

CFP PLAYOFF: TCU-Michigan
a contrast in styles **Page 48**

THE YEAR IN REVIEW
Griner saga was year's
top sports story **Page 44**

Top sports moments **Page 45**

EUROPE
& PACIFIC

WEEKEND

EDITION

THE YEAR IN POP CULTURE

The best – and worst –
that 2022 had to offer

Pages 14-20; 24-31

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Sting operation



PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Troops and contractors at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait gather around a suspected hideout for scorpions on Nov. 28.

Nighttime scorpion hunts a popular pastime at Kuwait base

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

ALI AL SALEM AIR BASE, Kuwait — Army veterinary technician Spc. Joseph Neitz shined the ultraviolet beam of his blacklight on the desert sands, yielding a fluorescent turquoise glow that confirmed the presence of his quarry.

The scorpion-hunting former Marine had encountered one of the world's most dangerous species of the stinging arachnid.

But the Arabian fat-tailed scorpion did not run away. Instead, it raised its pincers and arched its venomous tail at Neitz, as if to challenge him.

Neitz gestured to a fellow hunter, who donned protective gloves,

grabbed the tennis-ball-sized critter with metal tongs and placed it in a plastic container.

"Initially we went out to do a population estimate, and then we found that there is a significant number," said Neitz, who started the scorpion hunts in May.

Troops captured at least 300 of the creatures at the base over those six months, he added. Neitz hopes the military will supply antivenom to the base after seeing the data.

The base does not have the antivenom because of a belief that the scorpion population there had diminished over the last five years,

SEE STING ON PAGE 3



An Arabian fat-tailed scorpion glows under a blacklight near a bunker at Ali Al Salem Air Base. The exoskeletons of the scorpions glow when ultraviolet light shines upon them.

3 steps to a better 2023

Navy psychologist offers advice on how to follow resolutions

By FRANK ANDREWS
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — New Year's resolutions: They're easy to make but easier to break.

For the determined, a Navy psychologist in Okinawa has three "powerful steps" he said will sustain the healthy life changes those resolutions inspire. Start by recognizing that progress is often stalled by conflicting beliefs, wrote Navy Cmdr. Mathew B. Rariden, a psychologist at U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, in a Nov. 8 email to Stars and Stripes.

"Do you want to lose weight, but also like sweets? OK, well, are you lying about wanting to lose weight because you like sweets, or are you lying about liking sweets because you want to lose weight?" Rariden asked. "The answer is you are not lying."

Neutralize the belief that competes with your desire for change, he said.

"The human mind can tolerate significant adversity as long as it believes in what it's doing," he wrote. "To fervently believe in what one is doing they must find meaning in what they're doing — meaning that can override competition between conflicting beliefs.

SEE STEPS ON PAGE 3

"The human mind can tolerate significant adversity as long as it believes in what it's doing."

Navy Cmdr. Mathew B. Rariden

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.196	..
Germany	\$3.473	\$3.975	\$4.307	\$4.919	Change in price	..	..	-3.5 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.265	\$4.530	\$5.205	Turkey	..	..	\$4.715	\$4.856*
U.K.	..	\$3.911	\$4.243	\$4.855	Change in price	..	..	No change	No change

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective, Dec. 30. The change in price is from Dec. 23.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.159	..	\$3.999	\$4.609
Japan	..	\$3.969	..	\$4.589	Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	-3.0 cents	-6.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.139	..	..	\$4.589	Guam	\$3.149	\$3.649	\$3.979	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Dec. 30 - Jan. 5

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	South Korea (Won)	1265.02
Euro costs (Dec. 30)	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9235
Dollar buys (Dec. 30)	Thailand (Baht)	34.61
British pound (Dec. 30)	Turkey (NewLira)	18.7203
Japanese yen (Dec. 30)		
South Korean won (Dec. 30)		

(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.)

Commercial rates	Prime rate	7.50
Bahrain (Dinar)	Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00
Britain (Pound)	Federal funds market rate	3.83
Canada (Dollar)	3-month bill	4.46
China (Yuan)	30-year bond	3.97
Denmark (Krone)		
Egypt (Pound)		
Euro		
Hong Kong (Dollar)		
Hungary (Forint)		
Israel (Shekel)		
Japan (Yen)		
Kuwait (Dinar)		
Norway (Krone)		
Philippines (Peso)		
Poland (Zloty)		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)		
Singapore (Dollar)		

INTEREST RATES

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.

TODAY IN STRIPES

Classified	36
Comics	34,38-41
Crossword	34,38-41
Faces	35
Opinion	11
Sports	42-48

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MILITARY

High Army, Marine turnover in cyber fields

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

More stringent service obligations are needed to ensure that Army and Marine cyber specialists don't bolt for big private-sector paydays immediately after receiving high-priced training at taxpayer expense, according to a government watchdog agency.

While the Navy and Air Force have instituted three-year service obligations to protect their investment, the Corps and the Army are falling short, the Government Accountability Office said in a report this month.

The report comes amid struggles to keep crucial cyber units fully manned, even as cyberwarfare and network protection have become a top priority for a Defense Department whose tech-savvy adversaries include China and Russia.

"DOD faces increasing competition from the private sector looking to recruit top cyber talent," the GAO said.

The Army and Marine Corps have the



MATTHEW LUCIBELLO/U.S. Marine Corps

Marine Corps Cpl. Dakota Filyaw, left, and Cpl. Gabriel Mowry, right, cyberspace warfare operators, work at Camp Nett in Niantic, Conn., on June 16.

added challenge of trying to retain specialists without giving them clear-cut service obligations.

The Marines struggled the most with staffing gaps. That's the difference between the number of personnel authorized and the number of personnel staffed.

While most Navy, Army and Air Force cyber career fields were staffed at 80% or higher, four of the six such career fields in the Marine Corps were below 80% of authorized levels in fiscal year 2021.

The Marines also are the only branch without any service obligations after cyber training, which is often over a year long and costs the military hundreds of thousands of dollars per person.

Marine Corps officials told the GAO that the service's cyber office has requested authority to institute a 54-month active-duty service obligation requirement for personnel in these areas.

However, a Marine official told the GAO that there had been no indication whether the request would be approved and implemented.

Meanwhile, Army Cyber Command officials said that because of bureaucratic confusion, personnel offices lacked relevant information needed to calculate and implement service obligations for various Army cyber courses.

"As a result, officials stated that it is a challenge to hold personnel to general service obligations when they attend (critical cyber) training," the GAO said.

Army Cyber Command officials said some officers who attended a yearlong course costing hundreds of thousands of dollars left the military soon after completing certification, the GAO said.

The officials said they are working to revise regulations to clearly define a 36-month service obligation for certain training.

The services have taken other steps to try to mitigate the turnover problem, such as retention bonuses, which tallied \$160 million in all between 2017 and 2021.

"However, officials have acknowledged that while the military services offer retention bonuses and special pays, they continue to experience challenges retaining qualified cyber personnel," the GAO said.

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Steps: Service members share their resolutions as the new year approaches

FROM PAGE 1

Firmly grasping this concept is a necessary pre-requisite to sustaining any positive change over time."

The first of Rariden's three steps to keeping a resolution, he said, is to establish a strong, internal motivational structure.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Mathew Neese, 32, from Wilmington, N.C., an X-ray technician at the Naval Hospital Okinawa, said his goal is to maintain a healthy lifestyle. He is motivated by the example he sets for his 7-year-old daughter, who lives stateside with her mother.

"As soon as I look at her, as soon as I see her smile and see how well she's doing in school, she is my motivation and I think me being motivated kind of rubs off on her," he said during a workout session at the gym. "Every year since her birth, she has been my main motivation for everything."

GROW for goals

Step No. 2, wrote Rariden, is to set and achieve goals using the GROW model.

"The Navy has formally adopted the Goal, Reality, Options, and Will (GROW) model for its coaching efforts, but the GROW model can also be used to facilitate change," he said.

Know your precise goal, that is, what you want to accomplish and understand the feasibility of reaching that goal, or its reality, he

said. Understand your options to achieving that goal and choose the path you will follow to reach it, he said.

Lance Cpl. Keilm Rodriguez, 21, of Philadelphia, of the 3rd Transportation Battalion, made her first New Year's resolutions in October. She resolved to read the Bible more often and to get closer to her family, she told Stars and Stripes on Dec. 20, while exercising at Gunner's Gym at Camp Foster.

"I found some Bible studies, so it makes it easier for me to read," she said. "Just the family part has been difficult because I have always kept my distance. It's hard for me to reach out. Even back at home I'm just not much of a talker. I never reach out first. I know my family misses me, and I miss them, so I am trying to reach out more."

'Accountability partners'

The third step, according to Rariden, is to never underestimate the power of positive peer pressure or accountability. For example, ask that friend who visits the gym regularly to drag you along, too. That friend becomes an "accountability partner," Rariden said.

"There are many ways to establish accountability," he wrote.

Ultimately, he said, we each must motivate ourselves, and take charge of our own accountability as soon as possible, he said.

Airman 1st Class Kira Johnson, 18, from Charlotte, N.C., is an ap-



PHOTOS BY FRANK ANDREWS/Stars and Stripes

Air Force Airman 1st Class Kira Johnson, 18, center — shown here with Airmen 1st Class Brandon Smith, 19, left, and Emma Abrams 19, at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, on Dec. 22 — resolved to become a journeyman crew chief with the 353rd Air Force Special Operations Command in 2023.



Lance Cpl. Keilm Rodriguez, 21, right, of the Marine Corps 3rd Transportation Battalion at Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan, at the base gym on Dec. 20, said she resolved to read the Bible more frequently and get closer to her family in 2023.

prentice crew chief with the 353rd Air Force Special Operations Command at Kadena Air Base.

Her 2023 resolution is to move up to journeyman crew chief, she told Stars and Stripes on Dec. 22 at the

base Exchange.

Johnson said she enlisted because the Air Force is a part of her family heritage. Her great-grandfather was a member of the Army Air Corps.

"I wasn't going to fail; because originally, I didn't want to join the Air Force and then, the more I looked at it, the more it became appealing to me, and I made the resolution that I was going to do it for myself, not because my parents wanted me to," she said. "And I was going to kind of prove myself a little bit because I have two younger brothers, and I wanted to make my parents proud."

Exercise, discipline and the support of friends help her keep her resolutions, she said.

"I am here for me," Johnson said, "but also because my two younger siblings are probably going to join so I am here as a trailblazer for them."

MILITARY

Some F-35s grounded after crash at base

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A small number of F-35 fighter jets have temporarily been barred from flight after a pilot crashed one of the planes this month while testing it at a joint base in North Texas, officials said Wednesday.

The F-35B was going through testing before delivery to the Marine Corps when it encountered trouble while hovering over a runway at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth in Texas on Dec. 15.

The fifth-generation fighter jet slowly fell toward the ground and bounced off the tarmac before the pilot ejected. The plane ultimately came to rest just off the runway and appeared to be mostly intact.

As the crash is being investigated by Naval Air Systems Command, the F-35 Joint Program Office — the military office that oversees life-cycle management of all three U.S. F-35 variants — said it has issued a directive to keep some of the technologically advanced aircraft on the ground.



Tom Fox/TNS

Officials look over the F-35B military aircraft wreckage along the runway at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base in Fort Worth, Texas, on Dec. 15.

“[We] recommend restrictions on a small number of aircraft, which have been evaluated to be of higher risk, from flight operations and until procedures can be developed for their return to flight,” the Joint Program Office said in a statement to Stars and

Stripes.

The F-35B, the variant involved in the crash, is Lockheed Martin’s variant for the Marine Corps and is the only version that can take off and land vertically and hover stationary above the ground. Because of its ability to hover, the

plane is equipped with an automatic pilot ejector seat.

Military officials have not concluded why the plane went down, but they have said the pilot was an Air Force major who was testing the F-35B before delivery to the Marine Corps. The pilot was taken to a hospital as a precaution but was not seriously hurt.

The Joint Program Office did not specify which F-35s were grounded or why they’re considered to be at greater risk than others that remain airworthy.

“The affected aircraft have been identified, and the JPO will work with the military services and international partners to ensure understanding of the risks,” the office added.

“This is a preliminary assessment of the risk, and actions are in work that we believe will lead to a refinement of this assessment. The safety of flight crews is the JPO’s primary concern.”

The investigation into the crash is expected to be completed sometime in the next two weeks, and other investigators are trying to

determine how much damage was done to the crashed F-35.

Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth is a joint reserve base — which means it’s home to Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine reservists — and it’s operated by the Navy Reserve. The 10th Air Force is headquartered there.

The Dec. 15 crash is the latest involving the F-35 this year. An F-35A crashed in Utah in October, and an F-35C fell into the South China Sea in January after striking the ramp of an aircraft carrier. In both accidents, the pilot ejected safely.

The F-35 entered service in the Marine Corps in 2015. The Air Force began receiving its version, the F-35A, a year later and the Navy (F-35C) in 2019.

Lockheed also makes a variant for the Israeli military, the F-35I. The Israeli Air Force said last week that it’s grounded nearly a dozen of its F-35s pending the outcome of the investigation into the Texas crash.

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DOD civilians in Japan must find medical care off-base in new year

BY KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Jordan and Denise McMahan and their three children said they are returning to Albuquerque, N.M., just six months after they arrived at this air base, where Jordan works for U.S. Forces Japan.

“We uprooted our whole life,” McMahan, 44, told Stars and Stripes on Dec. 23. “I never in a million years, if we knew what the medical care situation was going to be like, would we have come here?”

The McMahons are among thousands of Defense Department civilian employees in Japan that U.S. Forces Japan said recently should expect only “space available” appointments at base medical facilities for routine health care starting with the new year.

In October, the Defense Health Agency announced that DOD civilian employees in the Indo-Pacific region should “have a plan in place” for medical care from a local provider in the event military hospitals lack the capacity to see them.

U.S. civilian employees of Star and Stripes Pacific in Japan fall into this category.

The law prioritizes health care at military health care facilities for service members and their families covered by Tricare Prime, the military’s health care plan for active-duty families over-

seas, the director of DHA Region Indo-Pacific, Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Heck, said at the time.

At Yokota Air Base, an airlift hub and USFJ headquarters in western Tokyo, the 374th Medical Group on Aug. 1 limited most pediatric care to active-duty families. Next, Yokosuka Naval Base, the homeport south of Tokyo of the Navy’s 7th Fleet, told DOD civilians there Oct. 17 to seek routine health care off-base.

As of Sunday, health care providers at bases across Japan may schedule appointments for DOD civilians on space-available basis only, according to the USFJ announcement Dec. 23 on its official Facebook page.

“Beginning January 1 all Military Treatment Facilities within the Indo-Pacific will offer Space Available care in Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, and Gynecology when excess capacity exists after meeting federal statutes governing access to care for active-duty Service Members and TRICARE Prime enrolled patients,” the post stated.

Space-available appointments are available on a same-day basis and are not guaranteed, according to the USFJ announcement.

In a comment posted Monday on the USFJ announcement, Stephanie Gilbert, an Air Force spouse, said the earliest she can book an appointment with a provider at Yokota’s 374th Medical

Group is mid-January.

“I’m an active-duty dependent on Tricare Prime at Yokota, walking around with my jaw not being able to open more than an inch, and the next available appointment for me isn’t until (the) middle of January,” she said.

