you're alive and nothing can kill you," he said. "This is the moment. This is a feeling you cannot get anywhere else in life."

And yet he did not want to return to the strip of forest leading to Andriivka. His commanders ordered him to take 10 days' leave, a break for a fighter whose anguish they sensed despite his outward calm. He would take the time to go fishing and clear his head.

"Unfortunately, I'm only able to leave after going through hell," he said bitterly.

On the day of the funeral, Sept. 13, any man whole enough to fight was in the forest, including another sergeant in the platoon, Fedya. On Sept. 5, Fedya had been lightly wounded by a cluster munition, and the injury may have saved his life. Gagarin took his place in the assault, and that was the day he died.

The last push started on Sept. 14. Men from other depleted units from the 3rd Assault Brigade joined in for the usual three- to four-day stint on the battlefield. After two months of inching their way forward through the stand of ash trees, maybe they would finally break through the woods to Andriivka.

"How many more lives do we need to give?" Fedya asked. "How many more forests are there?"

Fedya sees war as something to be perfected through a combination of study and experience. A 24-year-old with a smooth and unlined face, he wears his authority lightly, introspective but with little time or energy to spare on self-doubt or guilt. He dreams of war, and when he wakes, it is there waiting for him to move forward.

"War is a science, and you have to get better at it and study. If you don't, you have no chance of survival," said Fedya. "The smarter you are, the more qualified you are, the better your chances of coming back alive."

On Sept. 14, they finally did it — more than three months after receiving the order to reclaim Andriivka. They broke through the shelling and the drone-launched grenades, firing at Russian forces who fled in front of them.

The day was a blur. The Ukrainians pummeled the tiny village with artillery and then threw a smokescreen into its main street. Russian artillery hit retreating and surrendering Russian soldiers, whose bodies lay face down or curled on their sides. The last hundred meters was a mix of blood, metal, trash, spent cartridges and shredded armor.

The Ukrainians went house to house, taking Russian prisoners and killing those who fought back. Even after the last of the Russian forces were expelled, Andriivka came under constant shelling, with buzzing drones on both sides.

Fedya warned his men to shoot down the ones that hovered: They were the ones that dropped grenades.

That night, Fedya dreamed he was cowering behind a shrapnel-pierced truck on the battlefield and was hit by artillery fire.

The next morning, Sept. 16, Fedya carried a Ukrainian flag to hoist in the reclaimed village of Andriivka.

It was time to retrieve the bodies. There was the body of 19-year-old Riley, killed on the first day he ever fought. There was Zima. There were others, placed carefully into bags and carried back through the forest. The men left dozens of Russian bodies for later.

Andriivka was now nothing but a pile of bricks and scorched trees with the smell of death. But it was in Ukrainian hands, and Fedya was ready to hand control to the next brigade to reclaim the next forest. He huddled in one of the few basements left and tried to explain to the incoming commander why the fight for this broken town was worth it.

"Look at these fields, this forest. Everything grows again," he said. "The cities that we reclaim, they will be rebuilt. ... We will clear out all that's left of the Soviet Union. ... The war could be the best thing to happen, in the sense that everything can start fresh."

Ukrainian officials said this month's battles for the road to Bakhmut may have taken as many as three Russian brigades out of combat, as cited in an assessment Tuesday by the Institute for the Study of War. But Fedya was ready to leave.

"I'm tired of this forest. I want to go home. I want to wash and sleep," he said with a curse. "Until morning. And in the morning, I'll come back."

NATION

Test vote fails after McCarthy gives in on cuts

By Stephen Groves and Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy emerged with a spending cut plan to avert a looming federal government shutdown by appeasing his hard-right flank, only to see it quickly collapse Thursday in a crushing defeat, the next steps uncertain.

His latest attempt to move ahead with a traditionally popular defense funding bill as a first step toward keeping the government running was shattered by a core group of Republican colleagues who refused to vote with the increasingly endangered speaker.

A test vote to advance the bill failed, 212-216, as a handful of Republicans joined with Democrats to stop it. It was the third time that McCarthy, R-Calif., has been stymied, and once again the House came to a sudden standstill.

The open revolt was further evidence that McCarthy's strategy of repeatedly giving in to the conservatives is seemingly only emboldening them. A handful of GOP lawmakers, urged on by Donald Trump, the party's early frontrunner for the 2024 presidential nomination, has run roughshod over their own House majority.

Trump urged the conservatives to hold the line against the higher funding levels McCarthy had agreed to with President Joe Biden earlier this year and to end the federal criminal indictments against him.

"This is also the last chance to defund these political prosecutions against me and other Patriots," Trump wrote on social media. "They failed on the debt limit, but they must not fail now. Use the power of the purse and defend the Country!"

A federal shutdown looms Sept. 30, the end of the current budget year, if Congress cannot pass the bills needed to fund the government or approve a short-term measure to keep Washington running while negotiations continue.

"We need the extreme MAGA Republicans to get their act together," said House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, referring to Trump's campaign slogan.

"End the civil war," Jeffries urged the Republicans. "Get your act together."

The White House and Democrats, along with some Republicans, warn that a shutdown would be devastating for people who rely on their government for everyday services and would undermine America's standing in the world.

Moving forward with the defense bill was supposed to be a way for McCarthy to build goodwill among the GOP House majority as he tries to pass a more temporary bill just to keep the government open.

Many on the right flank want to see progress on the 12 individual appropriations bills that would fund the various federal departments at the lower levels these lawmakers are demanding before they give their votes for any stopgap measure.

Republicans appeared on track, in a tight roll call, to advancing the measure Thursday. Then the Democrats who had not yet voted began rushing into the chamber.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and fellow Democrats yelled out to hold open the vote. She was a "no." A few others came in and tipped the tally toward defeat.

Carlos Osorio / AP

United Auto Workers march outside the Stellantis North American Headquarters, on Wednesday, in Auburn Hills, Mich.

Jeep maker Stellantis makes new offer amid likely strike expansion

Assoicated Press

General Motors and Stellantis announced fresh layoffs Wednesday that they blamed on damage from the United Auto Workers strike, and the labor standoff grew more tense just two days before the union was expected to call for new walkouts.

Stellantis provided a glimmer of hope for a breakthrough by giving the union a new contract proposal. However, a company spokeswoman said the offer primarily covered non-economic issues.

It was not clear whether the Stellantis offer would satisfy union President Shawn Fain, who vows to announce new strike targets on Friday unless there is "serious progress" toward agreements with GM, Stellantis and Ford.

So far UAW workers are striking at just three factories, one for each company. It's a novel approach for the union, which in the past has focused negotiations on one company and limited a 2019 strike to GM. Fain says his approach will keep the companies guessing about UAW's next move.

"He is trying to distinguish himself from the old leadership of the UAW," said Harry Katz, a professor of collective bargaining at Cornell University. "He's different, he's tough, and he's trying to put pressure on the companies."

The three-plant strike has so far had limited impact on the automakers — probably by design, longtime industry observers say.

"The strategy is to incrementally apply pressure on the companies to encourage them to come to the table," said Marick Masters, a management professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. "He is negotiating with the three companies simultaneously with the expectation that the one that is most vulnerable and will give them the best deal will surface from that strategy."

However, if there is little sign of progress in the talks by Friday, Fain could take a more aggressive tack, "and they are going to strike where it hurts," said Daniel Ives, an analyst at Wedbush Securities. "For Ford, on the pickups — disrupting (production of) F-150s, and strategically striking GM and Stellantis in a way that could substantially impair 30% to 40% of the industry's production."

Strikes that target production of popular models like the F-150 or the Dodge Ram would inflict a lot of pain on the carmakers, but the UAW could pack the same punch if it walks out of key engine and transmission plants.

Another clue of possible strike targets might be found in locations where UAW locals have announced they will hold rallies and practice picketing in the coming days. Those include a Ford plant in Louisville, Ky., a GM plant in Bedford, Ind., and a GM truck plant in Arlington, Texas.

"If Friday comes and there is no major progress" at the bargaining table, "this will get a lot nastier," Ives said.

The layoffs that GM and Stellantis announced Wednesday will be in Kansas, Ohio and Indiana.

Mom of boy who shot teacher may be jailed over failed drug tests

Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The mother of a 6-year-old who shot his teacher in Virginia could be jailed Thursday for failing drug tests while awaiting sentencing on federal weapons charges that she used marijuana while possessing a firearm.

A bond revocation hearing is set in federal court in Newport News for Deja Taylor. Her son used her gun to shoot Abby Zwerner in her classroom in January. The first-grade teacher was seriously wounded and had multiple surgeries.

Taylor

Taylor pleaded guilty in June to using marijuana while possessing a firearm. Authorities say she also lied about her drug use on a federal background check form when she bought the gun that her son brought to school.

A judge had set an October sentencing date and released Taylor on bond under the conditions that she submit to drug tests and receive addiction treatment. But Taylor has twice tested positive for marijuana and once for cocaine, federal prosecutors wrote in a filing with the court this month. She also missed two drug tests and two drug treatment sessions, they said.

"These violations are serious and call into question the defendant's danger to the community, respect for the law and this Court's Orders," Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lisa McKeel and Peter Osyf wrote.

James Ellenson, an attorney for Taylor, said his client doesn't dispute the prosecutors' allegations. But he argued against incarceration in a court filing, stating that Taylor has made "substantial positive developments."

She's taken four more drug tests since Aug. 25, Ellenson said. And while they've been positive for marijuana, "the levels are decreasing and show that Ms. Taylor is abstaining from this drug," Ellenson wrote.

He added that the one positive result for cocaine "was an aberration and likely caused from her use of marijuana unknowingly laced with cocaine."

"Ms. Taylor freely admits that she has had and still faces a serious substance abuse challenge," Ellenson wrote. "Her addiction is clearly a disease — nonetheless, revocation and incarceration are not the cures. ... A jail cell will only exacerbate the deep issues that she is facing."

NATION

White House to create federal office of gun violence prevention

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is creating the first-ever federal office of gun violence prevention, according to two people familiar with the plans.

The office will coordinate efforts across the federal government and will offer help and guidance to states struggling with increasing gun violence, while taking the lead on implementation of the bipartisan gun legislation signed into law last year. Biden tentatively plans to announce the new effort with an event Friday at the White House, said the people, who had direct knowledge of the plans and who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The office fulfills a key demand of gun safety activists who banded together as a coalition to endorse Biden for president in 2024, and is an effort by the White House to keep the issue front-and-center as the president pushes for a ban on so-called "assault weapons" and urges Congress to act.

"The creation of an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in the White House will mark a turning point in how our federal government responds to an epidemic that plagues every state and every community in America," said Kris Brown, president of the gun safety group Brady, which has advocated for the office since 2020.

"Tackling this epidemic will take a whole-of-government approach, and this new office would ensure the executive branch is focused and coordinated on proven solutions that will save lives."

Greg Jackson, the executive director of the Community Justice Action Fund, and Everytown for Gun Safety's Rob Wilcox are expected to hold roles in the newly created office, which White House staff secretary Stef Feldman will oversee, the people said.

"There are few people who care more about the work of gun violence prevention than President Biden," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who has drafted legislation with Rep. Maxwell Frost, D-Fla., that would create such an office. "Establishing a White House office dedicated to this fight will save thousands of lives and strengthen the federal government's implementation of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act."

Firearms are the No. 1 killer of children in the U.S., and so far this year 220 children younger than 11 have died by guns and 1,049 between the ages of 12 and 17 have died. As of 2020, the firearm mortality rate in the U.S. for those under age 19 is 5.6 per 100,000. The next comparable is Canada, with 0.08 deaths per 100,000.

But Republican support for gun restrictions is slipping a year after Congress passed the most comprehensive firearms control legislation in decades with bipartisan support, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Most Democrats, 92%, want gun laws made stronger, in line with their views in a UChicago Harris/AP-NORC poll conducted in July 2022. But Republican desire for more expansive legislation has dropped to 32% from 49% last summer and independents' support has also declined slightly to 61% from 72%.

US unemployment benefits applications fall by 20,000

Associated Press

U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell to their lowest level in eight months last week as the labor market continues to show strength in the face of elevated interest rates.

U.S. applications for jobless claims fell by 20,000 to 201,000 for the week ending Sept. 16, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's the lowest figure since the last week of January.

Jobless claim applications are seen as representative of the number of layoffs in a given week.

The four-week moving average of claims, a less volatile measure, fell by 7,750 to 217,000.

Though the Federal Reserve opted to leave its benchmark borrowing rate alone this week, it is well into the second year of its battle to stamp out four-decade high inflation. The whopping 11 interest rate hikes since March of last year have helped to curb price growth, but the U.S. economy and labor market have held up better than most expected.

Earlier this month, the government reported that U.S. employers added a healthy 187,000 jobs in August. Though the unemployment rate ticked up to 3.8%, it's still low by historical measures.

U.S. businesses have been adding an average of about 236,000 jobs per month this year, down from the pandemic surge of the previous two years, but still a strong number.

Biden administration announces $600M to produce COVID tests

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration announced Wednesday that it is providing $600 million in funding to produce new at-home COVID-19 tests and is restarting a website allowing Americans to again order up to four free tests per household — aiming to prevent possible shortages during a rise in coronavirus cases that has typically come during colder months.

The Department of Health and Human Services says orders can be placed at COVIDTests.gov starting Sept. 25, and that no-cost tests will be delivered for free by the United States Postal Service.

Twelve manufacturers that employ hundreds of people in seven states from California to Maryland have been awarded funding and will produce 200 million over-the-counter tests to replenish federal stockpiles for government use, in addition to producing enough tests to meet demand for tests ordered online, the department said.

The new effort is meant to guard against supply chain issues that sparked some shortages of at-home COVID tests made overseas during past surges in coronavirus cases. But it also illustrates the political balance President Joe Biden is trying to strike as he seeks reelection next year between trumpeting his administration having led the country through the worst of the pandemic while also trying to better prepare for the continued effects of a virus that persists.

Dawn O'Connell, assistant secretary for preparedness and response at HHS, said that though some portions of the public may be tired of the pandemic and its implications, at home-testing remains a key way to slow the spread of new cases.

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WORLD

PHOTOS BY AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Hundreds of thousands are expected at The Tokyo Game Show 2023, where rows of game players tried out KOEI's Fate Samuri Remnant at the Makuhari Messe convention center in Chiba on Friday.

Tokyo brings its A game

Publishers and developers unveil upcoming titles

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

CHIBA, Japan — The much-anticipated Tokyo Game Show 2023 kicked off Thursday, back in full force after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, more than 2,600 booths are showcasing over 2,200 individual titles; that's more than 800 booths and 400 games than premiered at last year's event.

Streamers, content creators and industry professionals only were admitted to the Makuhari Messe convention center in Chiba for business Thursday and Friday. Doors open Saturday and Sunday for the public.

This show is the first in four years that the event organizers had the entire event center, according to an email from game show management on Thursday.

The four-day Tokyo Game Show is an annual event where video game developers and publishers show off their upcoming titles and give attendees an opportunity to play the games well before the official release.

Booths set up by larger studios typically have life-size replicas, cosplayers and other items from their games, which helps draw the attention of the thousands streaming through the convention center.

Visitors photograph an Endless Dungeon cosplayer at the Sega booth at The Tokyo Game show in Chiba.

This year, some of the biggest booths were for Square Enix, the developer behind the Final Fantasy franchise; Capcom, which developed the Monster Hunter franchise; and Konami, which pumped up attention for its Metal Gear Solid: Master Collection that releases in October.

In addition to visiting the show's many booths, eventgoers can sit in on various conferences where representatives for industry giants like Valve, Microsoft and Sony announce games and discuss the industry.

For those that can't attend in person, the game show has a virtual reality version that is accessible through the Tokyo Game Show website.

The Tokyo Game Show has been an annual event since 1996 and has only grown in scale since its inception.

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Talks held; Azerbaijan claims entire rule of region

Associated Press

Representatives from Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijan government met for talks Thursday to discuss the future of the breakaway region that Azerbaijan claims to fully control following a military offensive this week.

Azerbaijan's state news agency said the talks had ended but provided no details on whether an agreement was reached. Nagorno-Karabakh authorities and the news agency earlier said the talks between regional leaders and Azerbaijan's government would focus on Nagorno-Karabakh's "reintegration" into Azerbaijan.

The talks in the Azerbaijani city of Yevlakh came after local Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh agreed to lay down their weapons following an outbreak of fighting this week in the decadeslong separatist conflict. Authorities in the ethnic Armenian region that has run its affairs without international recognition since fighting broke out in the early 1990s declared Wednesday that local self-defense forces will disarm and disband under a Russia-mediated cease-fire.

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev trumpeted victory in a televised address, saying his country's military had restored its sovereignty in Nagorno-Karabakh.

India halts visa services in Canada

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — India's visa processing center in Canada suspended services Thursday as a rift widened between the countries after Canada's leader said India may have been involved in the killing of a Canadian citizen.

Ties between Ottawa and New Delhi, two key strategic partners on security and trade, have plunged to their lowest point in years after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau this week said there were "credible allegations" of Indian involvement in the assassination of a Sikh separatist leader on its soil.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a 45-year-old Canadian citizen who had been wanted by India for years, was gunned down in June outside the temple he led in Surrey, outside Vancouver.

The bombshell allegation from Trudeau set off a diplomatic tit-for-tat as both countries expelled a diplomat each from their consulates. India denied the claim and called it absurd.

WEEKEND

Leon Russell getting his due

Music, Pages 28-29

Films worth falling for

Autumn brings histories, mysteries and a double dose of Roald Dahl

Movies, Pages 15-17

iStock

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Latest Apple iPhones finally use USB-C

How the port change from the Lightning connector may impact users of the company's newest smartphone models

BY GEOFFREY A. FOWLER
The Washington Post

The iPhone is changing charging cables again. I hear your groan. Switching is going to be annoying — but ultimately could make our lives better. Really.

With the iPhone 15, Apple is ditching the stripey Lightning connector we've used since 2012. Instead, it uses a shiny connector called USB-C, which you might already know from laptops, tablets or most Android phones.

That means if you buy the latest iPhone, you're going to end up replacing all the spare charging cables strewn around your home, car and office. Also annoying: You may need new headphones, if yours aren't wireless — or Apple's new $29 adapter dongle if you want to keep using what you already own.

Don't want to deal with this right now? There's no rush: Beyond the port change, there are not many standout features in the iPhone 15 worth an upgrade, and older iPhones will keep on charging with your existing cables for a long time. In a few years, perhaps wireless charging will be so common that you can skip this mess altogether.

This is the third cable switch in the life of the iPhone, not counting when it also ditched the headphone jack in 2016. In the end, what annoys me the most is that Apple took so long to adopt for the iPhone the cable used by the rest of the gadget world.

USB-C is the mini but mighty champion of connectors. It doesn't matter which way you stick it in: There's no "up" or "down" on either end. USB-C cables can be as cheap as chips. And depending on your cable, your iPhone also could transfer data more quickly, too.

The biggest benefit is that you should end up with fewer cables to worry about. You'll be able to charge your iPhone from the same cable as billions of other phones, laptops and tablets out there. You could make friends with an Android person and borrow the person's cable.

Picture yourself going on vacation and packing just one charging cable. You can just plug your iPhone into your USB-C laptop charger, and it should juice up just fine. (But this won't work if you also have an Apple Watch, which uses another proprietary cable.)

This is better for the environment, too, because we'll end up buying fewer single-purpose cables. The European Commission estimates that a common charger will save 11,000 tons of e-waste annually in Europe alone.

But there are aspects of making the switch that could be confusing or even expensive. For one: Not all USB-C cables are created equal.

I've been researching the ins and outs of USB (pardon the pun), and I answer some of the biggest questions:

MONICA RODMAN/The Washington Post

Like the Lightning cable, left, a USB-C cable has no "up" or "down" side.

Why is the iPhone switching to USB-C?

Apple pitched the shift as a way to join a "universally accepted standard." But it actually had no choice: The European Union passed a law requiring common plugs by 2024 to reduce e-waste and make life easier for consumers.

The rest of the smartphone world switched to the USB-C plug around 2016. What took Apple so long to give up its proprietary Lightning cable for the iPhone? Apple has actually already switched over its laptops and iPads to USB-C. But the company is notorious about not doing anything that might make it easier for people to switch to Android phones, like how it also won't make iMessage work across operating systems. Apple in the past even criticized the idea of moving away from Lightning for generating too much e-waste, and setting a dangerous precedent by allowing lawmakers to make product design decisions. But now the company's all in on the change.

Is there just one kind of USB-C cable?

No. USB-C is just a standardized plug and port shape. The cables might look the same but can have very different capabilities — and unfortunately it can be hard to tell them apart.

All USB-C cables support charging. But some carry as much as 240 watts of power — meaning they could charge devices much faster than cables that carry less power.

The cables also vary wildly in how fast they transfer data. Some USB-C cables can do it at 80 gigabits per second, or Gbps, allowing them to connect computers to high-resolution monitors.

The cable that comes in the box for a device is usually capable of charging it at the maximum possible rate. So hold onto that one, and maybe even label it.

What cables are included with iPhone 15?

Inside the box of the iPhone 15 and 15 Pro, you'll get a 1-meter cable with a USB-C connector on both ends that's capable of the same (relatively slow) data-transfer speed as a Lightning cable (480 Mbps). Apple is also selling its cable for $19.

There is no charging brick. There's no adapter for your older cables. Nor are there any USB-C headphones.

If you want to take advantage of the faster data-transfer rates that the iPhone 15 Pro is capable of, you'll need to buy a separate USB-C cable capable of 10 Gbps transfers (also known as a USB 3 cable).

How do I choose the right USB-C cable?

Prices for USB-C cables can vary widely — from under $10 to as much as $160. You don't need to splash out on a cable with super-fast data transfers if you're only ever going to plug it into the iPhone charger.

But you also want a cable that's not going to overheat or catch fire, so I recommend sticking with a reputable brand like Anker, Cable Matters and Monoprice or one that says it's been certified by a trade group called the USB Implementers Forum, or USB-IF. (It tells me it tests them for being plugged and unplugged 10,000 times.)

How can you know the capability of a USB-C cable? Look near the plug part of the cable for a little swoopy logo with two numbers: The one on top is how fast it can transfer data, and the one on the bottom is how much power it can carry.

Not all cables include this label, but usually, they'll at least list the power and speed specifications on their box or website.

For most iPhone users, around 20 watts of power is just fine — that's what a standard Apple charging brick puts out. As for data transfer, these days, most people transfer data off their iPhone via Wi-Fi, so the speed isn't really critical.

What should I do with old Lightning cables?

Don't throw out all your cables just yet if you have old AirPods or an Apple Magic Mouse or keyboard. They still charge via the Lightning cable.

But if you're really done with Lightning, give the cables to a friend who has an older iPhone, or take them to an e-waste recycler. Check Call2Recycle to find one.

Your old charging bricks may be worth holding onto, though. You can buy cables with the tiny USB-C plug on one end and the older, wide USB-A plug on the other. Just know that smaller bricks like the ones Apple used to include with iPhones put out less power — meaning you'll charge more slowly.

Soundcore's Space One over-ear headphones offer company's best noise cancellation at affordable price

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Soundcore, the premium audio brand of Anker Innovations, has launched the Space One over-ear headphones. The headset includes what Soundcore says is its best noise cancellation to date. What it doesn't have is a hefty price tag.

After using the Space One for a few days, I was sold, and it even made me wonder why anyone would pay three or four times the cost of these ($99.99).

Friends and family who hear my eclectic playlist often make fun of me, and it shined right out of the gate when I turned on my Space One review unit. I even mentioned to an Anker representative how Glen Campbell never sounded so good (only because that's the first artist I heard on the '70s station).

Then, switching to some classic rock, the Space One gave me the bass sound I crave. The headphones performed flawlessly with any genre I chose.

The Space One press notes describe the newly upgraded noise canceling structure as having the ability to block more irritating, distracting mid- to high-frequency voices, such as mundane work calls and crying babies. The noise canceling adapted well to the various environments I was in. Soundcore added that the headphones can detect external sounds and sound leakage and auto-calibrate to deliver optimal noise reduction.

Inside each soft padded earcup is a 40 mm customized dynamic driver. The earcups are built with a floating design, allowing each side to rotate 8 degrees in either direction. The headband is padded and adjustable.

Soundcore rates the battery life of the Space One at up to 40 hours with the active noise cancellation (ANC) turned on and 55 hours with the ANC off. A five-minute USB-C fast-charge with the included cable will yield up to four hours of playtime.

The headset has a 3.5 mm port for a direct wired connection; the headset can also detect when it is on your head or off of it, auto-playing/pausing the music.

Controls on the headset are easy to access for power, pairing, turning the ANC on or off and volume, etc. The Soundcore companion app has great-sounding equalizer presets, allowing users to get the exact sound they want or create their own. Other settings can also be changed in-app.

For hands-free calls or online meetings, the Space One has three built-in microphones with an enhanced artificial intelligence algorithm so those on the other end can hear you with optimum clarity. The Space One also has Bluetooth 5.3 and multipoint connectivity, allowing it to be paired and used simultaneously with multiple devices.

Online: us.soundcore.com; available in Jet Black, Latte Cream and and Sky Blue

SOUNDCORE/TNS

Space One headphones come in three colors.

WEEKEND: FALL MOVIE PREVIEW

WARNER BROS. PICTURES/TNS

Timothée Chalamet stars as the young Willy Wonka in "Wonka," the musical origin story of the inventor-magician-chocolatier, out in theaters on Dec. 15.

Tipping our hat to these 20 fall flicks

LA Times film writers select their favorite upcoming movies of the season

Los Angeles Times

As we head into fall's smart season, things are noticeably quieter: a sad circumstance of the actors' strike. But there's a kind of unspoken grandeur to the slate of movies in store, even if the stars and writers can't promote it. Summation works from heavy hitters like Martin Scorsese and Hayao Miyazaki jockey with titles from well-heeled upstarts like Sofia Coppola and Yorgos Lanthimos. It will be a season to remember, with twice the Michael Fassbender our doctors recommend. Don't expect another "Barbenheimer," just plenty of the films that sustain us through the leaner months. Here, our film writers offer their personal picks:

EX4 Productions, Inc.

Sylvester Stallone returns as Barney Ross in "Expend4bles," the fourth entry in the franchise and the first in nearly a decade.

'The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar'

Sept. 20; on Netflix Sept. 27

So much is usually made of Wes Anderson's hyper-elaborate visual style as to almost obscure the fact that his approach to story structure — the anthological magazine-issue format of "The French Dispatch," the nesting of narratives within narratives in "Asteroid City" — has become nearly as dizzying. All of which generates curiosity and raises expectations for this short adaptation of Roald Dahl's 1977 short-story collection, with a cast that includes Benedict Cumberbatch, Ralph Fiennes, Dev Patel and Ben Kingsley. It surely doesn't hurt that Anderson's previous Dahl adaptation, "Fantastic Mr. Fox," is one of his best-loved movies. Or that "Henry Sugar" — due to be released by Netflix, which now owns the Roald Dahl Story Company — runs a mere 37 minutes, shorter than many TV episodes, and is thus unlikely to overstay its welcome.

— Justin Chang

'Expend4bles'

Sept. 22

In the near-decade that humanity and cinema have gone without a new "Expendables" movie, conversations around masculinity have evolved, which should make things interesting when "The Family Stallone" reality TV patriarch Sylvester Stallone returns in the R-rated fourth entry in Lionsgate's brawny action franchise. Jason Statham steps up to lead the titular band of alpha male mercenaries recruited from your fave '80s and '90s action flicks, with Megan Fox, Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson and martial arts icons Tony Jaa and Iko Uwais joining the fight. Plot particulars involving nuclear weapons-smuggling terrorists are likely to be less memorable than the explosive stunts orchestrated by director Scott Waugh ("Act of Valor"). More curious will be how the film explains the conspicuous absence of franchise regular Terry Crews, who alleged in a 2018 Senate hearing that his outspokenness over sexual assault lost him the chance to reprise his role.

— Jen Yamato

Netflix

Benedict Cumberbatch plays Henry Sugar and Ralph Fiennes a policeman in "The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar."

'The Creator'

Sept. 29

Artificial intelligence has played the villain in countless sci-fi films over the years, from "Metropolis" and "2001: A Space Odyssey" to "The Matrix." Now, with fears of a technological super-intelligence wiping out humanity (or at least Hollywood) no longer the stuff of fantasy, director Gareth Edwards ("Godzilla," "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story") is upping the emotional ante. Against the backdrop of an all-out conflict between humans and machines, John David Washington plays an ex-special forces agent recruited to hunt down the Creator, an AI architect who has developed a mysterious weapon with the power to end the war — only to discover that the weapon is in the form of a young cyborg child. Citing his influences, Edwards has referenced films as varied as "Apocalypse Now," "Blade Runner," "E.T." and "Paper Moon," promising a dystopian thriller that aims to be as touching as it is terrifying.

— Josh Rottenberg

Other notable September releases:

Sept. 18: "Superpower" (Paramount+)

Sept. 19: "The Saint of Second Chances" (Netflix)

Sept. 22: "Flora and Son" (in theaters; streaming Sept. 29 on Apple TV+); "It Lives Inside" (in theaters); "Neither Confirm Nor Deny" (in theaters); "Spy Kids: Armageddon" (Netflix)

Sept. 29: "The Kill Room" (in theaters); "Carlos" (in theaters); "She Came to Me" (in theaters); "PAW Patrol: The Mighty Movie" (in theaters); "Saw X" (in theaters); "Dicks: The Musical" (in theaters)

'The Exorcist: Believer'

Oct. 13

Everyone was a William Friedkin fan a few weeks ago (a bit too late), shouting out his late-career wobbles, championing his sinewy earlier work. About one movie, there was no question. "The Exorcist" is a perfect crystallization of its fraught Nixon-era moment, loaded with parental revulsion at counterculture kids, misplaced spiritual longings and the evil potentially lurking in any Karen Carpenter nice girl in a plaid skirt. Director David Gordon

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WEEKEND: FALL MOVIE PREVIEW

Fall flicks: ‘Marvels’ among few films based on established franchises

FROM PAGE 15

Green (responsible for 2018’s updated “Halloween”) has lately become something of a specialist in reviving classic ’70s slashers, staying true to their sleepover-approved stingers while injecting something fresh. He can’t improve on Friedkin’s original, but the spooked presence of Ellen Burstyn is a huge endorsement. (She didn’t need to do this.) Additionally, there is word that Linda Blair herself had a role on set. If you’re even remotely into horror, you’re going to want to see this.

— Joshua Rothkopf

‘Killers of the Flower Moon’

Oct. 20

Simply no one marshals the tools of big-budget filmmaking quite like Martin Scorsese. Even now, in his 80s, he still burns with an unrivaled passion. His latest is an adaptation of the popular 2017 nonfiction book by David Grann, detailing a series of murders of Osage people in 1920s Oklahoma over oil rights. Working with local Osage communities, Indigenous actors and crew, Scorsese’s production attempted to avoid the sort of cultural potholes around representation and authenticity that even just a few years ago would have been simply ignored by a major Hollywood film. “Killers” notably reunites Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro, two of Scorsese’s biggest on-screen collaborators, but it is Indigenous actor Lily Gladstone who may be the film’s beating heart, thanks both to her performance and the pivotal off-screen role she played in supporting the long-gestating project, to which she was attached for years. The film premiered earlier this year at Cannes to wide acclaim, and with its October release date, it should be one of the year’s leading awards hopefuls.

— Mark Olsen

‘The Holdovers’

Oct. 27

With his previous movie, the sweeping 2017 sci-fi satire “Downsizing,” filmmaker Alexander Payne super-sized the scale of his ambition and ended up with a box-office dud that polarized critics and audiences. Six years later, the director of “Election,” “About Schmidt” and “The Descendants” returns to his comfort zone. “The Holdovers” reunites Payne with his “Sideways” star Paul Giamatti for a small-scale, Nixon-era period dramedy about a curmudgeonly, widely disliked prep school teacher who is forced to babysit a group of students who have nowhere to go for Christmas break. Eventually he finds himself forming an unlikely bond with a brainy but rebellious student (newcomer Dominic Sessa) and the school’s head cook (Da’Vine Joy Randolph), who has lost a son in the Vietnam War. Payne is the bard of dyspeptic middle-aged men, and no one plays such men better than Giamatti.

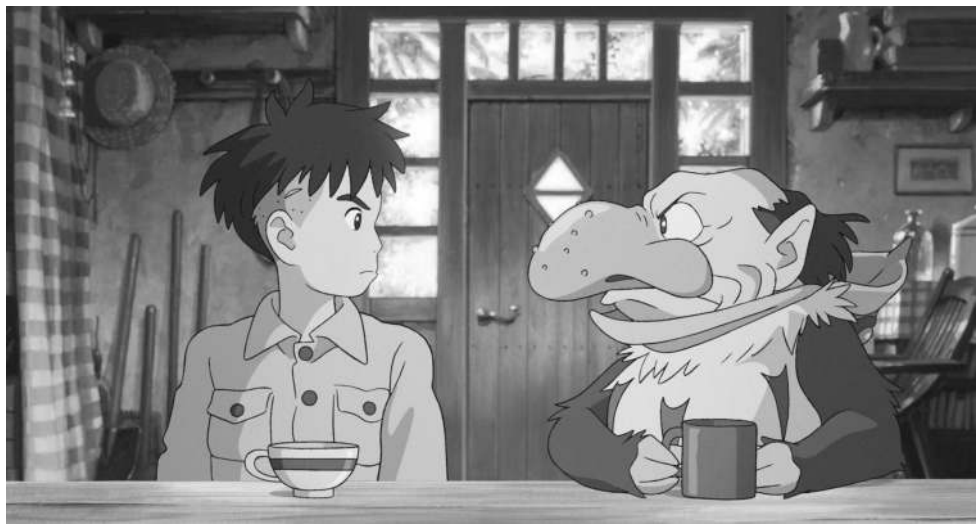
— Josh Rottenberg

‘The Killer’

Oct. 27; on Netflix Nov. 10

Do you really need to know anything more than it’s David Fincher directing a smart, moody drama about an assassin at war with himself — and his employers — after botching a job? That’s the premise, and at the time I’m writing this, it’s pretty much all the info we have. It’s Fincher’s first movie since “Mank,” the warm (for Fincher, anyway) dramatization of the life of screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz. “Mank” was an accomplished biopic, earning 10 Oscar nominations, but hardcore Fincher fans, the ones who have committed “Zodiac” and “Fight Club” to memory, were left wanting. “The Killer” should satisfy those with baser instincts, particularly as it reunites Fincher with “Seven” screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker, who adapted Alexis Nolent’s noirish graphic novel. Also notable: Michael Fassbender, better known for his race-car driving than his acting of late, plays the assassin who fears that he’s losing his mind. It’s going to be a chilly affair.

— Glenn Whipp



STUDIO GHIBLI, GKIDS/AP

Hayao Miyazaki’s “The Boy and the Heron” is a Studio Ghibli film that hit theaters overseas without any of the usual pre-release fanfare. Miyazaki is also known for his animation work on “Spirited Away” and came out of retirement to work on the new film.

APPLE TV+/TNS

Lily Gladstone and Leonardo DiCaprio in “Killers of the Flower Moon,” adapted from the 2017 nonfiction book about the murders of Osage people in the 1920s.

NETFLIX/TNS

Carey Mulligan as Felicia Montealegre and Bradley Cooper as Leonard Bernstein in “Maestro,” Cooper’s biopic of the composer, conductor and pianist.

‘Priscilla’

Oct. 27

By any measure, Priscilla Presley has led an epic life — at times, the stuff of fairy tales, at others, the makings of a nightmare. Meeting Elvis Presley, already an international icon, when she was only a teenager, young Priscilla set upon a path she could never have imagined. To see Sofia Coppola, who specializes in quiet, precise examinations of the interior lives of overlooked women entrapped by privilege, take on Priscilla’s 1985 memoir “Elvis and Me” is just too perfect. The casting of rising stars Cailee Spaeny and Jacob Elordi as Priscilla and Elvis should go a long way toward capturing the interest of younger viewers, energizing material that might otherwise seem musty and oh-so-20th-century. The tale of the Presleys is not yet entirely written, with the untimely death of Lisa Marie Presley earlier this year and the legal battle over ownership of his longtime home Graceland. Following the gaudy maximalism of Baz Luhrmann’s “Elvis” last year, the tasteful minimalism of Coppola’s style should bring a whole new perspective to a great American saga.

— Mark Olsen

Other notable October releases:

Oct. 6: “Foe” (in theaters); “The Burial” (in theaters, streams on Prime Video Oct. 13); “Plan C” (in theaters); “Joan Baez: I Am Noise” (in theaters); “Reptile” (Netflix)

Oct. 13: “Taylor Swift - The Eras Tour” (in theaters); “The Persian Version” (in theaters; expands Nov. 3)

Oct. 18: “The Delinquents” (in theaters)

Oct. 20: “Radical” (in theaters); “Old Dads” (Netflix); “Nyad” (in theaters; on Netflix Nov. 3); “Pain Hustlers” (in theaters; on Netflix Oct. 27)

Oct. 23: “Beyond Utopia” (in theaters)

Oct. 27: “Five Nights at Freddy’s” (in theaters); “Fingernails” (in theaters; on Apple TV+ Nov. 3)

‘The Marvels’

Nov. 10

Though the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s grosses have been fine, fan enthusiasm has lagged. This may be due to the relentless onslaught of 10 films and 10 series since 2021, many of them rigidly formulaic and clearly substandard. “The Marvels” could excuse a lot of those interminable origin stories as it teams two newer heroes (TV’s Ms. Marvel and Monica Rambeau) with Brie Larson’s Carol Danvers. Director and co-writer Nia DaCosta (“Candyman”) presents as a comic nerd, which can only help. The full trailer looks fun while downplaying the broad comedy of the earlier teaser. Perhaps the Marvel brain trust has recognized audience exhaustion with the comedy-first approach that has lately characterized the megafranchise in lieu of earned emotion. “The Marvels” could give fans the payoff they’ve earned for sitting through some uninspired stuff. Or it could further demonstrate that the MCU’s greatest enemy isn’t Thanos or Kang, but studio overreach.

— Michael Ordoña

‘Next Goal Wins’

Nov. 17

Director Taika Waititi has been talking enthusiastically about this project since at least 2019, when he told the L.A. Times, “Sometimes the fear is, ‘It shouldn’t veer too much from the documentary — it’s a true story.’ If you want the real events, watch the documentary. I’m not in the business of telling the truth. There’s that great saying, ‘Don’t let the truth get in the way of a good story.’” Fleshing out his facts-based, sports comedy-drama, Michael Fassbender plays a Dutch American soccer coach tasked with elevating a barely competitive American Samoan team to World Cup status. The cast includes Elisabeth Moss, Will Arnett, Kaitlyn Dever, Kaimana and Rhys Darby.

— Michael Ordoña

‘Thanksgiving’

Nov. 17

Have a look at the trailer, if you dare. It’s for one of those fake movies from Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino’s super fun 2007 double feature “Grindhouse,” and, to remember from crowd reactions, there are many who wished it wasn’t just a lark (“This year, there will be no leftovers”). Looks like they got their wish: Director Eli Roth returns to his grungy two-minute masterpiece, expanding it into a proper feature. Mega-followed TikToker Addison Rae looks to transition into a scream queen, while the cast includes Patrick Dempsey and Gina Gershon, last seen giving Aubrey Plaza a hard time in “Emily the Criminal.” But the real star here is Oscar-winning makeup designer Adrien Morot, who somehow managed to do both “The Whale” and “M3GAN” last year and no doubt has something gross in store.

— Joshua Rothkopf

‘The Boy and the Heron’

Nov. 22

Legendary animator Hayao Miyazaki (“Spirited Away”) came out of retirement to make this film, released as “Kimitachi wa Dou Ikiru ka” (or “How Do You Live”) earlier this summer in Japan. Written and directed by the Studio Ghibli co-founder, the film — which shares its Japanese title with a novel by Genzaburo Yoshino — hit theaters overseas without any of the usual pre-release fanfare such as trailers, promotional stills or even a synopsis. Because of this, I’ve so far refrained from seeking out any coverage or reactions. But my hope from the English title is that the story is centered around a young protagonist. This is no knock to Miyazaki’s films anchored by adults, but I’ve always found the way he sees and portrays childhood as special.

— Tracy Brown

SEE FALL FLICKS ON PAGE 17

WEEKEND: FALL MOVIE PREVIEW

Fall flicks: A mix of historical and fiction

FROM PAGE 16

'Maestro'

Nov. 22; on Netflix Dec. 20

Composer, conductor, pianist, influential figure in the life of Lydia Tár: Leonard Bernstein was a monumental figure of 20th-century music. (Forget about the nose for a second.) As with most geniuses, he was complicated, and "Maestro," Bradley Cooper's long-in-the-works biopic, homes in on that knottiness in its focus on Bernstein's marriage to Chilean-born actress Felicia Montealegre. Cooper directed and co-wrote the film with Josh Singer ("Spotlight"), and, of course, stars as Bernstein, with Carey Mulligan playing Montealegre. With his 2018 remake of "A Star Is Born," Cooper displayed a willingness to luxuriate in sweeping, weeping emotions, an enthusiasm that should translate well as he delves into the life of the flamboyant Bernstein. Decades after his death, Bernstein remains a revered figure, beloved for "West Side Story," "Candide," his symphonies and his guidance of the New York Philharmonic. With "Maestro's" impressive pedigree — Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese are among its producers — he may now have the movie his life deserves.

— Glenn Whipp

'Napoleon'

Nov. 22

"The Last Duel" wasn't the hit it deserved to be, but it confirmed that Ridley Scott, a director nearly as erratic as he is prolific, still has few Hollywood peers in the realm of lavish, grand-scaled historical filmmaking. Here's hoping his forthcoming "Gladiator 2" offers further proof; until that sequel arrives, though, we have this muscular-looking epic action-drama to look forward to, starring Joaquin Phoenix as Napoleon Bonaparte during his early rise to power, with Vanessa Kirby as his first wife, Empress Joséphine. All good signs, as is the fact that the script was written by David Scarpa, who previously collaborated with Scott on the underappreciated "All the Money in the World."

— Justin Chang

'Wish'

Nov. 22

Long before Disney got into the business of superhero multiverses and rebellions in a galaxy far, far away, it was a studio built on animation that helped propel the form into what it is today. Directed by Chris Buck (the "Frozen" movies) and Fawn Veerasunthorn ("Raya and the Last Dragon"), "Wish" is an animated musical anchoring Disney's yearlong 100th anniversary celebration. From a wooden puppet who dreams of being a flesh-and-blood boy to a mermaid who longs to explore the human world, many of Disney's most beloved films have centered characters driven by their desire to make their wishes a reality. I think one of the reasons Disney has such a strong hold on us culturally is because these beautifully rendered stories push us (often from a very young age) to be unafraid to dream. If "Wish" can evoke that magical feeling, it's a guaranteed future classic.

— Tracy Brown

Other notable November releases:

Nov. 3: "Quiz Lady" (Hulu); "Sly" (Netflix); "What Happens Later" (in theaters)

Nov. 10: "Dream Scenario" (in theaters)

Nov. 15: "Stamped From the Beginning" (Netflix)

Nov. 17: "May December" (in theaters; on Netflix Dec. 1)

Nov. 22: "Leo" (Netflix)

Nov. 24: "Saltburn" (in theaters)

Nov. 30: "Family Switch" (Netflix)

'The Taste of Things'

December TBD

Up until recently, this movie was titled "The Pot-au-Feu," taking its name from a beloved French dish, a meal that has been called the "mythical center" of the nation's cuisine. At its heart, it's a slow-cooked stew made with whatever meat and vegetables you might have on hand. A democratic dish, if you will. Does it seem like I'm spending a lot of time talking about food and not the film? Well, Tran Anh Hung's exquisite romance opens with an intricate 30-minute set piece in which we watch a renowned chef (Benoît Magimel) and his cook (Juliette Binoche) prepare an elaborate meal at their French countryside chateau. It's the late 19th century. He's known as the "Napoleon of culinary arts," but he understands that he'd be nothing without his muse. "The Taste of Things" is a film about love, devotion, the appreciation of life's beauty and, yes, the savoring of food. It's gorgeous and unforgettable and I can't wait for you to fall under its spell.

— Glenn Whipp

SONY PICTURES/AP

Ridley Scott directs "Napoleon," which stars Joaquin Phoenix as the titular emperor during his early rise to power.

'Eileen'

Dec. 1

Mousy 24-year-old Eileen ("Last Night in Soho's" Thomasin McKenzie) is aimless, deeply unhappy and working at a juvenile detention facility in 1960s New England when glamorous Rebecca (Anne Hathaway) breezes into town in "Lady Macbeth" director William Oldroyd's latest, adapted by Ottessa Moshfegh and Luke Goebel from Moshfegh's 2015 novel. Crackling with black humor and delicious menace, the period psychological thriller arrives in theaters after a Sundance debut that rightfully earned Hathaway raves for her seductive turn as the enigmatic older woman whose interest awakens a transformation in the impressionable and quickly obsessive Eileen. But it's the electricity that sizzles as she and McKenzie dance around their increasingly off-kilter entanglement — and a scene-stealing appearance by the chameleonic Marin Ireland — that makes "Eileen" one of the year's most sly and mesmerizing watches, "Carol" by way of Hitchcock, an affair to remember and recoil from in equal morbid measure.

— Jen Yamato

'Poor Things'

Dec. 8

When Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos first garnered attention with the allegorical absurdities of "Dogtooth," few would have predicted he would soon be making prestige pictures with international stars that somehow still felt fully idiosyncratic, adventurous and emotionally resonant in ways that are often hard to explain or understand. Following the successes of "The Lobster" and "The Favourite," Lanthimos has returned with an adaptation of Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel. The film looks to be Lanthimos' biggest, wildest story yet, a sci-fi fantasy riff on "Frankenstein" starring Emma Stone (also a producer on the film) as a woman brought back to life, with a cast that also includes Willem Dafoe, Mark Ruffalo, Ramy Youssef, Jerrod Carmichael, Margaret Qualley and Christopher Abbott. The movie was originally scheduled for a September opening, but the Searchlight Pictures release has been pushed back to early December, presumably in hopes that the impressive cast may be able to promote the movie by then.

— Mark Olsen

'The Zone of Interest'

Dec. 8

File this one under "films I'm most excited to see ... again." Jonathan Glazer's brilliantly oblique, technically immaculate study of human evil, set in and around the Auschwitz-adjacent home of a Nazi commandant (Christian Friedel) and his wife (Sandra Hüller) was first screened earlier this year at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was so well received that some deemed its second-place Grand Prix win a consolation prize. I'm curious to see how the movie — freely adapted and re-imagined from a 2014 novel by the late Martin Amis — plays outside a festival setting, how audiences respond to a Holocaust drama assured enough to keep its horrors just out of view, though not out of earshot. I also hope it spurs more than one moviegoer to seek out Glazer's undersung "Birth" (2004) and "Under the Skin" (2013), two achievements as eerily hypnotic in their own way as this.

— Justin Chang

'Wonka'

Dec. 15

Though the original Roald Dahl book has its young protagonist, Charlie, in its title, it's the proprietor of the business who steals the show on screen. The 1971 movie "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" remains such a delicious adaptation largely because of the beguiling Gene Wilder, who flipped between embodying wondrous creativity and reclusive angst at the drop of his iconic top hat. That said, if there's anyone I'd trust to make another movie with this beloved character — especially after that unnecessarily dark take with Johnny Depp — it's Paul King, the writer and director of the delightful "Paddington" films. This origin story (also a full-fledged musical) stars Timothée Chalamet as the eccentric inventor-magician-chocolatier and features original songs by Neil Hannon of the band the Divine Comedy. The cast also includes Olivia Colman, Sally Hawkins, Keegan-Michael Key and Hugh Grant as an Oompa-Loompa.

— Ashley Lee

Other notable December releases:

Dec. 1: "Candy Cane Lane" (Prime Video)

Dec. 8: "Leave the World Behind" (Netflix); "Magazine Dreams" (in theaters)

Dec. 15: "Anyone But You" (in theaters); "Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget" (Netflix)

Dec. 20: "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" (in theaters)

Dec 22: "Migration" (in theaters)

Dec. 25: "The Boys in the Boat" (in theaters); "The Color Purple" (in theaters); "Ferrari" (in theaters)

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Sony Pictures Entertainment

Shailene Woodley, left, and Paul Dano in "Dumb Money." Dano plays Keith Gill, aka "Roaring Kitty," the amateur investor whose enthusiastic endorsement of GameStop stock help fuel a viral trading frenzy on Wall Street. Woodley plays his wife, Caroline.

'Dumb Money' looks like smart investment

Film about 2021 GameStop shakeup of Wall Street finds the stick-it-to-the-man energy that buoyed the stock experiment

By Jake Coyle
Associated Press

Think of movies about the financial system and your mind is almost sure to go to Gordon Gekko and "Wall Street" or Leonardo DiCaprio's gyrating Jordan Belfort in "The Wolf of Wall Street."

When Hollywood takes on Wall Street, it usually heads straight to the C-suite.

The protagonist of "Dumb Money," though, is an amateur investor who trades out of his basement in Brockton, Mass., with a bandana tied around his head and a Belgian beer in his hand.

This is Keith Gill (played in the film by Paul Dano), also known as Roaring Kitty. In 2021, Gill's enthusiastic endorsement of GameStop stock helped fuel a viral trading frenzy that rocked Wall Street and humbled the hedge funds that have shorted the brick-and-mortar video game company.

Gill

Now, Sony Pictures is betting that a David vs. Goliath story that played out on Reddit message boards can be a big-screen attraction, too. Like any investment, it carries some degree of risk.

"Dumb Money," made for about $30 million, is charging into a still-fresh wound for some Wall Street power players; at least one executive portrayed in the film has reportedly threatened to sue.

The film, which opened Sept. 15 in limited release and expands in the next several weeks, will also have to sell itself without its colorful ensemble cast (including Pete Davidson, Seth Rogen, America Ferrara, Anthony Ramos and Shailene Woodley) due to the actors strike. And then there's the inherent challenge of making a dramatic narrative out of a revolution that occurred mainly on computer screens and smartphones.

Yet Craig Gillespie, director of the Tonya Harding black comedy "I, Tonya," managed to corral a brash online movement into a remarkably rollicking and crowd-pleasing entertainment that's already stoking some of the same energy that sent GameStop soaring. Ticket prices to the movie's Toronto International Film Festival were driven past $900 on secondary seller websites.

"As much as it's a really fun ride, ultimately I wanted to respect the frustration and the outrage that was happening," Gillespie says.

There are many ironies surrounding "Dumb Money." It will play in AMC Theaters, which followed GameStop as a meme stock, pumping up its share price at a time when movie theaters were reeling from the pandemic.

"I think we should go to AMC Theaters and we should bring stuff from Bed Bath & Beyond and carry Blackberries," says Ben Mezrich, author of the book the film's adapted from, "The Antisocial Network: The GameStop Short Squeeze and the Ragtag Group of Amateur Traders That Brought Wall Street to Its Knees."

Mezrich, whose 2009 book about Mark Zuckerberg, "The Accidental Billionaire," served as fodder for David Fincher's "The Social Network," immediately recognized the potential drama in the GameStop phenomenon. On the day the company's stock surpassed $300 a share, he began plotting a book that could adapted into a movie.

"By the end of that day, I knew that this was something that I wanted to write and I could see it as a film," Mezrich says. "That night, I wrote a 12-page proposal and treatment as both a movie and book idea. By the end of the week, we had a movie."

"Dumb Money" proceeded at a ripped-from-the-headlines pace — fast enough that most of those involved in making it failed to invest, themselves. Gillespie was able to follow the phenomenon thanks to his son, 24, who had been involved with the subreddit Wall Street Bets.

"I got to live it through him," Gillespie says. "That was a huge touchstone for me in terms of the emotionality of the film. That frustration, that outrage, all those emotions that were happening through this. I actually got in too late, myself. My son warned me: You got in too late."

Lauren Schuker Blum and Rebecca Angelo, two former Wall Street Journal reporters-turned-screenwriters, came on to write the script. For them, it was a way to extend their interest in the power of internet populism — and they already had some experience turning digital-based stories into something human.

"We wrote a film about GamerGate a long time ago that didn't get made," Blum says. "The producer in that process was like, 'Alright, let's just go out and invent a new language of cinema.' It has taken many years trying to figure out: How do you make a story like this cinematic?"

"Dumb Money" seamlessly juggles a wide spectrum of characters who invest in GameStop for various reasons — a Pittsburgh single-mother nurse (Ferrera), a GameStop employee (Ramos), a pair of in-debt college students (Myha'la Herrold and Talia Ryder) — while breezily synthesizing the complicated economic context.

"We don't need Margot Robbie in a bathtub explaining complex financial concepts," says Angelo, referencing 2015's "The Big Short."

The meme-stuffed grammar of the film owes much to the frenetic, inundating experience of social media, but it also works as a surprisingly accurate portrait of the pandemic. You may be surprised how affectingly, and empoweringly, the film uses the then-ubiquitous TikToks of Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage."

"It was a time when people were feeling very small. They feel small, they feel powerless, they feel that the system is rigged," Angelo says. "And this was an opportunity to feel big and find power in numbers."

Gill, himself, dropped out of the spotlight as fast as he entered it. His last tweet from his "Roaring Kitty" account was posted in 2021, of sleeping kittens. His investments, originally about $50,000 (much of his young family's savings) when GameStop was going for about $5 a share, at one point reached $48 million in value.

The filmmakers attempted to reach Gill but ultimately respected his privacy and had no direct contact with him. Gill has said little publicly since testifying before Congress in 2021. Lawmakers were then probing whether the rally had violated regulations of market manipulation.

Gill maintained that he advocated for GameStop "for educational purposes only, and that my aggressive style of investing was unlikely to be suitable for most folks." He simply believed in the company.

"In short," Gill said, "I like the stock."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Washed-up 'Expend4bles'

Fourth film in franchise is mind-numbingly dull and so profoundly silly it verges on self-parody

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

Back in 2010, Sylvester Stallone created the mother of all geezer teasers in "The Expendables," collecting every over-the-hill action star in a single movie like they were Pokémon — gotta catch 'em all. Since then, our favorite monuments of masculinity have come and gone, but nevertheless, the Expendables persist, whether we want them to or not. A full nine years after "The Expendables 3," we have the confoundingly titled "Expend4bles," with Stallone back in the cockpit and trusty Jason Statham riding shotgun.

Scott Waugh, a former stuntman and stunt coordinator who directed "Need for Speed," helms this latest iteration, which concerns a crew of easily expendable baddies who take on various secret missions like in every other juiced-up action franchise. This one happens to run on digital blood spatter, bootleg CGI and japes about genitalia, but the animus behind these films is nostalgia for the kind of retro action movies of the 1980s and '90s, where the men were muscly and the misogyny was cool with everyone — at least that's the kind of image we're presented with in the profoundly silly "Expend4bles," a film that verges on self-parody.

Waugh and cinematographer Tim Maurice-Jones bring a bright, cartoonish look to the film, while writers Kurt Wimmer, Tad Daggerhart and Max Adams deliver the corny one-liners. (Spenser Cohen contributed to the story, Dave Callaham the characters.) This is especially evident in their opening mission, where Barney Ross (Stallone) and Lee Christmas (Statham), and the rest of the Expendables crew, attempt to retrieve a set of nuclear detonators from a crafty thief, Rahmat (Iko Uwais), who has stolen them from Moammar Gadhafi's compound in Libya.

The action is messy, the geography indiscernible and a few shots seem stitched together with but a single pixel and a prayer. As Christmas chortles atop an all-terrain vehicle while wielding a .50 caliber weapon, it looks like it could have been shot with rear projection, the green screen work is so shoddy. The scene is so incredibly bad and unbelievably wacky that one simply has to laugh in disbelief.

LIONSGATE/AP

At one point in "Expend4bles," Gina, played by Megan Fox, takes over leading the team in a mission to recover nuclear detonators. Also shown: Andy Garcia and Jacob Scipio.

But that is far preferable to the rest of the film, which becomes mind-numbingly dull. Stallone dips out, and Gina (Megan Fox) takes over leading the Expendables, though Fox seems exceptionally disinterested in the whole affair. Perhaps because this gig requires Gina to halo jump and fight bad guys in a crop top, full glam and astonishingly long and unwieldy hair extensions.

Gina's team now has to liberate the same set of nuclear detonators from a container ship en route to Vladivostok. But they are quickly confined by Rahmat's henchmen, and spend most of the movie standing around a small room, or sauntering around the ship trading stale jabs. Christmas has been left out of this mission for a minor infraction, but he makes his way aboard nevertheless, and thank goodness, as he's seemingly the only Expendable with any pep in his step.

"Expend4bles" is the Statham show, but is this really the show in which he wants to star? He gamely goes through the motions, while Fox seems bored out of her mind, delivering every line dripping with sarcasm. Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson is also there. Randy Couture and Dolph Lundgren are the two other original cast members to return, while Jacob Scipio and Levy Tran round out the team, as Galan and Lash, respectively.

Not even the two most reliable action movie ringers, in legendary martial artists Iko Uwais and Tony Jaa, can help "Expend4bles" achieve liftoff. Uwais is relegated to growling threats into a walkie-talkie for most of the movie, getting only one fight scene at the end (wasting Iko Uwais is an action cinema crime). Jaa jazzes things up a bit, and when this film briefly flirts with becoming a martial arts movie, there's a spark of genuine potential.

But Waugh doesn't take advantage of what he has to work with. "Expend4dbles" wants to be the kind of movie that's best seen on cable with commercial breaks, or on a beat-up VHS tape, but there are far more entertaining action classics that can get the job done — there's no need to enlist this tired team.

"Expend4bles" is rated R for strong/bloody violence throughout, language and sexual material. Running time: 103 minutes. Now playing at select AAFES theaters.

Horror flick 'It Lives Inside' has unique threat yet feels unoriginal

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

A beautiful Indian American teen, Samidha (Megan Suri), just wants to fit in with her suburban classmates in the new horror film "It Lives Inside." But there's a demon at large and it's not hormones or puberty — it's a literal monster that will maim and kill you and anyone who tries to help in this grisly, if imperfect, metaphor for the immigrant experience.

It's the feature debut of Bishal Duttal, who co-wrote the film with Ashish Mehta and crafts an effectively menacing PG-13-rated nail-biter centered around the interesting and conflicting dynamics of an Indian American family. The mom, Poorna (Neeru Bajwa), is determined to keep up with the traditions of the country they left behind. Samidha — sorry, Sam — would rather not, which her dad supports, in theory. She shaves her arms in the morning and posts a Kardashian-level selfie with a carefully chosen filter. She "forgets" the lunch her mother has packed her. She resents the Indian customs and holidays that prevent her from hanging out with the cute guy in her class. And she's cast aside her old best friend, a fellow Indian American named Tamira (Mohana Krishnan), hoping that maybe she can just blend in and not be the "Indian girl" anymore. Essentially, she's a normal teen, through and through.

Unfortunately for Sam, Tamira has gotten pretty weird. Her childhood friend skulks around school like a ghost, hidden behind a curtain of unbrushed hair and cradling a cloudy Mason jar like her life depended on it — not exactly the kind of person that an aspiring popular girl wants on her résumé. And it just gets worse because, naturally, IT does live inside that Mason jar and that Mason jar is unable to withstand a fall to the floor. Oops.

Neon

Megan Suri plays Samidha, aka "Sam," an Indian American teen trying to be popular in the immigrant horror film, "It Lives Inside."

Duttal gets your heart rate going right off the bat, with a creepy prologue as screams flood out of a normal suburban house, but Sam's descent into one of the haunted never quite finds a suitable or consistent tone. It's all moody, wide-eyed paranoia with "Stranger Things" vibes that's occasionally interrupted by run-of-the-mill jump-scares and demonic nightmare visions. It'll startle and spook, but it also doesn't feel incredibly original, which is an odd failure for a story that has chosen to focus on a very original threat.

Her parents are a bit confounding and frustrating too — as she becomes increasingly paranoid and scared (which seems reasonable after she witnesses the shocking death of a classmate, regardless of whether it was invisible demon or rabid wild animal) — they respond like she's just a delinquent who has broken curfew or been caught skipping school. The only one who seems to care and listen is her teacher (Betty Gabriel of "Get Out"), which does not put her in the good graces of the vindictive, flesh-eating Pishacha.

The story also doesn't really grapple enough with the intriguing themes of assimilation, alienation and identity once the monster is at large, perhaps because we're simply plopped in the middle of a mystery that doesn't give us enough to really care about anyone involved. One kid's already dead. Tamira is already weird. Sam is already cool.

"It Lives Inside" is still a welcome respite from the other long-in-the-tooth horror franchises populating theaters this time of year in that it's just something new — new faces, new themes, a promising filmmaker to watch — but I wish it would have embraced more of the things that make it unique as opposed to trying to fit in with its genre brethren. Sort of like Sam. I mean, Samidha.

"It Lives Inside" is rated PG-13 for teen drug use, brief strong language, bloody images, terror and violent content. Running time: 99 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Netflix

Haley Lu Richardson, left, as Hadley Sullivan and Ben Hardy as Oliver Jones in "Love at First Sight." The pair meet in a New York airport and fall in love on the same flight to London.

Twist of fate on a flight

Richardson, Hardy anchor sappy but sweet book-inspired Netflix rom-com 'Love at First Sight' about missed romantic connections

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

The last time we saw Haley Lu Richardson — at least, the "White Lotus" version of Haley Lu Richardson — her Portia was in an airport, leaving the murderous mayhem of Sicily (and one dead boss) behind and exchanging contacts on her phone with nice young Albie.

Now, in an amusing bit of symmetry, we rejoin the charming Richardson at an airport again in "Love at First Sight" — with another young man, this time trying but failing to get his contact info into her phone. (Spoiler alert: One really needs to keep one's phone charged when looking for love.)

It's this theme of missed connections — and fate, and inadequately charged iPhones — that anchors the plot of this sweet, often moving but also painfully corny rom-com that survives on the appeal of Richardson and also her co-star, Ben Hardy, a couple that could triumph over anyone's saccharine dialogue.

The Netflix film, directed by Vanessa Caswill, is based on the popular young adult novel "The Statistical Probability of Love at First Sight" — a more interesting title, but one can understand the desire to avoid anything that could potentially be shortened in conversation to "Statistical Probability" (likely the least romantic title in the history of rom-coms).

In any case, those already fans of Jennifer E. Smith's book will need no prompting to root for this couple who meet-cute at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport on December 20, which, the film's narrator tells us, is the airport's busiest day of the year. (The narration is full of such factoids.) On this day, we learn, Hadley Ella Sullivan, American, age 20 and 65 inches tall, is traveling to London but misses her flight by four minutes.

And those four minutes will change everything, because waiting in the airport lounge is one Oliver Jones, age 22, a Brit studying statistics at Yale, whose average phone battery life is 94% (compared to Hadley's, which is 21% — also the percentage of times she is late.)

The two meet when Oliver ("As in Twist?" says Hadley — see what we mean by corny?) offers his phone charger. Then they head to dinner, at which point they realize that they share a hatred for mayonnaise. We also learn that Hadley is heading to London for her father's wedding to the woman he left her mom for.

As for Oliver, he indicates he's also traveling to a wedding, but he's actually traveling to something a lot sadder. The two end up sitting together on the plane, through yet another twist of fate, but maybe also because the flight attendant who seats them is the very same narrator (Jameela Jamil) who pops up throughout in different roles, sort of a hip fairy godmother.

In any case, the two talk all night, but get separated in the customs line the next morning. Before running off, Oliver gives Hadley his number, but it doesn't make it into her phone before she loses juice, yet again.

If you're like me, you might recall here Jesse and Celine, aka Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, who also fell in love, overnight, while traveling, in "Before Sunrise" and agreed to meet at the same place in six months. Celine couldn't make it, and poor Jesse, with no phone number, had to wait nine years and write a bestselling novel in a bid to find her.

This was before social media. Now, as our narrator acknowledges, there are so many ways to find someone: Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter (or X). But even with those helpful tools, you need to know the person's last name. Somehow, Hadley and Oliver don't.

And then, through an ingenious, yep, twist of fate again, they find each other. And then, annoyingly, they lose each other again! Still with no name and no number! Really?!

The supporting cast features a few lovely performances, namely by the very moving Sally Phillips and Dexter Fletcher as Oliver's parents, a pair of Shakespeare-loving thespians struck by tragedy. As Hadley's father, Rob Delaney is saddled with some of the sappier lines in the script as he tries to explain his divorce to his daughter with piercing thoughts like "Love is a lot of work."

Richardson, throughout, gives an empathetic and endearing performance, and Hardy matches her for charm, even if he doesn't convince as a self-described "maths nerd." Both are playing college students about a decade younger, but we'll suspend the disbelief, because darnit, we want to see these kids get together!

We won't give the end away, but we can tell you — because the narrator told us — that 17.6% of people walk away from the loves of their life.