But she sympathized with the DOD civilians now expected to find health care elsewhere in Japan.

“In what world is there ever going to be space-available for non-prime patients?” Gilbert asked. “This seems like a back-handed way to say, ‘We don’t actually care about access to healthcare for those who we send overseas.’ This policy is not for the people.”

The Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy group, a group of DOD civilian employees, responded to USFJ with its own Facebook post Dec. 23.

“What a time to be alive — you inform thousands of patients they will no longer have access to routine or chronic care nor access to future appointments in an infographic 2 days before Christmas,” the post states.

The group advocates for civilians and their medical needs. It found at least 70 cases in 2022 where DOD civilians were denied care by military and Japanese providers, according to an Excel spreadsheet posted on the group’s Facebook page.

The advocacy group launched a



Jordan McMahan

The McMahan family is seen in Tokyo on July 17.

petition Oct. 10 named “DOD Civilian Families in a Healthcare Crisis,” asking lawmakers to preserve civilians’ access to routine health care at military hospitals and protect them from denials by off-base providers. The 374th Medical Group has scheduled a town hall on the subject at 4:30 p.m. Thursday at the Yokota Enlisted Club.

McMahan, a former career Marine, and his family are covered by Tricare, not Tricare Prime.

He said he accepted the position in March and he and his family, including Denise McMahan, 40, and their children, ages 12, 13 and 18, arrived in Japan on July 4.

“We came here with the as-

sumption and with the knowledge that our family was going to be able to be seen by practitioners on the base at the Yokota treatment facility,” he said.

That changed Aug. 1 when routine services and management of chronic medical conditions in Yokota’s pediatric clinic were limited to Tricare Prime enrollees. The McMahan’s youngest child, Gavin, has Down syndrome, his parents said.

“We can’t continue to live here,” McMahan said. “I can’t stay here and have them here for the next year knowing that our son might get sick.”

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MILITARY

Pentagon: No alien life discovered on Earth

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

A new office at the Pentagon is scrutinizing hundreds of reports of unidentified objects in air, sea, space and beyond, senior U.S. defense officials said recently, and while it has discovered no signs of alien life, the search is set to expand.

The issue has taken on increasing seriousness as a bipartisan group of lawmakers presses the Defense Department to investigate instances of unidentified phenomena and disclose publicly what they learn. Established in July, the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office is evaluating recent reports and soon could evaluate accounts that date back decades, officials said.

The Pentagon's top intelligence official, Ronald Moultrie, told reporters during a recent briefing, the first to discuss the office and its ongoing work, that "At this time ... we have nothing" to affirm the exist-



Moultrie

tence of space aliens.

The proliferation of drones, including those operated by foreign adversaries and amateur hobbyists, account for many of the reports, officials said.

"Some of these things almost collide with planes," said Sean Kirkpatrick, the director of the new office, who spoke to the media alongside Moultrie on Friday. "We see that on a regular basis."

The U.S. government employs sophisticated sensors around the globe to collect data, and the office analyzes it for relevant information, they said, declining to elaborate.

While most of the reports the Pentagon investigates are about aerial objects, defense officials are increasingly concerned about unusual activity below the surface of

the ocean, in space and on land. For that reason, the Pentagon now uses the term unidentified anomalous phenomena, or UAP, rather than previous descriptions such as "unidentified flying object."

Moultrie said that, "Unidentified phenomena in all domains ... pose potential threats to personal security and operational security, and they deserve our urgent attention."

Unidentified "trans-medium" objects, he said, is a class of phenomena that would jump between domains, like from the air to the sea. None has been documented yet, Moultrie noted.

The research is likely to expand next year. Congress wrote a provision into the next defense policy bill, which is awaiting President Joe Biden's signature, that requires the Defense Department to complete a "historical record report" about detailing unidentified phenomena observed and documented by the United States. If approved by

Biden, the National Defense Authorization Act will then trigger "quite a research project, if you will, into the archives," Kirkpatrick said.

Defense officials already are digging through old reports. Kirkpatrick, a physicist and career intelligence officer, said he will "adhere to the scientific method—and I will follow that data and science wherever it goes." Some past reports, he acknowledged, may be highly classified and not yet known to him.

Moultrie said he has not seen anything in current documentation that includes "alien visitation, an alien crash, or anything like that." But if something of "alien origin" emerges, he said, defense officials will analyze it and take "appropriate actions." He did not elaborate.

In May, lawmakers held the first congressional hearing on the subject in 50 years, seeking to bring the issue out of the shadows, they said. That followed the release of a re-

port last year by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence that scrutinized 144 cases of unidentified phenomena, and did not find evidence of extraterrestrial visits.

"Some UAP appeared to remain stationary in winds aloft, move against the wind, maneuver abruptly, or move at considerable speed, without discernible means of propulsion," the report said. "In a small number of cases, military aircraft systems processed radio frequency (RF) energy associated with UAP sightings."

Researchers involved with the report labeled the phenomena in five categories: man-made objects cluttering the air, moisture and other natural objects, man-made American aircraft, foreign-made aircraft, and a vague fifth option "other."

Moultrie said another DNI report will be released by the end of the year.

Sting: Scorpion hunts popular on Kuwait base

FROM PAGE 1

he said.

People stationed at Ali Al Salem have gone on some 100 hunts since the spring. The nighttime journeys into the desert attracted hundreds seeking to bag a scorpion or a camel spider during their tour to Kuwait.

So many, in fact, that there's a waitlist for the hunting parties, said Air Force Staff Sgt. Adan Guzman, a public health technician and fellow leader of the hunts.

During the humid summer months, they'd sometimes find eight or 10 scorpions a night.

"Seeing people catch one for the first time, either they're super-excited or they're scared halfway to death," said Staff Sgt. Brendan Guerra, an Air Force medical equipment technician who's gone on many of the forays. "Either way, it's an enjoyable experience."

"Not many people can say, 'I went to catch some of the deadliest scorpions in the world in my free time while on deployment,'" Guerra added.

Sometimes the groups didn't find any scorpions. They were content to watch the top-heavy beetles that strut across the sand, the lines of marching ants or the foxes, lizards, hedgehogs and kangaroo rats that pop out at night from their tunnel networks.

The base provides ample hiding spots for creatures in the abandoned bunkers and aircraft wreckage from when Iraq invaded



Neitz shows off a camel spider caught on Ali Al Salem Air Base and then encased in resin as a memento.

Kuwait in 1990 under Saddam Hussein.

Guzman said he's often called to offices and dorms when people discover scorpions. The venom of the Arabian fat-tailed variety is potentially lethal to humans and especially to the military working dogs on the base, he said.

Neitz, who is finishing his deployment, said he hopes the scorpion hunts will continue next year when the weather heats up and the desert's creatures emerge once again.

He and Guzman cast most of the captured scorpions, and some camel spiders, into a resin memento for the troops who participated in the hunts.

"It's something different," he said. "It makes the deployment a little better. And it's something memorable."

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PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Army Spc. Joseph Neitz, right, packs up protective gloves, metal tongs and ultraviolet flashlights into a bag he uses for scorpion hunting. Neitz and Air Force Staff Sgt. Adan Guzman, left, lead troops and contractors on trips into the desert night to collect scorpions and camel spiders.



Guzman aims a heat gun at a resin cast of a scorpion captured on a hunt at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait.



Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Louis Ludwig shows off a scorpion encased in resin that he received after a morale trip into the desert around Ali Al Salem Air Base to capture venomous creatures.

PACIFIC

S. Korean plans embrace alliance

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korea's first comprehensive strategy for the Indo-Pacific region embraces the country's ties to the United States and Japan against its neighbor North Korea's "serious threat to peace and stability."

"The future of the Indo-Pacific will be determined by our collective efforts to find common solutions to a range of complex challenges and build a sustainable and resilient regional order," the report, released Wednesday, states. "To do our part, Korea aspires to become a global pivotal state that actively seeks out [agendas] for cooperation and shapes discussions in the region and the wider world."

Washington replied that President Joe Biden's administration is in lockstep with South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy, which outlines the country's economic, military and social goals.

South Korea's strategic goals reflect "our shared commitment to the region's security and growing prosperity," national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement by the White House.

"[South Korea's] goal to expand its cooperation with other allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific will strengthen our shared ability to advance international peace, security, and promote nuclear nonproliferation," Sullivan said in the statement. "The strategy will enhance the region's economic security networks, cooperation in science and technology, and engagement on climate change and energy security."

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman also tweeted on Wednesday: "We look forward to working with our [South Korean] friends to strengthen our alliance and expand our joint efforts in the region."

Biden's administration released its own strategy for the Indo-Pacific

in February that reaffirmed the U.S. alliance with South Korea, advocated for the removal of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula and called out China's "bullying" in the region.

The administration's plan also appealed for greater military cooperation with allies in the region, or "extended deterrence," to respond to the military threat posed by North Korea.

South Korea's strategy describes North Korea's continued missile and nuclear capabilities as "a serious threat to peace and stability" in the world and seeks strengthened ties with the U.S. and Japan, "its closest neighbor," to address the threat.

"Improved relations with Japan [are] essential for fostering cooperation and solidarity among like-minded Indo-Pacific nations; we are thus continuing our diplomatic efforts to restore mutual trust and advance relations," the strategy report states.

North Korea fired over 70 missiles in 35 separate days of testing so far this year. U.S. and South Korean officials have warned throughout the year that the communist regime has also prepared to conduct its seventh and first nuclear test since 2017.

The plans reiterate that the "door to dialogue with Pyongyang" remains open and that South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's terms are still on the table.

Yoon unveiled his self-described "audacious initiative" in August, promising economic incentives for North Korea should it actually take earnest steps toward denuclearization.

The communist regime rejected Yoon's offer to help modernize its agricultural and medical sectors in exchange for scrapping its weapons programs.

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SOUTH KOREA DEFENSE MINISTRY/AP

South Korean soldiers operate a vulcan automatic cannon during a military exercise in Yangju, South Korea, on Thursday.

S. Korea stages drills simulating downing of North Korean drones

By HYUNG-JIN KIM
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea staged large-scale military drills Thursday to simulate shooting down drones as a step to bolster its readiness against North Korean provocations, three days after the North flew drones into its territory for the first time in five years.

South Korean warplanes and helicopters failed to bring down any of the five North Korean drones spotted south of the border Monday before they flew back home or vanished from South Korean radars. One of them traveled as far as northern Seoul. That caused security jitters among many people in the South, for which the military offered a rare public apology Tuesday.

Thursday's training involved

land-based anti-air guns, drones playing the role of enemy drones, and a total of 20 fighter jets, attack helicopters and unmanned assets. While there was no actual live-fire, it was still the country's first set of major anti-drone drills since 2017, according to military authorities.

The drills near Seoul set up diverse scenarios of border infiltrations by small enemy drones, under which the mobilized South Korean military assets practiced how they could detect, track and shoot them down, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Also on Thursday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol reiterated his push to build a stronger air defense and get tough on North Korean provocations.

The North's drone flights followed its record number of mis-

sile tests this year that some experts say is part of an effort to pressure the United States and its allies to make some concessions like sanctions relief.

"Whether they have nukes or whatever weapons of mass destruction they have, we must send a clear message to those who repeat provocations. We must not be frightened of [their nukes] and we must not hesitate," Yoon said during a visit to a weapons development agency. "To obtain peace, we must prepare for a war that [we can win] overwhelmingly."

North Korea's state media hasn't commented on South Korea's announcement of its reported drone flights.

But some observers say North Korea likely sent those drones to test South Korean and U.S. readiness.

US, partners launch hundreds of operations against ISIS

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military and partner forces launched hundreds of operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2022, Central Command said Thursday, as attacks by the militants grew more brazen at the outset of the year.

No U.S. troops were killed or injured in any of the 313 declared operations this year, CENTCOM said.

The operations included raids on militants such as ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qu-

rayshi, who killed himself, as well as fighting to contain a prison attack in northern Syria.

ISIS attacks against the Syrian regime dropped in 2021, as fighters withdrew to more remote parts of central Syria, according to International Crisis Group, a multinational think tank.

Others moved into Iraq or northeastern Syria and concentrated their forces where U.S. and partner forces operate. In January, ISIS militants overran al-Sinaa prison in the Syrian city of Hassakeh as part of an attempted

prison break. The ensuing 10-day battle led to the deaths of more than 420 ISIS militants and 120 members of the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces, the CENTCOM statement said Thursday.

Some 191 of anti-ISIS operations took place in Iraq, where U.S. troops officially act only in an advisory role, and 122 took place in Syria, a number that included 14 unilateral U.S. missions, the statement said.

"While ISIS is significantly degraded in Iraq and Syria, the group does maintain the capabil-

ity to conduct operations in the region, and we know the group has the desire to strike outside of the region," Army Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, head of CENTCOM, told reporters last week.

Roughly 900 U.S. troops are based in Syria to support counter-ISIS operations by partner forces, The Washington Post reported Dec. 6.

U.S. troops also remain in Iraq as part of anti-ISIS operations despite the formal end of the U.S. combat mission there in 2021.

The U.S. has been fighting ISIS

since the militant group conquered about a third of Syria and 40% of Iraq in 2014. ISIS lost its last territorial enclave in 2019.

One prison facility, the al-Hol camp in northern Syria, contains 56,000 people, more than 90% of whom are women and children related to ISIS militants, Kurilla said after a visit to al-Hol in September. The poor conditions, which include sweltering heat and limited access to water, may foster radicalization, he said.

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EUROPE

Russian missiles blast key infrastructure

BY RENATA BRITO
AND HANNA ARHIROVA
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian missiles hit Ukraine Thursday in the biggest wave of strikes in weeks, damaging power stations and other critical infrastructure during freezing winter weather.

Russia fired 69 missiles at energy facilities and Ukrainian forces shot down 54, Ukrainian military chief Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi said. Local officials said attacks killed at least two people around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. The strikes also wounded at least six people across the country, although the toll of the attacks was growing as officials assessed the day's events.

Russia dispatched explosive drones to selected regions overnight before broadening the barrage with air and sea-based missiles, the Ukrainian air force said. Air-raid sirens rang out across the country, and the military activated air-defense systems in Kyiv, the regional administration said.

Russia has attacked Ukrainian power and water supplies almost weekly since October while its ground forces struggle to hold ground and advance. Mayor Vitali Klitschko warned of power outages in the capital, asking people to stockpile water and charge their electronic devices.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called the attacks "senseless barbarism."

"There can be no 'neutrality' in the face of such mass war crimes. Pretending to be 'neutral' equals taking Russia's side," Kuleba tweeted.

After more than 10 months of fighting, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a grinding battle of attri-

tion. The Ukrainian military has reclaimed swaths of Russian-occupied territory in the country's northeast and south and continues to resist persistent Russian attempts to seize all of the industrial Donbas region in the east.

At the same time, Moscow has targeted Ukrainian power facilities and other key infrastructure in a bid to weaken the country's resolve and force it to negotiate on Russian terms. The time between strikes has increased in recent weeks, though, leading some commentators to theorize Russia is trying to ration its missile supply.

The Ukrainian military has reported success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones in earlier attacks but many cities have gone without heat, internet and electricity for hours or days at a time.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said a number of energy facilities were damaged during what he said was the 10th such large-scale attack on his country.