Does that mean that 82.4% walk in the opposite direction, toward love? More importantly, what percentage of sappy rom-coms end in romantic failure? The odds seem pretty good for Hadley and Oliver.

"Love at First Sight" is rated PG-13 for brief strong language and some suggestive references. Running time: 90 minutes. Now available to stream on Netflix.

'Cassandro,' about gay luchador, is a winner

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Anyone who has eagerly followed Gael Garcia Bernal since his breakthrough roles in "Amores Perros" and "Y tu mamá también" likely never foresaw him one day in the world of lucha libra wrestling.

Bernal, far from the most brawny actor, has been a slyer shape-shifter, whether in heels as a femme fatale in Pedro Almodovar's "Bad Education" or on a motorcycle as Che Guevara in Walter Salles' "Motorcycle Diaries."

But while almost anything with Bernal in it has been worth seeing, it's been a little while — maybe his pair of movies with Pablo Larrain, 2012's "No" and 2016's "Neruda" — since Bernal had a sufficiently good part to, well, really go to the mat for.

He's found it, though, in "Cassandro," Roger Ross Williams' based-on-a-true-story drama about the Mexican wrestler Saúl Armendáriz. He was an exótico in 1990s lucha libra wrestling who rose to become one of the sport's most popular champions.

Exóticos, who emerged in the 1940s, evolved to be male fighters dressed in drag who served as a contrast to those of the macho main events. But Armendáriz, a gay man, wanted his character, Cassandro, to be more than that. He wanted to spar with luchadores on equal ground.

"Cassandro," which streams on Amazon Prime Video, follows Armendáriz's rise from scrawny outsider to center stage. The odds are always against him, but Bernal plays Armendáriz with an infectious innocence, even when he's doing lines in the bathroom. Most of all, his transformation of the exótico into something more than is prescribed by luchador tradition makes for a stirring metaphor of gay empowerment.

Armendáriz, after struggling to catch on as the wrestler El Topo, is convinced by his trainer (Roberta Colindrez) to jump into the ring as an exótico. Armendáriz, though, has no interest in playing Cassandro as he's supposed to. For starters, he wants to win, and exóticos were intended to to be fey, flamboyant victims for the hulking luchadores to easily dispatch.

They were also masked, but Armendáriz chooses to go without — an especially bold move considering the withering waves of homophobia directed at him by many in the crowd. But Armendáriz wins them over, and in doing so, achieves something spectacular, turning a gay stereotype into a hero. "I felt like Wonder Woman," the real Armendáriz once said.

"Cassandro," which co-stars Bad Bunny, doesn't always make time for some of the inner pain that Armendáriz was experiencing. (He dealt with depression and drug addiction.) And the filmmaking by Williams, in the narrative debut for the longtime documentarian, can be muddled. The story is so sensational that you almost wish "Cassandro" was instead a feature-length documentary. (Williams first made a fine short about Armendáriz for the New Yorker in "The Man Without a Mask.")

Yet "Cassandro" will surely bring many more to Armendáriz's remarkable tale. Bernal, again channeling the feminine side he showed in Almodovar's "Bad Education," makes up for what he lacks in physical strength with charm. It's a terrific performance, even if it doesn't measure up to Cassandro's.

"Cassandro" is rated R for language, drug use and sexual content. Running time: 107 minutes. Available on Amazon Prime Video.

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO/AP

Gael Garcia Bernal plays exotico Saúl Armendáriz, a real-life Mexican wrestler, in "Cassandro" on Amazon Prime Video.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Testing Europe's cultural waters in Haarlem

I'm under the towering church spire in the tidy Dutch market town of Haarlem, tempted to eat a pickled herring. The sign atop the mobile van reads: "Jos Haring — Gezond en Lekkerrr" (healthy and deeeeeelicious).

I order by pointing and ask, "Gezond?"

Jos hands me what looks more like bait than lunch, and says, "En lekkerrr."

I stand there — not sure what to do with my bait — apparently looking lost. Jos, towering over his white fishy counter, mimes swallowing a sword and says, "I give you the herring Rotterdam style. You eat it like this. If I chop it up and give you these" — he points to the toothpicks — "this is Amsterdam style."

As I take a bite he asks, "You like it?"

I mutter the only polite response I can muster: "It's salty."

"Yes," he says. "This is not raw. Tourists say this is raw. But it is pickled in salt. Great in the hot weather. You sweat. You need salt. You eat my herring."

Haarlem is a good place to start a European trip. In small-town Holland, cultural differences are obvious and travel is easy. I see the Netherlands as a cultural wading pool that slopes gradually into the more challenging waters of central Europe.

While Amsterdam is just a 20-minute train ride away, cute Haarlem provides a comfy base and a more genteel experience.

Amsterdam's Anne Frank wrote her story in a world-famous diary, and visitors must book well in advance to visit to her house. Haarlem's Corrie ten Boom shared an equally inspirational story in her book, "The Hiding Place," telling how her family courageously hid Jews from the Nazis until the inevitable day came when the Gestapo knocked on their door, too. A visit to Corrie's home in Haarlem costs only a suggested donation.

Rick Steves

Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum has a sprawling collection of great Dutch masters. Haarlem, however, fills a 17th-century pensioner's house with a small, delightful collection of the quintessential Dutch master: local boy Frans Hals.

While Amsterdam's red light district is a rowdy cheering squad of hedonism, Haarlem's is a quiet little cobbled zone where no one dares even litter. Amsterdam's coffee shops are filled with pot enthusiasts from Sydney to Vancouver, while Haarlem's caters to local students and old hippies out for a joint and a stroll.

Rick Steves

Haarlem's busy main square, with its Great Church (Grote Kerk) towering overhead, is both the community's living room and marketplace ... as it has been for centuries.

Much of the architecture of today's "old Holland" is from the 1600s. That was Holland's golden age — when merchants ruled the waves, stockpiled profits and hired Rembrandt to paint their portraits. While Haarlem has its fancy old guildhalls and business has reigned here for centuries, the town's strictly enforced building code assures that the church tower will always dominate the downtown.

On the Grote Markt, tent-like market stalls lead to red brick guildhalls. And above it all rises St. Bavo Church, better known locally as the Grote Kerk (Great Church). Inside, its pipe organ, an Oz-evoking tower of musical power, reaches nearly a hundred feet to the ceiling. Cupids swing from the largest of 5,068 pipes. Mozart trilled here.

Mondays and Saturdays are market days on Haarlem's Grote Markt — a cheerful festival of flowers, bolts of cloth, cheese pushers and warm, gooey stroopwafels. The carillon in the medieval church tower clangs with an out-of-tune sweetness. Savoring the merry dissonance, and taking tiny Amsterdam-style bites of my Rotterdam herring, I'm happy to be immersed in Holland — with raw-herring breath.

This article is used with the permission of Rick Steves' Europe (www.ricksteves.com). Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio and organizes European tours.

Fulda event represents a wonderful opportunity to wander

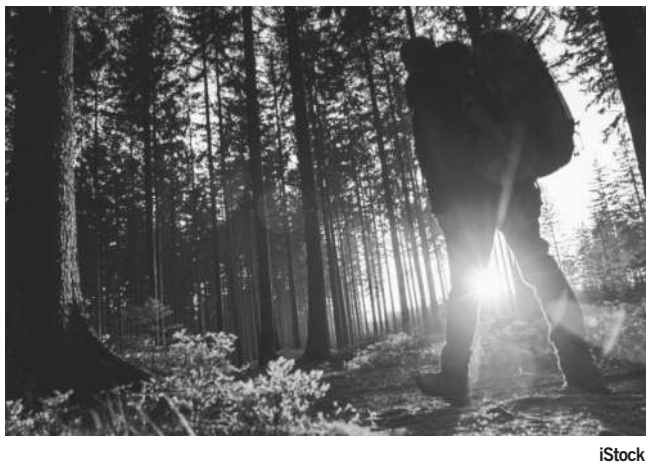
The small city of Fulda in northern Hesse, Germany, is found in a pleasantly rural area surrounded by green, rolling hills. Any casual passerby could hardly guess at the strategic importance the vicinity had during the years when the Cold War smoldered, a period that stretched from 1947 to 1991. Should Soviet troops have ever decided to attack the US forces stationed in Germany, military strategists had theorized that these forces would advance into the USAREUR sector through the Fulda Gap, a narrow region about fifty miles northeast of Frankfurt hemmed in by steep, wooded ridgelines. With the Soviet Army positioned just across the border in Eastern Germany, the threat felt very real. The Point Alpha Museum, located just a few miles outside of town, does an excellent job of painting a picture of life for both American soldiers and German civilians during these tense and troubled times.

Karen Bradbury

Nowadays, Fulda has a much more fortunate claim to fame. The local Volksmarch hiking association, the Volkssportfreunde Fulda 1986 e.V., organizes an annual walking event which attracts thousands of participants from all corners of Europe and well beyond. The 2023 event has been scheduled for Sept. 30-Oct. 1.

Participants in the two-day march, who can be either military or civilian, have several distances to choose from: 11, 21, 30 or 42 kilometers per day. (Note that on the second day of the march, no 30 or 42-kilometer route has been planned.) The cost of participation is 20 euros, which includes a certificate and a medal.

Those not wishing to camp or stay in a hotel have the opportunity of sleeping in the Bürgerhäusern Sports Hall on either Friday or Saturday night, or on both nights.



iStock

Late September in Germany is a lovely time to plan a walk.

They should make use of their own air mattresses and sleeping bags. The cost of this mass accommodation and breakfast at the start area is 18 euros per night, and advance reservations are a must. On Saturday night, a buffet dinner will be offered; the meal costs 17.50 euros.

Although it's too late to register as part of a group, it's possible to sign up as a single participant until Sept. 24.

Another option is to take part in just one day of the walk within the context of an International Volkswandertag, or hiking day. In this case, all participants in the 6, 11 or 21 km routes pay 3 euros, while those taking on the 30 km route will pay 5 euros. The cost of the 42 km route is 8.50 euros.

For details, see fuldamarsch.de.

The march is organized under the auspices of the IML Walking Association, which organizes 29 marches around the world, including in the countries of Austria, Belgium, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States.

As walking up to 42 km is no small feat, it no doubt makes sense to start training for long-distance walks well in advance. To keep on track, consider signing up for one of the races to take place in in Europe 2024, the dates for which have already been announced. The IML Walking Association schedule for the coming year looks as follows:

Gilboa Walk in Gilboa, Israel: April 19-20

Linnémarschen in Borås, Sweden: April 27-28

Blankenberge Two Days Walk in Blankenberge, Belgium: May 4-5

R4JCV 4 Days Walk in Chantonnay, France: May 9-12

Waendel Weekend in Wellingborough, UK: May 17-19

Marche Internationale de Diekirch in Diekirch, Luxembourg: May 25-26

Zwei Tage Marsch in Bern, Switzerland: June 1-2

Haervejsmarchen in Viborg, Denmark: June 28-30

International Four Days Walks in Castlebar, Ireland: July 4-7

De Vierdaagse in Nijmegen, Netherlands: July 13-19

Lithuanian Marching Festival in Kaunas, Lithuania: Aug. 3-4

Vaasan Marssi in Vaasa, Finland: Aug. 9-11

Sagamarsjen in Verdal, Norway: Aug. 23-25

Croatian Walking Festival in Gospic, Croatia: Aug. 31-Sept. 1

Mare e Monti Walk in Arenzano, Italy: Sept. 7-8

Int. 3 Tage Einhornmarsch in Seefeld, Austria: Sept. 13-15

Jede Kudrna okolo Brna in Brno, Czech Republic: Sept. 28-29

Zwei-Tage-Marsch in Fulda, Germany: Oct. 5-6

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Early German movies and books about the Americans deployed to Ramstein Air Base focused on the swift changes that the soldiers' presence caused as well as on fears of corruption, both financial and moral, according to displays at the Docu Center exhibition.

A media perspective of Ramstein Air Base

New special exhibition at Docu Center showcases American, German pop culture portrayals of largest US base in Europe

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A strange sight greeted me as I entered the special exhibition at the Docu Center in Ramstein village: Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3.

The 2011 video game sat in its green plastic shell atop a pedestal, protected by a display case and bathed in soft lighting, as if it were the Hope Diamond.

The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the ways in which the nearby Ramstein Air Base and other bases have been depicted in highbrow art and pop culture over the decades.

"An American visitor would maybe be surprised how much German media or German music deals with Ramstein Air Base," said Mario Aulenbacher, the center's director. "It's a big difference between the Germans' idea of Ramstein Air Base, and the Americans' idea."

Aulenbacher

The movies, books and other works of art highlighted at the center offer an illuminating look at how Americans and Germans have differed in their views of the U.S. military presence in Rheinland-Pfalz, which the Docu Center says has been the home of more than 170 U.S. military sites at different times over the decades.

In American pop culture, it seems that Ramstein is just another military airfield in a vast collection of strongholds around the world.

Posters for Hollywood movies are displayed near the video games at the exhibition, along with a blurb explaining how Ramstein is portrayed.

Whether in "Air Force One," "Mission Impossible: Fallout" or "Knight and Day," the base is often relegated to a transit hub, a temporary stop for protagonists on their way to or from more interesting locations.

Examples are given of U.S. network television shows that mention Ramstein, but these references are often a single line of hasty dialogue.

Even Call of Duty mentions Ramstein almost as an afterthought, when during a Russian land invasion of Germany, the base is just another battlefield far away from the player's location.

But for Germans, the base and the surrounding area hold a deeper meaning. The curated selection of German films, books and art provides a window into the anxieties and sentiments about the American military presence.

Early films, set against the backdrop of Ramstein's establishment in the 1950s, show the fears that Germans had about the Americans moving into the region.

In film portrayals, Germans feared that the Americans brought with them moral decay, a penchant for drunken bar fights and a hunger for tawdry red-light districts.

On the QT

Address: Schernauer Strasse 46, Ramstein-Miesenbach. Near the Azur swimming pool, across the street from the Reichswald-Gymnasium.
Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 2-5 p.m.; the special exhibition runs through Nov. 5.
Cost: Free
Information: Online: dc-ramstein.de; info@dc-ramsteinde; +49 6371-838-005. Most displays are in English and German. Guided tours are available upon request.

J.P. Lawrence

The video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, which has one level that mentions Ramstein Air Base, is among the American media featured at the exhibition. American culture tends to use the base as a stepping stone to or from wars or conflict elsewhere.

To give some credit to the sensibilities of those mid-century Germans, on my way to the exhibition I did pass a crass ad for a strip club.

A section for movies and TV programs about the 1988 Ramstein air show disaster, which killed 70 people and injured hundreds, highlights how that horrific tragedy continues to resonate in the German psyche. A corner of the exhibit showcases the band Rammstein, which got its name from the airshow disaster.

Later films highlighted another tension, as the Gulf War and especially the 9/11 attacks led to heightened security, the closure of the base's gates and imposing fences that shut out civilians.

In the wake of that, Germans began believing more conspiracy theories about the Americans, said Aulenbacher, who recalled that as a child in the late 1980s, he could simply ride his bike onto the base in Baumholder.

Though the films do not explicitly castigate the American military or NATO, there exists a subtle undercurrent of critique, a common theme of wondering what evils those American troops must be hiding behind their fences and their insistent smiles.

In one show, German detectives search for a killer. The culprit is not the Middle Eastern immigrant they suspected, but instead an American drone pilot with post-traumatic stress disorder.

A display reminds visitors of the unsettling fact that notorious serial killers Jeffrey Dahmer and Gary Michael Heidnik once served as soldiers in this region during the Cold War.

My favorite discovery from the exhibit is the horror movie "Lost Place," directed by a Kaiserslautern native.

The exhibition inspired me to watch the film, in which four teens venture into the region's forests, where they stumble upon the villain: the U.S. military-industrial complex.

Their happy walk ends when they discover a hidden American base where secret experiments take place, kicking off a plot that ends in a radioactive nightmare.

The movie gave me pause for reflection on the sobering notion that in a real nuclear war, this area would be a primary target.

It encapsulated the duality of life next to Ramstein, where people complain that nothing ever happens, and then a fighter jet zooms overhead.

The assemblage of American and German art at the Docu Center may at times turn into a mere game of recognition for those who have watched these films or a "see also" Wikipedia page, but in real life.

And yet the exhibition also serves as a great entry point into the cultural tapestry depicting the region's complex relationship with Ramstein.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

Bun Viet's interior provides a casual, comfortable atmosphere without frills. Its large outdoor terrace beckons visitors to take in the mountain views in the warm months. The Vietnamese restaurant is located next to a Bavarian clothing store in Unterammergau, Germany.

A small shrine adorned with offerings of fruit and incense aims to bring good luck to the owners of Bun Viet restaurant.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Bun Viet

Location: Rottenbucher Strasse 9, Unterammergau, Germany
Hours: Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and 5-10 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday and public holidays, 5-10 p.m.; closed Monday
Prices: Soups and starters range from 5.90 euros to 12.50 euros. Pho starts at 12.90 euros. Sushi ranges from 4 euros to 51.50 for the large sampler platter. A changing lunch menu is also available. Lemonades and teas are 6.90 euros, soft drinks start at 3.50 euros and coffee drinks are 5.80 euros.
Info: 08822 278-0819, Online: bunviet.de

Alexander Riedel

A Vietnamese encounter in Bavarian Alps

Bun Viet in Unterammergau serves a tasty, somewhat encyclopedic array of Asian dishes in a tropical-looking interior

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

In the heart of southern Bavaria, where traditional German dishes like schnitzel and potato dumplings traditionally accompany tall glasses of wheat beer, diverse cuisines can seem like a rare find.

Yet in the foothills of the picturesque Alps, an unexpected encounter with Southeast Asia occurred when I stumbled across Bun Viet during a recent work trip.

This small Vietnamese eatery sits along the highway running through Unterammergau, a small town neighboring the overpriced and touristy Oberammergau, which is home to the NATO School and a German military education center.

Situated next to a store selling lederhosen and dirndl dresses, the eatery was once a traditional beer garden.

In its current incarnation, bamboo lamps hang from the ceiling, while a wood-paneled bar and ocean-blue walls offer a welcome tropical contrast to the game trophies and rustic farmhouse looks typical of the surroundings.

Notably, Bun Viet avoids the kitsch often found in Asian restaurants in Western settings. A small family shrine adorned with offerings of fruit and incense aiming to bring the owners good luck adds to the restaurant's authenticity.

Cha gio chay vegetable spring rolls with a sweet and sour sauce at Bun Viet in Unterammergau.

Avocado and arugula cream cheese rolls from Bun Viet's extensive sushi menu.

A steaming bowl of pho, a staple dish of Vietnam, as served at Bun Viet in Unterammergau.

During my visit for lunch on a recent weekday, I sat in the spacious outdoor terrace, perused the extensive menu and enjoyed the view of Kofel Mountain.

Besides the flavorful noodle bowls the restaurant is named after, Bun Viet's menu surprises with a somewhat encyclopedic array of dishes falling under the umbrella of "Asian food."

Options include curries, grilled and wok-cooked dishes, pad thai and even poke bowls, all prepared with a focus on regional ingredients, according to the menu. Bun Viet even sports a sushi selection that includes hand-pressed nigiri and maki rolls of tuna, salmon and eel.

The Vietnamese waitstaff, while friendly, presented a bit of a language barrier, speaking little German and even less English. This didn't diminish the enjoyment of the experience for me, though.

Lunch got off to a good start with the cha gio chay vegetable spring rolls, which came fresh and crispy with a sweet and sour sauce.

In addition to numerous food offerings, Bun Viet boasts tasty homemade teas and lemonades. I cooled off with the nuoc chanh sa, a refreshing mix of black tea, lime syrup, brown sugar and pomelo juice.

While initially hesitant to order Japanese fare at a Vietnamese establishment, I gave some avocado and arugula cream cheese rolls a try. The plate was generous and the rolls' ingredients tasted fresh.

Despite this tasty culinary detour, however, I had to leave some room for the dish I really came for.

My Bun Viet stop was inspired by fond memories of a trip to Vietnam years ago. During that adventure, I had the pleasure of savoring one of its culinary treasures: pho, an aromatic noodle soup that is a source of national pride.

I vividly recall my tour guide passionately exclaiming "pho is number one in Vietnam!" And he was not wrong. The dish is ubiquitous and eaten at all times of the day.

Traditional pho is cooked slowly, sometimes for more than 12 hours. It emphasizes fresh herbs like coriander and mint as well as spices such as cinnamon, cardamom and ginger plus a specially fermented fish sauce.

Bun Viet's version balanced all these flavors well and instantly transported me back to the bustling streets of Nha Trang, where I first smelled its distinct blend wafting from small family-run shops.

This pho was prepared with noticeably milder spice levels to suit European tastes, which I did not mind one bit. While the sushi and spring rolls were good, the soup was clearly Bun Viet's home turf and full of the familiar flavors.

After that, I had little room for more but couldn't pass up the fried banana dessert with honey drizzle and peanuts. Together with a cup of green tea, it was the perfect capstone to the meal.

Bun Viet adds a welcome and exotic touch to the local restaurant scene, proving that whether in Bavaria or Vietnam, a good bowl of pho will always play.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

The macaque is popularly associated with lounging in hot springs in snowy forests, but its national park habitat in Nagano, Japan, is accessible year-round.

A snow monkey for all seasons

Japan's macaques are just as photogenic year-round

BY JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

The macaque, or snow monkey, is familiar to any Netflix subscriber — the animals are featured on programs like "Wild Babies" and "Night on Earth."

A firsthand, up-close encounter with these iconic primates is an essential experience in the island nation, as any woodland hiker in Japan will attest. A trip to their surroundings in Joshinetsu Kogen National Park in Nagano prefecture will check that box on your list of Japanese things to do.

The macaque is popularly associated with lounging in hot springs in snowy forests, but its national park habitat is accessible year-round, in warm months from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and in winter from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The icy, sometimes slushy winter trail in warmer months is an easy hike from the parking lot to the Joshinetsu Kogen's entrance.

The macaques are spread out through the entire park. Many are within camera range, but visitors are prohibited from using drones or other gear that will startle the animals.

There is really no need for any special lens; the monkeys are not afraid to approach humans, and they're known to deliver a slap to human paparazzi who get out of line.

Otherwise, the rules are few and visitors have free range to watch the monkeys, even right up to the communal hot spring where the macaques congregate and their youngsters play.

Feeding time comes as the park is closing, and park employees throw what looks like a seed mixture to the monkeys. The experience can be intense as the animals exit the hot spring and make for the chow line.

The drive from central Tokyo can take about three hours on the expressway, but it's worth the trip. The mountains are beautiful and warrant a stop for pictures.

No outside food is allowed in the park, but a pastry and ramen shop are side by side next to the parking lots before the hike to the park.

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The macaques are a well-known attraction, and getting an up-close encounter with these animals is considered by many to be an essential experience while in Japan.

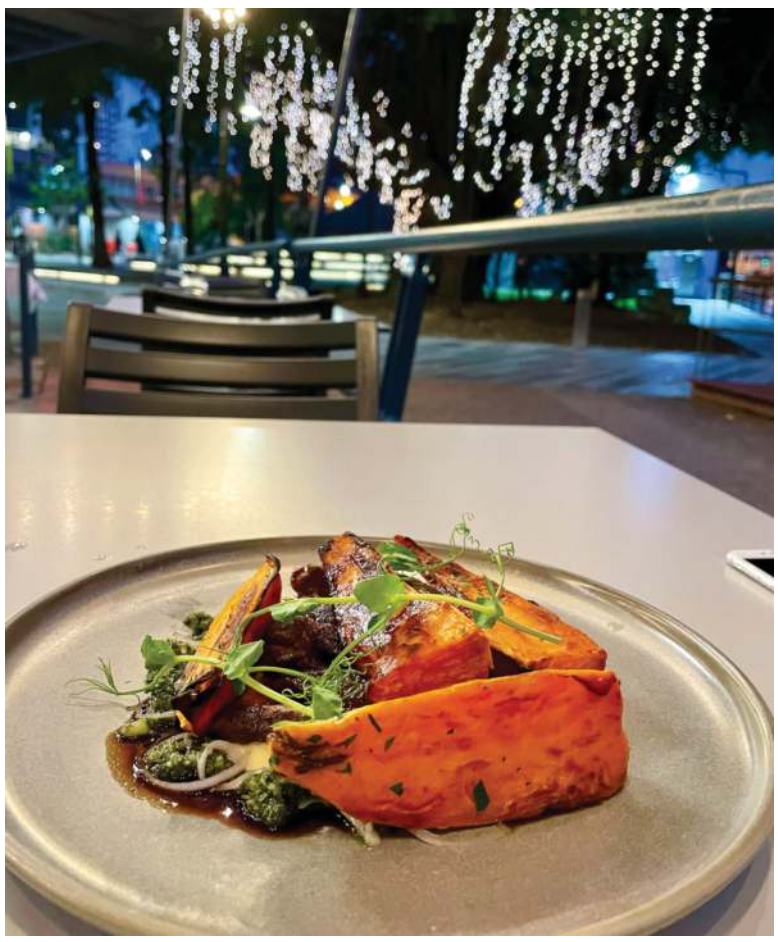
The macaques are spread out through Joshinetsu Kogen National Park. Many are within camera range.

On the QT

Directions: 6845 Yamanouchi-machi, Shimotakai-gun, Nagano prefecture; roughly a three- to four-hour drive from Tokyo.
Times: Varies by season.
Costs: Park admission is 800 yen for adults and 400 yen for children.
Food: No food is allowed in the park, at least for humans.
Information: jigokudani-yaenkoen.co.jp

Jennessa Davey

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

Myrtle-roasted lamb from A Touch of Salt, a fine-dining restaurant near Royal Australian Air Force Base Townsville in Queensland.

A flavorful experience

A Touch of Salt in Queensland offers fine dining in a low-key setting

BY JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

American troops training in Australia are finding ample opportunities to explore this distinctive culture, including its outstanding cuisine.

A Touch of Salt — situated along Ross Creek in Townsville, Queensland — is the perfect setting for a casual dinner or a special event. Just off Victoria Bridge, this restaurant offers a fine-dining experience in a calm setting without the stuffy pretense.

Reservations are preferred via its website — space is typically available on the day — but A Touch of Salt welcomes walk-ins, too. It is easy to reach by foot from downtown Townsville and about a 15-minute drive from Royal Australian Air Force Base Townsville.

I can't say enough about the friendly service. The staff greeted guests with a cordial smile, checked on me throughout my meal and attended kindly to every request.

The menu at A Touch of Salt borders on universal; it accommodates every taste and comes with gluten-free, dairy-free and plant-based options from appetizers to entrées to desserts.

My choice of myrtle-roasted lamb came cooked just as I ordered, with soubise (a thickened onion sauce), a spicy chimichurri and sides of sweet potato and green beans. It cost 44 Australian dollars, or about $28.37. Cleaning my plate was no problem.

A Touch of Salt is typically booked solid, but I lucked out and was seated as a walk-in. My table had a view of the Coral Sea as a tide of patrons filled the dining room.

davey.jennessa@stripes.com
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AFTER HOURS AUSTRALIA

A Touch of Salt

Location: 86-124 Ogden St, Townsville City QLD 4810, Australia

Hours: 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday through Thursday; Noon to 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Friday.

Prices: Appetizers start at 12 Australian dollars. Entrees top out at 24 dollars. Plant-based items 18 to 28 Australian dollars, depending on the size.

Dress: Business casual

Directions: The restaurant is a few blocks north from Queensland Country Bank Stadium, right off the Victoria Bridge. Taxis and public transportation serve the city.

Information: Phone: +61 7-4724-4441; Online: atouchofsalt.com.au

Jennessa Davey

Sausage and sun-dried tomato risotto doesn't require all that extra stirring

BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Milk Street/Associated Press

It turns out we've all been cooking risotto the wrong way.

On a trip to Milan, we learned that risotto does not require the constant vigilance and uninterrupted stirring we thought it did. No slow simmer. No gently ladling in broth over and over again.

At Trattoria Masuelli San Marco, the creamy, loose risotto was made lightning-fast with a rollicking, dump-and-go style — a method we were happy to adapt for weeknights.

In this recipe from our book "Cook What You Have," which draws on pantry staples to assemble easy, delicious meals, we add half the liquid early and depend only on brisk intermittent stirring. That's enough to agitate the Arborio rice and release its starch, thickening the cooking liquid and producing the creamy consistency that's the hallmark of great risotto.

This version is rich with Italian sausage, which usually comes loaded with additional spices like fennel seed and black pepper. Use sweet or hot, depending on your preference, and remove it from the casing before adding it to the pan, which aids in breaking it into smaller bits.

Sun-dried tomatoes are added at the end for a splash of color and tangy sweetness, while Parmesan cheese lends umami and subtle nutty flavor.

Risotto with Sausage and Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Start to finish: 40 minutes
Servings: 4

Ingredients

1 quart low-sodium chicken broth
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
8 ounces sweet OR hot Italian sausage, casing removed
1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
1 cup Arborio rice
¼ cup drained oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
⅓ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley OR basil
1 ounce Parmesan cheese, finely grated (½ cup), plus more to serve

Directions

In a medium saucepan over medium, bring the broth and 2 cups water, covered, to a simmer. Reduce to low to keep warm.

In a large saucepan over medium, heat 1 tablespoon oil until shimmering. Add the sausage and cook, breaking it into small pieces, until no longer pink and starting to brown, 5 to 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the sausage to a small bowl; set aside.

To the same large saucepan over medium, add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil and heat until shimmering. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and cook, stirring constantly, until the grains are translucent at the edges, 1 to 2 minutes. Add 3 cups of the hot broth mixture and bring to a boil over medium-high. Reduce to medium and cook, stirring often and briskly, until most of the liquid is absorbed, 10 to 12 minutes; adjust the heat as needed to maintain a vigorous simmer.

Cook, adding ¼ cup of the broth at a time, until the rice is al dente and loose but not soupy, another 8 to 10 minutes. You may not need all of the broth. Stir in the sausage and accumulated juices along with the sun-dried tomatoes; cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through, about 1 minute.

Off heat, stir in the parsley and Parmesan, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Serve sprinkled with additional Parmesan.

MILK STREET/AP

Risotto With Sausage can be made quickly if the risotto is intermittently stirred.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Mortal Kombat is out of ideas

More fluid movement, but same old story in fighting game franchise's latest iteration

BY GENE PARK
The Washington Post

It's fitting in many ways that Jean-Claude Van Damme appears in Mortal Kombat 1, a reboot of the 31-year-old fighting franchise.

In 1992, John Tobias and Ed Boon hoped to make a martial arts fighting game that placed the "Bloodsport" star as one of its central characters. They were already working on a game version of Van Damme sci-fi vehicle "Universal Soldier," but they couldn't make the stars align for what eventually became Mortal Kombat.

Now in Mortal Kombat 1, released Sept. 14, a three-decade-old wish is fulfilled. Van Damme plays an alternate version of Johnny Cage, the fictional Hollywood star created to lampoon and satirize him. Like Elon Musk and his long obsession with calling a company "X," the Mortal Kombat franchise feels like it never outgrew its youthful desires.

That goes for the story of Mortal Kombat 1. It's the second attempt by developer NetherRealm Studios to reboot the franchise, yet beyond a few superficial changes, it reuses the same characters with basically the same characteristics under the same circumstances. When the credits rolled, I hadn't gained a great understanding of series protagonist Liu Kang, who was promoted in Mortal Kombat 11 from zombie to the actual god of all creation. (And no, I don't have the time to explain how that happened or why he was a zombie in the first place.)

The Mortal Kombat series are basically R-rated Marvel movies, and they share much in common with the blockbuster films. The more devout consumers are rewarded for their knowledge of and dedication to the back catalog. The stories end with people yelling and shooting different-colored laser beams at each other or at a thing.

On the flip side of that comparison, this single game franchise has a character roster that's as diverse and fun as that of the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe. The writers are without parallel when it comes to filling out last-century action movie archetypes, giving them quirky character traits and placing them in simple yet relatable soap opera drama. Shang Tsung, a Fu Manchu-stroking kung fu villain who glowers and says ridiculous things like "Your soul is mine," remains an iconic antagonist.

These distinct, memorable personalities have helped make Mortal Kombat king of the fighting game genre when it comes to sales. For the first two hours of Mortal Kombat 1, it plays with audience expectations while coloring new lives and stories for these old characters. After Liu Kang reset the universe, Shang Tsung is no longer a powerful sorcerer, instead recast as a literal snake oil salesman down on his luck. Thunder god Raiden is now a mortal and pleasant farmer boy with "aw shucks" charm.

Even the titular Mortal Kombat tournament plays out differently than it has in the past, and there's something tantalizing in watching and waiting for the inevitable turmoil as these volatile people can't help but find themselves in conflict. When that bubble finally bursts, that's when the disappointment sets in.

The second half of the plot relies on already-used story beats from past games, including the 2011 reboot attempt, which was also frustratingly named just Mortal Kombat. NetherRealm seems incapable of creating a new type of story with these characters. In theme and presentation, this is a series in arrested development.

Which is ironic, considering that the original game is often credited for the "maturation" of the video games industry. Its depiction of gore and violence led to a nationwide moral panic that ended in 1993 with the U.S. Senate threatening government regulation of video games, and that in turn created a national standard for age and content ratings for video games.

There is still great entertainment value here anyway. Mortal Kombat 1 is never shy about using one liners and making winking references to past games and adventures. This entire story is a constant stream of "they said the thing" moments.

The cast is animated and acts with excellence, particularly Mara Junot as Sindel, reformed as a gentle sovereign, and Alan Lee, sneering as series villain Shang Tsung. NetherRealm also proves itself to be among the industry's best in cinematography, with close-up shots that accentuate emotion.

NetherRealm Studios photos

The characters' distinct, memorable personalities have helped make Mortal Kombat king of the fighting game genre. In the latest game, the cast is animated and acts with excellence.

Most critiques of fighting games don't account much for stories, because they're almost always besides the point. But the Mortal Kombat series is different. The 2011 reboot was an industry pioneer in how the genre presents a story mode, complete with great acting and a plot with dramatic twists. It was so successful it saved the studio from doom after years of failed sequels: NetherRealm found its winning formula and has repeated it since.

Part of that winning formula is packing each title with so much content, it's almost impossible to run out of things to do. The new Invasion mode is a board game that unlocks many cosmetic assets simply by playing your favorite characters.

If the story failed in reimagination, it's not because of the set and scene design. These are some of the most dynamic and lively backgrounds in fighting game history. A fight at a teahouse sees waitresses scrambling away as onlookers cheer. There's a great, tangible sense of place.

The fighting itself sees more improvement. The Mortal Kombat series has been criticized for sticking to its peculiar and stiff animations, but this game offers more flexibility than ever for attack combination expression. It allows for more fluid movement. True to the original intentions of the first game's digitized real actors, the fights in Mortal Kombat 1 have never looked more real and grounded.

Above and below, in Mortal Kombat 1, the fighting itself sees more improvement. Movements are more fluid and there is more flexibility than ever before in the expression of attack combinations. Mortal Kombat fights have never looked more real and grounded.

Mortal Kombat 1 as a fighting game product remains as stellar as ever. It's too bad that the game feels like a refreshing reboot until it can't help itself and reiterates its past habits. Mortal Kombat doesn't need to and probably shouldn't "grow up." Eternal adolescence is the point. But to stay young, it just needs to shed the old.

Platforms: PC, Xbox Series X and S, PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch

Online: mortalkombat.com

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Ode to victims, survivors

Serial killer's crimes provide the impetus for novel 'Bright Young Women'

By Alicia Rancilio
Associated Press

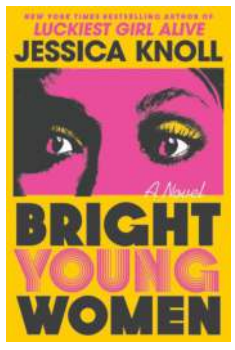
Author Jessica Knoll's latest novel was inspired by Ted Bundy's murders of two sorority sisters at Florida State University in 1978.

Media coverage often mentions Bundy's so-called charm and good looks as an oxymoron to his crimes. Instead of romanticizing the killer, Knoll's "Bright Young Women" is a tribute to victims and survivors.

A docu-series about Bundy on Netflix called "Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes," was the impetus for the novel. Knoll was floored by an episode that included the judge's description of Bundy at his sentencing, where he was complimentary of the convicted killer. Knoll looked up the court transcripts and was disturbed by the full picture.

"He called Bundy 'a bright young man,'" recalled Knoll. "(Bundy) rambled on for like 30 or 45 minutes before the judge said, 'You're a bright young man. You could have done all these things with your life, but you went another way.' And when you read what Ted Bundy said, what he rambled on about, I was like, 'This was your bright young man, judge?'"

"Bright Young Women" follows fictional FSU student Pamela, who sees a man fleeing her sorority house in the middle of the night. It's discovered that two of her sorority sisters were murdered, and two others were brutally attacked.



"The dates of the attacks, the dates of the trial, the locations, things like that are all based on real events," explained Knoll, who also modeled a chilling scene in her book off of real-life, when her fictional defendant, acting as one of his own attorneys, deposes Pamela. Bundy also deposed witnesses in his trial.

"He brought those sorority sisters down to a jail cell and was able to depose them because he was representing himself," said Knoll. "That's actually illegal now. It's a violation of the victims' rights. But at the time, it would have been a violation of his rights for the women to refuse to be deposed by him."

Knoll is also quick to clarify that Bundy was not the only attorney on his defense team, believing history sometimes overlooks that fact, giving him too much credit. "He had a whole counsel. He would have drowned trying to defend himself on his own," she said.

Bundy, who is believed to have killed at least 30 women, was executed in 1989.

Knoll's research included meeting with Kathy Kleiner, one of the women attacked by Bundy in the Chi Omega sorority house, while she was sleeping. She later testified at his trial. Kleiner is the first person thanked by Knoll in the acknowledgments for "Bright Young Women."

"I was blown away by, first of all, how generous she was to give me her time and to speak to me," said Knoll. "She was very candid and vulnerable, but at the same time, she's a very happy-go-lucky person, and she married her soul mate and has a beautiful life. She was really adamant from a very young age, that this was not going to define her, and she was not going to be afraid for the rest of her life."

Knoll has also demonstrated resilience to the unthinkable. Her debut novel, "Luckiest Girl Alive," is about a woman confronting the trauma of being sexually assaulted as a teen at a party. Knoll is also a rape survivor with a similar experience and says an objective of "Bright Young Women" was to say something "about the grit of survivors, which is something that I have personal experience with, too."

"Luckiest Girl Alive" was adapted into a film starring Mila Kunis that debuted last fall on Netflix. Knoll wrote the screenplay and was a co-executive producer. Her second novel, "The Favorite Sister," will also be made into a TV series.

Chris Pizzello, Invision/AP

A Netflix docuseries about serial killer Ted Bundy was the inspiration for author Jessica Knoll's next novel, "Bright Young Women."

'Elon Musk' is a revealing but not surprising portrait

By Andrew DeMillo
Associated Press

For those who have been paying attention to Elon Musk for at least the past couple years, Walter Isaacson's biography of the tech billionaire doesn't feel that surprising.

Isaacson's biography "Elon Musk" does a good job hammering home the portrayal of the SpaceX founder and now owner of X — formerly Twitter — as a visionary but mercurial figure who's given to mood swings and self-destructive behavior.

It's a familiar descriptor for Musk's fans and detractors, but Isaacson's biography still offers plenty of revealing details.

In the opening pages of the book on Musk's childhood, he's described as someone "not hard-wired to have empathy," a characteristic that comes into play throughout his work endeavors and personal life.

What Isaacson doesn't conclude is whether those characteristics are propelling Musk's success or undoing it.

By shadowing the billionaire over two years and through interviews with Musk's family and colleagues, Isaacson is also able to show how Musk's risk-taking may work well in designing electric cars and rockets, but hasn't fit well with running a social media platform.

Isaacson provides insight into how badly Musk misjudged his ability to run Twitter and the consequences of his missteps. He also offers his own theories on why the billionaire wanted to take over the social media platform. In part, Isaacson writes, it was a chance for someone who was beaten up as a kid to now own "the ultimate playground."

The book has already made headlines, including Isaacson walking back his initial reporting on Musk not allowing Ukraine to use Starlink internet services to launch a surprise attack on Russian forces in Crimea. Isaacson's book initially reported that Musk secretly told his engineers to turn off coverage within 100 kilometers of the Crimean coast as Ukraine was launching the attack. Isaacson has since posted on X the coverage hadn't been activated over Crimea.

But the most fascinating parts are early on, as Isaacson delves into Musk's upbringing, particularly his father. Musk's father is portrayed in the book as a conspiracy-minded, verbally abusive Jekyll-and-Hyde figure. Musk's fear that, as his mother puts it, "he might become his father," is identified early on as a specter and possibly a driver of his success.

'Stranger Things' star combines romance novel, WWII disaster

By Rob Merrill
Associated Press

The actor who plays Eleven on "Stranger Things" wrote a romance novel! That'll be the headline for too much coverage of "Nineteen Steps," so let's set that aside and consider the debut book from Millie Bobby Brown on its own merits.

It's a love story set in London, spanning the wartime years of 1942-1945. Nellie is the protagonist, an 18-year-old young woman who works as a secretary for the mayor of Bethnal Green, in the city's East End. She lives with her mother, father, brother and little sister, and next door to her best friend Babs, whose brother, Billy, is besotted with Nellie after a childhood spent together.

In the wake of the Blitz, Germany continues to selectively bomb England, forcing Nellie and the rest of Bethnal Green's citizens into an underground air raid shelter many nights. That's where those foreboding titular steps come in: Every time they descend to the shelter, Nellie "counted them like usual. Nineteen, turn right and seven more."

Brown dedicates the book to her grandmother ("Nanny Ruth, who told me this story"), but the book is being marketed as fiction.

The story starts to sing when Nellie meets Ray, a U.S. Air Force pilot stationed nearby. The prose describing their first kiss fits the moon-eyed mood as the young couple falls hopelessly in love. "If ever she had to pick a moment she'd want to last for eternity, she thought, this would be the one she'd choose," writes Brown.

Honestly, most readers could predict the rest of the plot at this point. The love triangle involving Nellie, Billy and Ray, plays a central role, and, of course, what happens on those steps, but the book is really about making your way when consumed by grief.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

His songs, for you

JEFF DALY/AP

Leon Russell performs at the Sunshine Music and Blues Festival at the Mizner Park Amphitheater in 2014 in Boca Raton, Fla. Russell died at 74 in 2016.

Leon Russell — a musician's musician — is finally getting his due

BY MIKAEL WOOD
Los Angeles Times

Anyone tracing a path through the history of American soul music could do worse than to catalog the many, many renditions of Leon Russell's "A Song for You."

Start with Russell's tender yet stately original, which opened his debut solo album in 1970 after the years he spent haunting Los Angeles recording studios — that's him playing piano on the Ronettes' "Be My Baby" and the Byrds' "Mr. Tambourine Man" and the Beach Boys' "California Girls" — as a member of the storied Wrecking Crew of first-call session musicians. Then move through Donny Hathaway's virtuosic R&B aria, Willie Nelson's cosmic-cowpoke ballad and Aretha Franklin's queenly slow jam on your way to the pleading testimonial with which Ray Charles won a Grammy Award in 1994; skip ahead to hear later interpretations by Herbie Hancock and Christina Aguilera, Whitney Houston and — why not? — the pairing of rappers Bizzy Bone and DMX.

GLOBE PHOTOS/TNS

Leon Russell, seen here in 1971, is the subject of a new tribute album, "A Song for Leon" (left), released Sept. 8.

The latest to take up "A Song for You," which salutes a partner for teaching the narrator "precious secrets of a true love withholding nothing," is Monica Martin, who performs it on a new tribute album called "A Song for Leon" that also features Margo Price, the Pixies, Orville Peck, Bootsy Collins and Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats, among others. An L.A.-based singer and songwriter known for her collaborations with Marcus Mumford and James Blake, Martin performs "A Song for You" as a hymn, more or less, with churchy organ rippling beneath her airy vocals.

"It's such an unusual piece of music in that it's very free-form but it still cradles you," Martin says. "And some of the lyrics! 'I love you in a place where there's no space and time,'" she says, quoting one of Russell's signature lines. "You don't have to engage with the woo-woo nature of that, but it so captures that feeling where it's like you've loved someone for multiple lifetimes, you know?

"It just makes you want to know more about what was going on in this man's head when he wrote it."

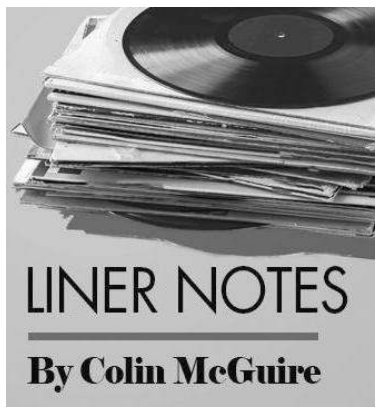
That's the idea behind the 10-track "A Song for Leon," released Sept. 8 from Primary Wave Music. Nearly seven years after Russell's death at age 74, the LP is part of an effort by his survivors and stewards to bring attention to the work of a musician who bridged styles and eras — from rock and pop to country and gospel, from the '60s song factory to the emergence of the '70s auteur — but whose legacy has been overshadowed by those of the classic-rock icons he inspired and worked with, among them George Harrison, Elton John, Eric Clapton and Joe Cocker.

As an oft-top-hatted bandleader, Russell organized Cocker's famously boisterous Mad Dogs & Englishmen and played a crucial role in Harrison's all-star Concert for Bangladesh in 1971; he arranged horns

SEE RUSSELL ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC

The XX singer's solo LP a return to dance floor



The XX are perhaps one of the most deceptive trios of the past 15 years in pop music. Leaning heavily on mood, they've made their name for themselves off a sparse approach to musicality. Half their tone could smugly be described as merely "air," but the truth is, once you dissect their blend of Euro indie pop, you begin to realize how the group is very much a sum of its parts. Romy Madley Croft's gorgeous vocals and tasteful guitar blends perfectly with Oliver Sim's breathy singing and sturdy bass playing. Jamie XX, meanwhile, ties it all together with a knockout musical sensibility.

So, what happens when one of them strikes out on their own? Sim made his case on 2022's "Hideous Bastard" with an uneven if not ambitious solo set. Jamie XX seems to never, ever stop working. And as for Madley Croft … well, she's been putting out music in dribs and drabs for quite some time now, but alas, after months of anticipation, her debut LP "Mid Air" collects those dribs and drabs and throws them into one gloriously danceable box. If the internet is to be believed, she wanted to make a record that recalled the days

when she would frequent fluorescent night clubs, and with these 11 songs, she does just that. Does that mean it works? Some of the time, at least. The best moments come when the XX textures peek through the two-stepping in subliminal ways. "The Sea," as an example, recalls the dance-pop that made the 1990s and early 2000s more interesting than they deserved to be and Madley Croft's understated, melancholic croon is unmistakable, even if it is surrounded by a "Dance Dance Revolution" floorboard. It wouldn't have been out of place on either her band's excellent 2017 effort "I See You" or, say, some of Madonna's better latter-day work.

It's also impossible not to hear the Everything But The Girl influence on a good chunk of the tracks here. While not as musically complex as her countrymate's mid-90s work, both Madley Croft and EBTG's Tracey Thorn command attention with their dour, affecting vocal approach. "Weightless" is simple and bright as it leans heavily on arpeggiated notes that echo through the speakers with joy as Madley Croft meditates on pure love. The Beverly Glenn-Copeland title track — which also features a Brian Eno co-producer credit — is as pretty as anything Madley Croft has ever been part of, and it bleeds into the Daft Punk-ish "Enjoy Your Life," which proves to be a worthy combination, the latter providing a hook that will stick with you for days.

Is it The XX part deux? No, but nobody said Madley Croft should strive for that anyway. This is an album about grief (Madley Croft lost both of her parents), love (this is the first time she's been this public this often about her wife), and, in some ways, nostalgia (Madley Croft has said she would burn CDs to bring to dance clubs back when she was just falling in love with music). It's a liberating love letter that lacks the sophistication of an XX album but makes up for it with both inspiration and purity from an artist who clearly needed to get a project like this out of her system.

"Hold my hand under the table," she asserts on the tone-setting opener "Loveher." "It's not that I'm not proud in the company of strangers / It's just some things are for us." And there's nothing wrong with that.

Russell: Book, tribute album push singer back into spotlight

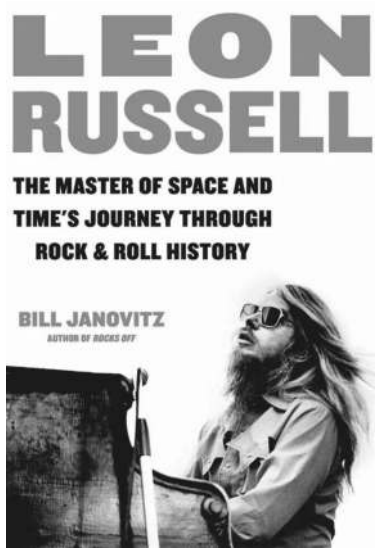
FROM PAGE 28

for the Rolling Stones and played guitar and piano with Delaney & Bonnie and Friends, whose lineup Clapton borrowed to create Derek & the Dominoes. John has called Russell's barrelhouse piano playing the model for his own, while acts as diverse as the Carpenters ("Superstar") and George Benson ("This Masquerade") scored huge hits with his elegantly crafted songs. In Russell's music, history and geography fold in on themselves — you can hear New Orleans, L.A., his native Tulsa, Okla. — even as he showcases an instinct for the explosive and the unpredictable.

Can you think of someone else who worked with both Barbra Streisand and the Gap Band?

"Leon had the total package," says Collins, the funk pioneer who played bass with James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic and who teams with the art-rock group U.S. Girls for a slinky version of "Superstar" on the new tribute album. "Whether he was recognized as a bluegrass player or a rock 'n' roll player or a jazz player, to me it don't really matter much. And I don't think it mattered to him. Certain things just touch the soul."

Often described as a musician's musician — and by even those who admire him as curmudgeonly — Russell managed to dent the charts under his own name with songs like 1972's rollicking "Tight Rope," which made it to No. 11 on Billboard's Hot 100. But by the time John cold-called him to make a 2010 duo album, he'd fallen — thanks to health and money troubles and



Bill Janovitz's thorough biography is one of many projects meant to shine a light on Leon Russell, a musician who bridged styles and eras. A documentary project and reissued albums via George Harrison's Dark Horse Records are said to be in the works.

to some dubious creative decisions — into what he called "a ditch by the side of the highway of life." He married twice, abused drugs and booze and food and blew up a relationship with singer Rita Coolidge, she says, because of his taste for orgies; some claim that Russell cut Coolidge out of a songwriting credit for "Superstar" as revenge.

Now things are happening to elevate his standing. Bob Dylan, who recruited Russell in the early '70s to produce a handful of tunes including "Watching the River Flow," name-checks him in a cut from his most recent studio LP, "Rough and Rowdy Ways." An exhaustive biography by author and musician Bill Janovitz, "Leon Russell: The Master of Space and Time's Journey through Rock & Roll History," was published to acclaim this past spring, just about the time Russell was feted with a tribute concert at Nelson's Luck Ranch during March's South by Southwest festival in Texas. And on the heels of "A Song for Leon," a documentary project about Russell is said to be in the works with the involvement of big names yet to be revealed.

This Leonaissance comes as legacy acts' catalogs have become newly valuable in the age of streaming and social media and of Hollywood and commercial licensing of old hits — see the resurrection last year of Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" after it was featured in an episode of Netflix's "Stranger Things" or the return of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" to the Hot 100 in 2020 after a random TikToker used it in a skateboarding video. Primary Wave — which also owns portions of the intellectual property of Whitney Houston (whose 2022 biopic it helped produce), Bob Marley, Prince and Joey Ramone — acquired a stake in Russell's music publishing and master recording income stream in 2019.

"I think of this tribute album as a trailer to the rest of what's unfolding with Leon," says Primary Wave's Laurel Stearns, who assembled "A Song for Leon" and who describes Russell as "a genre-hopping genius." Adds Dub Cornett, a veteran manager and producer who serves as a partner to Russell's widow, Jan Bridges, in overseeing Russell's estate: "It's vital we keep his memory alive, reintroducing his music to a new generation."

The eclectic nature of Russell's career — he also co-founded Shelter Records, which released early singles by Bob Marley and by Tom Petty's first band, Mudcrutch — might make it easier to do that at a moment when young listeners think little of stylistic barriers. "A Song for Leon" certainly demonstrates the breadth of his approach and influence, with laidback alt-country from Price (who sings "Strangers in a Strange Land"), windswept balladry from Peck ("This Masquerade"), fuzzy indie rock from the Pixies ("Crystal Closet Queen"), trippy blue-eyed soul from Rateliff ("Tight Rope") and swaggering R&B from Russell's daughter Tina Rose, who teams with Nelson's daughter Amy Nelson and Louis XIV's Jason Hill for "Laying Right Here in Heaven."

"His songs were all over the place," says Rateliff, who took on "A Song for You" at Nelson's recent 90th-birthday bash at the Hollywood Bowl. "But he had such a unique voice" — high, scratchy, perpetually lagging behind the beat — "and such a funny emphasis on certain sounds and words that it was always just totally Leon."

So too might Russell's outthere look attract interest, just as it did back in the '70s, when Jim Henson reportedly based his Muppets character Dr. Teeth on a combination of Russell and New Orleans' Dr. John.

Despite his obvious fondness for image-making, Russell's semi-forgotten status is in part the result of his own ambivalence regarding stardom.

"Basically, he wasn't tripping about himself," says Collins, another experienced sideman with an outre appearance. Janovitz, who says he "can't imagine Leon would have welcomed somebody writing a book about him," traces that aversion to fame to a traumatic childhood experience in which an aunt caught a 4-year-old Russell and a female cousin examining their different body parts, then excoriated him in front of the rest of his family.

"That incident has affected me for my entire life," Janovitz quotes Russell as writing in an unfinished memoir. "It has had an immeasurable detrimental effect on my career in show business in that I tend to freeze up around any situation that involves people watching me."

According to Stearns, Russell's estate was in a state of benign neglect before Primary Wave got involved along with David Zonshine, a longtime music-industry figure who currently runs Harrison's Dark Horse Records. Cornett says Dark Horse is planning a series of reissues of Russell's albums and is exploring "the extensive audio archive that Leon left behind."

What we won't see anytime soon, Stearns promises, is anything that runs counter to Russell's spirit just to make a buck. "So much of this stuff is really embarrassing," she says of the booming rock-nostalgia market. "It's not like we're gonna do a Leon slot machine in Las Vegas."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Q&A

Apple TV+

Brie Larson plays Elizabeth Zott, a widowed mother and gifted chemist who now runs a TV cooking show, in "Lessons in Chemistry."

The formula for a new format

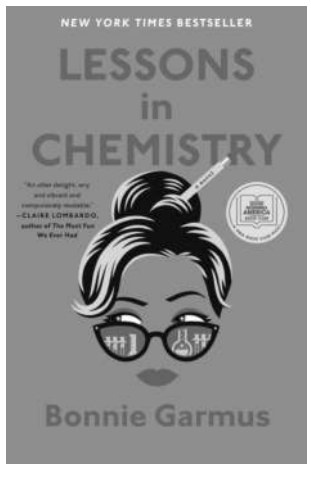
Bonnie Garmus' bestselling book 'Lessons in Chemistry' jumping to Apple TV+ in October

By Yvonne Villarreal
Los Angeles Times

Every woman has had an experience like it — or 50, author Bonnie Garmus ventures. It was 2013 and she was a creative director at an advertising agency in California's Bay Area when she, the only woman in a pitch meeting for a major technology campaign, received no feedback for her presentation. Then, as she tells it, one of the vice presidents in the room, a man, essentially regurgitated everything she had just outlined and got full credit for the campaign.

"I put up a fight because I'm not exactly a shrinking violet," she says. "And everyone ignored me. I basically stomped back to my desk. But you know what? It was a really great thing in a way because I was in such a bad mood, that instead of working on the deadline that I was supposed to be working on, I sat down that day, and I wrote the first chapter of 'Lessons in Chemistry.'"

The book follows Elizabeth Zott, a gifted chemist-turned-reluctant TV cooking show sensation who is navigating life as a widowed mother while contending with a sexist 1950s establishment. The emotional thrust of the book didn't need much research. But when it came to the science element, Garmus bought a book on eBay and taught herself basic chemistry from the '50s. "The fire department had to come twice for the amount of flames in my flat. So, I made some mistakes, but once I got into the chemistry, I was so glad I was forcing myself to do this because if I had not done it, I would have never realized chemistry rules us all," she said.



Published in March 2022, a few days before she turned 65, "Lessons in Chemistry" is Garmus' debut novel. It quickly became a bestseller, remaining on the New York Times bestsellers list more than a year after publication and has been translated into 40 languages. It's a welcome and unexpected outcome for Garmus, who said the first book she finished and tried to get published was rejected 98 times.

On Oct. 13, the TV adaptation of "Lessons in Chemistry" will premiere on Apple TV+ and star Oscar winner Brie Larson, who is also an executive producer.

"When I started writing Elizabeth Zott, I was writing my role model," Garmus says. "Because that day in the meeting where I was saying, 'Hey, wait, those are my ideas! Hey, everybody!' and no one was listening to me, and later when I started writing her, my constant theme in my head was, 'What would Elizabeth Zott do?' She was always a little more bold than I was. She doesn't apologize for anything she says. So it's great to be in her head."

In a video call from London, where she lives with her husband and their dog, a greyhound named Ninety-Nine, Garmus spoke about having her work adapted for television, ceding control of the fictional world she created and having Stanley Tucci create a cocktail for her.

Los Angeles Times: Is it a surreal experience seeing something you wrote become a visual thing?

Garmus: It's so surreal. But you know, it's less surreal in one important way, which is that because it's not the novel, it's an adaptation, I can look at it as a completely new thing. And that is so much better than saying "no, no, it has to be exactly like the book."

Book adaptations are a fundamental part of the Hollywood content machine. Was that ever a goal? Is it something you hoped would happen?

I never imagined ever that this could happen. And when they asked me later on who I saw in the roles when I was writing it, I said no one because I never imagined it would get this far. What happened was, the book started to get a lot of interest during the publishing auctions. I think we had 16 bids in the United States from publishers, and my agent, Felicity Blunt, called me and she said, "We've got to find a U.S. publisher; you've got to decide, but in the meantime, is this a bad time to tell you that I'm getting a lot of calls from Hollywood?" So, it was a shock. And then suddenly, she said, "You have a film agent now." And I said, "I do?" There were like 38 different studios who were interested, and it was just very overwhelming. But I will say Brie Larson Zoomed with me and she said, "I want to be executive producer, and I want to bring this to life." I have an incredible amount of respect for her.

But for me, it was the writer who was going to be taking it on — Susannah Grant ["Unbelievable," "Erin Brockovich"]. She is one of my heroes when it comes to screenplays and limited series. Her work is impeccable. And so having her writing the series, I felt like I could not have found a better person.

You sometimes hear of authors who are, with good reason, very protective and possessive of the work that they've

SEE FORMULA ON PAGE 31

Formula: ‘Chemistry’ sequel a possibility, but no time soon

FROM PAGE 30

created. And they want as much control as they can and want final say on the script. What did you want out of this experience?

Well, at first, I did want to be involved in the scripts. I did want to be one of the writers on it. This is how naive I was — my publishers all said, “You have no idea what’s about to hit you with book promotion. You’re not going to have time to brush your teeth, much less work on the script while your book is coming out. That’s impossible.” And at the time, I thought, I don’t know. I mean, how hard would it be? Well, they were 1,000% right — maybe 2,000% right. I’ve been on the road for a year and a half; I’ve had very few breaks. Now, I can’t imagine adding that on. Also, I didn’t have any experience taking something from a book, which, of course, the writer is just married to. You know as a writer that you’re going to have to let them bring their vision to it too. Because I created this world in my head, I know how everyone looks. and I know how everyone talks, but they’re doing the visual part of it. And you got to let them do it.

How would you describe your level of involvement in the season?

Oh, it’s really next to nothing. They’re very generous and I’m called a co-executive producer, but I did nothing. The only thing I did was — if I’m being really honest — I read the last scripts. Lee Eisenberg took over for Susannah Grant and Hannah Fidell because they were both off the project by then. He was very generous. And he said, “I’m going to send you these and please feel free to write notes. And please know our deal is that we can ignore your notes.” And I said, “You know what, I am fine with that. I get that. You’re taking it into a different direction, and I get it.” So that’s what we did. I wrote all over the scripts. Sometimes I go, “Oh my God, no.” And other times, I’d say, “This is great.” But honestly, I knew as a creative person to another creative person: Let me let you do your work. Let me not get in your way. And so I think Lee and I had a really good relationship that way.

As with most adaptations, there is some rearranging to the story. There are some additions, there are some tweaks. Did you have any stipulations? Like, look, I know this is going to be an adaptation, and some things are gonna be different, but these are things that are really important that I would like to keep intact?

I wanted to keep everything intact. This is why I had to remove myself. I mean, this is where the novelist can get in everybody’s way. I’m used to being edited, I think it’s really nice just to say to another creative person, “You have a vision, let’s see what your vision is. Let’s see what you want to do.” Also, there are a lot of people. I’m used to working on my own. They have 9,000 people working on this. They have different motives, and they have different things that they’re trying to do. And I respect that.

Have you watched any of it? Does it still feel like it’s the world you created? Or does it feel totally different in your view?

Well, I just saw a rough cut. I will say Brie Larson really immersed herself in this role. And I really appreciate all the work that she put into that because when

THOMAS BANNEYER/TNS

Bonnie Garmus, the author of “Lessons in Chemistry,” in Germany in 2022.

Apple TV+

“Lessons in Chemistry,” premiering Oct. 13 on Apple TV+, stars Brie Larson.

“I was really astonished and so happy to see how how seriously she took the role, and how she just kind of immersed herself in it. I really have a huge, huge amount of respect for her.”

Bonnie Garmus

about Brie Larson, who plays the central figure of “Lessons in Chemistry,” Elizabeth Zott

she walks out on that stage, when she’s just Elizabeth Zott at work, that’s who I saw. And it was really amazing for me to see that on the screen. It was like, “Wow, there she is.” It’s a different animal. And so I would say to any viewer, this is their rendition. It’s different from my vision, but it doesn’t mean that it’s not as good.

It’s hard to get into specifics without spoiling for both readers and non-readers. But one thing I will say is I was curious about how they would work in Six-Thirty, which is the name of Elizabeth’s dog in the book. You wove in his perspective throughout the novel. And the series did find a way to include that.

We all knew, no matter which studio I talked to, they all said, “Six-Thirty — that is the hard one.” And I knew it was going to be hard. It is so much easier to write that in a novel. I had the easy job there. So I really respected the fact that they wanted to keep it and that they weren’t going to have like the dog move his mouth or anything. Because Six-Thirty doesn’t talk, he only thinks. I think it was a really hard thing to pull off. And I’ll be interested to see how audiences feel about it. There are three characters of the fan favorites in the novel, and that is Harriet Sloane, Elizabeth Zott and Six-Thirty, and Mad coming in a close fourth. So with those four, I hear from people all the time, readers are like, “They better not change ...” And I don’t know how I would have brought him on the screen. I think they did great with what they were trying to do.

Tell me more about your conversations with Brie before filming? And were you able to visit the set at all and see her bring Elizabeth to life?

I got to talk with Brie — there were no agents on that Zoom call. Brie has great empathy. And she’s able to bring that empathy to the screen. When I watched her face change, when she was reacting to different people, that’s when you see a great actress. I was really astonished and so happy to see how how seriously she took the role, and how she just kind of immersed herself in it. I really have a huge, huge amount of respect for her.

But, yes, I did go to the set, but unbelievably — so, I’d had all the COVID shots. I had a PCR test before I flew. I land in Hollywood, they do another PCR test, and it says I’m COVID positive. I couldn’t go to the set! I’m in the hotel room. And I’m just there for five days. And then after five days, my husband and I were changing flats in London, and I needed to come home and the CDC says you can leave after five days. So I had to fly myself home. I missed the whole thing.

What do you hope viewers will take away if they haven’t read your book? What do you hope viewers take away from Elizabeth’s journey?

I really hope that people see that men and women have always been exactly the same in so many important ways, including intellectually, but that keeping anybody out of science or any other career, based on their religious belief, based on their gender, based on the color of their skin, based on their age, all of it is wrong. And all of it, the most important thing is, is that [it] is completely unscientific. And that is why I put Elizabeth Zott into the science world because science knows that none of this flies in the science world, and yet it still reigns, this kind of sexism. And we need all the smart people we can get on all these problems that we have.

Do you think there’s more of Elizabeth Zott’s story to tell? Would you want to revisit her at some point?