"Russia is trying to deprive Ukrainians of light before the New Year," Shmyhal wrote in a Telegram post. He said that emergency blackouts may be necessary "in some areas."

About 90% of Lviv was without electricity, Mayor Andriy Sadovyi wrote on Telegram. Trams and trolley buses were not working, and residents might experience water interruptions, he said.

Meanwhile, a Telegram channel affiliated with the presidential press service of Belarus said a Ukrainian S-300 air defense missile landed in Belarusian territory of Belarus early Thursday. It said the missile could have veered off course accidentally and there



ROMAN HRYTSYNA/AP

Anhelina, right, watches as emergency workers remove debris of her house, destroyed following a Russian missile attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Thursday.

were no casualties.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry said later that the missile was downed by the Belarusian air defense over the western Brest region and fell into a field, according to a statement carried by the state Belta news agency.

Belarus served as a staging ground for Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

Belarus' foreign ministry summoned the Ukrainian ambassador to express "strong protest," it said, demanding that Ukraine "conduct a thorough investigation" and "hold those responsible to account."

The United States said this

month that it would give a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine to boost the country's defense. The U.S. and other allies also pledged to provide energy-related equipment to help Ukraine withstand the attacks on its infrastructure.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Russia was aiming to "destroy critical infrastructure and kill civilians en masse."

Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, said Monday that his nation wants a "peace" summit within two months at the United Nations with Secretary-General António Guterres as mediator. He

said Russia must face a war-crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow but that other nations should feel free to engage with the Russians.

Commenting on the summit proposal Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed it as "delirious" and "hollow," describing the summit proposal as a "publicity stunt by Washington that tries to cast the Kyiv regime as a peacemaker."

Russian officials have said that any peace plan can only proceed from Kyiv's recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the regions it illegally annexed in September.

Lawyer seeks free sperm-freezing for Russians deploying to Ukraine

Stars and Stripes

Russian troops mobilized to fight in Ukraine may be eligible for free infertility treatment and cryogenic sperm storage, according to a Russian report this week.

A Russian lawyer lobbied the government to offer the benefits to men called up to fight in Ukraine, the state-owned news agency Tass reported Wednesday.

Igor Trunov, president of the Russian Union of Lawyers, said in the report he was notified recently that the Russian Health Ministry had answered favorably to his request for a federal budget outlay for sperm storage for people mobilized between 2022 and 2024.

Tass did not include any comment from the health ministry in

its report.

The U.S. military considered similar plans in 2016 when then-Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced a pilot program for any service members that wanted the procedures, regardless of any deployments.

However, the plan faced Senate opposition and wasn't brought back up again, Military.com reported in June.

Faced with increasing casualties and few options for replacement troops, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in September a "partial mobilization" of as many as 300,000 reservists to fight in Ukraine.

The announcement was met with widespread protests, and

some Russian men, worried that civilians would be caught up in compulsory military service and sent to Ukraine, fled the country.

In late October, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the mobilization goal had been achieved and no further drafts were planned, NPR reported Oct. 28.

More than 10,000 Russian troops have died since the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion into Ukraine in February, the Moscow Times reported Dec. 16, citing data from the BBC Russian Service and the independent Russian news outlet Mediazona.

Some Western estimates put the number of Russian soldiers killed at 100,000, the report stated.



Russian Defense Ministry

Mobilized Russian soldiers train in the Kostroma region of Russia on Nov. 25.

In September, Shoigu said that 5,937 soldiers had been killed in Ukraine, according to a Sept. 21 report by the state-owned Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

Trunov said his group plans to apply for the benefits on behalf of several couples whose husbands were drafted to fight in Ukraine, according to the Tass report.

NATION

Southwest cancels another 2,300 flights

Associated Press

DALLAS — Southwest Airlines continued to slash about two-thirds of its daily schedule, canceling another 2,350 flights Thursday, though most of the planes that flew arrived on time.

Southwest is struggling to recover after being overwhelmed by a winter storm that left hundreds of pilots and flight attendants stranded out of position to operate

flights.

The airline said expected to return to normal operations Friday.

Other airlines are back to full strength. Delta, American and United together canceled around 30 flights by late morning, according to tracker FlightAware.

Southwest's cancellations amounted to 58% of its schedule, slightly better than in previous days. The Dallas carrier account-

ed for more than 95% of all canceled flights in the United States on Thursday.

About the only good news for Southwest passengers was that 98% of flights that took off managed to land within 15 minutes of schedule, meeting the government's definition of an on-time arrival.

Southwest has acknowledged that it has inadequate and outdat-

ed technology that can leave flight crews out of position when bad weather strikes.

The airline has declined requests to make executives available for comment and did not provide an update about operations on its website. Its main public outreach has been to post video statements by CEO Robert Jordan and its chief commercial officer.

The federal government is in-

vestigating what happened at Southwest, which has canceled more than 13,000 flights since its meltdown began on Dec. 22.

Southwest added a page to its website specifically for stranded travelers, but thousands of customers were unable to reach the airline. It wasn't just customers, either — pilots and flight attendants reported being on hold for hours.

Winter storm brings flooding, deaths to Oregon Washington

AP/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. — A winter storm that brought powerful wind gusts to Oregon on Tuesday caused at least two fatal car accidents that left four people dead, preliminary police investigations have found. Weather conditions also appeared to have contributed to a third fatal crash that killed one person and injured another, police said.

Three people were killed, including a 4-year-old girl, when severe weather caused a large tree to fall on their pickup truck as they were driving on U.S. 26 about 15 miles east of the coastline, Oregon State Police said in a news release. The passengers were deceased when first responders arrived at the scene.

Further east on U.S. 26 on Mount Hood, a motorist was killed when a large tree fell on the cab of the commercial truck he was driving because of snow and strong winds, causing it to lose control and leave the highway, state police said. The 53-year-old driver, who was alone in the truck, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Another person died when a tree fell and struck a pickup they were riding in as a passenger on Interstate 84 near Cascade Locks in the Columbia River Gorge, the agency said. The driver was injured and taken to a hospital. The weather appears to have contributed to the tree falling, said state police spokesperson Captain Kyle Kennedy.

Strong winds felled trees and knocked out power lines across large swaths of the Pacific Northwest on Tuesday, cutting power for more than 160,000 people at certain points. Wind gusts reached 86 mph near Cape Perpetua on Oregon's central coast and 107 mph near the iconic Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, said Andy Bryant, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service's Portland office.

Utility companies have progressively restored power, but more than 30,000 people in Oregon were still affected by outages as of 5 p.m. Wednesday, according to online tracker PowerOutage.

Portland General Electric and Pacific Power — among the utilities reporting the highest number of outages — both said they had hundreds of service crew members, including from out of state, working to assess and repair damage.

In Washington state, thousands of residents east of Seattle remained without power Wednesday afternoon after the previous day's wind storm caused extensive damage to power lines in and around North Bend and Snoqualmie.

Gerald Tracy, a spokesperson with Puget Sound Energy, told KOMO-TV that power was expected to be restored to the area around 10 p.m. Wednesday, with the caveat that additional problems could push that timeline back.

"It is mountainous terrain, more rural areas, where sometimes our crews will have to hike out on foot and use hand tools to take care of the situation," Tracy said.

Tuesday's storm system also brought massive waves, high tides and flooding to the region.

Wave heights reached 30 feet along the Oregon coast, the National Weather Service said.

Storm surges flooded parts of Washington state, including Seattle, where some residents of the South Park neighborhood kayaked through the streets and used buckets to clear their homes of water.

A record high tide of 18.4 feet submerged parts of the state capital of Olympia and washed jellyfish over the shoreline onto the city's streets, officials said.

A coastal flood advisory was in effect for the Seattle area through Friday afternoon.



JOSEPH COOKE, THE BUFFALO NEWS/AP

Vehicles drive down Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo, N.Y., on Wednesday.

Buffalo roads reopen as search for victims of blizzard continues

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Roads reopened Thursday in storm-besieged Buffalo as authorities continued searching for people who may have died or are stuck and suffering after last week's blizzard.

The driving ban in New York's second-most-populous city was lifted just after midnight Thursday, Mayor Byron Brown announced.

"Significant progress has been made" on snow removal, he said at a news conference late Wednesday.

Suburban roads, major highways and Buffalo Niagara International Airport had already reopened.

Still, Brown urged residents not to drive if they didn't have to.

More than three dozen deaths have been reported in western New York from the blizzard that raged across much of the country, with Buffalo in its crosshairs on Friday and Saturday.

The National Guard was going door to door to check on people who lost power, and authorities faced the possibility of finding

more victims as snow melted amid increasingly mild weather. Buffalo police and officers from other law enforcement agencies also searched for victims, sometimes using officers' personal snowmobiles, trucks and other equipment.

With the death toll already surpassing that of the area's notorious Blizzard of 1977, local officials faced questions about the response to last week's storm. They insisted that they prepared but that the weather was extraordinary, even for a region prone to powerful winter storms.

Storm dumps heavy snow, rain in Arizona

Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — A winter storm dumped several inches of snow in Arizona's high country and rain in the deserts, with more precipitation on the way through the new year.

Communities near Flagstaff received as much as a foot of snow by midday Wednesday before the storm moved east and out of the

state. Travel was slow on major roadways and local streets, with some sections shut down at least temporarily.

Power outages also were reported earlier in the day, but much of the service had been stored by Wednesday afternoon.

Meanwhile in Phoenix, residents woke up to heavy rain that subsided to intermittent light

showers by mid-day.

The National Weather Service in Phoenix forecasts mostly clear skies for the rest of the day with some clouds moving in by nightfall.

Scattered rain and snow are expected across Arizona through Saturday before another big storm hits the state on New Year's Day, the National Weather Service said.

NATION

NY's Santos investigated for lies about past

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. Rep.-elect George Santos of New York was under investigation by Long Island prosecutors on Wednesday after revelations surfaced that the now-embattled Republican lied about his heritage, education and professional pedigree as he campaigned for office.

Despite intensifying doubt about his fitness to hold federal office, Santos has shown no signs of stepping aside — even as he publicly admitted to a long list of lies.

Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly, a Republican, said the fabrications and inconsistencies were “nothing short of stunning.”

“The residents of Nassau County and other parts of the third district must have an honest and accountable representative in Congress,” she said. “If a crime was

committed in this county, we will prosecute it.”

Santos' campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

He is scheduled to be sworn in next Tuesday, when the U.S. House reconvenes. If he assumes office, he could face investigations by the House Committee on Ethics and the Justice Department.

Santos suggested he does not plan to step aside in a Twitter post Wednesday about a visit to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy earlier in the day.

“In Congress, I look forward to working alongside them to fully utilize this amazing resource we have in our own backyard in #NY03,” the tweet said.

The Republican has admitted to lying about having Jewish ancestry, a Wall Street pedigree and a



DAVID BECKER/For The Washington Post

Rep.-elect George Santos, R-N.Y., speaks during the Republican Jewish Coalition annual leadership meeting at the Venetian Las Vegas in Las Vegas on Nov. 19.

college degree, but he has yet to address other lingering questions — including the source of what appears to be a quickly amassed fortune despite recent financial problems, including evictions and owing thousands in back rent.

Fellow Long Island Republican, Rep.-elect Nick Lalota, said he was troubled by the revelations.

“I believe a full investigation by the House Ethics Committee and,

if necessary, law enforcement, is required,” Lalota said Tuesday.

The New York attorney general's office has already said it's looking into issues that have come to light.

A spokesperson for the Nassau County DA's office, Brendan Brosh, said Wednesday: “We are looking into the matter.” The scope of the investigation was not immediately clear.

Other Republicans castigated Santos but stopped short of asking him to step aside.

“Congressman-Elect George Santos has broken the public trust by making serious misstatements regarding his background, experience and education, among other issues,” said Joseph G. Cairo, chair of the Nassau County Republican Committee, which is within the 3rd Congressional District.

EPA investigating Colo. for discriminatory air pollution

BY MICHAEL PHILLIS
AND BRITTANY PETERSON
Associated Press

DENVER — The Environmental Protection Agency is investigating whether Colorado's regulation of air pollution from industrial facilities discriminates against Hispanic residents and other racial minorities, according to a letter released Wednesday.

That's a level of scrutiny long sought by Lucy Molina whose daughter goes to school near Colorado's only petroleum refinery. Three years ago Molina had just stepped outdoors when she noticed a coating of ash on her Nissan Altima that wiped off on her fingers. Then she received a message that her daughter's school was locked down and panicked. She later learned the refinery had malfunctioned, spewing a clay-like material into the air. She'd heard of lockdowns for shootings, but never for pollution.

Since then she's pushed for community air monitoring and stronger protections, but says it all feels too late. She's lived here for 30 years, and her kids are already young adults.

“If we would have known” years ago, she said, “we would have moved.”

Advocates say the Suncor refinery too often malfunctions, spiking emissions. They say Colorado rarely denies permits to polluters, even in areas where harmful ozone already exceeds federal standards.

Federal investigators said in the letter they will scrutinize the state's oversight of

Colorado's biggest polluters including the Suncor oil refinery in North Denver where Molina lives, and whether the effect of that pollution on residents is discriminatory.

Suncor did not respond to a request for comment.

But it is already harder for oil and gas companies to get their air permits in Colorado than in some other energy-producing states, said John Jacus, chair of the Colorado Chamber of Commerce board of directors and an environmental compliance attorney. He said recent allegations that the state's permit review process was faulty had the effect of slowing air permitting, a blow to business.

“It would be really good for air quality to shut everything down, but that's not good for society,” Jacus said, adding there needed to be a balance between environmental protection and economic activity.

The EPA launched its investigation under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It has been going on since March but went little noticed until Wednesday's letter, which explains its scope. The Act allows the EPA to negotiate agreements with states to promote equity. The Biden administration has stepped up its enforcement of environmental discrimination.

Colorado officials said they welcome the EPA review, more community participation and are reviewing their permitting policies to ensure they are focused on environmental justice.

“We've always prioritized the health and



RACHEL ELLIS, THE DENVER POST/AP

A view of the Suncor Energy plant in Commerce City, Colo., on Nov. 23, 2020.

well-being of every Coloradan no matter their zip code, but we know we have even more to do,” said Trisha Oeth, Colorado's Director of Environmental Health and Protection in a statement.

Ian Coghill, an attorney with Earthjustice that is challenging the Suncor permit, says the push and pull between the EPA and state hasn't yielded major improvements. Revisions to Suncor's permit, he said “didn't change a lot.”

He is hopeful the civil rights investigation will force the state to make changes and detail the cumulative effect of pollution from industry on residents of North Denver.

“I'm definitely optimistic,” he said.

Applications for unemployment aid rose slightly

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people seeking unemployment aid rose only slightly last week with the labor market remaining strong despite the Federal Reserve's efforts to cool the economy and hiring.

Applications for unemployment benefits for the week ending Dec. 24 climbed 9,000 to 225,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week moving average of applications, which smooths out some of the week-to-week swings, slipped just 250 to 221,000.

Unemployment benefit applications are a proxy for layoffs, and are being closely monitored by economists as the Fed has rapidly raised interest rates in an effort to cool job growth and inflation. Should the Fed's rate hikes cause a recession, as many economists fear, a jump in layoffs and unemployment claims would be an early sign.

So far, the level of jobless claims remains quite low, evidence that Americans are enjoying a high degree of job security. In the coming weeks, thousands of workers with temporary jobs during the winter holidays will lose work and apply for jobless aid.

The Fed is seeking to slow job growth and the pace of wage increases as part of its efforts to battle inflation. The central bank has hiked rates seven times this year, which has made it more expensive for consumers to take out mortgage and auto loans, and raised borrowing rates for credit cards.

NATION

4 more slayings tied to suspected Calif. serial killer

Associated Press

STOCKTON, Calif. — A man suspected in Northern California serial killings has been charged in four additional slayings this week, bringing the total to seven deaths since April 2021, authorities said.

The shootings terrorized the Central Valley city of Stockton earlier this year as police searched for a man clad in black who appeared to be “on a mission” as he hunted victims for ambush-style shootings. He was also tied to violence in Alameda County.

Three of the four slayings listed in court documents Tuesday have already been disclosed by authorities — who earlier said they had linked suspect Wesley Brownlee to the killings of six men and the wounding of a woman — but charges had not been filed.

Tuesday’s fourth case, an April 2021 slaying that brings the total to seven killings, was previously unreported.

Brownlee was arrested in October when he “was out hunting” for another possible victim in Stockton, police said at the time. He is set to appear in court Jan. 3. His public defender, Allison Nobert, did not immediately return a request for comment.

Brownlee was initially only charged in the deaths of three victims in Stockton: Jonathan Rodriguez Hernandez, 21, who died Aug. 30; Juan Cruz, 52, who died Sept. 21; and Lawrence Lopez Sr., 54, who died Sept. 27.

The amended complaint, filed Tuesday, additionally charges Brownlee with the killings of Paul Yaw, 35, who died July 8, and Salvador Debudey Jr., 43, who died Aug. 11, in Stockton, as well as the Alameda County fatal shootings of Juan Vasquez Serrano, 39, on April 10, 2021, and Mervin Harmon on April 16, 2021.

He is also charged with attempted murder in the April 16, 2021,



HECTOR AMEZCUA, THE SACRAMENTO BEE/AP

Wesley Brownlee stands with public defender Allison Nobert during his arraignment in San Joaquin County Superior Court in October. Brownlee has been charged in four slayings this week.

shooting of Natasha LaTour, 46.

Harmon had not previously been publicly linked to Brownlee’s spate of shootings. Additional details about Harmon’s death were not immediately available.

A convicted drug offender, Brownlee was barred from owning a gun and he allegedly used an un-

registered “ghost gun” to carry out at least some of the slayings, police said in October after his arrest.

In January 1999, Brownlee had been sentenced to two years in prison in Alameda County, which encompasses the city of Oakland, for possessing and selling a controlled substance, the California correc-

tions department said. He was released on parole in August 1999 after serving seven months.

Brownlee was again convicted in Alameda County in December 2001 and sentenced to three years for the same crime. He was paroled in May 2003 and discharged three years later.

Suspect in attack on Paul Pelosi enters not-guilty plea

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The man who allegedly broke into U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s home and beat her 82-year-old husband in October pleaded not guilty Wednesday to six charges, including attempted murder, prosecutors said.

The suspect, David DePape, had planned to kidnap the speaker — who was in Washington at the time of the attack — when he broke into the couple’s San Francisco home on Oct. 28, authorities said. Instead, the 42-year-old de-



DePape

political world.

Paul Pelosi was knocked unconscious and woke up in a pool of his own blood. He later underwent surgery to repair a skull fracture and serious injuries to his right arm and hands. He has since ap-

peared in public wearing a hat and a glove that covered his wounds. Earlier this month, a judge ruled that prosecutors had presented enough evidence during a preliminary hearing to move forward. Wednesday’s appearance was another arraignment, a procedural move where the defendant enters a plea on the charges that will be brought to trial.

DePape is still being held without bail; his state case returns to court Feb. 23. The public defender’s office declined to comment. A federal case in which DePape

has also pleaded not guilty is also ongoing. He is charged in state court with attempted murder, first-degree residential burglary, elder abuse, assault with a deadly weapon, false imprisonment and threatening a family member of a public official.

During the preliminary hearing earlier this month, a San Francisco police investigator testified that DePape said there was “evil in Washington,” and he was looking to harm Nancy Pelosi because she is second in line for the presi-

dency. Authorities have said DePape was drawn to conspiracy theories.

DePape told police he wanted to hold the Democratic leader hostage and “break her kneecaps” to show other members of Congress there were “consequences to actions,” the criminal complaint alleges.

In November, Nancy Pelosi said she would step down as the Democrats’ leader in the House after two decades, but remain in office. She and Paul have been married for nearly 60 years.

Dad told kids to ‘keep your seat belt on’ before running down his wife

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — A Queens father, in the moments before slamming the accelerator to run down his estranged wife, delivered a chilling message to his three sons: “Keep your seat belt on,” prosecutors alleged Wednesday.

The boys then watched in horror from their seats inside the speeding SUV as their father, Stephen Giraldo, a Metropolitan Transportation Authority bus driver, plowed into his wife before jumping from the Ford Explorer to stab her after the collapse of a troubled 13-year marriage described by the victim as “toxic,” authorities said.

“I hit my wife, arrest me,” the suspect told police in an admission caught on body camera footage, according to prosecutors. Minutes earlier, the 36-year-old Giraldo had dialed 911 and said “I think I killed my wife,” prosecutors said at a Queens Criminal Court arraignment where the accused killer was ordered held without bail.

Victim Sophia Giraldo was left in a vegetative state and may not survive after her husband loaded their kids into the car and lay in wait for her to appear on the dark street outside her Flushing home at 5:20 a.m. Tuesday, officials said.

“The brutality of the attack, and

the fact that it was committed in full view of the victim’s three young children, stirs heartbreak and outrage in all of us,” Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz said.

Prior to the pre-planned assault, the husband was caught on video moving a trash bag impeding his path before slamming into Sophia Giraldo as she was headed toward the white Ford Explorer. The impact sent her sailing over a nearby fence before the suspect climbed over his oldest son with the knife in his hand to continue the attack, Assistant District Attorney Audra Beerman said.

The accused attacker had lured Sophia Giraldo from her home to pick up the youths and drove into her as she crossed the street to see her sons, Beerman said.

The wife, a domestic violence survivor, was fighting for her life Wednesday after the Tuesday morning attack witnessed by the couple’s kids outside her Flushing home. Sophia had filed for divorce four months earlier.

A criminal complaint recounted the seat belt instructions delivered to the boys — ages 11, 9, and 6 — with the details provided by the suspect’s eldest son. A knife was recovered about 15 feet from the

vehicle and police found the victim covered in blood, officials said.

The oldest boy watched from the front seat, with his siblings sitting in the back of the vehicle, the prosecutor said. The defendant took the three kids out of vehicle before dialing 911, said Beerman, and the car skidded to a stop on its side after running down the victim.

The 41-year-old Sophia, who hosted a podcast on domestic violence where she shared details of her troubled marriage, remained in critical condition at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Queens one day after the attack.

STARS AND STRIPES

OPINION

How the invasion of Ukraine altered the world

BY GEORGE F. WILL
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON

Shortly after the end of World War II in Europe, which began when Germany attacked Poland and Britain honored its commitment to Poland, Henry “Chips” Channon, a Conservative member of Parliament, attended a high-society event in London with Lady Cunard. Gazing upon the lavish gathering of the upper crust, and marveling at how quickly normality had been restored for those whose normality was especially enviable, Channon said contentedly, “This is what we have been fighting for.” Lady Cunard replied dryly, “Why, are they all Poles?”

Wars, including the one that began 10 months ago, cause events to take unanticipated caroms that, cumulatively, eclipse the wars’ origins. The world at the end of 2022 was remarkably changed from when the year dawned. On Feb. 24, Vladimir Putin could not have imagined that Sweden’s and Finland’s swift decisions to join NATO would extend the alliance’s border with Russia many more miles than his faltering army has advanced into Ukraine.

Three of the most spectacular geostrategic blunders of the past 250 years have involved Russia: Napoleon’s invasion 210 years ago, Hitler’s invasion 129 years later and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine 81 years after that. Putin aimed to show that Russia is a formidable nation — and that Ukraine is not a nation. He insisted that “Ukraine” is merely a geographical, not a political, designation. Instead, he demonstrated that Russia, with an economy significantly smaller than Italy’s — and smaller than the gross domestic product of Texas — is even

less impressive politically than it is materially because its authoritarian culture breeds stagnation, corruption and toadyism.

And, as Henry Kissinger recently wrote in Britain’s Spectator, “Ukraine has become a major state in Central Europe for the first time in modern history.” This has “mooted the original issues regarding Ukraine’s membership in NATO. Ukraine has acquired one of the largest and most effective land armies in Europe, equipped by America and its allies. A peace process should link Ukraine to NATO, however expressed. The alternative of neutrality is no longer meaningful, especially after Finland and Sweden joined NATO.”

These two Scandinavian countries were among a handful of European nations that strengthened their militaries in response to Putin’s 2014 seizure of Crimea from Ukraine. In 2022, two weeks after they submitted applications to join NATO, a third Scandinavian nation, Denmark, voted overwhelmingly (67%) “yes” in a referendum that had been rejected twice, ending Denmark’s opt-out from some European Union defense discussions and missions.

In two other caroms from Putin’s aggression, the two nations that by their aggressions initiated World War II have been propelled into more active commitment to preventing aggression. Putin’s war began on a Thursday; the following Sunday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a “Zeitenwende” or turning point: an increase in defense spending unthinkable four days earlier.

This month, Japan, whose southwesternmost island is closer to Taiwan than Taiwan is to mainland China, says in its new National Security Strategy report: “In no way

can we be optimistic about what the future of the international community will bring.” So, Japan, in another incremental step away from its formal (meaning constitutional) pacifism, is ramping up military spending beyond weapons classified, with varying degrees of plausibility, as merely defensive. New “counterstrike” weapons will include hundreds of U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles that can reach targets more than 1,000 miles away in China. If Japan meets (as most NATO nations have usually not done) the NATO standard of spending 2% of GDP on its military, it will have the world’s third-largest defense budget. So, China is more vulnerable — and, presumably, deterrable — because the international order has been shaken by events in Central Europe.

Russia is less a potential hair-trigger threat than on March 30, 1981, when President Ronald Reagan was shot. William Inboden, in “The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink,” reported that the two Soviet ballistic missile submarines usually lurking off the U.S. coast had that day moved closer than normal to the coast — and could strike Washington in 10 minutes and 47 seconds. Senior U.S. officials, worried that the attempted assassination of Reagan might have been a prelude to an attack, readied the U.S. B-52 bomber fleet for retaliatory strikes.

Forty-one years later, the world remains a dangerous place. But in 2022, what the Soviets used to call “the correlation of world forces” shifted substantially against the Russian rump of the Soviet empire, and against China, which 10 eventful months ago said there are “no limits” to its cooperation with the rump.

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Zelenskyy holds a strong hand heading into 2023

BY ARTHUR I. CYR

Special to Stars and Stripes

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine is ending 2022 in a strong and highly visible manner. On Dec. 21, he addressed both houses of the U.S. Congress and received multiple standing ovations. Time magazine named him Person of the Year.

The war in Ukraine continues, with devastating, perhaps irreparable damage to the influence and image of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, and also the military of his nation. Rightly, the Red Army of the Soviet Union was generally respected, and greatly feared by those nations occupied by that powerful force.

After all, this was the military organization that faced, fought and ultimately destroyed the bulk of the enormous war machine of Nazi Germany. The vast majority of the mechanized units of the Wehrmacht were deployed on the Eastern Front, a theater where the war was literally a fight to the collective death, without the restraints present in combat involving American, British and others in the West.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Army with some regularity suppressed popular revolts in occupied nations with relative ease. These included East Germany in 1953, Hungary and Poland in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yugoslavia successfully broke away in 1948.

Clearly, Putin and associates miscalculated how easily Russia’s military would be able to

occupy Ukraine and take control, in Cold War fashion. As in armed conflict through history, determination and courage of the people of Ukraine has been the vital factor.

But Russian forces have also proven extraordinarily deficient. Mechanized weapons and equipment have broken down to a striking degree, military units are ineffective and general disorganization has accompanied the large but clumsy invasion. Clear by now is that the end of the Soviet Union has also opened the door to corruption and disorganization, undeniably and extraordinarily widespread.

In a particularly shocking development, dead Russian soldiers have simply been left where they lie on the battlefield by retreating comrades. Not abandoning comrades, alive or dead, is a traditional tenet of military culture.

One key factor almost never mentioned is Putin’s own lack of military experience, including combat, in contrast to leaders of the Soviet Union. He was in the KGB, technically a military organization, but in reality, an intelligence arm of the Soviet Community Party.

The Biden administration decision to provide the Patriot missile defense system to Ukraine is important. The Patriot is part of a great revolution in military technologies over the 19th and 20th centuries.

In World War II, various changes created a much more fluid battle environment. The tank and other motorized vehicles, long-range heavily armed aircraft, modern electronic

communications and other innovations drastically altered the characteristics of fighting.

One important innovation was the Tube-launched Optically tracked Wire-guided missile, or TOW, a relatively small lethal anti-tank weapon. The German V-1 rocket of World War II was a very early example of a guidance system within a missile. Related technologies have evolved to an extraordinary degree since that time.

In the spring of 1972, North Vietnam launched a massive armored invasion of South Vietnam. TOW missiles, usually launched from helicopters, completely devastated large numbers of Soviet-supplied tanks along with other targets. This offensive was destroyed.

Other Precision-Guided Munitions (PGMs) include the Stinger anti-aircraft missile. This weapon proved important in defeating the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, over a decade starting in 1979.

From 1973, the Pentagon began to develop a satellite network for use in earth navigation. The resulting Global Positioning System alleviated the challenge, as old as warfare, of determining accurately the location of forces.

Technologies equalize numerical disparities. However, the human element remains key.

Ukraine demonstrates strength in both dimensions.

Arthur I. Cyr is author of “After the Cold War — American Foreign Policy, Europe and Asia.”

WORLD

Lack of info on China's virus rise stirs concern

Associated Press

BEIJING — Moves by several countries to mandate COVID-19 tests for passengers arriving from China reflect global concern that new variants could emerge in its ongoing outbreak — and that the government may not inform the rest of the world quickly enough.

There have been no reports of new variants to date, but China has been accused of not being forthcoming about the virus since it first surfaced in the country in late 2019. The worry is that it may not be sharing data now on any signs of evolving strains that could spark fresh outbreaks elsewhere.

The U.S., Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have announced testing requirements for passengers from China. The U.S. cited both the surge in infections and what it said was a lack of information, including genomic sequencing of the virus strains in the country.

“Right now the pandemic situation in China is not transparent,” Wang Pi-Sheng, the head of Taiwan’s epidemic command center, said. “We have a very limited grasp on its information, and it’s not very accurate.”

The island will start testing everyone arriving from China on Jan. 1, ahead of the expected return of about 30,000 Taiwanese for the Lunar New Year holiday later in the month. The new Japanese rules, which restrict flights from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao to designated airports beginning Friday, are already disrupting holiday travel plans.