I revisit her every day because I’m never going to get off this book promotion. I’m trying to write another novel. People keep asking me if I’m going to write a sequel and right now the answer is no because I started on this other story that I really like and I really feel like those characters are like “Me! Me! Me! Me!” Characters are really demanding. But I do think maybe down the road, I would tell a little bit more of what happens to her and what happens to Mad because it’s not like when it ends in the book, everything’s fixed now. Patriarchy! Obviously, we’ve seen the “Barbie” movie. We have a long way to go as women in this world. And I think we need constant reminders. And we need a guide.

Would you want to be more involved next time, if the time allowed? If you weren’t busy with book promotion?

Yeah, I would definitely want to be the lead writer. I’ll say, I’m pretty good about listening to other people’s input because it really does help. I would definitely want to work on it if I were to do this again. But I know my publisher is going to go, “Oh, what about the book promotion?”

As you mentioned, Felicity Blunt is your agent. She is also the sister of actor Emily Blunt and the wife of Stanley Tucci. Has Stanley ever made you a cocktail?

Yes, he has. He is the one, by the way, who developed the cocktail in the reader’s guide. I did not develop that cocktail. I’m not much of a mixologist. The only thing I do is drink wine. Felicity told me I had to have a cocktail for the reader’s guide, so I said OK. I made one up using the web. Then I sent it out. And I guess Stanley made it at home and went, “Oh, my God.” [contorts face] It was around 10 o’clock at night; Felicity called me, which I thought was kind of late to call. She said, “Bonnie, someone wants to talk to you about your cocktail.” And then she moved to the side and Stanley is standing there with these limes going, “It was bad.” He redid the entire cocktail for me in the next hour. He’s just the greatest. And so it is his cocktail, which I have called “The Cocktail for the Disenchanted Woman.” He was the one who saved it because apparently mine was treacle.

I’m sure you get asked a lot about what books you’re reading these days. But what TV show has had your attention recently?

I was a huge “Succession” fan. I loved the writing of that show. I drove my husband nuts. Every five minutes I’d pause and go, “The show is so well written.” It’s so out of the box, so unexpected. And I just loved the whole thing. I love Roman, of course. He is just hilarious, but all of them, honestly, are so good. I was sitting at a restaurant in Chicago and one of the actors walked in and I almost had a heart attack. I thought, “Oh my God, get a hold of yourself.” And then I was in Dubai, and Brian Cox was there; we were both there for the literary festival. We were both standing together and they were trying to direct us where we were to go. And I said, “You know, you can’t swear here.” He was great. He probably thought I was crazy.

Sounding off

iStock

If you hate hearing your voice in a recording, you're not alone — here's what you can do about it

By Lisa Mulcahy
Special to The Washington Post

For many of us, hearing our own voice on a recording is a bit of a shock. "Do I really sound like that?" (Yes, you do, but more on that later.)

In a recent survey of 1,500 people, half said hearing their recorded voice was so harmful to their mental well-being that they would change it if they could.

When researchers at Massachusetts Eye and Ear, a Harvard teaching hospital, asked people to listen to their own voices on a recording, 58% of the survey subjects said they didn't like listening to themselves; 39% found the sound of their voices troubling in normal — non-recorded — conversation, as well.

So why are so many of us surprised by the sound of our own voices, and what can be done to alter them? Read on for thoughts from experts:

Why do voices sound different recorded?

"There are two ways sound is conducted when you speak," says Tricia Ashby-Scabis, senior director of audiology practices at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in Rockville, Md.

"You hear yourself through both air conduction and through bone conduction," Ashby-Scabis says. "As a result, you hear a deeper, fuller, pleasing sound to your voice. When you hear a recording of your voice, however, you're only hearing ourselves through air conduction, so you lose that internal deep sound quality."

Air conduction uses the pinna (the external part of the ear), ear canal, tympanic membrane (eardrum) and ossicles (tiny bones inside the ear) to amplify your voice, while bone conduction transmits the vibration of the sound of your voice to the inner ear, and from one ear to the other.

Internally, your voice will have a lower tone. But on a recording, where air alone carries sound, your voice may assume a higher frequency — an accurate one, as far as others are concerned.

"If you listen to a recording of your voice, yes, that's actually what the rest of the world is hearing," says Matthew R. Naunheim, a physician and surgeon at MassEye and Ear and assistant professor of otolaryngology/head and neck surgery at Harvard Medical School. Naunheim was one of the authors of the Harvard study on people's impressions of their voices.

Why don't I like my recorded voice?

When you hear yourself speak as you sound to others, it can mess with your internal expectations, and subsequently your self-confidence. The concept is called voice confrontation, and it was first studied by psychologists Philip Holzman and Clyde Rousey in the 1960s.

Holzman and Rousey found that when presented with what they really sound like, people tended to focus on the negative vocal qualities of their voices on recordings to the point of getting defensive about how they sounded.

"In psychology, there's the ideal self, and then there's the actual self," says Chloe Carmichael, a clinical psychologist in New York. "The ideal self is more aspirational, and that's not a bad thing. We need to have an aspirational mindset to be healthy and functional. However, when people get confronted with reality ... we realize that our voice doesn't actually sound as we hear ourselves. This can be jarring, and can produce insecurity."

Can I change my voice?

Several interventions are possible, including vocal cord injections using collagen, gel fillers or Botox, Naunheim says.

"Vocal cords can also be pushed together, a treatment that was developed for paralysis, but it can act as a 'voice lift.' It's pitch modification," Naunheim says. "Transgender and nonbinary patients have used this type of surgery to change the pitch of their voices."

But vocal cord surgery risks include bleeding, infection, hoarseness, breathing issues, chipped teeth during the procedure and undesirable results.

"If someone is dissatisfied with their voice without a medical reason, however — if someone says, 'My voice doesn't hurt, but I don't like it" — I recommend a conservative approach at first," Naunheim says.

Voice therapy using airflow exercises can be a helpful, safe alternative, according to data from the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Increasing airflow through simple techniques — such as blowing through your lips or gargling — will help your vocal muscles relax, and help you to develop more resonance in your voice. A vocal coach can guide you through these exercises, which work best when practiced consistently.

Simple, safe steps toward change

Consulting a speech therapist, voice coach or singing coach can be a good way to get an analysis of your voice.

But "it's important if you visit an expert that you are willing to listen to their objective feedback," Carmichael says. "Ask yourself, is there anything else about myself I tend to be critical of? If so, it may be more helpful to work on your self-esteem and self-acceptance rather than your voice."

If you decide to work with a professional, you'll learn simple techniques to improve the quality of how you sound.

Jessica Doyle-Mekkes, a vocal coach who teaches applied voice at East Carolina University's School of Theatre and Dance in Greenville, N.C., got personal benefit from the skills she now teaches.

"Working as a young actor, I often got critiques that my voice was too nasal-sounding," she says. "I worked with a voice teacher who told me that the key to losing the nasal quality to my voice was to relax my tongue more and release my jaw. Acoustically, the rule is 'more space equals more bass.' The warm, lower sound of bass is what the human ear finds attractive."

Reading a news article every day into your phone, and then analyzing where your voice needs improvement, is a great first step, Carmichael says. The more you do it, the more desensitized you'll be to the flaws you think you hear, and the easier they'll be to improve. It's also important to take good care of your voice. This means:

- Not smoking
- Treating gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD
- Getting enough sleep and hydration
- Avoiding unnecessary throat clearing, coughing and whispering
- Working with a professional to improve your posture and learn vocal warmup exercises.

"Good vocal hygiene, and working on your vocal technique, is better than a risky procedure," Naunheim says.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

Developing patience

Experts and parents offer tips, tricks for teaching your kids how to wait

iStock

"Patience is teachable as long as the person teaching it is patient themselves," says Michele Borba, an educational psychologist. "You'll never get instant results. It takes patience and it takes time."

BY STACEY COLINO
Special to The Washington Post

It's no secret that patience doesn't come easily to kids. And the challenge to develop it may be increasing in our modern world, given that kids have immediate access to so many things that have led them to expect instant gratification 24/7.

They have constant internet access and on-demand TV services. They don't have to wait to see how a photo will turn out after it's been developed: They can see it right away on a digital camera's window or their phones. And they can reach their parents wherever they are, thanks to texting.

"It's a now generation — everything is instant and accessible and kids are used to having everything quickly," says Michele Borba, an educational psychologist based in Palm Springs, Calif., and author of "Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine." Yet this new reality comes at the expense of kids developing the ability to tolerate waiting or delays without getting upset.

Kids aren't born with patience. It's a quality they develop over time.

"Young kids are supposed to be egocentric because their whole world is revolving around them," Borba explains. This is partly because parents and caregivers are constantly attentive to a child's needs and safety, and partly because of how their brains work. The goal is to gradually help kids build self-control as their brains mature and develop.

"We live in a social world and we can't have everything we want when we want it — that's where patience and self-control come in," says Pamela Cole, a professor of psychology and human development at Pennsylvania State University. "The years between toddlerhood and kindergarten are critical for developing patience."

By age 6 or 7, kids can start to think about their own behavior and the consequences of that behavior and better understand the concept of patience, says Pamela Davis-Kean, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan. "Patience is another name for self-regulation, which is both behavioral and emotional."

While schools are a major setting where kids learn patience, parents can also help kids build it. And it's worth the effort, because "a patient child is a happier child," Borba says. "He'll be less stressed, have better self-control and make fewer rash decisions." Another perk: Research suggests that when people increase their capacity for patience, they have less depression and more positive moods.

Here are some ways you can help your kids cultivate patience:

Play games that involve patience: Outdoor games such as Red Light, Green Light or Mother, May I? help kids learn when to act and when to wait. Inside, playing card games such as Go Fish or board games such as Candy Land or Chutes and Ladders are great ways to help kids learn to wait their turn and handle frustrations, Borba says.

Redirect your child's attention: To help a child be patient while waiting in line, for example, create distractions by playing a hand game (such as Rock Paper Scissors) or an I Spy game or singing a song together.

Sohaib Hasan's almost-3-year-old child often becomes frustrated while waiting for her turn at the playground; "We'll engage in a fun activity like counting birds or finding shapes in the clouds," says Hasan, a father of three girls in Karachi, Pakistan, and founder of OhMyClassroom.com. "This makes the waiting time more enjoyable and helps her cope with her impatience."

Research has found that using the attention training technique — which involves focusing your attention on different sounds in space to divert attention from your feelings — also improves kids' ability to delay gratification.

Model patience when you're frustrated: Sometimes adults struggle with patience, too. "The difference is, as adults, we have a tool kit to go to, to help us be patient," says Kimberly Cuevas, an associate professor of psychological sciences at the University of Connecticut. As a parent, you can model how you use these tools — by taking a deep breath before acting when you're frustrated or using time spent in traffic to listen to calming music or think aloud about your next vacation. Seeing this behavior may inspire your child to follow your lead in similar situations, experts say.

Build in pauses: When you ask your child a question that requires more than a yes-or-no response, encourage them to wait at least three seconds before answering, Borba suggests. Besides allowing your child a chance to think of an appropriate response, this pause helps curb the impulse to blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Along with patience, these are key aspects of self-regulation, Borba says.

Rely on visual aids: Offer concrete ways to count down the waiting time — such as using an oven timer or an hourglass-shaped sand timer — while they're waiting for a snack or your attention, for example. This is especially helpful for younger kids, for whom a particular span of time may feel abstract.

When Yaeli Vogel's 4-year-old son began asking for a new magnet toy, she suggested it would be a great gift for his 5th birthday. He liked the idea until he realized his birthday was several months away. Because he kept asking for the toy, Vogel decided to create a chart for him that depicts every day up until his birthday.

Validate your child's feelings: "There may be times when you need to be compassionate and say, 'this is really hard for you, honey, and I'm sorry,'" Cole says. This is a form of "emotion coaching," which can be effective in helping kids develop patience among other self-regulatory skills. Research has found that including emotion coaching in parenting programs helps reduce children's disruptive behaviors and improve the relationship between kids and their parents.

Use positive reinforcement: "Recognize when your kids have been patient and tell them you appreciate it," Cuevas says. "This will help motivate your children to do that again." You can also do this by "telling the other parent or a friend how well your child did with patience while your child is within earshot," Borba says. Hopefully, your child takes pride in that behavior, which will encourage a repeat performance in the future.

"Patience is teachable as long as the person teaching it is patient themselves," Borba says. "You'll never get instant results. It takes patience and it takes time."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

The relatable misery of expecting company

On Monday morning, I sat at the kitchen island to write my to-do list for the week. Company was coming on Thursday, and there was much to do.

This wasn't just any company. Not our siblings, who were easygoing enough to ignore the tumbleweeds of dog hair blowing through our house. Not our mothers, who were too old to see the moldy caulk in the corner of the shower. Not our high school or college friends, on whom we had enough blackmail "dirt" to keep them from complaining.

The houseguests coming Thursday were Doug and Suz, friends we'd met in 2001 while stationed in Norfolk, Va. Although Doug and Suz were Navy folks like us, our lives had been very different. When we met, we were in our mid-30s. Our family lived in a suburban house on a cul-de-sac with a playset in the backyard. I drove a minivan sprinkled with cold french fries, and my idea of luxury was taking long showers at the YMCA while the kids were in childcare.

Doug had recently left active duty to be an airline pilot, so he and Suz bought a house in a cool part of Virginia Beach, steps from the ocean. Without any kids to worry about, they owned a vintage red Jeep Wrangler, and their "family room" contained a large pool table and a stocked liquor cabinet. Their home decor included original paintings from their favorite modern artists. They went to rock concerts, took winter ski vacations and ate at Michelin Star restaurants around the globe.

At the top of my to-do list, my handwriting started at a pleasingly legible 16-point script. But as I thought of more and more tasks to squeeze onto the small slip of paper, it became barely visible. "I can't let them see our kitchen like this ... they make their own sushi, for criminy's sake," I muttered, as panic set in.

I dug underneath the sink like a deranged underground miner, coming up with three sponges, six bottles of cleaning products and the frayed toothbrush I used to scrub dog doo out of tennis shoe treads. In a frenzy, I scoured the cabinets, appliances and backsplash. I feather-dusted the fan blades, mopped the floor and collected cobwebs in the corners.

While wiping up crumbs, I spied the melange of health aids I kept on the countertop for easy access — Metamucil for regularity, and a large pill organizer packed with a self-prescribed assortment of vitamins intended to delay my eventual demise. "How embarrassing," I realized, quickly stuffing it all into a drawer.

On Tuesday, while vacuuming the living room, I noticed the water rings on Aunt Millie's buffet and the fresh chew marks our dog had left on my parents' 1978 coffee table. The hodgepodge of secondhand furniture that once passed for "shabby chic" suddenly looked like dusty old junk. Remembering Doug and Suz's sleek modern home decor, I futilely plumped pillows and hid knickknacks.

On Wednesday, while putting fresh sheets on the guest bed, I saw myself in a mirror and gasped. I was young when I met Suz. In the past 22 years, I'd raised three children while moving seven more times. I'd lost my legal career, countless friends and bladder control. I'd grown squishier, wrinklier, saggier and infinitely more tired. Conversely, Suz and Doug had spent that 22 years living at their beach house, developing careers, working out, straightening their teeth and growing their enormous friend group.

Just then, the retro "dance" ringtone I'd selected on my phone startled me. "Hello, Suz?" I answered, apprehensively. We discussed their arrival time and our plans for the weekend, before I confessed, "I'm really old now, by the way."

To my surprise, my friend of 22 years replied, "Me too," and we shared stories about the pains in our hips and knees. They say, "Misery loves company," but I was just happy that my friend and I still had something in common after all.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

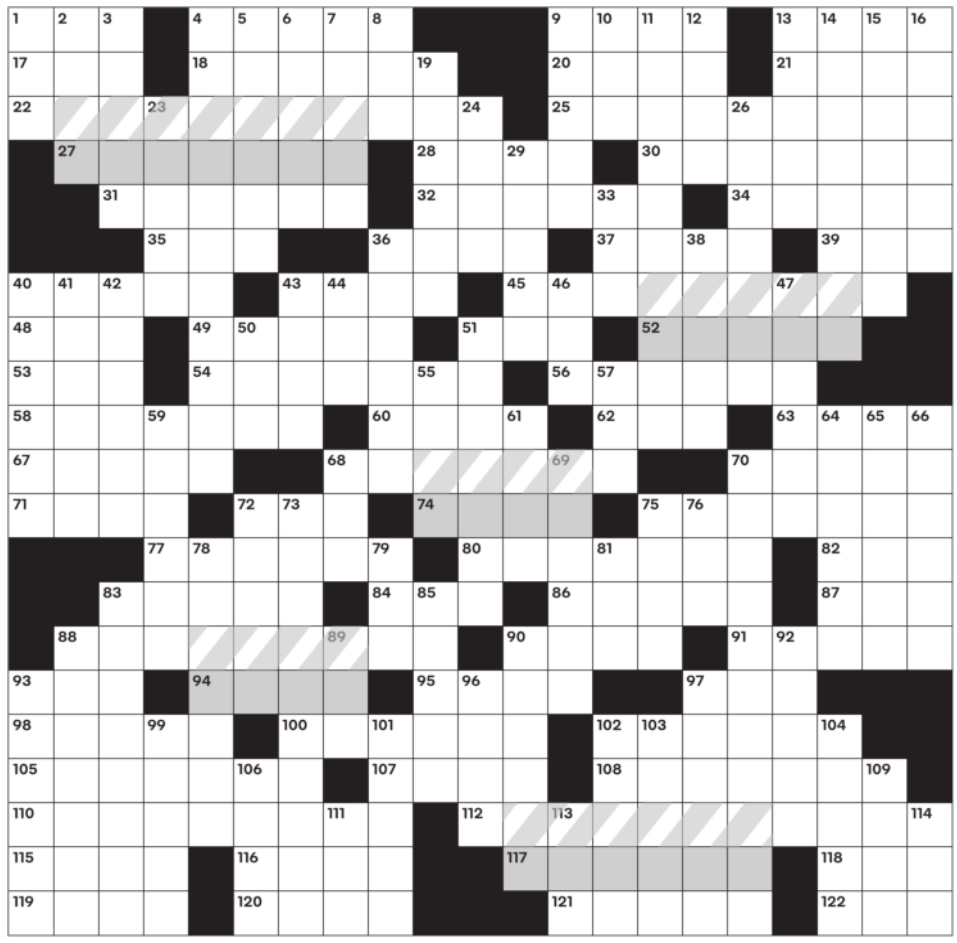
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

DETOURS AHEAD

BY ADAM WAGNER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Adam Wagner, of Oakland, Calif., is a creative lead at Patreon, a monetization platform for content creators. This is his 16th crossword for The Times (and fifth Sunday). Adam is part of a large community of Bay Area puzzlemakers. He speculates that the overlap between tech and crossword construction might be the reason for the concentration. Or maybe it's just something in the water? — W. S.



ACROSS

1 Chat chuckle
4 Less than one's best, in sports lingo
9 ____ Stadium, venue with a cushioned acrylic surface that is the largest of its type in the world
13 Wholesale
17 Inits. associated with accessibility
18 Submitted after the deadline
20 Some ring finishes, for short
21 ____ research, source of ''dirt'' on a political rival
22 ~~Dickens clerk~~ DETOUR: Theatrical success
25 Formidable-but-awesome behavior
27 DETOUR No. 1
28 It comes out on top
30 Family name in folk music
31 Parts of some choral arrangements?
32 Boosler who was the first woman to have an hourlong comedy special on cable TV
34 Big name in health care
35 What a sleepy head might do
36 Stagger
37 Dentist's command
39 ''That sucks''
40 Composer Strauss, the brother of Johann
43 ''Glass Onion'' director Johnson
45 ~~Homeland Security concerns~~ DETOUR: Computer-port inserts
48 Cry stressed on its second syllable
49 Purpose
51 Bygone auto inits.
52 DETOUR No. 2
53 Present-day auto inits.
54 Pharaoh who founded Egypt's 19th dynasty
56 ''Get out!''
58 Things settled over drinks
60 Shakespearean verb
62 A head
63 Mums' mums
67 ____ cloth (sandpaper alternative)
68 ~~They're laid in Australia~~ DETOUR: They feel your pain
70 Gas whose name comes from the Greek word for ''foreigner''
71 Common first word for an infant
72 Taxpayer's ID
74 DETOUR No. 3
75 Lose one's balance?
77 Hebrew greeting
80 ''It's a thumbs down from me''
82 ''O patria ____'' (Verdi aria)
83 Metropolis with a Little Havana neighborhood
84 Major ref.
86 Mineral used in glass production
87 Texted shrug
88 ~~Photographer's setting~~ DETOUR: Come in handy
90 Grps. that liaise with superintendents
91 Fermented drink from Russia
93 Embargo
94 DETOUR No. 4
95 Bird embodied by the Egyptian god Thoth
97 Cells are covered in it, in brief
98 Studio Ghibli genre
100 Trickster
102 What some emails, checks and balls do
105 Wholesale
107 Jane who says, ''I need not sell my soul to buy bliss''
108 Golden
110 Classic game of bluffing
112 ~~Feature of some sweatpants~~ DETOUR: Well-known musical group with a place name
115 Then
116 Puts together
117 DETOUR No. 5
118 Brown, for one
119 N.A.A.C.P. and A.C.L.U., for two
120 Component of a beekeeper's suit
121 Stuffs with bacon fat, say
122 Caustic cleaner

DOWN

1 Titration station
2 Something typically found in a barnyard
3 Lead-in to delivery
4 Hunt-and-peck types?
5 Chewed (on)
6 Meeting spot for a union
7 Company that owns Bloomingdale's
8 Neighbor of Djibouti: Abbr.
9 In check
10 Reggae forerunner
11 Jumble
12 Early victim of identity theft?
13 Israel's Dayan
14 Photographer's setting
15 Suddenly appears, with ''up''
16 ''And, uh, that's what happened''
19 ''Come On ____'' (1982 hit)
23 Michael who was knighted in 2000
24 Related thing
26 Substitute
29 Face ____
33 Noggin
36 Containing graphic content, say
38 Diamond imperfection?
40 Vaccinated, to Brits
41 ''Wowza!''
42 Seethed
43 Parts of drinking or reading glasses
44 Access points
46 Express some intense emotion
47 Goal that sends a game into overtime
50 Bit of cereal
51 CVS competitor
55 Make more powerful, with ''up''
57 Series segments, informally
59 Five-time winner of the Copa do Mundo
61 ''Love It or List It'' airer
64 Inability to recall the names of everyday things
65 Restriction on some wedding invites
66 Running kicks?
68 William Phelps ____, inventor of the stop sign and the crosswalk
69 Henrik Ibsen play
70 Motion-sensing Microsoft gaming devices
72 Literary character who transforms into an insect
73 Backyard toy that attaches to a hose
75 Some hair products
76 Busy time at a cafeteria
78 Small towns
79 ''Calvin and Hobbes'' character based on ''every jerk I've ever known,'' per Bill Watterson
81 ____ Maria
83 Bite-size Tex-Mex snack
85 Enlighten
88 Elle or Dakota of Hollywood
89 Slippery sort
90 Resolution units
92 Flashcard words
93 Leave high and dry
96 Snoozefest
97 Not easily accessed
99 Conventions
101 ''Ooh, that's bad''
102 Iraqi city near the Tigris and Euphrates
103 Peripheral
104 Amazon's domain
106 Lambert or Levine of pop
109 Sin that sounds like two letters
111 Many '90s music purchases
113 Code of the world's busiest airport
114 Stain, maybe

GUNSTON STREET

"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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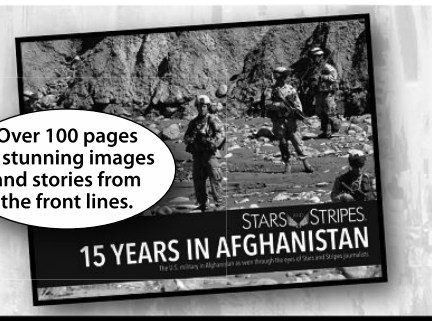

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FACES

Crazy, but beautiful

Jared Leto says Thirty Seconds to Mars' new album surprisingly upbeat

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Thirty Seconds to Mars is back with a new clutch of songs born from the pandemic and collected under a very long title. "It's the End of the World But It's a Beautiful Day" is exactly what it sounds like — optimistic, despite the doom.

"I really feel like it represents where we're at as a planet, as a people," says Jared Leto, who formed the band with his brother, Shannon. "You keep waiting for crazy to be over. But there's just one more day. And sometimes it's easy to forget that life is full of promise and hope and beauty."

Despite its long title, the band's sixth studio album is filled with shorter songs than usual and seems to try to veer away from their typical anthemic, soaring sound.

"We're not shy about things," says Leto. "But this album was different. We really challenged ourselves to do as little as possible. We wanted there to be a focus on the vocal and really to allow what is there to be felt and heard."

The resulting 11-track album is heavy on hooks, with lead single "Stuck" — a dancehall banger that Lady Gaga would be proud of — making the top 10 of Billboard's Rock & Alternate Airplay and Alternative Airplay.

"This is an important album for us. It feels like we're a brand-new band, like we're at the beginning again and that's an exciting place to be on your sixth album," says Leto.

"We're really breaking new ground for ourselves creatively and going to places we haven't been before. And I think a lot of people are going to be surprised."

The music has offered the Oscar- and Golden Globe-winning Leto something to concentrate on as the actors' strike drags on, which has silenced movie and TV shoots.

"I'm really grateful that I do have another outlet to share my creativity, and I share it with my brother. And that's a really important thing for me," says Leto. "I'm compelled to do both."

He and Shannon began work on it early during the pandemic. Jared was in Nevada and California for lockdown and his brother was in Seattle. "My brother and I had a little distance, which is always good when you're working on an album," Jared jokes.

"Once we had finished every show that's available to stream in every language — I think maybe it was around the "Tiger King" era, I'm not sure — but we decided to use that time to our advantage and get to work on a new album."

The duo stockpiled a few hundred songs and whittled them down to the final 11, from the anguished torch song "Never Not Love You" to the encouraging "Get Up Kid."

"Of course, they started off kind of dark and brooding songs about isolation and desperation. But as we started to come out of that time, the songs reflect those feelings, too, like hope and optimism."

They got help on some tracks by writer-producers Monsters & Strangerz — on "Never Not Love You" and "Lost These Days" — Ed Sheeran and Snow Patrol's Johnny McDaid — on "World On Fire" — and Dan Reynold of Imagine Dragons on "Life Is Beautiful."

"Other artists, they teach you things. They bring out different sides of yourself," says Leto. "I would have started that much sooner had I known the reward that was there and the benefits and how fun and exciting that it could be."

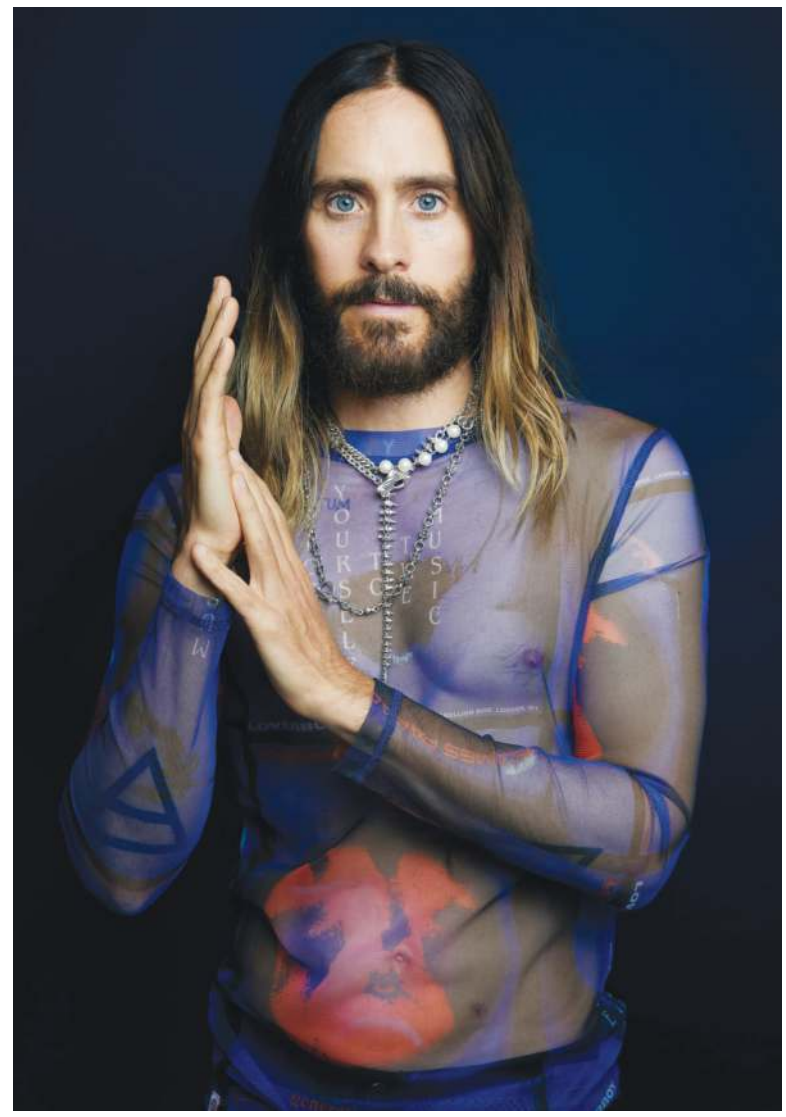
Leto is one of those rare artists who has succeeded in both movies and music — with two albums in the Top Ten of the Billboard 200 — and is not told to stay in his lane. This summer, Thirty Seconds to Mars played Lollapalooza alongside The 1975 and Kendrick Lamar.

"I think we've all gotten a little more forgiving of people kind of stepping into different lanes, exploring different avenues," he says. "Maybe it's a return to a time from the past where, you know, musicians were dancers and dancers sang and singers acted." He adds: "It all comes from the same place."

Leto has also softened his grip a bit on the band and its music. He says early on it was important for him to have control and to take ownership.

"But as I've gotten older, I've learned to relinquish some of that and share some of that and collaborate more and be open to other ideas and inspiration," he says.

"What a privilege it is to make a sixth album. It's incredible. I never thought we would make a single album. I never thought we would have a song on the radio. I never thought a single person would sing our songs at a concert."



TAYLOR JEWELL, INVISION/AP

Actor and musician Jared Leto is promoting Thirty Seconds to Mars' latest album, "It's the End of the World But It's a Beautiful Day." Leto and his brother Shannon started writing it during the pandemic.

Bob Ross' 1st TV painting for sale for nearly $10M

Associated Press

What would Bob Ross think?

The artist who brought painting to the people, with works completed for PBS viewers in less than a half-hour with little more than a large bristle brush, putty knife and plenty of encouragement, certainly wouldn't have envisioned one of his works going up for sale for nearly $10 million.

But that's the price a Minneapolis gallery is asking for "A Walk in the Woods," the first of more than 400 paintings that Ross produced on-air for his TV series "The Joy of Painting."

"It is season one, episode one of what you would call the rookie card for Bob Ross," Ryan Nelson, who owns the gallery, Modern Artifact, said of the work created in the show's debut, which aired Jan. 11, 1983.

Growing up in a small town, Nelson said he was introduced to art through Ross' show and loves his paintings. He doesn't expect a quick sale given the high asking price, which he sees as an opportunity to display the painting for a larger audience.

On that first show where he painted "A Walk in the Woods," Ross — sporting his beloved perm, full beard and unbuttoned shirt — stressed that painting didn't need to be pretentious.

"We have avoided painting for so long because I think all of our lives we've been told that you have to go to school half your life, maybe even have to be blessed by Michelangelo at birth, to ever be able to paint a picture," Ross said. "And here, we want to show you that that's not true. That you can paint a picture."

Ross, who died in 1995, hosted the show from 1983 until 1994.

MARK VANCLEAVE/AP

"A Walk in the Woods," the first painting Bob Ross produced for hic iconic show "The Joy of Painting," sits on display Sept. 19 at the home of Modern Artifact owner Ryan Nelson in Wayzata, Minn.

'Game of Thrones' creator, other authors sue ChatGPT maker over copyright infringement

John Grisham, Jodi Picoult and George R.R. Martin are among 17 authors suing OpenAI for "systematic theft on a mass scale," the latest in a wave of legal action by writers concerned that artificial intelligence programs are using their copyrighted works without permission.

In papers filed Tuesday in federal court in New York, the authors alleged "flagrant and harmful infringements of plaintiffs' registered copyrights" and called the ChatGPT program a "massive commercial enterprise" that is reliant upon "systematic theft on a mass scale."