World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said the body needs more information on the severity of the outbreak in China, particularly on hospital and ICU admissions, “in order to make a comprehensive risk assessment of the situation on the ground.”

Serbs revoke troop alert, remove dozens of roadblocks in Kosovo

Associated Press

MITROVICA, Kosovo — Serbia on Thursday revoked combat readiness of its troops on the border with Kosovo as local Serbs started removing more than a dozen of the roadblocks they had set up in the north of the state, in a sign of easing of tensions that have sparked fears of a renewed conflict in the Balkans.

Earlier on Thursday, Kosovo reopened a border crossing with Serbia after a nearby barricade that led to its closure was first removed. Later, ethnic Serbs in Kosovo dismantled another road-

block and more are set to follow.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic first announced late on Wednesday that Serbs would start removing their barricades. The move defuses weeks of tensions between former war foes Kosovo and Serbia.

The European Union, which both Serbia and Kosovo are seeking to join, welcomed the developments.

“Diplomacy prevailed in de-escalating tensions in north Kosovo,” EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. “Violence can never be a solution.”

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2 Peter 3:18 (KJV)

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Colossians 3:10 (KJV)

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WEEKEND

THE POP CULTURE YEAR IN REVIEW

SUDDEN IMPACT

Will Smith's slap of Chris Rock on Oscar night reverberated through the rest of the year

Page 15

AP's 9 breakthrough entertainers shot to the next level in 2022

Pages 24-27

Fifty shades of gray? Barf. Cultural trends that have worn out their welcome

Page 14

Plus, the year's best in:

- **Movies, Pages 18-19**
- **Video games, Page 20**
- **Music, Pages 28-29**
- **Television, Page 30**
- **Books, Page 31**

CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW

No gray area

We're completely over these 2022 trends

By LEANNE ITALIE
Associated Press

The rudeness pandemic, the actual pandemic and all things gray. There's a lot to leave behind when 2022 comes to a close. The health crisis brought on the dawn of slow living, but it crushed many families forced to hustle for their lives. Karens went on the rise. Cryptocurrencies tanked. Pete Davidson's love thing with Kim Kardashian made headlines. A list of what we're over as we hope for better times in 2023:

Incivility be gone

The pandemic released a tsunami of overwrought Karens and Kens, but heightened incivility has stretched well beyond their raucous ranks.

Researcher Christine Porath restricted herself to rudeness, disrespect or insensitive behavior when she recently wrote about the subject in the Harvard Business Review. The professor of management at Georgetown University found incidents of incivility way up, in line with a steady climb stretching back nearly 20 years.

Particularly hammered this year, Porath wrote, were front-line workers in health care, retail, transportation, hospitality and education. All were declared heroes when the pandemic struck. It didn't take long for them to be beaten down.

Noting that incivility can and does escalate to physical aggression and other violence, the news website Axios dubbed it the rudeness pandemic.

Stop it, mean people. We're all stressed out, including you, we're quite sure.

Crypto craziness

Will the implosion of FTX, the world's third-largest cryptocurrency exchange, bring on broader chaos in a digital world that millions already distrust?

Time will tell as other and otherwise healthy cryptocurrency companies face a liquidity crisis. And there's the philanthropic implications of the FTX bankruptcy collapse here in the real world, since founder Sam Bankman-Fried donated millions to numerous causes in "effective altruism" fashion.

The FTX bankruptcy filing followed a bruising of cryptocurrency companies throughout 2022, due in part to rising interest rates and the broader market downturn that has many investors rethinking their lust for risk. That includes mom-and-pop investors along for the ride.

While more people than ever before know what cryptocurrencies are, far fewer actually partake. Is it any wonder? Get it together, cryptocurrency.

ASMR, pipe down

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. It began, innocently enough, as brain tingles brought on by whispering, tapping, brushing or scraping. Then, bam, it took off on social media like a really loud rocket on a mission to annoy.

Today, we've got millions of videos filled with people attempting to calm by speaking in low tones, armed with anything they can get their hands on in conjunction with their expensive, ultra-sensitive mics.

Companies are selling beer, chocolate, paint and home goods using ASMR. All the calming — and commerce — is deafening.

Gray, the color

Gray walls, floors, furniture. Is gray passé? Here's hoping.

The color spent much of 2022 as a purportedly neutral "it." The problem was, we were already feeling gray on the inside.

Of course, gray has been around as long as color itself, but it took over as an alternative to beige and Tuscan brown. Gray took a tumble mid-year, but one doesn't paint or swap out the couch as quickly as trends fade. We've been stuck with gray, thanks to TV home shows and social media loops.

"What would your reaction be if I told you that color is disappearing from the world? A graph suggesting that the color gray has become the dominant shade has been circulating on TikTok, and boy does it have folks in a tizzy," wrote Loney Abrams in Architectural Digest in October.

By that, she explained, the upset folks she mentioned stand firmly behind the notion that a lack of color "spells tragedy."

Abrams, a Brooklyn artist and pop culture curator, speaks of the fixer-uppers of Chip and Joanna Gaines and the Calabash compound of Kim Kardashian. And she cites Tash Bradley, a trained color psychologist who works for the U.K. wallpaper and paint brand Lick.

Bradley, Abrams wrote, points to the hustle-bustle of pre-pandemic life as one villain leading



Pool/AP

Tesla CEO Elon Musk attends the opening of the Tesla factory Berlin Brandenburg in Gruenheide, Germany, on March 22. Musk is illustrative of the 2022 focus on working harder and faster.



iStock

Even though people were already feeling gray on the inside, the color gray somehow became an "it" neutral thanks to TV home shows and social media. It's time for the trend to end.

to The Great Gray Washing. Bradley, the interior design director for Lick, sees no psychological benefits to gray.

Many actual colors are calming. Find one. And speaking of design trends, quit turning around your books, pages out. Read one instead, perhaps a volume on color theory.

Pete Davidson's love life

Not the King of Staten Island himself, per se. Look deeply into your hearts and decide for yourselves whether to love him or Ye him.

We're talking about the vast quantities of air volume his love life has sucked up on a near-hourly basis, especially in 2022, otherwise known as his Kim Kardashian era (which actually started in late 2021 for the obsessives).

Davidson's love roster has puzzled for years, stretching back to his MTV "Guy Code" days in 2013 while still a teenager, leading to his Carly Aquilino phase.

There were stops along the way with Cazzie David (Larry David's daughter), Ariana Grande, Kate Beckinsale (briefly), Kaia Gerber (even more briefly), and others, including his latest: model Emily Ratajkowski.

The "SNL" alum and self-described — in appearance — "crack baby" is a paparazzi, social media, gossip monger magnet. Rather, his love life is.

As Ratajkowski mouthed recently in a TikTok video to some random audio track while riding in a car: "I would be with multiple men. Also some women as well. Um, everyone's hot but in an interesting way."

So be it. Live your life, Pete. Can the rest of us stop chasing every relationship-confirming kiss?

Movie upchuck madness

The film industry, to state the obvious, has produced decades of genre-spanning grossness, much of it significant and legit to show on camera.

However, there's one particular cinematic exclamation point we could do without, or at the very least, with significantly less of: The dispensable spew.

Implied vomiting with an urgent rush to a curb, hand to a mouth or turn of a head would sometimes suffice, thanks. Who spread the word in Hollywood that movie watchers actually desire all the nauseating details? The projectile-ness, the color combinations, the chunks?

Well, in some cases, audiences themselves.

That notable dress shop scene in the 2011 smash hit "Bridesmaids" was a gender test of sorts, according to the Daily Beast. Would audiences accept all the spewing and other grand scatology from women in a wedding-themed movie as they do for the bros of producer Judd Apatow's other comedies?

Apatow and director Paul Feig extensively tested "Bridesmaids"

with audiences, and they were fine with it.

Fast forward to 2022's notables. There's the satire "The Triangle of Sadness," which could hardly do without, but there's also "Tár," a far more serious film that wouldn't make the vomit hall of fame with Lydia Tár's one fleeting gush. We ask, what's the point of that?

Cate Blanchett's Tár has far bigger problems, so let's rein in all the gratuitous spewing. Make it count, people!

The ultra hustle

Elon Musk put it thusly in an email to his remaining employees:

"Going forward, to build a breakthrough Twitter 2.0 and succeed in an increasingly competitive world, we will need to be extremely hardcore. This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade."

Musk is Musk, but he illustrates a moment: A need to remain in motion, to work harder, climb higher, sweat longer. With the volatile economy, political chaos, extreme weather and wars, it's no wonder that a blanket of anxiety has kept the ultra hustle alive.

As if all the slow living and work-life balance talk is meaningless, or more to the point, can't exist for many.

"We're hustling to make ends meet, 'building our brand,' ensuring our startup doesn't tank, or dreaming about the day our side hustle takes off and we can walk into the office and give everyone the bird," wrote Benjamin Sledge on Medium.

It stands to reason, he said, that "most of us are hustling because we literally have to in order to survive."

Bring on a 2023 that allows for all those long walks in the woods we've been hearing so much about.

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW

POP CULTURE MOMENTS



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Will Smith, right, hits Chris Rock during the presentation of the award for best documentary feature at the Academy Awards on March 27 at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. Rock had made a joke about Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. The Slap, one of the Oscars' most bizarre moments, shocked those in attendance and viewers around the world.

The Year of 'The Slap'

Will Smith's meltdown at the Oscars dominated entertainment talk in 2022

By JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

Taylor Swift was up. Elon Musk was in, out, and in. Tom Cruise was back. BTS stepped aside, and so did Serena Williams, and Tom Brady too — oops, scratch that.

But the slap? The slap was everywhere. OK, so maybe it wasn't on the level of a moon landing, or the selection of a pope. But henceforth all you need say is "The Slap," and people will know what you mean — that moment Will Smith smacked Chris Rock at the Oscars and a global audience said, "Wait, did that happen?" Even in the room itself — maybe especially in the room itself — there was a sense that everyone had imagined it, which

helps explain why things went on as normal, for a bit.

The pandemic was over in 2022, phew! Well, of course it wasn't. But live entertainment pushed forward, with mask mandates dropping, and people rushing to buy things like, oh, Taylor Swift tickets!

We'll take any segue to mention Swift, who already had a big year in 2021, but just got bigger — heck, she broke Billboard records and then she broke Ticketmaster. (No word if she got her scarf back).

It was a year of celebrity #MeToo cases like Harvey Weinstein (again), R. Kelly (again), Kevin Spacey, Paul Haggis, Danny Masterson. And the Johnny Depp-

SEE TALK ON PAGE 16

FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS

AP photographer and reporter recall shocking night at Academy Awards

The background: Was it real? Or staged? Very real, it turned out. Will Smith's slapping of Chris Rock at the 2022 Academy Awards after the comedian told a joke about his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, reverberated through the entertainment industry and the nation — and led to Smith being banned from the Oscars for a decade.

The incident touched off multiple conversations about race, about celebrity and — for a couple days of intense debate — about authenticity. Smith apologized, and eventually released an



Smith



Rock

apology video as well.

But even months later, the very moment it happened — and the unexpected

SEE SHOCKING ON PAGE 16

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW

Shocking: Incident put a damper on Hollywood's planned storyline

FROM PAGE 15

ed pall it cast over the Oscars that evening — remains a focal point. Here, the AP photographer who captured the moment and an AP entertainment writer who covered the evening recall their experiences.

Chris Pizzello

AP photographer who caught the iconic image and has been covering the Oscars since the 1990s

When I think back, the main emotion I have is relief. I'm up there at the top of the Dolby Theatre, way high up, a long distance away. And I have a rig with a 600 mm lens and a 200-to-400 mm lens for a little wider shots. Luckily, when Chris Rock was there, I was on the 600. Then suddenly it looked like someone was coming on the stage. I saw someone's blurry head approaching him. And I was just working on instinct. And suddenly, something happened. The collision of the hand against Chris Rock's mic was really loud. And as soon as it happened, all the eight or nine photographers in the sound booth with me had the same reaction, which was, "Oh, my God, did I get that?"

If you look at the video, it happened really, really fast. And he did play Muhammad Ali in a movie, so he's got a good right cross. And my first emotion when it happened was fear that I missed it. Because it happened so fast. It was probably the longest 30 seconds of my life. I was waiting for Paula Muñoz, my editor, who I was tethered with. I have a headset on and I'm talking to her in real time as she's seeing my images. For about 30 seconds, there's nothing. Then suddenly I just heard Paula go, "Oh, you got it." I've never been more relieved.

I didn't get the hand hitting the face, but it happened so fast that you'd almost have had to see it in advance. But it's probably a better picture anyway, him reacting to getting hit. I think everyone was slightly late on it. But you'd have to be able to predict the future to get the hand on the face. So yeah, it was wild. But as I look back on it. I just feel just relief that I got a decent image out of it.

The Oscars is always one that I'm hyper-alert about, because big, unpredictable things happen. Other unexpected things have happened. And I've luckily got all of them. I haven't failed yet. The first one was when Jennifer Lawrence tripped on the way to the stage. Remember when Warren Beatty announced that it was "La La Land" and it was really "Moonlight"? I didn't think it could get any crazier than that. But this flap is the topper of all of them. And so you just have to be extremely on alert. Every year. I

come out of photojournalism, and I'm glad that I have that photojournalism training. Because you have to rely on your instincts sometimes. I think that helps me in situations like this.

Jake Coyle

AP entertainment writer

I was in the press room, backstage at the Oscars, which is where the winners come back afterwards, and where there are 100 journalists from around the world. It's a buzzy kind of atmosphere. And I think there was especially a lot riding on that Oscars, because it was the first real ceremony after the first two years of the pandemic. The movie business had been through such ups and downs and had really just been struggling to survive. So Hollywood really wanted to put on its best show.

Things had been going pretty well. But when that happened, it was like the world's largest balloon just got popped, like all the air went out of the whole festivities. And nobody really knew immediately what exactly had transpired. It obviously looked, at first, like it was a setup, that it was a scene being acted, I think, partially because of how dramatically Smith kind of strode on stage and hit Rock. We're accustomed to that kind of overdramatized response to things in an award show. And it really did feel like that because it just came so out of left field that nobody could process it as it was happening.

It seemed like you're in a "Manchurian Candidate" moment — like he got a signal in his brain and acted on it somehow.

Part of it was the difficulty of just knowing what emphasis to

give it. It was clearly the biggest talking point of the night, but we're so geared up for all the milestones that can happen during an Academy Awards broadcast. You sort of have to shift from watching an awards show to almost reporting on a crime scene. It's a weird juxtaposition that is hard to kind of reconcile in a story that is supposed to, you know, cover all of what happened during those 3½ hours. I guess that that's kind of what I struggled with the most that night — how to properly frame it.

Chris Rock has never really had his say about this yet. He has in standup, but his special will probably be when he finally airs exactly his thought about it. Will Smith has a new movie out, which is a new test of how people feel about him. I do think that when he struck Chris Rock, he also waged a blow against the movie business. The comeback story that Hollywood was hoping to tell the world kind of got hijacked. It just added to all of the uncertainty and destabilization that seems to be around the movie business right now.



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Bradley Cooper, left, talks with Will Smith after Smith slapped presenter Chris Rock onstage during the 94th Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre on March 27 in Los Angeles. AP entertainment writer Jake Coyle, who was covering the Oscars that night, said that the bizarre moment was "like the world's largest balloon just got popped, like all the air went out of the whole festivities."



MICHAEL DWYER/AP

The Wordle app appears on a mobile phone. The New York Times bought the popular game in January.

Talk: Cruise, 'Black Panther' among the year's comebacks

FROM PAGE 15

Amber Heard defamation trial, its every excruciating turn captured on TV.

On the big screen, there were big comebacks. Mourning its dearly missed star, Chadwick Boseman, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" was a box office triumph. James Cameron's "Avatar" made a December return.

Then there was Tom Cruise, turning 60 in '22 — just like the Rolling Stones — swooping into Cannes with his most successful movie, and showing, like those still-touring rockers, that when they tell you "The end is inevitable," as they do in "Top Gun: Maverick," you can always reply "Maybe so, sir, but not today."

Will audiences one day find Cruise — or the Stones, for that matter — too wrinkled and past the sell-by date? Maybe so, but not this year.

Our annual, totally selective journey through a year in pop culture:

January

It's Golden Globes time. But is a Globes with no telecast, boozy

celebs or red carpet a Globes at all? The embattled Hollywood Foreign Press Association, reeling from stunning failures over diversity, holds a private event and plans a comeback next year. Hey, remember the original wardrobe malfunction? Well, Janet Jackson says she and Justin Timberlake have moved on, and so should we. The New York Times buys Wordle, and we're all thinking in five-letter words (though W-O-R-D-L-E is six, just saying). Meanwhile, it's a month of loss, heading off a year of loss: pioneering Black actor, director and activist Sidney Poitier dies at 94.

February

What would a year in pop culture be without Britney? Just months after her liberation from her restrictive conservatorship, Spears is reported to have signed a mammoth book deal, but at year's end we're still waiting for news. Rihanna is pregnant! Tom Brady retires! (Stay tuned on that one.) Taylor watch: Jake

SEE YEAR ON PAGE 17

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW

Year: BTS takes a break; Bennifer's 2 weddings; Brady, Gisele split

FROM PAGE 16

Gyllenhaal speaks out, saying he really has nothing to do with that song, that it's about an artist's relationship with her fans — but fans shouldn't be cyberbullying, either.

March

Quick, who wins Oscars this month? Well, "CODA" does, a feel-good drama with a largely deaf cast, and **Troy Kotsur** becomes the first deaf man to win an acting Oscar. Alas, all anyone can talk about is — you know. **Smith**, who wins the best actor award not long after slapping Rock over a joke about his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, won't truly address the issue until the end of the year, so keep reading. **Kardashian** watch: Kim K is declared legally single again in her ongoing divorce with **Ye**, the rapper formerly known as **Kanye West**. And **Brady**, retired for 40 days, says, "Never mind!"

April

It's Grammy time, and **Jon Batiste** wins big, taking five statuettes. The musician's huge year will later include performing at the first state dinner of the Biden administration, for French President Emmanuel Macron. The next day Macron will meet with **Musk** (thanks for the segue, Monsieur le President) who begins his acquisition of **Twitter** this month, leading to untold, chaotic — and still unfolding — changes at the social media giant.

May

So imagine you're sipping cocktails at the **Met Gala** and a musician comes sauntering through, playing the melodica — of course it's **Batiste**, because the Met Gala's that kind of crazy party. The biggest splash of the night, though, is **Kardashian**, on the arm of boyfriend **Pete Davidson**, wearing the same sequined, skin-tight gown **Marilyn Monroe** wore to sing "Happy Birthday" to JFK in 1962. In movies, "**Top Gun: Maverick**" opens, the highest-grossing domestic debut in **Cruise's** career, and his first to surpass \$100 million on opening weekend. **Harry Styles** fans rejoice! His album, "Harry's



JOHN LOCHER, INVISION/AP

Jon Batiste grabbed an armload of Grammys in April.



EVAN AGOSTINI, INVISION/AP

Kim Kardashian, left, wearing **Marilyn Monroe's** famous "Happy Birthday" gown, and **Pete Davidson** attend the **Met Gala** on **May 2** in New York. By August, the couple had split.

House," is here.

June

Stunning news for the global fanbase of **BTS** as the K-pop supergroup announces it's taking a break to focus on members' solo projects. On the legal front, a Virginia jury hands **Depp** a victory in his very messy libel case over allegations of domestic abuse, finding that former wife **Heard** defamed him in a 2018 op-ed. On a happier note, **Britney** gets married....

July

Only one wedding, **Britney?** **Bennifer** has two! Maybe what happens usually stays in Vegas, but not when you have 227 million followers on Instagram. With a winking reference to being a "Sadie" (married lady), **Jennifer Lopez** directs fans to her newsletter where she shares pics of her quickie wedding to **Ben Affleck**. "Love is beautiful," she writes. "And it turns out love is patient." Speaking of patience, fans of **Beyoncé** are rewarded for theirs, with the release of her long-awaited seventh studio album, "**Renaissance**," her first solo album in six years.

August

So, we were saying ... **Bennifer's** second wedding, on **Affleck's** compound in Georgia, is bigger and fancier. One wedding, one split: **Kardashian** and **Davidson** are no longer. In other summer news, the world remembers **Princess Diana**, whose shocking death in a car crash happened 25 years ago, and whose life is being reshaped for a new generation in the current season of "The Crown." Only days later, that same Netflix series will pause production briefly as a mark of



JORDAN STRAUSS, INVISION/AP

On **March 27**, **Troy Kotsur** became the first deaf man to win an Oscar, taking best supporting actor for best-picture winner "**CODA**."

respect for **Queen Elizabeth II** as Britain — and the world — mourn the beloved monarch, who dies at age 96 after more than 70 years on the throne.

September

Mounting political intrigue in Europe, and by that we mean ... did spit fly at the Venice premiere of "Don't Worry Darling"? Either way, the movie, directed by **Olivia Wilde** and starring her boyfriend (alleged spitter **Styles**), is saddled — or blessed? — with more than its share of extracurricular drama. At the **Emmys**, behold **Sheryl Lee Ralph**, who wins for "Abbott Elementary" and schools the crowd on the power of dreams and self-belief. "This is what believing looks like," she says. You know what else believing looks like? **Rachel Berry** from "Glee" — aka **Lea Michele** — at last getting to play **Fanny Brice** in "Funny Girl" on Broadway. In sports, with four rueful words that resonate with working moms everywhere,



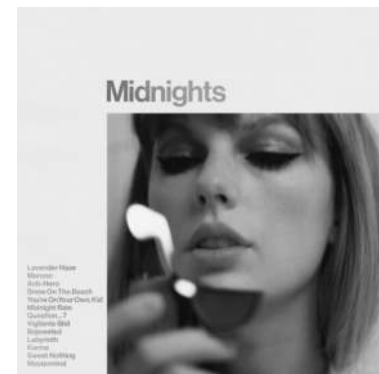
20th Century Studios

Moviegoers flocked to **Pandora** once again, and the long-awaited "**Avatar**" sequel "**Avatar: The Way of Water**" was raking in millions as the year wound down.

Serena Williams says she's stepping aside from tennis, because: "Something's got to give."

October

The second **Harvey Weinstein** trial opens in Los Angeles (he would be found guilty of rape in December). **Adidas** drops **Ye**, part of a cascade of companies that will sever ties with the rap-



REPUBLIC RECORDS/AP

It was a big fall for **Taylor Swift**. She dropped her new album, "**Midnights**," occupied the entire top 10 on the **Billboard** chart and broke **Ticketmaster** with the demand for her upcoming tour.

per over his antisemitic and other troubling comments. The **Musk** era begins at **Twitter** as the world's richest man carries a sink into the office, to "let that sink in." **Heidi Klum's** Halloween costume is a slimy, glistening rain worm. But before the month worms away from us, let's cede it to **Swift** for dropping her new album, "**Midnights**" (Spotify's most-streamed album in a single day), then adding seven bonus tracks, then becoming the first artist to occupy all top 10 slots on the **Billboard** Hot 100 chart. Let THAT sink in! P.S. Celebrity divorce watch: **Brady** and wife **Gisele Bundchen** split.

November

Did we say LAST month was **Taylor Swift** month? Well now, millions of eager fans crowd a presale for her much-awaited **Eras Tour**, resulting in crashes and endless waits. **Ticketmaster** cancels the general sale, citing insufficient stock. Multiple state attorneys general announce investigations. Takeaway: People want **Taylor Swift** tickets. At the multiplex, they also want their **Wakanda**. "**Black Panther: Wakanda Forever**" meets the double challenge of following up one of the biggest blockbusters in history and losing its biggest star.

December

Love 'em or hate 'em, here come **Harry** and **Meghan** again, with a Netflix "documentary" being watched very, very closely by royalty across the pond. **Cameron's** "**Avatar**" sequel finally appears, 13 years after the original broke records. Viewers flock to **Pandora** once again as the film grosses \$855 million globally in its first two weeks of release. And bringing the year full circle, **Smith** emerges to promote his new film, "**Emancipation**," and hoping people will forget about ... what was it? ... at least enough to check out the movie.

In this year of comebacks, will **Smith's** be the biggest?

Check back with us in 2023.

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – MOVIES

Getting some perspective

Picks for best movies of 2022, according to AP's Bahr and Coyle



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP

Colin Farrell loses not only a long-standing friendship but also his sense of self in “The Banshees of Inisherin,” which takes place on a small Irish island.

1. ‘The Banshees of Inisherin’

Martin McDonagh’s film is a sharp, funny and utterly devastating work about the end of a friendship on a small Irish island. Colin Farrell uses his wonderful brows (and acting chops) to ensure ultimate heartbreak as his world and sense of self crumbles and rots. But it’s the ensemble, including Brendan Gleeson, Kerry Condon and Barry Keoghan, who imbue this deceptively simple setup with gravity and depth.

2. ‘Tár’

Todd Field’s brilliant, restless “Tár” reminded me how much I love movies (and tricked me into believing that I was some kind of scholar of classical music for a few hours). Cate Blanchett is transcendent in bringing this flawed genius to life, challenging the audience to consider big questions about power, status and art. It is demanding but immensely rewarding cinema that is not easily defined, which is perhaps why audiences aren’t taking a chance on it in theaters (which is a mistake).

3. ‘Women Talking’

Sarah Polley’s film hasn’t even been released to the general public and it’s already considered “divisive,” which is one of the best reasons to seek it out. Aren’t you curious which side you’ll be on? I’m one who was spellbound by her heady, spiritual vision of a group of abused women in an isolated religious colony questioning their reality and wondering if life could somehow be different than what they know.

4. ‘Aftersun’

In a year full of autobiographical films from very famous names, it was the one from the unknown that made the biggest impression. You don’t have to know anything about Charlotte Wells to get wrapped up in “Aftersun,” an inspired and fully realized memory piece about an ordinary vacation some 20 years prior that will leave you in pieces (which is somehow possible even when the “Macarena” is also stuck in your head).

5. ‘Saint Omer’

A young woman is on trial for the death of her 15-month-old daughter in this haunting French courtroom drama, a tremendous debut feature from documentarian Alice Diop, that upends your notions of what the genre can be in its examination of trauma, the immigrant experience and expectations of motherhood.



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Associated Press critic Lindsey Bahr says “Kimi,” the Alexa/Siri-inspired pandemic crime thriller with Zoë Kravitz, was her favorite popcorn experience of the year.

6. ‘Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris’

This is the kind of romantic confection that’s a bit of an outlier on a list like this, but that’s why it’s here. Anthony Fabian’s film about an English housecleaner and war widow (Lesley Manville) in the 1950s who saves up to travel to Paris to buy a couture Christian Dior gown is a balm — heartwarming without being schlocky, reverential of high fashion artistry but critical of its exclusionary ways and just a supreme delight.

7. ‘Kimi’

Sorry “Top Gun: Maverick,” you were very entertaining too, but Steven Soderbergh’s “Kimi” was my favorite popcorn experience of the year — a taut, paranoid thriller with a modern, Alexa/Siri-inspired spin on the overheard crime scenario of “Blow Up,” with a sharp performance from Zoë Kravitz, who can even make an agoraphobic shut-in extremely cool.

8. ‘Murina’

There is rot beneath the punishingly beautiful, sun-soaked Adriatic setting of Croatian filmmaker Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic’s sublimely menacing debut feature about a 17-year-old girl who is starting to question the ingrained misogyny around her. The family dynamics are



ORION-UNITED ARTISTS RELEASING/AP

Judith Ivey, left, and Claire Foy are shown in a scene from the “divisive” Sarah Polley film “Women Talking,” about a group of abused women in a religious colony.

as rocky and dangerous as the picturesque backdrop.

9. ‘Corsage’

Beauty, waistslines, aging, celebrity, duty and desire haunt Empress Elisabeth of Austria in Marie Kreutzer’s intricate and interpretive portrait of a dynamic mind and soul that’s been stifled by her position and myriad traumas. Vicky Krieps is perfect as the deliriously subversive “Sissi.”

10. ‘White Noise’

The supermarket dance to LCD Soundsystem’s “New Body Rhumba” might not come until the end of Noah Baumbach’s Don DeLillo adaptation, but there is a dazzling rhythm to the entire epic, from the controlled chaos of the overlapping dialogue to the hectic choreography of a family making breakfast. But maybe the most surprising thing: Behind all the wit, the style, the commentary on American society and the banal and the profound in the everyday, there is a real emotional weight, too.

Honorable mentions: “Happening,” “The Eternal Daughter,” “Avatar: The Way of Water,” “Fire of Love,” “Catherine Called Birdy,” “EO,” “Bodies Bodies Bodies,” “All the Beauty and the Bloodshed,” “Cyrano”

— Lindsey Bahr

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – MOVIES



A24/AP

Frankie Corio, left, and Paul Mescal go on an ordinary vacation in Charlotte Wells' autobiographical feature "Aftersun."

1. 'Aftersun'

Rarely does such a delicately crafted tale pack such a wallop. Charlotte Wells' breathtaking feature debut, starring newcomer Frankie Corio and Paul Mescal as an 11-year-old girl and her father, respectively, on vacation in Turkey, has such a keenly observed accumulation of detail and feeling that you hardly notice the undertow of heartache that will, in the end, absolutely floor you.

2. 'Belle'

Though it was a hit in Japan, it was easy to miss Mamoru Hosoda's glorious anime back in January, when it arrived in North American theaters. It's a dazzling blend of "Beauty and the Beast," a girl's wrenching battle with grief and self-doubt and possibly the best movie ever made about the Internet. It's a lot, maybe too much, but "Belle" reaches the most beautiful of climaxes.

3. 'The Banshees of Inisherin'

Martin McDonagh's latest is a lean fable that throbs with existential conundrum. It plays out between a quizzical Colin Farrell, a doom-laden Brendan Gleeson, an exasperated Kerry Condon and a much-cherished donkey. What else could you possibly need?

4. 'Decision to Leave'

The Korean master Park Chan-wook marries a police procedural and romance, and the twisty noirish results are at turns delightful and devastating.