The suit was organized by the Authors Guild and also includes David Baldacci, Sylvia Day, Jonathan Franzen and Elin Hilderbrand among others.

"It is imperative that we stop this theft in its tracks or we will destroy our incredible literary culture, which feeds many other creative industries in the U.S.," Authors Guild CEO Mary Rasenberger said in a statement. "Great books are generally written by those who spend their careers and, indeed, their lives, learning and perfecting their crafts. To preserve our literature, authors must have the ability to control if and how their works are used by generative AI."

The lawsuit cites specific ChatGPT searches for each author, such as one for Martin that alleges the program generated "an infringing, unauthorized, and detailed outline for a prequel" to "A Game of Thrones" that was titled "A Dawn of Direwolves" and used "the same characters from Martin's existing books in the series "A Song of Ice and Fire."

Earlier this month, a handful of authors that included Michael Chabon and David Henry Hwang sued OpenAI in San Francisco for "clear infringement of intellectual property."

Associated Press

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Some of the latest Scam fads are:

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Automotive 140

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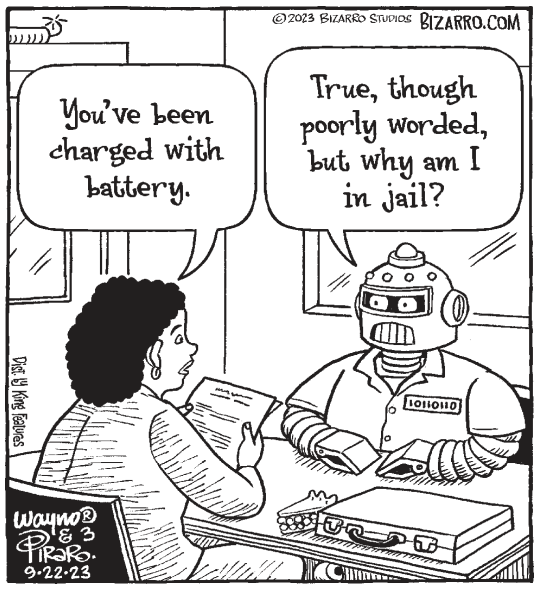
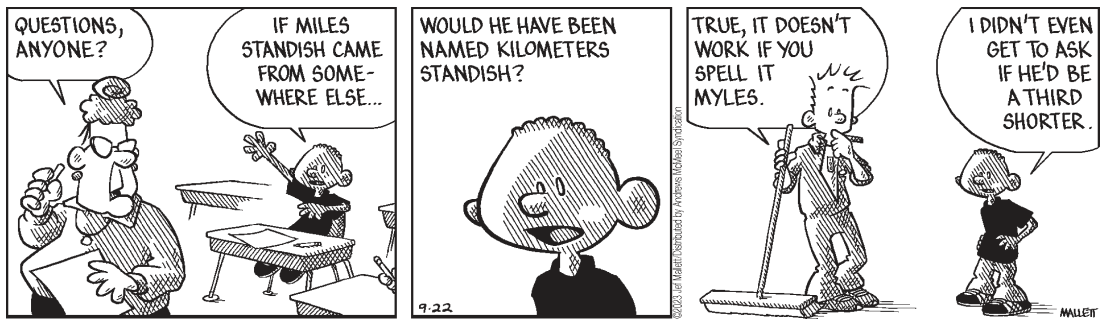
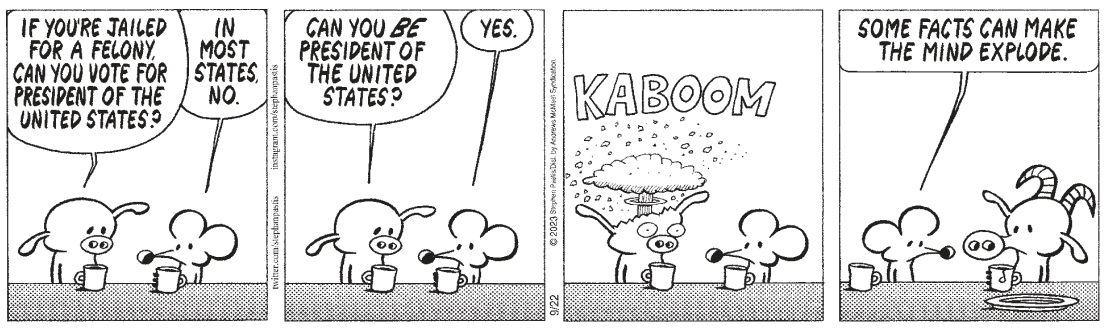


Loose Parts

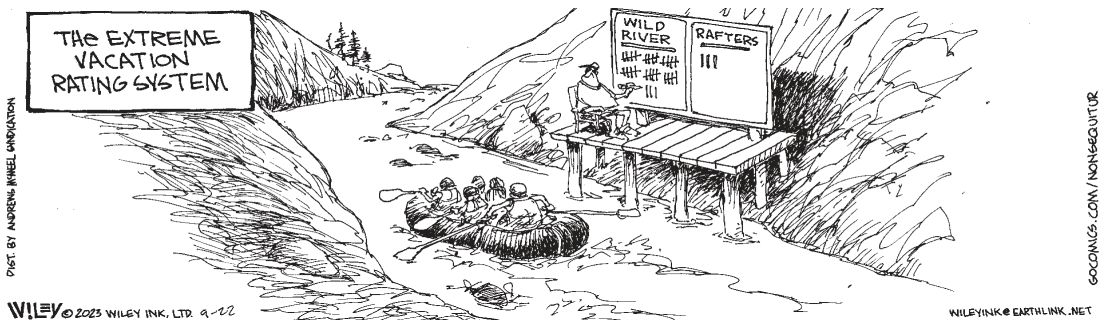
Frazz



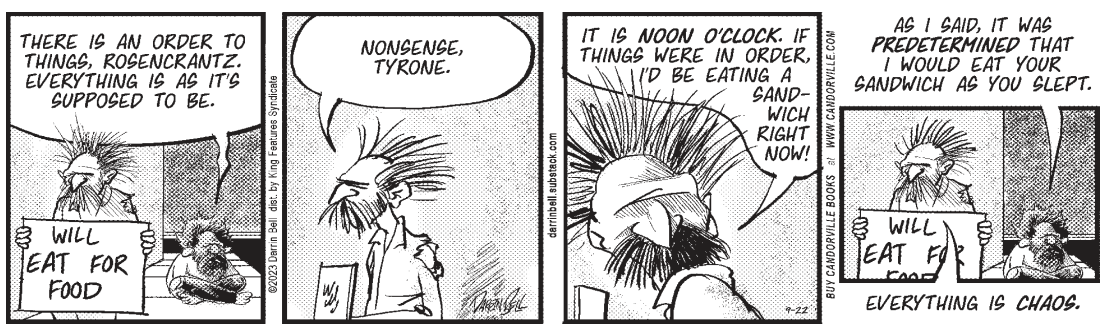
Pearls Before Swine



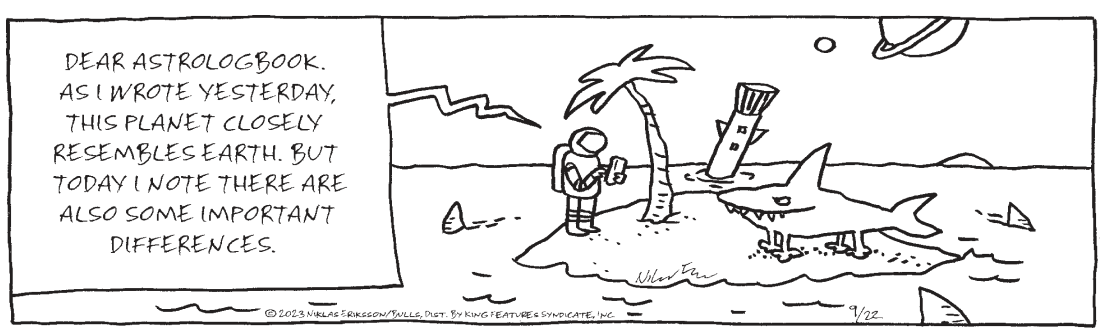
Non Sequitur



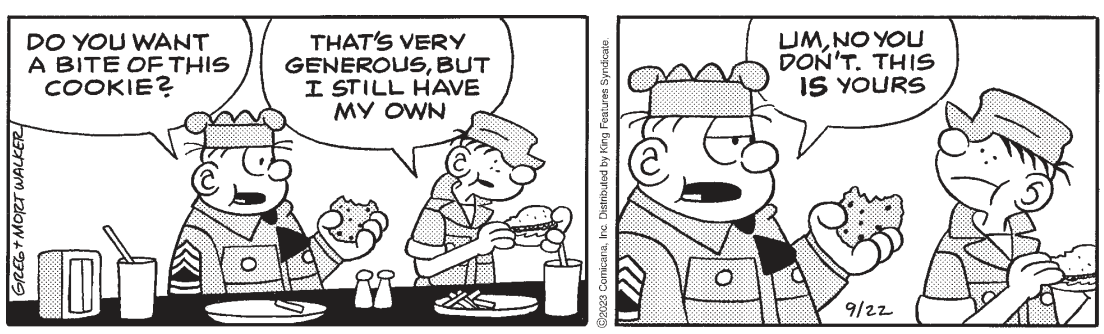
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	■	6	7	8	■	9	10	11
12					■	13			■	14		
15					■	16			17			
■	■	18			19			■	20			
21	22		■	23			■	24				
25			26	■	27		28			■	■	■
29				30		■	31			32	33	34
■	■	■	35			36		■	37			
38	39	40			■	41		42	■	43		
44				■	45				46		■	■
47				48			■	49			50	51
52			■	53			■	54				
55			■	56			■	57				

ACROSS

1 Dad's brother
6 Scale notes
9 Many coll. applicants
12 Respectful denial
13 Likely
14 — Beta Kappa
15 Rude observer
16 "The Waste Land" poet
18 Change gradually
20 Sicilian spouter
21 Part of DJIA
23 Outdoor gear brand
24 Surgical beam
25 Yale students
27 Vice President Burr
29 Italian scooters
31 Meaning
35 Locales
37 Theater award
38 Sidestep
41 "Ben-Hur" author Wallace
43 Bankroll
44 Gum flavor
45 Diocese part
47 "A Taste for Death" author
49 Inventor Howe
52 Asian language
53 "A snake!"
54 Gambling game
55 TV Tarzan Ron
56 — -la-la
57 Considers

DOWN

1 Dos preceder
2 Yule quaff
3 "The Chronicles of Narnia" author
4 Actor Schreiber
5 Goof
6 Riga's land
7 Church section
8 Fr. holy woman
9 Barbecue rods
10 Avignon's river
11 "Norwegian Wood" instrument
17 Crude shed
19 Rental contract
21 "Lion" actor Patel
22 Flamenco cheer
24 Chaney of horror films
26 Rival of Athens
28 Stair part
30 Gallery display
32 "Charlotte's Web" author
33 Actress Vardalos
34 Slugger Williams
36 Nome's state
38 Sufficient
39 Hair stylist Sassoon
40 "Have fun!"
42 Brandish
45 Equal
46 — gin fizz
48 Bumped into
50 $ dispenser
51 "Mayday!"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

W	O	R	D	■	F	O	B	■	A	F	A	R
O	P	E	R	■	A	R	I	■	S	A	G	E
L	A	L	O	■	N	O	B	■	S	N	U	B
F	L	Y	O	F	F	■	B	A	A	B	A	A
■	■	■	P	E	A	■	■	L	I	E	■	■
D	E	F	Y	■	R	E	F	I	L	L	E	D
O	R	A	■	■	E	N	A	■	■	T	S	A
T	E	N	N	Y	S	O	N	■	T	S	P	S
■	■	D	U	E	■	■	C	A	R	■	■	■
H	E	A	D	E	R	■	I	C	I	C	L	E
M	U	N	I	■	E	L	F	■	B	I	O	S
O	R	G	S	■	I	O	U	■	E	T	A	T
S	O	O	T	■	D	O	L	■	S	Y	N	E

9-22 **CRYPTOQUIP**

YLRK TIRT EDLCCX EWQHRKWE ZIR QKHRI UQZIHBZKE' DZIR, YLZW JBULW OCQ DZXX WLRJ? ZDZHRJO YZIHE.

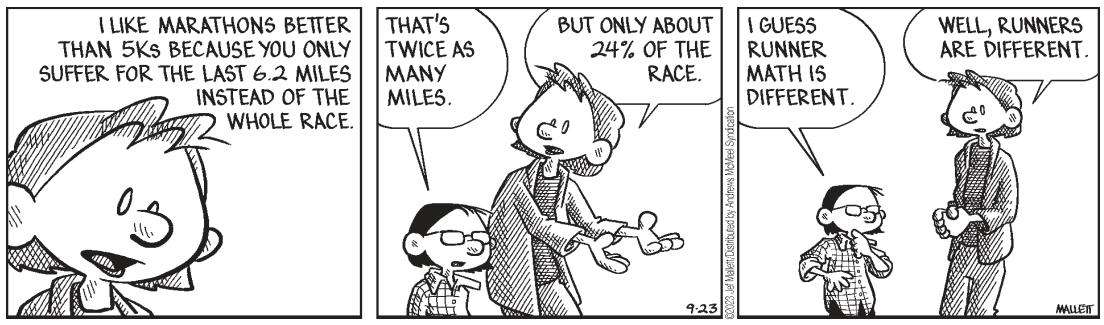
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD YOU CALL ONIONS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY PALE IN COLOR, NOT RED OR GREEN? LIGHT BULBS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals C

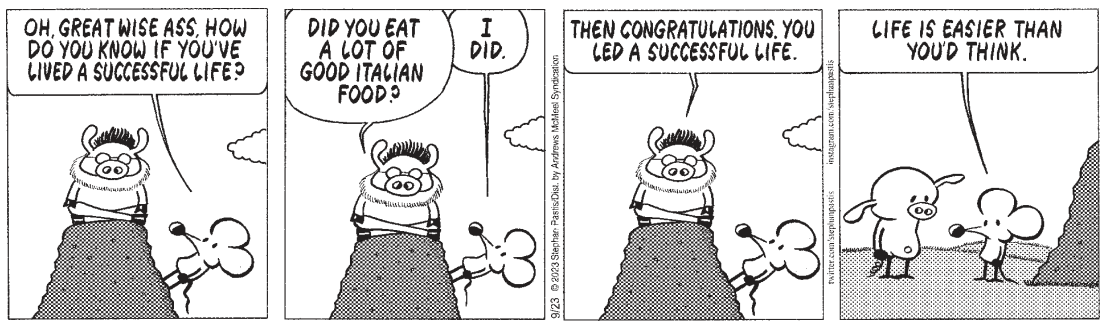
Bizarro

Loose Parts

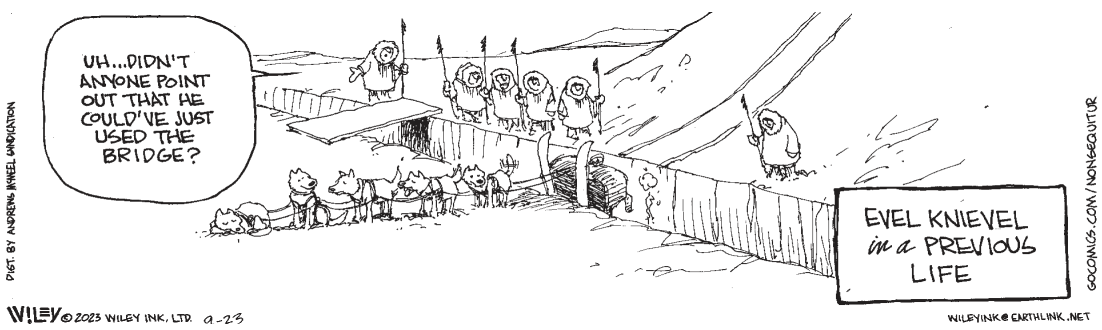
Frazz



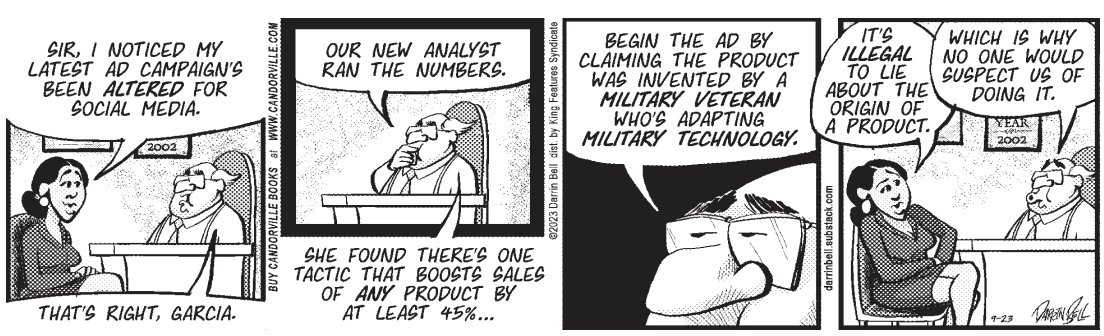
Pearls Before Swine



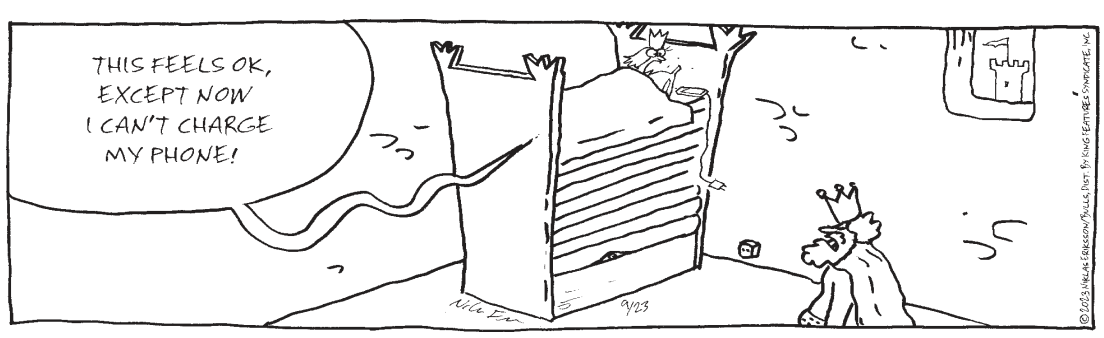
Non Sequitur



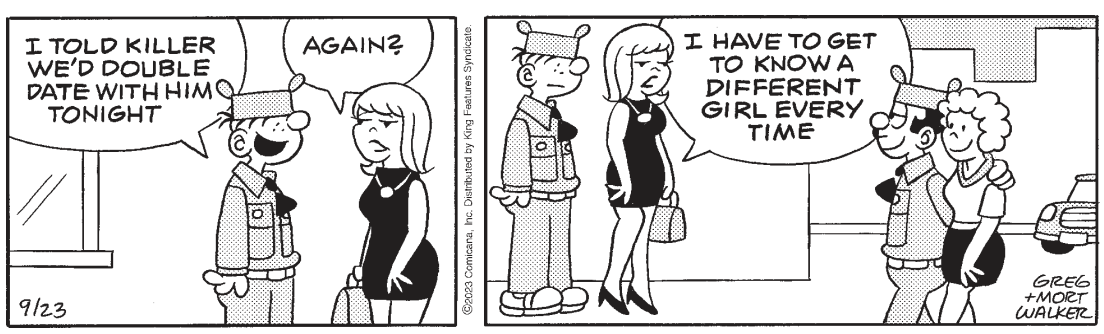
Candorville



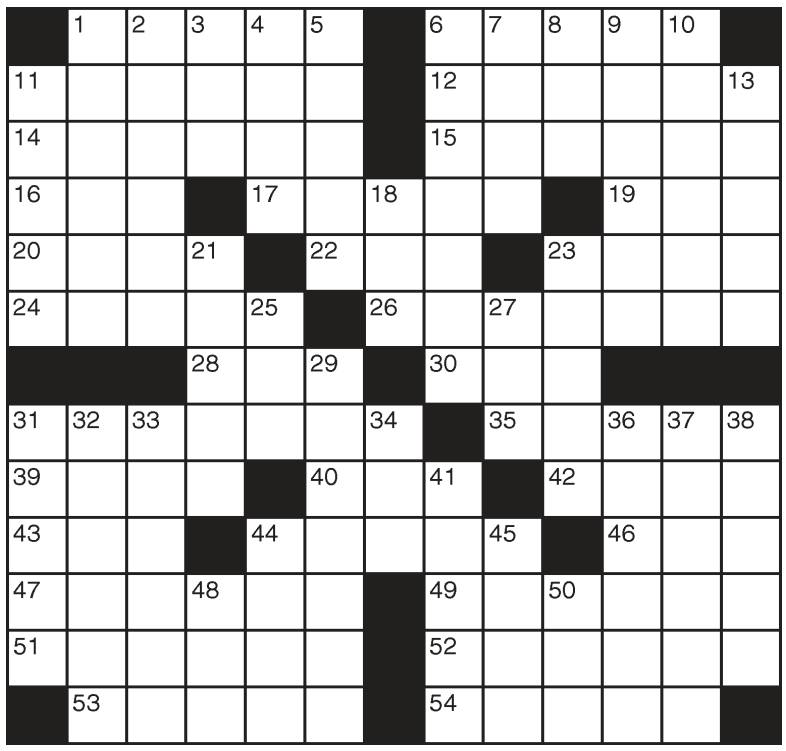
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Interior design
6 Skater Ohno
11 Sporty Chevy
12 Foodie's avocation
14 Hobbled
15 Grumble
16 Sugary suffix
17 Big rigs
19 CBS forensic drama
20 Trawler gear
22 "— the ramparts ..."
23 Voucher
24 Bar legally
26 Makes a comeback
28 Saloon
30 Summer sign
31 Sideways
35 Scarecrow stuffing
39 Winged
40 — Angeles
42 "Hell — no fury ..."
43 Hr. fraction
44 Donnybrook
46 Numerical prefix
47 Nobelist Sakharov
49 Gladdens
51 Going out with
52 Table linen fabric
53 Big hit
54 Incline

DOWN

1 Speakers' platforms
2 Circus clown Kelly
3 Upper limit
4 Unrefined metals
5 Wild West show
6 Fleet bigwig
7 Name of 12 popes
8 Toronto's prov.
9 Chinese nut (Var.)
10 Infant's outfit
11 Carbon copy
13 Southern side dish
18 Sea, to Ravel
21 Serious
23 Fabric
25 Standard
27 Guitar great Paul
29 North Carolina capital
31 Tibetan monks
32 Flared skirts
33 Bicycle for two
34 Texter's chuckle
36 Wicker material
37 Not moving
38 Egg-beating tool
41 Canary snacks
44 Clothing store section
45 Mideast airline
48 Estuary
50 Docs' org.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

U	N	C	L	E		L	A	S		S	R	S
N	O	S	I	R		A	P	T		P	H	I
O	G	L	E	R		T	S	E	L	I	O	T
		E	V	O	L	V	E		E	T	N	A
D	O	W		R	E	I		L	A	S	E	R
E	L	I	S		A	A	R	O	N			
V	E	S	P	A	S		I	N	T	E	N	T
			A	R	E	A	S		O	B	I	E
A	V	E	R	T		L	E	W		W	A	D
M	I	N	T		P	A	R	I	S	H		
P	D	J	A	M	E	S		E	L	I	A	S
L	A	O		E	E	K		L	O	T	T	O
E	L	Y		T	R	A		D	E	E	M	S

9-23 CRYPTOQUIP

L H L J R V ' V N X S S R C N Y Z V N M H N H W R O H C R J F N M R J O H P R Y S Q T H V V J Q Q Y X F N W Z V J F P R W H W F Y T C : R C C Z L R H W V .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN PREP SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE UNDER GUARDIANS' CARE, WHAT MIGHT YOU CALL THEM? ACADEMY WARDS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals T

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OPINION

The UAW can strike, but it's running out of gas

By George F. Will
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON

Henry Ford, according to corporate legend, said that if he had asked potential customers what they wanted when he founded his company in 1903, they would have said faster horses. The infant automobile industry began by giving people what they did not know they wanted. Twelve decades later, this industry is being discombobulated by government pressure to manufacture products — electric vehicles — that the public does not much want, least of all in the quantities that Washington's central planners deem proper.

There has been much commentary about the nation's "new economy" because of all the new devices produced to serve the digital economy, and because of the dominance of finance — the making of deals rather than material things. Yet here we are, invited to be fixated on a partial strike affecting only a portion of a quintessential example of the old economy: the automobile industry. During the strike, much of the industry continues to manufacture vehicles, far from Detroit.

In 1979, United Auto Workers membership peaked at 1.5 million, in a national civilian workforce of 98.8 million. Today, the "big three" — General Motors, Ford, Stellantis (Chrysler's parent company) — employ about 150,000 UAW members, and the civilian workforce is about 160 million. Time was, America's auto manufacturing meant those three. Today, they are not nearly as important as they were in May 1950, when the UAW and GM signed the "Treaty of Detroit." No one wanted a repeat of that year's 104-day strike against Chrysler that idled 100,000 in Detroit. The "treaty" improved wages and established pensions and company-paid health care.

In the 1950s, Detroit was the nation's fifth-largest city (it is now 27th) and Germany and Japan were still struggling to recover from damage done by U.S. bombers, many with Ford-built engines. U.S. car companies, with 95% of the national market share, had negligible competition and could pass along to consumers the costs of labor contracts.

Labor strife in Detroit — the automobile industry had supplanted railroads as the emblem of the nation's industrial might — used to be riveting news: Capitalism's big battalions were battling for supremacy. Now, the union and the companies are subordinate to much the biggest battalion: the federal government.

In a market economy, labor and management participate in profitmaking, then tussle over carving the profit pie. Now, however, government hovers over the negotiating table, armed with monetary incentives (subsidies) and regulatory coercions (e.g., ever-stricter CAFE — corporate average fuel economy — standards).

The Biden administration is ladling at least $12 billion into the automakers to cushion them against the Biden administration. Against, that is, myriad government pressures to quickly eliminate the non-EVs that the obdurate public prefers. This will require the companies to make tens of billions in capital investments, some of which with money the public will provide. The semi/sort of/once-upon-a-time private companies will pretend this is private enterprise, freshly reimagined.

The UAW reasons, not unreasonably, that its job is to seize for its members as much as it can of the billions sloshing around in the name of "industrial policy" subsidies. Meanwhile, non-UAW production lines are still humming along, disproportionately in the South's right-to-work states.

The UAW worries that EVs, having many fewer components than internal combustion vehicles, will require many fewer assembly workers. Last year, Ford's CEO suggested 40% fewer. The union probably cannot even moderate the Biden administration's climate monomania. It might, however, extort some taxpayer-funded payoffs.

The union should also worry that many Americans will keep their gas-powered cars longer than usual, rather than take a leap of faith regarding EVs. How many miles can they go between charges? The government is in charge of guaranteeing an adequate supply of charging stations, so drivers, too, should worry. To understand why this month's inventory of unsold EVs is almost twice that of gas-powered vehicles, start by reading NPR's report on Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm's misadventures during her planned drive from Charlotte, N.C., to Memphis, Tenn., trying to demonstrate EVs' delights. Fortunately, her advance team had a gas-powered car.

Regarding one matter, the UAW is too timid, given the nation's increasingly political — very political — economy. The UAW rails against the CEOs' salaries at GM, Ford and Stellantis — reportedly $29 million (362 times a median employee's earnings), $21 million (281 times), and $24.8 million (365 times), respectively, in 2022.

The UAW should propose that each CEO be paid $152,771, the highest base pay for GS-15 federal civil servants. This is what the CEOs should be considered, because their companies have become appendages of government, implementing its policies.

Border crisis 'will destroy' NYC? What about the US?

By Gary Franks
Tribune Content Agency

"Let me tell you something New Yorkers, never in my life have I had a problem that I did not see an ending to — I don't see an ending to this. This issue (i.e. the influx of migrants crossing the Mexican border into the U.S.) will destroy New York City," said New York Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, also a Democrat, let out a similar cry for federal assistance.

More than 110,000 immigrants lacking permanent legal status have entered Adams' city in the last several months. They came from the Mexican border in an invasion-like manner due to America being unable to secure its own borders. Adams projects that as many as 10,000 per month will be entering the city.

Over 1.5 million estimated migrants have skirted around border security on President Joe Biden's watch. Their whereabouts are unknown. About 5.8 million have been caught and relocated throughout America as so-called "asylum seekers." Deportation numbers have not been disclosed, however.

Sometimes I think that Biden is handling the border situation in a very sinister and calculative way. Other times I believe he is just being overly kind to others. But generosity should start at home. Many Americans — including some veterans — are living on the streets, while some migrants are put up in hotels and given three meals a day.

Then there are other times when I think the administration is just grossly incompetent.

But I never think of Biden doing anything out of ignorance. He is a skilled politician, though old and distracted by family issues.

In politics, Biden has made his own "luck." For example, to ensure his being able to stay in office once nominated for president, he picked the only candidate who had the least relevant experience for vice president — Kamala Harris. Great job security for Biden. This choice makes his impeachment less likely.

Then he gave Harris the most difficult domestic task of all: border control. Yet she didn't have the tools or authority to properly address the problem. And she performed as he knew she would. She made statements and demonstrated her commitment to solving the issue, but did nothing. This only added to what people already thought about her, and in a warped way, it elevated Biden. As a result, her poor polling numbers make it easier for him to remove her from the ticket before the 2024 election.

Back to my original dilemma: Is Biden allowing the invasion at the border to change the political makeup of America so that Democrats can win the Electoral College for decades to come?

Let us remember, Democrats win with a divided white population's vote and 90+% of Black Americans voting Democrat. On the presidential level, the Democrats have failed to carry the white vote for nearly 50 years. Amazing.

Conversely, after the Civil War nearly every Black American voted for Republicans. Why? Because then-President Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, had freed the slaves. It was the same reason Republican Ulysses S. Grant, the general who won the war to free the slaves, won the White House twice after the war with sizable Electoral College victories.

Is Biden trying to become Lincoln to the migrants? Is he granting them the American way of life so they will reciprocate for decades by voting against those bad Republicans, while voting for the soft-hearted Democrats? Maybe.

If that was the case, the Republicans screwed up those plans by sending migrants to sanctuary cities and states — places that Republicans could not win even if their candidate were Mother Teresa. America should say thank you to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. Biden ignored Republicans on this problem, but when Democrats like Adams and Hochul started "crying uncle" … well, let's see what happens next.

It is not hard. No other president has handled the protection of our borders worse than Biden. If you want to help Americans and not play politics, simply "close the border." Stop the flow of people, pure and simple. Use our military to do so if necessary. That is the first step to fixing the immigration problem.

Is Biden incompetent or is he the shrewdest politician in America's history? Sadly, both may be true.

Gary Franks served three terms as U.S. representative for Connecticut's 5th District. He was the first Black Republican elected to the House in nearly 60 years. He is the author of "With God, For God, and For Country."