5. 'Descendant'

Margaret Brown's expansive, ruminative documentary reverberates with history and stories passed down through time. The central incident is the discovery in Mobile, Ala., of the Clotilda, the last known slave ship to arrive on U.S. shores. But Brown's roaming, wide-lens film is most powerful for the way it captures the community of Clotilda descendants — a contemplative and compelling cast of characters — as they weigh slavery's present-day legacy.

6. 'No Bears'

Jafar Panahi may be the most vital and courageous filmmaker in the world right now. The Iranian writer-director has been banned from making movies or traveling since he was arrested in 2010 for supporting protesters. Yet Panahi has, ingeniously, continued to find ways to make thoughtful, playful, defiant films that reflect his predicament while slyly capturing the Iranian society

around him. "No Bears," which dramatizes Panahi making a film along the Turkish border, is one of his best. It's grown only more piercing since Panahi was jailed on a six-year prison sentence this year. In one bleakly stirring moment, Panahi stands on a darkened borderland, contemplating fleeing.

7. 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' and 'Nope'

In a movie world where spectacles often come with little within, both of these films were absolutely brimming with ideas and images. You could call the film by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert and Jordan Peele's latest opus overstuffed. But their sheer cinematic abundance made them nourishing, vibrant exceptions. Much the same could be said of James Cameron's equally visionary "Avatar: The Way of Water."

8. 'Lingui, the Sacred Bonds'

Chadian filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's film is one of the year's most tender mother-daughter portraits. Rihane Khali Alio and Achouackh Abakar Souleymane star in this extraordinarily vivid tale, set in the outskirts of present-day N'Djamena, of abortion, motherhood and female solidarity.

9. 'The Fabelmans'

Steven Spielberg's natural mode as a filmmaker might not be introspective. He's not historically been one to phone home. And while that awkwardness can sometimes be felt in his movie memoir, there are many scenes here unlike anything he's ever shot before, and among his best.

10. 'Kimi'

A great benefit of the so-called "pandemic movies" is that they were made fast, loose and of-their-moment. This year, many filmmakers, maybe as a result of all that time shut-in, released inward-looking films. Often better were the ones that more directly dealt with the pandemic reality around us. Steven Soderbergh's fleet-footed thriller starring Zoë Kravitz as an agoraphobic tech contractor deftly channeled the times into a riveting little pop gem.

Honorable mentions: "Compartment No. 6," "Till," "One Fine Morning," "The Cathedral," "The Woman King," "Saint Omer," "Apollo 10½," "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery," "Emily the Criminal," "Bones and All"

— Jake Coyle



Mubi/AP

Park Hae-il, left, and Tang Wei star in the romantic police procedural "Decision to Leave."



NETFLIX/AP

Emmett Lewis appears in the historical documentary "Descendant," about the Clotilda slave ship descendants.



A24/AP

From left: Stephanie Hsu, Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan in "Everything Everywhere All at Once."



SIDESHOW AND JANUS FILMS/AP

"No Bears" dramatizes Iranian writer-director Jafar Panahi making a film along the Turkish border.

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – VIDEO GAMES



OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT/AP

Pentiment is a thought-provoking whodunit set in the 16th century during the time of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

Indie titles find footing

By LOU KESTEN
Associated Press

It's been a bumpy year for video games, in part thanks to the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic. Some major releases got delayed (2023 could be a doozy), but enough crossed the finish line to keep gamers happy. Indie developers held up their end, delivering innovative challenges and fascinating stories.

Here are the games we enjoyed the most in 2022:

1. God of War Ragnarök

The latest chapter in the saga of surly Spartan warrior Kratos delivers everything you could ask for in a AAA Sony PlayStation blockbuster. There's bone-crushing combat against awe-inspiring mythical monsters. There are clever environmental puzzles to solve when you need a break from the mayhem. There's a surprisingly moving story about fatherhood, regret and the battle between fate and free will. And there's the year's best voice performance, by Richard Schiff (Toby from "The West Wing") as a droll, manipulative Odin. Epic in every way.

2. Wordle

On the other end of the spectrum is this simple yet seductive word and logic game that you can play in a few minutes while you're eating breakfast. Created by software engineer Josh Wardle for his partner's amusement, Wordle became a phenomenon when he added the ability for players to share their successes (and failures) on social media. Some fans groused when Wardle sold his creation to The New York Times, but it remains a tasty daily snack for language lovers.

3. Horizon: Forbidden West

Sony's other big release of 2022 is this sprawling post-apocalyptic adventure. In 2017's *Horizon: Zero Dawn*,



SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT/AP

Spartan warrior Kratos returns in **God of War Ragnarök**.

fearless heroine Aloy discovered why civilization collapsed; now she has to stop a mysterious enemy from wiping out humanity for good. The result is a spirited journey across an often breathtaking American West, where the robotic buffalo roam while our descendants patiently try to rebuild culture.

4. Pentiment

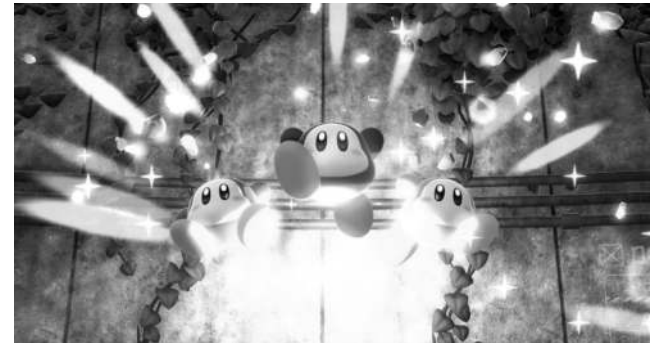
It's not often that you see a video game in which a major plot point revolves around Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. But such is life in 16th century Germany, the setting of this thought-provoking whodunit. It starts with a murder in an abbey, and your choices as you investigate the crime have irreversible effects on the people in the surrounding village as the decades go by. It's a provocative examination of faith, history and unforeseen consequences, told with beautiful graphics that evoke the manuscripts and woodcuts of the medieval era.

5. Norco

A young woman named Kay returns to her Louisiana hometown after her mother's death in this absorbing mystery. Norco — an actual town, built around a giant oil refinery — is a desolate place, damaged by flooding and decades of pollution, but it takes on an odd kind of beauty thanks to vivid pixel art reminiscent of classic LucasArts games of the 1990s. And as Kay searches for her missing brother, there are lively characters and moments of rueful comedy that balance out the sense of melancholy. It's one of the most thoughtfully written games in years.

6. Return to Monkey Island

One of the mad geniuses of LucasArts' golden age, Ron Gilbert, came back this year with an uproarious reprise of his most famous creation. Stumbling wannabe swash-buckler Guybrush Threepwood is determined to finally learn the Secret of Monkey Island that was promised in the 1990 original. (Spoiler: It's very silly.) The puzzles are as demented as ever — one involves repairing a laundry machine so you can flatten a talking skull — and every encounter is crammed with jokes. Even if you're new to the franchise, it's a cruise worth taking.



NINTENDO/AP

Kirby's new title is Nintendo's best Switch game of 2022.

7. Elden Ring

Since 2011's *Dark Souls*, Japan's From Software has built a dedicated fan base for its notoriously difficult — some would say sadistic — adventures. *Elden Ring* is a bit more welcoming. It's still challenging, but the studio's move from gloomy, claustrophobic castles into a more colorful, inviting open world at least gives less masochistic players a chance to explore its singular take on sword-and-sorcery.

8. The Case of the Golden Idol

The tiny studio Color Gray Games (essentially two Latvian brothers) made a splash with this ingenious mystery linking 12 gruesome crimes into one big conspiracy. Each case gives you a series of mostly static screenshots, and your job is to figure out not just whodunit, but what the heck happened in the first place. It'll make you feel like Columbo — albeit in the 18th century — as you piece together bits of evidence to assemble a coherent narrative.

9. Marvel Snap

There are tons of collectible card games and just as many superhero games, but somehow the studio Second Dinner (formed by a veteran of the card battle classic *Hearthstone*) has combined the two in a unique way. Each player has a handful of Marvel characters that are played onto three locations that have different effects; the goal is to take over two of the three spots. One game takes just a few minutes, but it's easy to lose hours playing just one more as you try to assemble a killer deck.

10. Kirby and the Forgotten Land

Nintendo's best Switch game this year finally takes Kirby into a 3D world, opening up some new skills and challenges for the adorable pink blob. Kirby's talent — he can inhale enemies and take on their powers — has always ensured plenty of variety, but whoever expected him to vacuum up an entire car? *Forgotten Land* is easy, but it's fun to play co-op with younger kids, and there are enough hidden secrets that you'll want to replay each level after the kids have gone to bed.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Embracing Europe in winter months

Every time I travel to Europe in the off-season, I find myself enjoying a cool and comfy tranquility — and not missing the heat and crowds that so often come with peak season. But even more than that, I enjoy catching Europe by surprise — at its candid best, living everyday life. When I travel outside of the tourist season, Europe seems even more welcoming than normal.

Some of my warmest European memories have been gained while wearing a sweater in the off-season. Linger over a café crème in a nearly tourist-free Paris, I'm joined by a tiny bird on the next wicker chair as we watch Parisians parade by. I enjoy a theater and music scene designed for locals rather than tourists. I take my time at a château in France's Loire Valley, with a big log on the fire and guards relaxed and happy to chat. I sit alone on a pebbly Italian Riviera beach and step into the wonder of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with none of the jostle. Bundle up and get convivial with Europe in the off-season and you'll understand why, for so many, that's a favorite time to travel.

There are also some practical advantages to traveling in the off-season (considered November through March). Airfare is

generally cheaper. Outside of places that get lots of business travelers, hotels and Airbnb-type rentals are also less expensive, and you can sometimes even bargain for deeper discounts.



Rick Steves

In winter, you can usually walk right in at sights that are plagued with lines in peak season. Without having to buy advance tickets, you can often show up when you want at places like Florence's Uffizi, Paris' Orsay and Barcelona's Picasso Museum. Sightseeing crowds are thinner, allowing you to spend some time enjoying Europe's treasures up close.

Of course, winter travel also comes with drawbacks. Because much of Europe is at Canadian latitudes, days are short, and it's generally dark by 5 p.m. The weather can be cold, drizzly and generally dreary, and you'll need to pack heavier, including a good waterproof coat and shoes.

In winter, sightseeing priorities change. You'll probably do less meandering and exploring of neighborhoods, and more beelining to and from sights. Museums provide a warm haven, while outdoor sights can be harder to enjoy — frigid



SIMON GRIFFITH/Rick Steves' Europe

Revelers in ornate costumes and colorful masks descend upon Venice during Carnival.

weather can drain the fun out of even the Eiffel Tower and other must-sees.

Many sights operate on shorter hours in the off-season, often closing around sunset. English-language tours, common in the summer, are not as common in the off-season, when most visitors are natives. And winter sightseeing can be especially frustrating in smaller tourist towns, where many sights and restaurants close down entirely.

Offseason is a fine time to visit big cities, which bustle year-round, as well as the Mediterranean region (Italy, Spain, Portugal, etc.), which is often horribly hot and crowded in the summer, but fairly mild in winter. While Europe's wonderful outdoor evening ambiance tends to hibernate during winter in the north, it sur-

vives all year in the south. And, of course, in some places, such as Switzerland, winter activities — skiing, sledding, and other snow sports — are an important part of the culture (and tourism).

Late winter brings raucous revelry, when various Mardi Gras/Carnival celebrations brighten the mood throughout Europe in February. The quintessential destination is Venice, which erupts for 18 days in an extravagant festival of costumes, parties, dinners, themed parades and masquerade balls — a final debauchery before the restrictions of Lent. The festivities end with a huge dance on St. Mark's Square, lit with fireworks.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

New year offers travelers milestone destinations, occasions

The year 2022 in travel was memorable for reasons both good and bad. Joy at the return to a semblance of normalcy after endless months of pandemic-related restrictions was tempered by the outbreak of war in Europe and economic uncertainty. While we're bound to face many of the same challenges as we step into 2023, milestone occasions and destinations preparing warm welcomes give plenty of reason for optimism.

A king's coronation: After the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles III ascended to the British throne on Sept. 8. According to tradition, the coronation of a new sovereign takes place only after several months' time, following a period of mourning and months of meticulous preparations. King Charles III's coronation is slated to take place on May 6, 2023, at Westminster Abbey, London, and will be conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In order to allow UK residents to welcome His Majesty to the throne, May 8 has been designated a holiday. Online: royal.uk/coronation-his-majesty-king



Karen Bradbury

Croatia joins the euro crowd: As of January 1, Croatia will become the newest nation to adopt the euro, joining 19 other European Union member states that already use the currency. Small amounts of the country's old currency, the kuna, can be exchanged at banks through Dec. 31, 2023.

New routes and airlines: The American low-cost airline JetBlue will continue to expand its recently launched transatlantic service. In the summer of 2023, JetBlue will offer nonstop flights between New York's JFK Airport and Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport. A route between Paris and Boston's Logan Airport is slated to begin at a later date. jetblue.com/flying-with-us/uk-and-europe

A new Condor partner airline named Marabu is set to offer leisure flights between Germany and the Mediterra-



iStock

Lonely Planet suggests the island nation of Malta as a great place to get away from it all in 2023.

nean in time for the summer season. Its three Airbus aircraft will offer flights from Hamburg and Munich to holiday destinations in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Canary Islands and Portugal. Online: flymarabu.com/en

Publishers' picks: Where to go in 2023? Travel industry publications have plenty to say about that. Here are just some of their top suggestions:

Travel + Leisure compiled "The 50 Best Places to Travel in 2023" by asking its editors where they wished to go in the year ahead. Their choices in Europe included the United Kingdom, along with the capital cities of Copenhagen, Madrid and Athens. Venice, Italy, merited mention for lovers of architecture, while France's Jura region was lauded for its superb wine and cheese.

Lonely Planet added a new twist to its annual suggestion of places travelers might wish to explore in the year to come by proposing five specific types of itineraries: eat, journey, connect, unwind and learn. Italy's Umbria region

makes the grade for culinary specialties such as black truffles, fine cured meats and local wines. The recently restored overnight train service between Sofia, Bulgaria, and Istanbul, Turkey, is proposed as a memorable journey. Albania is suggested as a place to connect with cultures and communities. The Halkidiki peninsula of Northern Greece and the island nation of Malta gain mention as places to get away from it all. Dresden, Germany, comes up as an example of a city reborn, whereas Marseille, France, is lauded for a newly found sense of optimism among its grit and grandeur.

Fodor's Travel produces two categories of destinations, Go lists and No lists. Places getting the green light include the Greek island of Crete (pristine beaches, fascinating archaeological sites, healthy food); Ghent, Belgium (canals, cinema and a booming arts scene); Granada, Spain (Moorish architecture, flamenco and free tapas); Ostuni, Italy (whitewashed buildings perched high above the Adriatic); Rye, England (medieval houses, cobblestone streets and antiques) and Trondheim, Norway (colorful timber houses, boutique shopping and highly-rated restaurants).

Fodor's No list contains popular places best avoided. It's suggested that travelers think twice before visiting France's cliffs and calanques (coastal erosion) as well as cities and regions that have long suffered from overtourism (Barcelona, Paris, Italy's Amalfi Coast).