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

AP Top 25 schedule

Saturday, Sept. 23

No. 1 Georgia vs. UAB
No. 2 Michigan vs. Rutgers
No. 3 Texas at Baylor
No. 4 Florida St. at Clemson
No. 5 Southern Cal at Arizona St.
No. 6 Ohio St. at No. 9 Notre Dame
No. 7 Penn St. vs. No. 24 Iowa
No. 8 Washington vs. California
No. 10 Oregon vs. No. 19 Colorado
No. 11 Utah vs. No. 22 UCLA
No. 12 LSU vs. Arkansa
No. 13 Alabama vs. No. 15 Mississippi
No. 14 Oregon St. at No. 21 Washington St.
No. 16 Oklahoma at Cincinnati
No. 17 North Carolina at Pittsburgh
No. 18 Duke at Uconn
No. 20 Miami at Temple
No. 23 Tennessee vs. UTSA
No. 25 Florida vs. Charlotte

Schedule

Friday, Sept. 22
EAST

Brown (1-0) at Harvard (1-0)

SOUTH

NC State (2-1) at Virginia (0-3)

MIDWEST

Wisconsin (2-1) at Purdue (1-2)

FAR WEST

Boise St. (1-2) at San Diego St. (2-2)
Air Force (3-0) at San Jose St. (1-3)

Saturday, Sept. 23
EAST

Sacred Heart (0-3) at St. Francis (Pa.) (0-3)
Virginia Tech (1-2) at Marshall (2-0)
Army (2-1) at Syracuse (3-0)
Cornell (1-0) at Yale (0-1)
Georgetown (2-1) at Columbia (0-1)
Stonehill (2-1) at Fordham (2-1)
Lehigh (1-2) at Dartmouth (0-1)
Colgate (0-3) at Holy Cross (2-1)
Rhode Island (2-1) at Villanova (2-1)
Va. Lynchburg (0-2) at Robert Morris (1-2)
Bryant (1-2) at Princeton (1-0)
New Mexico (1-2) at Umass (1-3)
Texas Tech (1-2) at West Virginia (2-1)
Duke (3-0) at Uconn (0-3)
Penn (1-0) at Bucknell (1-1)
Miami (3-0) at Temple (2-1)
Monmouth (NJ) (1-2) at Lafayette (2-1)
Richmond (1-2) at Stony Brook (0-3)
Norfolk St. (1-2) at Towson (1-2)
Merrimack (1-2) at Wagner (1-2)
New Hampshire (2-1) at Delaware (2-1)
Albany (NY) (1-2) at Morgan St. (1-2)
Iowa (3-0) at Penn St. (3-0)
North Carolina (3-0) at Pittsburgh (1-2)

SOUTH

Kentucky (3-0) at Vanderbilt (2-2)
Butler (2-1) at Stetson (2-1)
Florida St. (3-0) at Clemson (2-1)
W. Kentucky (2-1) at Troy (1-2)
Mercer (2-1) at Furman (2-1)
Wofford (0-3) at VMI (1-2)
Charleston Southern (1-2) at W. Carolina (2-1)
Chattanooga (2-1) at Samford (1-2)
NC Central (2-1) vs. MVSU (0-2) at Indianapolis
Texas Southern (0-3) at Grambling St. (1-2)
Maine (0-3) at William & Mary (3-0)
Texas A&M Commerce (0-2) at Old Dominion (1-2)
Mississippi (3-0) at Alabama (2-1)
Boston College (1-2) at Louisville (3-0)
UTSA (1-2) at Tennessee (2-1)
Rice (2-1) at South Florida (1-2)
E. Michigan (2-1) at Jacksonville St. (2-1)
Cent. Michigan (1-2) at South Alabama (2-1)
The Citadel (0-3) at SC State (0-3)
Alabama St. (1-1) at Florida A&M (2-1)
SE Missouri (1-2) at E. Kentucky (0-3)
Elon (1-2) at Campbell (2-1)
Gardner-Webb (1-2) at East Carolina (0-3)
Liberty (3-0) at FIU (3-1)
Georgia Tech (1-2) at Wake Forest (3-0)
Bethune-Cookman (1-2) at Jackson St. (2-2)
Houston Christian (1-2) at SE Louisiana (0-3)
Arkansas (2-1) at LSU (2-1)
Charlotte (1-2) at Florida (2-1)
Prairie View (1-2) at Alcorn St. (1-2)
UT Martin (2-1) at North Alabama (2-2)
St. Andrews (0-0) at Davidson (1-2)
Kennesaw St. (1-2) at Tennessee Tech (0-3)
Colorado St. (0-2) at Middle Tennessee (1-2)
Nicholls (0-2) at Tulane (2-1)
Buffalo (0-3) at Louisiana-Lafayette (2-1)
Mississippi St. (2-1) at South Carolina (1-2)
UAB (1-2) at Georgia (3-0)

MIDWEST

Rutgers (3-0) at Michigan (3-0)
Tulsa (1-2) at N. Illinois (1-2)
Oklahoma (3-0) at Cincinnati (2-1)
Lindenwood (Mo.) (2-1) at Illinois St. (2-1)
Marist (0-2) at Valparaiso (0-2)
W. Michigan (1-2) at Toledo (2-1)
Georgia Southern (2-1) at Ball St. (1-2)
Morehead St. (1-1) at St. Thomas (Minn.) (1-2)
McNeese St. (0-3) at E. Illinois (2-1)
Utah Tech (1-2) at Missouri St. (0-2)
Louisiana Tech (2-2) at Nebraska (1-2)
BYU (3-0) at Kansas (3-0)
Maryland (3-0) at Michigan St. (2-1)
Delaware St. (0-3) at Miami (Ohio) (2-1)
Ohio (3-1) at Bowling Green (1-2)
FAU (1-2) at Illinois (1-2)
Oklahoma St. (2-1) at Iowa St. (1-2)
Missouri (3-0) vs. Memphis (3-0) at St. Louis
Minnesota (2-1) at Northwestern (1-2)
Ohio St. (3-0) at Notre Dame (4-0)
Akron (1-2) at Indiana (1-2)
UCF (3-0) at Kansas St. (2-1)

SOUTHWEST

Auburn (3-0) at Texas A&M (2-1)
SMU (2-1) at TCU (2-1)
Sam Houston St. (0-2) at Houston (1-2)
Lincoln University (CA) (0-1) at Lamar (0-3)
Nevada (0-3) at Texas State (2-1)
North American University (0-1) at Incarnate Word (2-1)
Austin Peay (1-2) at Stephen F. Austin (2-1)
Southern Miss. (1-2) at Arkansas St. (1-2)
Abilene Christian (2-1) at Cent. Arkansas (1-2)
SW Baptist (0-0) at Tarleton St. (2-1)
Texas (3-0) at Baylor (1-2)
UNLV (2-1) at UTEP (1-3)

FAR WEST

Colorado (3-0) at Oregon (3-0)
UCLA (3-0) at Utah (3-0)
Cal Poly (2-1) at Portland St. (1-2)
Sacramento St. (3-0) at Idaho (2-1)
Montana (3-0) at N. Arizona (0-3)
Dayton (2-1) at San Diego (0-3)
N. Colorado (0-3) at Idaho St. (0-3)
Appalachian St. (2-1) at Wyoming (2-1)
Oregon St. (3-0) at Washington St. (3-0)
Arizona (2-1) at Stanford (1-2)
James Madison (3-0) at Utah St. (1-2)
W. Illinois (0-3) at S. Utah (0-3)
Montana St. (2-1) at Weber St. (2-1)
E. Washington (1-2) at UC Davis (2-1)
Kent St. (1-2) at Fresno St. (3-0)
Southern Cal (3-0) at Arizona St. (1-2)
California (2-1) at Washington (3-0)
New Mexico St. (2-2) at Hawaii (1-3)

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA playoffs

(x-if necessary)
First Round
(Best-of-three)
No. 1 Las Vegas 2, No. 8 Chicago 0

Las Vegas 87, Chicago 59

Las Vegas 92, Chicago 70

No. 2 New York 2, No. 7 Washington 0

New York 90, Washington 75
Tuesday: New York 90, Washington 85, OT

No. 3 Connecticut 2, No. 6 Minnesota 1

Connecticut 90, Minnesota 60
Minnesota 82, Connecticut 75
Wednesday: Connecticut 90, Minnesota 75

No. 4 Dallas 2, No. 5 Atlanta 0

Dallas 94, Atlanta 82
Tuesday: Dallas 101, Atlanta 74

Semifinals
(Best-of-five)
Connecticut vs. New York

Sunday: at New York
Tuesday: at New York
Friday, Sept. 29: at Connecticut
x-Sunday, Oct. 1: at Connecticut
x-Tuesday, Oct. 3: at New York

Dallas vs. Las Vegas

Sunday: at Las Vegas
Tuesday: at Las Vegas
Friday, Sept 29: at Dallas
x-Sunday, Oct. 1: at Dallas
x-Tuesday, Oct. 3: at Las Vegas

TENNIS

Guadalajara Open

Wednesday
At Guadalajara, Mexico
Purse: $2,788,468
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Caroline Garcia (3), France, def. Hailey Baptiste, United States, 7-5, 6-4.
Caroline Dolehide, United States, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova (8), Russia, 6-1, 6-2.
Sofia Kenin, United States, def. Jelena Ostapenko (6), Latvia, 6-4, 7-5.
Emiliana Arango, Colombia, def. Taylor Townsend, United States, 7-5, 1-6, 6-4.
Maria Sakkari (2), Greece, def. Camila Giorgi, Italy, 6-2, 6-2.
Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, def. Emma Navarro, United States, 6-2, 6-3.
Victoria Azarenka (10), Belarus, def. Veronika Kudermetova (7), Russia, 6-2, 6-1.
Martina Trevisan, Italy, def. Ons Jabeur (1), Tunisia, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-3.

Women's Doubles
Round of 16

Aldila Sutjiadi, Indonesia, and Miyu Kato (8), Japan, def. Angela Kulikov, United States, and Ingrid Martins, Brazil, walkover.
Jasmine Paolini, Italy, and Mayar Sherif, Egypt, def. Xu Yifan, China, and Tereza Mihalikova, Slovakia, 6-3, 6-3.
Asia Muhammad and Caroline Dolehide, United States, def. Shuko Aoyama and Ena Shibahara (4), Japan, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 10-4.
Storm Hunter, Australia, and Elise Mertens (1), Belgium, def. Bethanie Mattek-Sands, United States, and Kristina Mladenovic, France, 6-2, 6-2.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball

MLB — Suspended Milwaukee RHP J.C. Meija for 162 games without pay for violating the Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program.

American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Recalled OF Ryan McKenna from Norfolk (IL). Placed INF Ryan Mountcastle on the 10-day IL, retroactive to September 17.
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Reinstated LHP Garrett Crochet from the 15-day IL. Placed RHP Gregory Santos on the 15-day IL.
DETROIT TIGERS — Optioned RHP Brendan White to Toledo (IL). Selected the contract of RHP Brenan Hanifee from Toledo. Transferred OF Riley Greene from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL.
MINNESOTA TWINS — Placed SS Carlos Correa on the 10-day IL, retroactive to September 19. Recalled OF Trevor Larnach from St. Paul (IL).
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Selected the contract of RHP Joey Estes from Las Vegas (PCL). Optioned RHP Devin Sweet to Las Vegas. Transferred LHP Sean Newcomb from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL.
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Selected the contract of OF Cam Eden from Buffalo. Optioned INF Ernie Clement to Buffalo. Designated SS Mason McCoy for assignment.

National League

MIAMI MARLINS — Activated LHP Matt Moore. Designated RHP Chi Chi Gonzalez for assignment.
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Recalled RHP J.B. Bukauskas from Nashville (IL). Reinstated RHP Julio Teheran from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Colin Rea to Nashville. Placed RHP Elvis Peguero on the 15-day IL, retroactive to September 17. Placed RHP J.C. Mejia on the restricted list.
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Placed OF Alec Burleson on the 10-day IL. Recalled C Ivan Herrera from Memphis (IL).
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Placed RHP Alex Cobb on the 15-day IL and RHP Keaton Winn on the 15-day IL, retroactive to September 19. Recalled LHP Kyle Harrison and RHP Sean Hjelle from Sacramento (PCL).

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

SAN ANTONIO SPURS — Waived G Javante McCoy.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

NFL — Suspended New Orleans S Marcus Maye for three games without pay for violating the susbstance abuse policy.
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed WR Jeff Smith to the practice squad.
ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed RB Carlos Washington to the practice squad.
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed RB Kenyan Drake to the practice squad.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Promoted LB Deion Jones from the practice squad to the active roster. Signed QB Jake Luton and CB Robert Rochell to the practice squad. Released CB Mark Milton from the practice squad.
CHICAGO BEARS — Placed LT Braxton Jones on injured reserve. Signed OL Aviante Collins. Signed OL Austen Pleasants to the practice squad. Released QB Nathan Peterman.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed RB Kareem Hunt. Placed RB Nick Chubb on injured reserve.
DETROIT LIONS — Promoted RB Zonovan Knight and OL Kayode Awosika from the practice squad to the active roster. Released DL Chris Smith from the practice squad. Signed LB Mitchell Agude, CB Darius Phillips, RB Devine Ozigbo and OL Dan Skipper to the practice squad.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Placed OLB Chandler Jones on the non-football illness list.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Acquired RB Cam Akers and a conditional 2026 seventh-round pick from the L.A. Rams in exchange for a 2026 conditional sixth-round pick.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Signed RB Tony Jones. Signed DB Cameron Dantzler to the practice squad.
NEW YORK JETS — Re-signed WR Irv Charles to the practice squad. Released DT Tanzel Smart from the practice squad.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Placed CB Avonte Maddox on injured reserve. Promoted WR Britain Covey from the practice squad to the active roster. Signed RB Bryant Koback to the practice squad.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed RB Godwin Igwebuike and DT Breiden Fehoko. Signed WR Deuce Watts to the practice squad.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed TE Brady Russell. Waived OLB Tyreke Smith. Promoted CB Artie Burns from the practice squad to the active roster. Placed DE Mike Morris on injured reserve. Signed WR Tyjon Lindsey and DT Carl Davis to the practice squad.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Placed RB Chase Edmonds on injured reserve. Promoted DL Pat O'Connor from the practice squad to the active roster.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Signed DL Jaleel Johnson to the practice squad.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

ARIZONA COYOTES — Signed F Jan Jenik to a one-year contract.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

AUSTIN FC — Signed D Joe Hafferty to a short-term contract.

National Women's Soccer League

NWSL — Fined San Diego Wave FC forward Alex Morgan an undisclosed amount for comments detrimental to the league made on social media on Sept. 17.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	17	4	8	59	47	33
Orlando City	14	7	8	50	45	36
Columbus	14	9	6	48	60	41
Philadelphia	14	8	6	48	51	35
New England	13	6	9	48	47	34
Atlanta	12	8	10	46	57	46
Nashville	12	9	7	43	35	27
CF Montréal	11	14	4	37	29	41
D.C. United	9	12	9	36	38	39
NYC FC	7	10	13	34	30	36
Chicago	8	12	9	33	32	45
Charlotte FC	7	9	12	33	36	45
Inter Miami CF	9	15	4	31	36	44
New York	7	12	10	31	25	34
Toronto FC	4	15	10	22	24	45

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
SLC SC	15	10	5	50	56	38
Seattle	12	9	9	45	37	31
LA FC	12	9	8	44	44	34
Houston	12	10	7	43	41	33
Vancouver	11	9	8	41	46	41
Real Salt Lake	11	11	7	40	40	44
San Jose	10	10	10	40	35	39
Portland	10	11	9	39	38	46
FC Dallas	10	10	8	38	33	32
Minn. United	9	10	10	37	37	38
Sporting KC	9	13	8	35	39	43
Austin FC	9	13	7	34	40	46
LA Galaxy	8	11	9	33	39	48
Colorado	4	14	10	22	19	42

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Wednesday's games

Philadelphia 2, Charlotte FC 2, tie
Columbus 3, Chicago 0
Atlanta 1, D.C. United 1, tie
Miami 4, Toronto FC 0
Cincinnati 1, CF Montréal 1, tie
Austin FC 1, New York 1, tie
New York City FC 2, Orlando City 0
Houston 4, Vancouver 1
Nashville 3, Sporting Kansas City 0
Los Angeles FC 0, Saint Louis City SC 0, tie
Seattle 2, Colorado 1
FC Dallas 3, Real Salt Lake 1
LA Galaxy 4, Minnesota 3
Portland 2, San Jose 1

Saturday's games

CF Montréal at Atlanta
Charlotte FC at Cincinnati
New York at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New York City FC
Los Angeles FC at Philadelphia
New England at Chicago
Columbus at FC Dallas
Houston at Sporting Kansas City
Saint Louis City SC at Minnesota
Vancouver at Real Salt Lake
Colorado at Portland
Nashville at San Jose

Sunday's games

Miami at Orlando City
LA Galaxy at Austin FC

Wednesday, Sept. 27

FC Dallas at Philadelphia
Vancouver at Colorado

Saturday, Sept. 30

Philadelphia at Columbus
New York City FC at Miami
Charlotte FC at New England
Chicago at New York
CF Montréal at Orlando City
Cincinnati at Toronto FC
FC Dallas at Houston
San Jose at Minnesota
Seattle at Nashville
Sporting Kansas City at Saint Louis City SC
Austin FC at Colorado
Portland at LA Galaxy
D.C. United at Vancouver

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Portland	9	5	5	32	40	25
San Diego	9	7	3	30	27	22
Gotham FC	8	5	6	30	23	19
North Carolina	8	7	4	28	27	21
OL Reign	8	8	3	27	25	23
Washington	6	5	8	26	24	27
Orlando	8	10	1	25	23	25
Angel City	6	6	7	25	24	27
Louisville	5	5	9	24	22	19
Houston	5	6	8	23	13	15
Kansas City	7	11	1	22	21	29
Chicago	6	10	3	21	24	41

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, Sept. 30

Kansas City at Washington
Louisville at Chicago
San Diego at Portland

Sunday, Oct. 1

Houston at Gotham FC
North Carolina at OL Reign

PRO BASEBALL

MLB

American League
East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Baltimore	95	57	.625	–
z-Tampa Bay	93	60	.608	2½
Toronto	85	67	.559	10
New York	76	76	.500	19
Boston	75	78	.490	20½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	81	72	.529	–
Cleveland	72	81	.471	9
Detroit	71	81	.467	9½
Chicago	58	95	.379	23
Kansas City	51	102	.333	30

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	85	68	.556	–
Seattle	84	68	.553	½
Texas	84	68	.553	½
Los Angeles	69	83	.454	15½
Oakland	46	106	.303	38½

National League
East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Atlanta	97	55	.638	–
Philadelphia	83	69	.546	14
Miami	79	74	.516	18½
New York	71	81	.467	26
Washington	68	85	.444	29½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	86	66	.566	–
Chicago	79	73	.520	7
Cincinnati	79	75	.513	8
Pittsburgh	71	81	.467	15
St. Louis	67	85	.441	19

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Los Angeles	93	58	.616	–
Arizona	81	72	.529	13
San Francisco	76	76	.500	17½
San Diego	75	78	.490	19
Colorado	56	96	.368	37½

x-clinched division; z-clinched playoff berth

Wednesday's games

Minnesota 5, Cincinnati 3
Washington 13, Chicago White Sox 3
Texas 15, Boston 5
Kansas City 6, Cleveland 2
Houston 2, Baltimore 1
Seattle 6, Oakland 3
L.A. Angels 8, Tampa Bay 3
Toronto 6, N.Y. Yankees 1
Detroit 4, L.A. Dodgers 2
Philadelphia 6, Atlanta 5, 10 innings
Arizona 7, San Francisco 1
San Diego 3, Colorado 2
N.Y. Mets 8, Miami 3
Milwaukee 8, St. Louis 2
Pittsburgh 13, Chicago Cubs 7

Thursday's games

L.A. Angels at Tampa Bay
Milwaukee at St. Louis
Atlanta at Washington
Toronto at N.Y. Yankees
N.Y. Mets at Philadelphia
Baltimore at Cleveland
Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
Detroit at Oakland
San Francisco at L.A. Dodgers

Friday's games

Colorado (Davis 0-2) at Chicago Cubs (TBD)
Pittsburgh (TBD) at Cincinnati (Abbott 8-5)
Toronto (TBD) at Tampa Bay (TBD)
Milwaukee (Burnes 9-8) at Miami (TBD)
N.Y. Mets (Megill 8-8) at Philadelphia (Walker 15-5)
Atlanta (Morton 14-12) at Washington (Corbin 10-13)
Arizona (Pfaadt 2-8) at N.Y. Yankees (TBD)
Baltimore (Kremer 12-5) at Cleveland (Bieber 5-6)
Chicago White Sox (Toussaint 4-7) at Boston (Sale 6-4)
Seattle (Miller 8-5) at Texas (Dunning 10-6)
L.A. Angels (TBD) at Minnesota (López 10-8)
Kansas City (Ragans 6-4) at Houston (Valdez 12-10)
Detroit (Gipson-Long 1-0) at Oakland (Waldichuk 3-8)
St. Louis (Hudson 6-2) at San Diego (Waldron 1-3)
San Francisco (Manaea 6-6) at L.A. Dodgers (TBD)

Saturday's games

Atlanta at Washington
Arizona at N.Y. Yankees
L.A. Angels at Minnesota
Colorado at Chicago Cubs
N.Y. Mets at Philadelphia
Detroit at Oakland
Chicago White Sox at Boston
Toronto at Tampa Bay
Milwaukee at Miami
Baltimore at Cleveland
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati
Seattle at Texas
Kansas City at Houston
St. Louis at San Diego
San Francisco at L.A. Dodgers

Questions remain as training camps open

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

Exactly 100 days after the Vegas Golden Knights defeated the Florida Panthers to win the Stanley Cup for the first time, training camps opened around the NHL on Thursday.

The Golden Knights are bringing back nearly the same roster in their bid to repeat as champions while the Panthers are still licking their wounds after injuries piled up during their run to the final. There are also some big questions in Columbus as the Blue Jackets must now handle a last-minute coaching change.

The hot topics on and off the ice before the puck drops on the 2023-24 NHL season Oct. 10:

Is Vegas ready to repeat?

Fresh off helping lead Vegas to the Cup, Jack Eichel asked buddies who previously played long into June how they recovered for the following season.

"The message they relayed is, 'You'll be surprised by how good you feel come training camp, with having trained a little less and maybe spent a little less time in the gym,'" Eichel said. "Maybe more so now than past summers, it's about trying to get your body healthy and feeling good going into camp."

The Golden Knights should be feeling good about their continuity after keeping pending free agent goalie Adin Hill and forward Ivan Barbashev and losing only Reilly Smith by trade from the group that played the bulk of the playoffs.

According to FanDuel Sportsbook, the Colorado Avalanche are still the betting favorites at just under 9-1, followed by the Hurricanes at just under 10-1. The Golden Knights are sixth at 13-1.

How banged-up is Florida?

Matthew Tkachuk broke his sternum during the final, an injury he played through before missing Game 5. It took longer to rehab than expected, but the finalist for the Hart Trophy as league MVP and Panthers playoff leading scorer appears good to go.

"Feeling really good now," Tkachuk said. "Look at glass half full: I didn't miss 30 games or 20 games during the regular season. I had the summer to get it back and hopefully have a great start."

The rest of his team isn't so lucky. Both Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour had shoulder surgery and each defenseman could be out until at least mid-December.

What now for Columbus?

Nothing like a forced resignation of a polarizing, Stanley Cup-winning coach to shake things up for the Blue Jackets. Mike Babcock stepped down Sunday after asking to view photos on players' phones as part of a bonding effort led to an investigation by the NHLPA and Pascal Vincent being named his replacement.

It all happened over the past week or so, and ownership said there would be no changes to the front office led by president of hockey operations John Davidson and longtime general manager Jarmo Kekalainen at this time because "additional disruptions would be detrimental to our players and coaches as they prepare for the opening of training camp."

Vincent, who spent the past couple of seasons as an assistant under previous coach Brad Larsen, has a two-year contract and perhaps more respect from players.

"The advantage that I have is I know those people," Vincent said. "I've been with them for two years, and I know they care. They really care about the team."

Wilfredo Lee/AP

Florida defenseman Aaron Ekblad could miss the start of the season after shoulder surgery following the Panthers' run to the final.

Wilfredo Lee/AP

Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi, right, takes the ball past Toronto FC defender Kobe Franklin on Wednesday in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Inter Miami won 4-0 despite Messi having to leave early with an injury.

Messi to miss another game for Inter Miami

Star forward left early in match against Toronto

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Lionel Messi returned to Inter Miami's lineup on Wednesday night. It was a short-lived comeback, and now he's sidelined again.

Messi was subbed off in the 37th minute of Inter Miami's match against Toronto, after spending a few minutes laboring with what appeared to be a leg issue. Miami came up big without him, winning 4-0 to move within five points of the final playoff spot in Major League Soccer's Eastern Conference.

Robert Taylor, who came on for Messi, had two goals and an assist. But Messi's status overshadowed everything, and Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said after the game that the Argentine star will miss Sunday's game at Orlando.

"He had an old injury that had been bothering him," Martino said, as relayed through a team official who translated his remarks from Spanish to English.

In an earlier answer that was not translated, Martino said Messi would miss at least one more match. The 36-year-old Messi had missed two matches — one for club, the other for country — in recent days, after sitting out Argentina's World Cup qualifying win at Bolivia on Sept. 12, and Inter Miami's 5-2 loss at Atlanta United this past Saturday.

Fatigue was cited in both cases, and the team did not provide any diagnosis of what is troubling the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner now. The game was scoreless when Messi was subbed out.

It was the second big injury blow for Inter Miami on Wednesday. Jordi Alba — another celebrated midseason addition — had to leave in the 34th minute, shortly before Messi's night was over. Alba will not play Sunday, either.

"We had to step up," Taylor said.

Facundo Farias and second-half sub Benjamin Cremaschi had the other goals.

"It shows the depth that we have on our team," goalie Drake Callender said.

Messi had a couple of chances Wednesday, and appeared to stop running somewhat abruptly after carrying the ball deep into the Toronto box in the 33rd minute. He was barely engaged after that, leaning forward at one point as if to stretch the back of his legs, then eventually took off his captain's armband — actually trying a long pass while holding the armband — before waiting for play to stop so he could depart.

Messi didn't even wait to come off the field before unlacing his cleats, lowering his socks and removing his shin guards. He placed the captain's band onto the arm of DeAndre Yedlin — who was Inter Miami's captain before Messi began his stint with the team in July — and now it's anyone's guess when Messi will wear it again. The team would likely want him to play in the U.S. Open Cup final on Sept. 27.

Martino, per the team's translation, said Messi was removed from Wednesday's game "to be safe."

"We don't think it's a muscular injury. That's also from a conversation that I just had with him," Martino said via the translation, even though Messi was stretching in a manner that suggested otherwise before leaving the field. "But we have to continue being careful and we'll look at him the next few days."

Wednesday's match was the first of what will be six for Inter Miami in a span of 17 days. The team plays at Orlando on Sunday, then will host Houston in the U.S. Open Cup final on Sept. 27. That will be followed by three more MLS matches in short order: against New York City FC on Sept. 30, at Chicago on Oct. 4 and playing host to Cincinnati on Oct. 7.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Strength on strength in South Bend

Notre Dame's top-ranked pass defense gets its first real test against Ohio State

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman sees the numbers.

He knows the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish are near the bottom of the FBS in sacks per game. He's also aware his team has the nation's top passing efficiency defense and is eager to see if it will pass the unit's biggest test so far — Saturday against No. 6 Ohio State.

"Everybody keeps talking about sacks," Freeman said. "I told coach (Al) Golden, we're No. 1 in the country in pass efficiency defense, so that's the stat I'm worried about. I'm not worried about sacks."

Despite recording just six sacks, the Irish (4-0) have held opposing quarterbacks to a pass efficiency rating of 84.3 and already have 40 pass breakups — six more than they had all of last season.

Freeman thinks the disparity demonstrates there are other ways to rattle opposing quarterbacks. According to Pro Football Focus, Notre Dame has 70 pressures this season. Opponents, meanwhile, have completed 44.3% of their throws for just 5.2 yards per attempt and two TDs. Notre Dame ranks in the top 15 of the 133 FBS teams in all three categories.

It helps, of course, when receivers rarely get open.

But after starting this season against run-heavy Navy and FCS foe Tennessee State before facing North Carolina State on a soggy field and Central Michigan's backup quarterback, Notre Dame now faces one of the nation's highest-scoring teams.

MICHAEL CATERINA/AP

Notre Dame cornerback Thomas Harper, right, and safety Xavier Watts bring physicality that could help slow Ohio State's receivers.

No. 6 Ohio State (3-0)
at No. 9 Notre Dame (4-0)
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

The Buckeyes (3-0) rely heavily on All-American receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., a Heisman hopeful whose father spent his entire Hall of Fame career with the Indianapolis Colts. He caught two passes and hurt his shoulder in the opener at Indiana, but now has 14 receptions, 304 yards and three TDs.

Ohio State also has receiver Emeka Egbuka, who has 12 catches, 167 yards and three TDs after topping 1,000 yards last year, and tight end Cade Stover, who chose one more college season over the NFL

"You're dealing with speed, length, (a wide) catch radius, the ability to win a one-on-one," Golden said when asked about Harrison before turning his attention to the rest of the Buckeyes. "That's a really, really potent offense."

The biggest question in Columbus is whether three new offensive line starters can protect quarterback Kyle McCord, the successor to two-time Heisman finalist C.J. Stroud. McCord also struggled against the Hoosiers and their pass rush but looked much more comfortable against Western Kentucky and Youngstown State. The Hilltoppers recorded only two pressures last weekend.

McCord also has something to prove — that he can excel against a defense built to slow teams down and on the road in one of college football's most famous stadiums.

"I'm glad we went through those games to get to this point with some of the new faces we have," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "We did work out some of the issues, and so I'm excited to get on the field and go play this one now."

The Irish seem uniquely equipped to defend the Buckeyes.

Ben Morrison, a preseason second-team All-American, anchors the secondary after intercepting six passes last season as a freshman. He's teaming with Cam Hart. Opponents are 7 of 22 for 100 yards when targeting Notre Dame's starting cornerbacks.

Nickel cornerback Thomas Harper and safety Xavier Watts play a physical style, batting away passes and blitzing quarterbacks. Day has seen all of it on video.

"The biggest thing when you're dealing with a great corner, you have to know where he is," Day said.

And if the Irish pass defense continues to play well in this weekend's only top-10 matchup, Freeman just might walk away with the biggest win in his two-year tenure in South Bend.

"We're going to play a heck of an opponent Saturday," Freeman said. "So we'll see how good this football team really is."

DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Ohio State tight end Cade Stover, right, chose to play one more college season rather than head to the NFL. The Buckeyes' other weapons include wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka.

Show: Even loser of Irish-Buckeyes will have chance to recover

FROM PAGE 48

Sunday CET; 2 p.m. JKT.

Best game

No. 6 Ohio State (3-0) at No. 9 Notre Dame (4-0): The Buckeyes found their rhythm in a sharp performance on both sides of the ball in a 63-10 win over Western Kentucky last week. Confidence is not an issue for Notre Dame, either. Heisman Trophy candidate Sam Hartman has led the Irish to 184 points, their most through four games since 1914.

This is the teams' eighth meeting, but the fifth as a top-10 matchup. Notre Dame hasn't beaten the Buckeyes since 1936.

The winner can check a box on the to-do list for earning a College Football Playoff spot. The loser can take solace in the fact it's still early and there are big games to come.

Heisman watch

Bo Nix has completed 78% of his passes and thrown for eight touchdowns with no interceptions while leading No. 10 Oregon to a 3-0 start, yet he's overshadowed in his own conference by 2022 Heisman Trophy winner Caleb Williams, the prolific Michael Penix Jr. and brash newcomer Shedeur Sanders.

This week is Nix's opportunity to go from fringe Heisman candidate to serious contender when Colorado, the best show in college football right now, comes to Eugene for a Pac-12 opener.

Nix has beaten Portland State, Texas Tech and Hawaii — and the Buffaloes don't move the needle most years. This year they do.

Numbers to know

9: Number of consecutive September games won by UCLA.

10: Penn State's streak of games scoring at least 30 points, the longest in the nation.

16: Wake Forest's nation-leading number of sacks, with 10 of them coming last week against Old Dominion.

31: Washington's scrimmage plays of 20 yards or longer, most in the nation.

2012: The last time Texas has started 4-0.

Under the radar

BYU (3-0) at Kansas (3-0): The Cougars open their first run through the Big 12 on a seven-game win streak dating to last season and coming off a thrilling come-from-behind win at Arkansas.

New defensive coordinator Jay Hill has the Cougars playing aggressively, and his unit's confidence is high after sacking KJ Jefferson four times. That's good, because Hill's charges will be going against Jayhawks QB Jalon Daniels at his best.

Daniels is completing 75% of his passes for 287 yards per game since missing the opener with back tightness.

Hot seat

Tom Allen's seat at Indiana began warming up during an eight-game losing streak to end 2021 and got hotter by the week in 2022. It'll be downright blistering if the Hoosiers (1-2) don't beat Akron (1-2) of the MAC at home Saturday.

Indiana gets credit for making a game of it against Louisville after falling behind 21-0, and starting QB Tayven Jackson looks to be the right guy. Allen goes into the Akron game a 16½-point favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, and he's 12-2 against non-Power Five opponents, with both losses coming to Cincinnati.

Given that Allen's buyout is $20 million, the administration might not have the stomach to make a change. That could easily change if the Hoosiers don't take care of business this week and the bottom falls out in October.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

SEC unbeatens at 5 as league play begins

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

Georgia found itself in a rare situation against South Carolina last weekend, when the unranked and largely unheralded Gamecocks jumped out to a 14-3 lead against the two-time defending national champions.

Sure, the Bulldogs rallied with three unanswered touchdowns in the second half to keep their win streak going. But the very fact that they were on the ropes just three games into the season raised some eyebrows.

"We did respond to adversity," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said of the close call. "It's going to happen all over the country."

It certainly has been happening in the SEC.

Arkansas was knocked from the ranks of the unbeaten last week when it lost at home to BYU. No. 23 Tennessee also took a big tumble when it was waylaid in The Swamp by No. 25 Florida, which lost to Utah earlier in the year.

"We're disappointed," said Razorbacks coach Sam Pittman, whose team now plays three of the next four on the road. "LSU played really well (last week) and we have our work cut out for us, but we'll be ready when we go down there. LSU the next one at night — it's hard to go to Baton Rouge and get a win."

All of that leaves top-ranked Georgia headlining five teams from the mighty SEC to survive the first three weeks of the season unscathed. And by the end of the weekend, that total could well be two, with Missouri playing another unbeaten in Memphis on a neutral field and No. 15 Mississippi and Auburn heavy underdogs in their games.

The Rebels are headed to No. 13 Alabama, which has already lost to future SEC opponent Texas, to begin a daunting stretch, while the Tigers are on their way to Kyle Field to face Texas A&M, which lost at Miami a couple of weeks ago.

There are just 18 teams in college football's biggest subdivision that have yet to lose this season.

How long will those from the SEC last?

Might as well start with Georgia, which hasn't lost since the SEC title game against Alabama in December 2021, and hasn't lost a regular-season game since Florida on Nov. 7, 2020. The Bulldogs are six-TD favorites to beat UAB on Saturday, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, but then have back-to-back games against unbeatens Auburn and Kentucky.

The real test for the Bulldogs will be four games late in the season, though.

It begins with Florida on Oct. 28 and continues against Missouri, which improved to 3-0 last week with a win over then-No. 15 Kansas State. Ole Miss comes to Sanford Stadium the next week before the Bulldogs wrap the stretch with a trip to Tennessee.

Missouri is favored by only 6½ points against Memphis this weekend in a game being playing in St. Louis. If the Tigers get by that game and an SEC opener against Vanderbilt, LSU visits Faurot Field for what could be a big-time showdown.

Kentucky has hardly been tested during its 3-0 start, blowing out Ball State, Eastern Kentucky and Akron. And whether that nonconference schedule has prepared coach Mark Stoops' team will be known soon: The Wildcats are two-touchdown favorites against Vanderbilt this weekend before back-to-back games against the Gators and the Bulldogs.

"We have to concentrate on ourselves, going on the road and playing a better, more efficient style than we have been," Stoops acknowledged this week. "We've got to be better in a lot of areas."

Then there are Ole Miss and Auburn, the two teams most in peril this weekend.

The Rebels have one of the SEC's few marquee nonconference wins, over then-No. 24 Tulane a couple of weeks ago, and are coming off a tidy 48-23 win over Georgia Tech. But the level of competition goes up immeasurably against 'Bama, a touchdown favorite at home, with LSU lurking for Mississippi the following week.

Auburn is similarly untested heading into conference play, easily beating Massachusetts and Samford while struggling past lowly California. So the Tigers' trip to Texas A&M, which is more than a touchdown favorite, figures to be an eye-opener for Auburn, which is merely beginning a stretch that also includes Georgia, LSU and Ole Miss.

L.G. PATTERSON/AP

Fans rush the field after Missouri defeated Kansas State 30-27 on Saturday in Columbia, Mo.

No. 7 Penn State ready for gritty fight against No. 24 Iowa

BY TRAVIS JOHNSON
Associated Press

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Penn State players have always claimed to draw energy from a crowd of 110,000 ravenous fans who pack one of the country's largest venues all wearing white.

Cornerback Kalen King and the rest of the No. 7 Nittany Lions defense have built plenty of momentum to this point, and they believe they can feed off it again on Saturday when Penn State hosts No. 24 Iowa in a white-walled Beaver Stadium.

The Hawkeyes believe they can silence the masses.

"They've got a lot of good guys on the defensive side of the ball over there," King said. "We've got a lot of good guys on the defensive side of the ball over here. I just feel like it's going to be a real competitive game, a real tough game, a real gritty game."

It usually is when these two teams tangle.

Four of their last five meetings have been decided by six points or less. They've featured back-and-forth paces, late offensive heroics, dialed-in special teams play and hard-hitting defense.

"It's funny in conference play, sometimes some teams match up that way and some don't," Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz said.

CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

Penn State quarterback Drew Allar passes against Illinois on Sept. 16 in Champaign, Ill. Penn State won 30-13.

Shorthanded Hawks

Iowa will be without its leading receiver and two of its top three rushers.

Tight end Luke Lachey had ankle surgery Tuesday and will miss the rest of the year. He led Iowa with 10 catches for 131 yards before he was hurt last week.

Meanwhile, Ferentz said that running back Kaleb Johnson will miss his second-straight game and Jaziun Patterson is also out. They've combined for 195 yards and two touchdowns on 55 carries so far.

No. 24 Iowa (3-0)
at No. 7 Penn State (3-0)
AFN-Atlantic
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

More explosives

Penn State coach James Franklin would like to see more explosive plays from his offense.

So far, Penn State has run just nine plays for 20 yards or more. The Nittany Lions generated 68 last year. Franklin believes more big plays are coming, especially in the running game with star backs Kaytron Allen and Nick Singleton.

"It's been very obvious that over the first three weeks, people are saying their defensive game plan is going to be based on stopping our running game," Franklin said. "We can show that we can consistently be (explosive) in the passing game and cause real significant problems if you choose to play that way."

Just missing

Penn State quarterback Drew Allar knows he missed at least one wide-open touchdown throw a week ago and misfired on a few others that might've been big gains.

The first-year starter will face arguably his toughest test against Iowa coordinator Phil Parker's zone-heavy defense.

"If I put the ball in front, we get a broken tackle and the receivers can do their thing out in open space or even the running backs do their thing out in open space, and that would create a lot of explosives," Allar said.

Playing catch-up

Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara spent the last two weeks getting up to speed after a quadriceps injury limited him in camp.

Ferentz said the former Michigan quarterback has been able to do more and more and this week marks the second time he's been a full participant in the team's full slate of practices.

"It's going to be another step up, but good news is he's a veteran player who has done it" Ferentz said. "And at least he's got that to draw upon. But you still need to be in the here and now in terms of practice."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Colorado safety Shilo Sanders, left, runs back an interception for a touchdown as Colorado State wide receiver Tory Horton pursues in the first half Sept. 16 in Boulder, Colo. Colorado won 43-35 in OT.

Safety Shilo Sanders leads Colorado defense vs. Oregon

By Pat Graham
Associated Press

No. 19 Colorado (3-0)
at No. 10 Oregon (3-0)
AFN-Sports
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

BOULDER, Colo. — Colorado safety Shilo Sanders keeps moving up in the rankings — his father's rankings, anyway, of his favorite kids.

Yep, that really is a playful thing between Colorado coach Deion Sanders and his five children.

It's easy to see why Shilo Sanders received a bump in this week's family poll after his 80-yard interception return for a score over the weekend. That play motivated his proud father to sprint down the field — the most he's run in years, he later admitted — to celebrate with his middle son.

Shilo Sanders may not always garner as many headlines as his quarterback brother, Shedeur, but he's an indispensable part of the 19th-ranked Buffaloes (3-0). Shilo Sanders earned the Pac-12 defensive player of the week honors for his interception and a forced fumble in a 43-35 win over Colorado State in double overtime.

What's more, he's the current pick to top his father's favorite kid list. And yep, that's an actual betting thing, too.

"He is moving up. He is moving on up like 'The Jeffersons,'" said Deion Sanders, in reference to the American sitcom television series that started in the 1970s. "My kid rankings are tough. It really is a serious run right now."

Shilo Sanders, though, has inside information. He's seen the picture displays on his father's phone.

"He has different moods, so sometimes, whoever makes him the happiest that week is the screensaver," said Shilo, whose team plays at No. 10 Oregon (3-0) on Saturday. "Usually, it's me."

The 6-foot, 195-pound Sanders is following a similar path of his famous father, even wearing No. 21 just like dad. He's playing on the same side of the ball as dad, who high-stepped his way to two Super Bowl titles over his Hall of Fame career.

Just don't compare them. That's not fair, his coach/father warned.

"A lot of fathers do that. They want the kids to walk in their footsteps and live their life," Deion Sanders said. "My kids and I, our deal we made when they were young lads just getting into sports is you don't have to be me. Be the best you. ... Shilo is a bona fide leader. He's a 'dawg back there."

In high school, Shilo Sanders focused on baseball — his dad's other sport — before concentrating on quarterback. But with his brother coming up through the system, he switched to cornerback.

"My dad was like, 'I could get you a lot of offers if you play corner. I'll just teach you how to play corner,'" he said.

He gladly accepted his father's mentoring. He picked up the position in no time and was recruited to South Carolina, where the Gamecocks turned him into a safety. He picked that up quick, too.

Shilo Sanders left South Carolina to join his dad and Shedeur at Jackson State. And when Deion Sanders was hired at Colorado, he followed his dad and younger brother there, too. He didn't arrive until the summer, however, as he stayed at Jackson State to finish school.

In Boulder, Shilo Sanders joins not only his dad and Shedeur — who has the second-highest yards passing average in the nation — but his older brother, Deion Jr., who provides behind-the-scenes content of the team through his "Well Off Media" brand on YouTube. Their sister, Shelomi, is a guard on the women's basketball team for Colorado (the oldest sibling is Deiondra).

Sometimes, Shilo Sanders will study film from his father's playing days — back when he was "Prime Time" — for tips on how the elite cornerback played in certain coverage schemes.

"But the biggest thing that he did is use instincts," Shilo Sanders explained. "So that's really something that I took from him."

In that regard, he's a chip off the old block.

"He's bought in to what it takes to prepare," defensive coordinator Charles Kelly explained. "His intelligence and his work ethic is what separates him."

No. 4 FSU will look to avenge Clemson's 7 straight series wins

By Bob Ferrante
Associated Press

No. 4 Florida State (3-0)
at Clemson (2-1)
AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Once a heated Atlantic Coast Conference rivalry, the Florida State-Clemson series has become a lopsided affair.

The Tigers have won seven in a row against the Seminoles, including five by double digits and four in Death Valley. No one needs to remind No. 4 Florida State about the past. And no one needs to educate coach Mike Norvell's team about the present — or what's at stake Saturday.

"I don't think there's going to be a whole lot of motivational talks needed," Norvell said.

The Seminoles understand how important this game is to their ACC title hopes and their College Football Playoff chances. Fittingly, it's a high noon showdown.

"We'll be able to sit here (at) 3:30, 3:45 on Saturday and know whether we accomplished that or we didn't," Norvell said. "I've got a lot of confidence in what we'll be able to do, and I'll be able to live with whatever the result."

The Seminoles (3-0, 1-0 ACC) are 2½-point favorites, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. It's the first time Clemson (2-1, 0-1) has been a home underdog since facing eventual Heisman Trophy winner Lamar Jackson and Louisville in 2016. The Tigers escaped that one 42-36.

Clemson has won a bunch since, too. The two-time national champion (2016, '18) and the 2019 runner-up has taken seven of the last eight ACC titles.

FSU, meanwhile, has gone through two coaching changes — moving from Jimbo Fisher to Willie Taggart to Norvell — and a seismic rebuild. Now, Norvell's team has won nine in a row and appears ready for the Tigers.

The Seminoles consider last week's 31-29 squeaker at Boston College more of a wake-up call than cause for concern. Maybe they overlooked the Eagles. Maybe they were looking ahead to the Tigers. Either way, it provided them extra motivation this week.

"It was definitely a lesson learned," standout defensive end Jared Verse said. "You can't look down on any opponent you go up against. Everybody has a hit out on us. They want to get us.

"Everybody's got something they want to prove against us. They did that. We can't let that happen again. We got to go out there and play how we play. We're the top team and we can't ever let that ever happen again."

The Seminoles pulled away from then-No. 5 LSU in the season opener, routed Southern Miss the following week and then struggled at Boston College. Despite the ups and downs, they still managed to extend their scoring mark to nine consecutive games with 30 or more points. It's the longest active streak in the ACC.

FSU has averaged just 19 points in the seven-game series skid.

An experienced group filled with transfers, the Seminoles have little use for what happened last year or long ago. Clemson has had FSU's number for the better part of the past decade, a trend that could change in the span of a few hours Saturday.

"I heard it's a hostile environment," Verse said. "I'm excited for it. This is what I came here for."

PHIL SEARS/AP

Florida State defensive back Jarrian Jones returns an interception for a touchdown in the third quarter of a game against Southern Mississippi on Sept. 9 in Tallahassee, Fla. FSU won 66-13.

NFL

Vikings trade for Rams' RB Akers

By Dave Campbell
Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — The run-deficient Minnesota Vikings acquired running back Cam Akers in a trade with the Los Angeles Rams on Wednesday after the fourth-year player fell out of favor with the coaching staff and behind Kyren Williams on the depth chart.

The Vikings sent a 2026 conditional sixth-round draft pick to the Rams for Akers and a 2026 conditional seventh-round pick in the deal, which was pending Akers passing a physical.

Akers, who was the 52nd overall pick in the 2020 draft out of Florida State, tore his Achilles tendon during the 2021 preseason but recovered quickly enough to contribute in the playoffs during the Rams' run to a Super Bowl title. Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell, offensive coordinator Wes Phillips and quarterbacks coach Chris O'Hara were Rams assistants during Akers' first two years there.

Last season, Akers started slowly and clashed with the coaches. He was sent away from the team at midseason while the Rams tried to trade him. He returned after the deadline passed without a deal and ramped up his production, recording three straight 100-yard games to close out a dismal season for the then-reigning champions.

After the surprise retirement of Sony Michel, Akers was the clear frontrunner to be the featured ball carrier for coach Sean McVay's pass-centric offense.

"I know I deserve to be a starter in this league, so this is the year. Keep my head down, go to work, prove myself," Akers said after reporting to training camp.

But after the Rams put the second-year player Williams ahead of him in the pecking order, they renewed their attempt to trade Akers. The Vikings were a natural fit given their coaches' familiarity with him and their league-low 69 rushing yards.

"I think he did a lot of really good things, and I think Cam is a quality player. I think sometimes it boils down to, 'All right, is it a fit?'" McVay said on Monday after confirming the Rams were again trying to deal Akers. "This isn't an indictment on any individual. I really care a lot about Cam, and I'm appreciative of some of the challenging things that we've gone through and where we ended up getting to in terms of our relationship and our ability to communicate clearly."

The market value of running backs has never been lower in the NFL, as evidenced by the pennies-on-the-dollar trade compensation going to the Rams. By finding a trade partner, they at least saved $1.29 million off their cap.

The Vikings released four-time Pro Bowl pick Dalvin Cook during the summer and turned their backfield over to Alexander Mattison, with second-year player Ty Chandler and recent pickup Myles Gaskin backing him up. Akers will have an opportunity to factor into that mix.

O'Connell has stressed the need to have a more efficient rushing attack, even if the Vikings are built around Kirk Cousins passing to Justin Jefferson and company. The coaches spent the extra time after the loss last Thursday at Philadelphia revisiting their strategy around the running game.

"So much of it just comes back to simple elements of technique, fundamentals, understanding of what we're trying to get done," O'Connell said Wednesday before the trade was made.

Lindsey Wasson/AP

Cam Akers scores a touchdown for the Rams against the Seahawks on Sept. 10. Los Angeles traded Akers to the Vikings on Wednesday.

Raiders DE Crosby facing more attention

By Mark Anderson
Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — Almost lost in the Chandler Jones situation is the effect his absence has had on the Raiders defensive line.

In trying to make up the difference at one of the defensive end positions, Las Vegas has used a tackle in Jerry Tillery, an undersized Malcolm Koonce and not-yet-ready rookie Tyree Wilson.

Opponents have been able to pay even more attention than usual to Maxx Crosby on the other end, mostly neutralizing one of the NFL's top pass rushers.

"It gives other people opportunities because if he's got two on him, they usually have one on somebody else," Raiders coach Josh McDaniels said. "So there are opportunities that are there that will present themselves. We just need to be able to try to take advantage of it."

Crosby facing double teams isn't new. He often did so last season even with Jones in the lineup, but still found a way to account for nearly half of Las Vegas' 27 sacks.

He has one sack through two games this season, getting to Denver's Russell Wilson in the season opener. The Buffalo Bills devoted even more energy to defending Crosby, and though he had seven tackles, none occurred behind the line of scrimmage.

Pittsburgh Steelers (1-1)
at Las Vegas Raiders (1-1)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Monday CET
9:15 a.m. Monday JKT

"It's been a challenge for the last couple of years," Crosby said. "It's the ultimate respect getting chipped, getting slides (blocking), things like that. You can get frustrated by it, you can get irritated or you can find a way. For me, that's what it all comes down to. I'll find ways to affect the game no matter what. Facing two or three (blockers), it doesn't matter. I've got to find a way to be at my best, and that's what I'm seeking every single day."

Jones' long-term future in Las Vegas is murky. The club placed Jones, who had criticized Raiders management on social media, on the reserve/non-football illness list on Wednesday, meaning he will miss at least the next four games.

Regardless, not having Jones has created a big problem for the Raiders regarding how they can make up for his absence even if he didn't make the kind of impact envisioned when signing last season.

Jones had 10½ sacks in his final season with the Arizona Cardinals, but had just 4½ in 2022 for the Raiders.

Las Vegas, which hosts the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday night, started Tillery at Denver to give the Raiders three tackles in the game at once. Tillery did get a sack, but Koonce started on the edge at Buffalo and has one tackle this season.

Wilson was drafted seventh overall this year to be the answer for the future, not necessarily now. He was hampered by a foot injury sustained last season at Texas Tech, delaying his development, so there is little surprise he's off to a slow start with three tackles.

"I always break it down into quarters in terms of the first quarter of the season is trying to get acclimated to playing football again," Raiders defensive coordinator Patrick Graham said.

"Getting your hands right, making sure that your eyes are in the right place, getting situated like that. Tyree, along with all the other guys on the defense, they're just getting situated and getting acclimated to playing real football again, and we'll see how it goes this week."

In the meantime, Crosby will keep trying to fight through whatever blocking schemes opponents throw at him while hoping for some help on the other side. Steelers coach Mike Tomlin made it clear that Crosby will be a focal point of how his team attacks the Raiders.

Tomlin called Crosby one of those "guys that can change the climate in an instant."

"We've faced some of these challenging guys over the course of the first two weeks and we've done a largely solid job of minimizing those whether it's (Nick) Bosa or Myles (Garrett)," Tomlin said. "Maxx is just as challenging. We've been in the stadium with him before. I think he had four hits on the quarterback a year ago. We just can't allow that to happen."

Scoreboard

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Miami	2	0	0	1.000	60	51
Buffalo	1	1	0	.500	54	32
N.Y. Jets	1	1	0	.500	32	46
New England	0	2	0	.000	37	49

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Indianapolis	1	1	0	.500	52	51
Jacksonville	1	1	0	.500	40	38
Tennessee	1	1	0	.500	42	40
Houston	0	2	0	.000	29	56

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	2	0	0	1.000	52	33
Cleveland	1	1	0	.500	46	29
Pittsburgh	1	1	0	.500	33	52
Cincinnati	0	2	0	.000	27	51

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	1	1	0	.500	37	30
Las Vegas	1	1	0	.500	27	54
Denver	0	2	0	.000	49	52
L.A. Chargers	0	2	0	.000	58	63

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Dallas	2	0	0	1.000	70	10
Philadelphia	2	0	0	1.000	59	48
Washington	2	0	0	1.000	55	49
N.Y. Giants	1	1	0	.500	31	68

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Atlanta	2	0	0	1.000	49	34
New Orleans	2	0	0	1.000	36	32
Tampa Bay	2	0	0	1.000	47	34
Carolina	0	2	0	.000	27	44

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	1	1	0	.500	52	57
Green Bay	1	1	0	.500	62	45
Chicago	0	2	0	.000	37	65
Minnesota	0	2	0	.000	45	54

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
San Francisco	2	0	0	1.000	60	30
L.A. Rams	1	1	0	.500	53	43
Seattle	1	1	0	.500	50	61
Arizona	0	2	0	.000	44	51

Thursday's game
N.Y. Giants at San Francisco

Sunday's games
Atlanta at Detroit
Buffalo at Washington
Denver at Miami
Houston at Jacksonville
Indianapolis at Baltimore
L.A. Chargers at Minnesota
New England at N.Y. Jets
New Orleans at Green Bay
Tennessee at Cleveland
Carolina at Seattle
Chicago at Kansas City
Dallas at Arizona
Pittsburgh at Las Vegas

Monday's games
Philadelphia at Tampa Bay
L.A. Rams at Cincinnati

Thursday, Sept. 28
Detroit at Green Bay

Sunday, Oct. 1
Atlanta vs Jacksonville at London
Baltimore at Cleveland
Cincinnati at Tennessee
Denver at Chicago
L.A. Rams at Indianapolis
Miami at Buffalo
Minnesota at Carolina
Pittsburgh at Houston
Tampa Bay at New Orleans
Washington at Philadelphia
Las Vegas at L.A. Chargers
Arizona at San Francisco
New England at Dallas
Kansas City at N.Y. Jets

Monday, Oct. 2
Seattle at N.Y. Giants

Also on AFN
Dallas Cowboys (2-0)
at Arizona Cardinals (0-2)
AFN-Sports2
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

NFL

Bills LB Milano marches to his own beat

By John Wawrow
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Buffalo Bills linebacker Matt Milano is a player of numerous accolades and very few words, even when it comes to the topic of his musical tastes.

Milano's eyes lit up Wednesday when informed some of his teammates revealed he was a fan of house music.

"I don't know nothing about that," the seventh-year player said, laughing. "They're just making up (stuff)."

As for what Milano might be into, the 2022 All-Pro player provided a blunt response.

"I'm into football," he said.

It's a perfect answer from a player who is as intensely focused on keeping his life private, as Milano is running down an opponent.

Whether true or not, the house music connection is not lost on many of Milano's teammates because the "boom, boom, boom" beat of the sound reflects the familiar constant thud of tackles he makes during games.

"It's usually just him laying the wood, you know, boom, boom, left and right," said running back Damien Harris, who faced Milano twice a year during his first four seasons with the division-rival Patriots before signing with Buffalo this offseason. "You always know where 58 is on the field."

Milano has not lost a step two games into his seventh season, with Buffalo (1-1) preparing play at Washington (2-0) on Sunday.

And Milano is doing so while adapting to a new defensive system to accommodate Buffalo losing starting middle linebacker Tremaine Edmunds in free agency. Undersized second-year linebacker Terrel Bernard has taken over Edmunds' spot, and the Bills have incorporated Taylor Rapp to play a safety/linebacker role during passing situations.

Known for his ability to penetrate the backfield, drop back in coverage and his sideline-to-sideline range, Milano is second on the team in having had a hand in 12 tackles, and leads Buffalo with two interceptions.

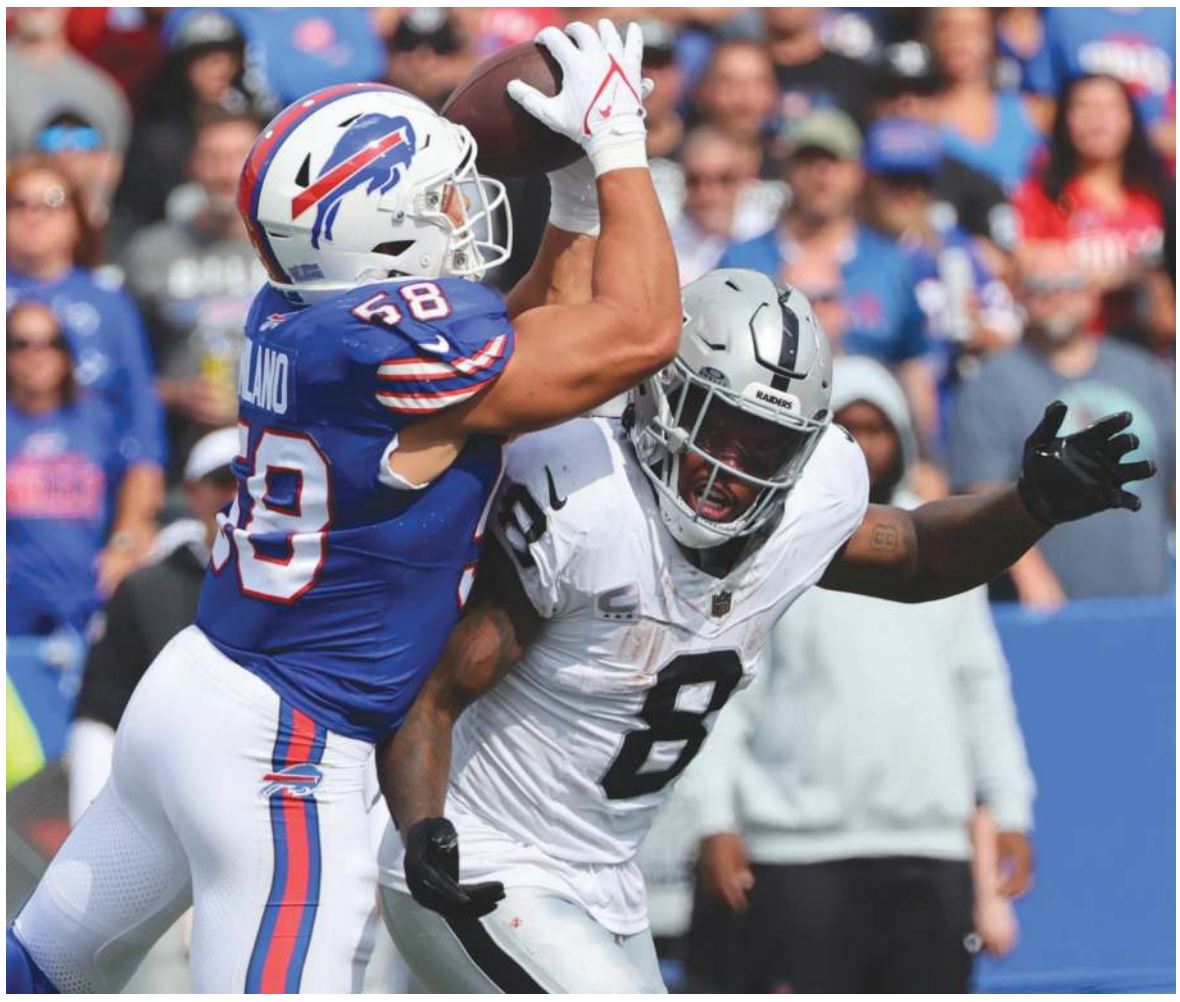
The first came when he dropped back into coverage and easily picked off Zach Wilson in a season-opening 22-16 overtime loss at the Jets. His next one came Sunday, when Milano jumped over the back of Raiders running back Josh Jacobs to cleanly catch Jimmy Garoppolo's pass in a 38-10 win.

"I actually had a pretty good vantage point to see it unfold, and just amazing," coach Sean McDermott said. "It's weird, though, because I almost expected Matt to do that when I saw the position he was in."

His dual abilities against the run and pass are the result of Milano's experience playing safety at Boston College. The question mark for Milano entering the 2017 draft was how his 6-foot-1, 220-pound frame would translate to the NFL because he was regarded as being too slow to play safety and too small to play linebacker.

Selected in the fifth-round by Buffalo, Milano quickly found a fit in the Bills' defense and has been a starter since late in his rookie season.

"That boy can do it all, man," safety Micah Hyde said. "He's no longer our secret on defense, because the word's definitely getting out. He's making too many plays."



Jeffrey T. Barnes/AP

Buffalo Bills linebacker Matt Milano intercepts a pass intended for the Las Vegas Raiders' Josh Jacobs during the second half Sunday in Orchard Park, N.Y. The Bills wound up with a convincing 38-10 win.

Buffalo Bills (1-1) at Washington Commanders (2-0)
AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

Colts QB Minshew prepares for possible start vs. Ravens

By Michael Marot
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Quarterback Gardner Minshew joined the Indianapolis Colts knowing the odds.

Yes, he wanted a chance to compete for the starting job. He also recognized Indy would likely use the fourth overall draft pick on its quarterback of the future — and perhaps its present day starter.

Knowing the reality didn't make it any easier for Minshew to accept that after one preseason game, his former offensive coordinator in Philadelphia and current head coach Shane Steichen declared 21-year-old rookie Anthony Richardson the starter.

Now, Minshew could get his long-awaited opportunity — making career start No. 25 Sunday at Baltimore in place of the injured Richardson.

"You just show up every day and do what they tell you to do," Minshew said before Wednesday's workout. "Just get ready with whatever reps you got. I'm here today, they said I'm going so I'm fired up about it and about to do my best."

The five-year veteran understands this isn't 2019 when he became a league-wide sensation as much for his quirky personality and trademark mustache as he was leading Jacksonville to a 6-6 mark during his starting tenure.

When Richardson clears the concussion protocol, he'll start.

But nobody can say precisely when to expect Richardson back because concussion-like symptoms can linger and recovery times vary. He did not practice Wednesday and was a possibility to sit out Thursday, too.

So, for now, Minshew is taking first-team snaps again as he did throughout the offseason and at the start of training camp.

The Colts (1-1) have no doubt, he'll be ready — if needed.

This is the third straight season Minshew has worked with Steichen, who applauded the way the former Washington State star led Indy during the final three quarters last weekend in Houston. Minshew finished 19 of 23 with 171 yards and one TD in relief of Richardson, leading the Colts to three scores in a 31-20 victory that snapped an eight-game losing streak.

Steichen wasn't surprised.

"Credit to him, what he does week in and week out to get prepared for games and to do what he did in that game, to come off the bench and have the success he had, it shows how prepared he is," Steichen said. "Just the way he operated, it was very impressive. "

Minshew has provided the kind of solid, steady presence Steichen envisioned when the Colts signed the free agent to a one-year, $3.5 million deal in March. Minshew's experience in Philadelphia helped him teach his new teammates the offense while developing strong locker room bonds.

His work ethic hasn't changed.

"They have to know you're ready, that you're dialed in, that you haven't been just sitting over there messing around on scout team, that you know the plan," Minshew said. "I think if you do that, you show you're prepared and ready, the guys will follow."

David J. Phillip/AP

Gardner Minshew, above, led Indianapolis to three scores and a win in relief of injured Anthony Richardson last weekend in Houston.

Indianapolis Colts (1-1) at Baltimore Ravens (2-0)
AFN-Atlantic
7 p.m Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

SPORTS

Camps open with questions

Can Golden Knights repeat? How healthy are Panthers? ›› Page 42

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

MICHAEL CATERINA/AP

Quarterback Sam Hartman has led Notre Dame to its highest point total through four games since 1914. The Irish will have their hands full with Ohio State on Saturday.

Settle in for the show

A full day of games matching Top 25 teams – mostly televised on AFN – awaits on Week 4 slate

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

College football fans will want to get to the market or get their fall yard work done early Saturday so they can settle in to watch what on paper is the best day of games in a long time.

There are six games matching AP Top 25 teams, the most in September since 2006. The main attraction is No. 6 Ohio State at No. 9 Notre Dame.

Viewers will face hard decisions, and might want to consider activating multiple screens.

That's when we'll find out if No. 13 Alabama can get its offense going with Jalen Milroe back at quarterback against No. 15 Mississippi; if Deion Sanders and No. 19 Colorado can continue their captivating run at No. 10 Oregon; and if the injured Cam Rising will be able to play for the first time this season as No. 11 Utah hosts No. 22 UCLA.

No. 7 Penn State hosts its annual "Whiteout" against No. 24 Iowa and No. 14 Oregon State will be at No. 21 Washington State in games that will go head-to-head with Ohio State-Notre Dame.

The day's warmup act: No. 4 Florida State at unranked Clemson in a possible preview of the ACC championship game.

All but Alabama-Ole Miss will be televised on AFN. Four will be shown live.

The schedule: Florida State-Clemson, AFN-Sports, 6 p.m. Saturday CET, 1 a.m. Sunday JKT; UCLA-Utah, AFN-Atlantic, 9:30 p.m. CET, 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT; Colorado-Oregon, AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. CET, 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT; Ohio State-Notre Dame, AFN-Sports, 1:30 a.m. Sunday CET, 8:30 a.m. JKT; Iowa-Penn State, AFN-Atlantic, 1:30 a.m. Sunday CET, 8:30 a.m. JKT; Oregon State-Washington State-Washington State (delayed), AFN-Sports2, 7 a.m.

SEE SHOW ON PAGE 43

INSIDE

Shilo Sanders follows his father, leads Buffs defense

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