Venice starts charging visitors: Venice's attempt to tackle overtourism by imposing entry fees upon day visitors appears set to go online in 2023. These fees will range from 3 euros to 10 euros, depending on how busy the city is on a given day. The fee will apply to all visitors ages 6 or above, and tickets will need to be booked prior to arrival. These will be issued in the form of a QR code that visitors must present to ticket controllers upon demand. The plan to impose charges as of Jan. 16, 2023, has been delayed due to logistical hurdles.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY KAREN BRADBURY/Stars and Stripes

The scenic Two Pools viewpoint offers panoramas of Bad Kreuznach along with its pool and spa facilities that would be a good option after a hike in the Nahe valley.

Refreshing perspective

Enjoy castle ruins and spectacular views over the Nahe valley

BY KAREN BRADBURY
Special to Stars and Stripes

As much as I dream of conquering the snow-capped mountain peaks of Bavaria, I've also come to appreciate the joys of hiking the state of Rhineland-Pfalz, where vistas of castle ruins and sun-drenched vineyards alternate with landscapes blanketed by thick forest.

Of course, it's a different look in the winter, when the ever-greens stand out among their bare-branched neighbors. But if you've just moved to the area and you enjoy a warmer nature outing, here's something to look forward to come spring.

One of my favorite regions for hiking is in the valley formed by the Nahe River, a left-hand tributary of the Rhine. And Bad Muenster am Stein-Ebernburg, a tidy spa town located at a bend in

On the QT

Address: The walk can be started from anywhere in Bad Muenster am Stein-Ebernburg. To find the trail, walk to the end of Kurstrasse, cross the pedestrian bridge over the Nahe River, pass by the Lidl to the right and turn left on Speckerbruecke. The trail begins in about 200 yards. It can be walked in either direction; we chose to walk it clockwise. An alternate starting point for those with a car is the Freizeitpark Kuhberg, located at Rheingrafenstrasse 159 in Bad Kreuznach.

Cost: Free to hike

Information: Online: naheland.net/de/erleben/wandern/top-wanderwege/index.html#ipd=113973586

the river, is one of my favorite points of departure.

The town's centerpiece, a leafy "cure park" with curious, anachronistic saline walls promising relief to those with respiratory ailments and a towering cliff as its backdrop, evokes a sense of times long past and a feeling of security.

While hikers making their first visit to the region might opt to

hike up the Rotenfels, a modest mountain whose claim to fame is its sheer rock face said to be the highest north of the Alps, we opted instead for a hike marked as the Valtour Rheingrafenstein, a 9-mile loop deemed of medium difficulty by one source and difficult by another.

Fortunately for our group of

SEE REFRESHING ON PAGE 23



The ruins of the Altenbaumburg Castle house a restaurant that is open from March through October.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Tufo serves traditional Neapolitan fare with flair

BY ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

Foreigners living in Naples quickly become acquainted with regional foods such as pasta with ragu or Genovese sauce, eggplant parmigiana and fried mussels or anchovies.

Those and other traditional Neapolitan dishes are the mainstay of almost every restaurant, making them seem ubiquitous, maybe even boring. That mindset is short-sighted.

The fun of eating in southern Italy isn't about vast selection but rather the experience of fresh vegetables, meats and cheeses paired with local food traditions. Variety comes from skillful interpretation, and Tufo Trattoria Gourmet doesn't disappoint.

Located in Naples' exclusive Posillipo enclave, Tufo offers a menu dedicated to well-prepared dishes reminiscent of those served by an Italian grandmother, or nonna, but with flair.

Word of warning: The trattoria is popular with locals and there almost always is a line, especially on weekends, when the restaurant serves lunch. Don't chance it; make a reservation.

Once inside, you'll be seated in one of two adjoining dining rooms decorated in an Italian countryside motif. The dining areas are intimate, meaning you'll sit very close to fellow patrons. Waiters are friendly and efficient.

The menu offers an array of dishes but isn't overwhelming. There are about eight pasta and 10 meat options. There also are appetizers, salads, fish, vegetable sides and desserts.

On a recent Saturday, my com-



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The eggplant parmigiana at Tufo in Naples' Posillipo neighborhood is rich, smoky and cheesy. The portion is large enough for two.

panion and I started our lunch with parmigiana di melanzane, or eggplant parmigiana, and polpettine, or small meatballs, in ragu. Each arrived steaming hot in a small copper skillet and topped with shaved parmesan.

The first bite of parmigiana yielded a bright, velvety tomato sauce balanced with smokiness from the eggplant that appeared to have been fire-charred, not fried as is typical.

A generous portion of melted mozzarella was sandwiched between the layers of eggplant and sauce. The serving was enough for two but I ate every bit, sopping up the tomato sauce with the fresh, crusty bread on our table.

My lunch companion did the same with the meatballs, which she said were lightly seasoned with a rich, meaty taste. The ragu, a traditional Neapolitan

sauce that features pork or other meat simmered with tomatoes and spices, wasn't cloying, which allowed the flavor of the meatballs to come through.

For our main dish, we each had pasta — and a show.

A hallmark of Tufo's first-course dishes, or primi, is pasta con patate, or pasta with potatoes and cheese. This classic is found on the menu of nearly every restaurant in Naples, but recipes vary. At Tufo, the pasta, potatoes and provola cheese are finished tableside, where they are tossed from a skillet into a flaming wheel of parmesan cheese.

During our visit, this ritual was performed several times, as it seemed everyone was having the dish — except us.

Thinking the trattoria gave this treatment to another menu option, I ordered the cacio e pepe, or pasta with cheese and pepper.



There are about eight pasta dishes on the menu at Tufo in Naples, including cacio e pepe, top, and pasta with Genovese, a rich onion sauce with beef.

It arrived in a dinner plate-sized copper frying pan, with the shorter, wider spaghetti-like pasta coated in a rich, smooth parmesan sauce with plenty of freshly cracked black pepper.

The dish was tasty, satisfying and plentiful, but I couldn't help thinking that I'd missed out by not having the pasta con patate.

My companion ordered the pasta with Genovese, a Neapolitan favorite featuring slow-cooked onions. Picture thick onion soup poured over ziti and topped with chunks of tender beef and shaved parmesan. She ate every bite.

Tiramisu and other dolci, or sweets, such as a sbriciolata a



Tufo Trattoria Gourmet

Address: Via Posillipo 268, Naples, Italy

Hours: Monday-Friday, 7:30 p.m.-midnight; Saturday, 12:30-4 p.m. (lunch), 7:30 p.m.-midnight; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. (lunch), 8-11:30 p.m. Take-out also is available.

Prices: Appetizers, 4-13 euros; pasta and salads, 8-15 euros; meat and fish, 8-30 euros; side dishes, 4 euros; desserts, 5 euros. Beer and wine also are available.

Information: +39 342-502-8667 (reservations strongly encouraged); Online: tufotrattoria.it

Alison Bath

Nutella, a sort of crumble cake made with the famous chocolate hazelnut spread, are among the dessert selections.

Although we passed on dessert, my dining companion finished her meal with an expertly made espresso.

Tufo's name likely is homage to the volcanic rock of the same moniker that is evident throughout much of Naples and the Amalfi coast.

The porous stone, formed by the compaction and cementation of volcanic ash, sometimes is used in walls and other structures, a visible symbol of Neapolitan thriftiness and ingenuity in using what's on hand.

Tufo makes good on that heritage through simple food that is borne of the same necessity but is never boring.

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Refreshing: 9-mile Valtour Rheingrafenstein loop provides bit of everything that makes good hikes great

FROM PAGE 22

three, it was only the trail's first couple of miles that proved particularly challenging. After crossing the Nahe via a footbridge and ascending into thick foliage, the path rose sharply on the way to Rheingrafenstein, the remains of an 11th-century castle destroyed by the notorious French general Ezechiel Melac in 1688.

From its viewing platform, we enjoyed an airplane-view perspective of the town and its surrounding villages, all overlooked by the wonderfully intact Ebernburg Castle, which nowadays operates as a Protestant conference and educational center.

From this lofty height, the trail winds roughly parallel along to the next vista, a view over neighboring Bad Kreuznach and toward the Rhine.

The scenic viewpoint's name, 2-Baeder-Blick, refers to the sight of two swimming

pools, either of which would make for a marvelous post-hike option, particularly on a hot summer's day.

With a modest gain in elevation, we passed by a radio tower, trees bearing ripe cherries and meadows bursting with purple foxglove.

Atop the highest hill, we encountered a Waldorf School and a pasture in which horses grazed. In short order, our dismay that the first restaurant we passed by was closed that day was replaced with delight upon discovery of Das Neu Waldheim.

The rustic establishment formerly attached to a local walking club offered garden seating under spacious umbrellas, wines of the Nahe and plenty of choices in regards to the regionally brewed Kirner beer, available in bottles only.

We didn't eat, although the day's special, half a roasted chicken served with bread, would have tempted if we hadn't packed a

picnic. The menu also featured salad, pasta, schnitzel, desserts and options for children, all at more-than-reasonable prices.

Highlights along the next stretch of the path included a burrow-pocked sandy bank and remnants of the 100 million-year-old sea that once blanketed the region, along with some ancient human graves we regrettably passed by without noticing.

Although we'd been looking forward to beers with a view, the restaurant housed in the Altenbaumburg castle ruins was closed that day. The final miles were made up of a gentle, tree-lined serpentine trail that gradually brought us back down to earth.

The hike, signposted as a five-hour endeavor, had taken us roughly that. In terms of all that makes a good hike great — history, nature, unexpected discoveries and ample, reasonably priced food and drink — the Valtour Rheingrafenstein provided in plenty.



KAREN BRADBURY/Stars and Stripes

The wide selection of beers brewed in nearby Kirn can keep hikers on the Nahe River trails well-hydrated.

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW



AP photos

AP's 2022 breakthrough entertainers: Top row, from left: Actor/recording artist Joaquina Kalukango, actor Tenoch Huerta, actor Danielle Deadwyler; middle: actors Daryl McCormack, Iman Vellani, Sadie Sink; bottom: actor Simone Ashley, actor Stephanie Hsu, actor/recording artist Tobe Nwigwe.

These fresh faces seized their moment, and the spotlight, as entertainers in 2022

Associated Press

They worked hard, with the rewards coming slowly but surely. Then something came along — often a key role or sometimes a cluster, maybe an album — and it all became next-level, a shift triggering where-did-you-come-from vibes.

That describes most of this year's nine Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year, a class of talent that flourished in 2022. They are Sadie Sink, Stephanie Hsu, Tenoch Huerta, Joaquina Kalukango, Iman Vellani, Daryl McCormack, Tobe Nwigwe, Simone Ashley and Danielle Deadwyler.

Sink had been on Broadway and worked alongside stars such as Naomi Watts and Helen Mirren. But playing Max Mayfield in the fourth season of "Stranger Things," she broke through as a brave skater girl who never lets go of her Walkman, who hates pink, plays video games and is a "Dragon's Lair" champion.

Hsu also was a Broadway veteran with a few TV credits when she was cast as a sullen teen and an intergalactic supervillain in the movie "Everything Everywhere All at Once." That led to an unforgettable performance that included dressing as Elvis and walking a pig on a leash.

Like many of the others on the list, Kalukango had racked up plenty of Broadway credits when she took a risk and played the lead in a Broadway musical, "Paradise Square." It led to a best actress in a leading role Tony Award and a stunning moment in the telecast when she sang "Let It Burn."

"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" isn't one of Huerta's biggest roles, but the Mexican actor suddenly launched a hundred memes as the mutant leader of a kingdom based on Mayan and Aztec influences beneath the ocean for centuries. Huerta, known for roles in the Netflix series "Narcos: Mexico" and the movie "The Forever Purge," has taken a big step for movie diversity.

Nwigwe, just nominated for a Grammy as best new artist, has been bubbling up with noted appearances on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series and earning a spot on Michelle Obama's 2020 workout playlist with "I'm Dope." This year, the Houston-based artist was featured on the "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" soundtrack and dropped the EP "moMINTs" to acclaim.

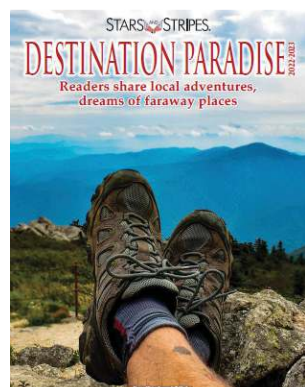
McCormack has worked consistently since 2018, but 2022 seems to have turned into something special with a constellation of roles — "Peaky Blinders," the buzzy, dark

comedy thriller "Bad Sisters," plus a star-making performance as the title character in the film "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande" opposite Emma Thompson.

Ashley, a British actress of Indian heritage with a Tamil background, found herself leading season two of the Regency-era period drama "Bridgerton." She had a role in the series "Sex Education," but playing the fiercely independent Kate Sharma for Shonda Rhimes was her first lead character in a major production.

Deadwyler burst into the awards race this year with her performance in "Till" as Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of teenager Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955. She has also appeared in "The Harder They Come," "Watchmen" and the Netflix series "From Scratch" and "Station Eleven."

Vellani, another member of the Marvel Cinematic Universe on this list, is the exception, having had no such slow burn. The 19-year-old actor in "Ms. Marvel" plays a high school student enamored with all things superheroes only to find herself suddenly wielding powers of her own. And Vellani, in real life, is just starting to find her powers, like all the entertainers nominated here.



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STARS AND STRIPES

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – BREAKTHROUGHS



CHRISTOPHER SMITH, INVISION/AP

Stephanie Hsu, everywhere

Dressed as Elvis and nonchalantly walking a pig on a leash, Stephanie Hsu made a memorable big-screen impression this year.

Hsu actually had two roles in “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” playing both a sullen teen and an intergalactic supervillain for a film that can be called a fantastical science fiction comedy-drama.

With Michelle Yeoh joining Hsu as her onscreen mother, the indie film has garnered critical acclaim, hit over \$100 million in global ticket sales and has sparked Oscar buzz.

“The movie is so special because we could not have possibly expected this to have happened and so we were really able to just throw paint at the wall,” Hsu said. “It came from a very raw place with zero expectations, only trying to tell the story as deeply and honestly as we can.”

Hsu’s performance — combining deep hurt with a real skill with nunchucks while rocking sequined eyes — has made her one of The Associated Press’ Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year.

“I have been working for a really long time and I guess that’s what a breakout is: You chip away and then all of a sudden, there’s one thing that everyone is like, ‘That’s the thing that put you on the map,’” Hsu said.

Hsu was a Broadway veteran with a few TV credits when she worked with the writing and directing duo of Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert for an episode of “Norah from Queens.”

Working with Kwan and Scheinert — know as The Daniels — was a revelation for Hsu and when they contacted her about “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” she never hesitated.

“We’re like artistic soulmates in so many ways,” she said. “When I read the script, in so many ways, it actually made a lot of sense to me, weirdly enough. I don’t know what that says about me.”

The film begins with Yeoh as a struggling laundromat owner who is being audited by the IRS and has a strained relationship with her daughter. The story gets surreal when she discovers she has to connect with parallel universes to prevent cataclysmic destruction, also involving her daughter. It’s also a family drama, with richness in the complex love between relations.

“This movie, in so many ways, embodies what I love to do as an artist. So it feels like the most honest handshake I could make with Hollywood,” she said. “I think art at its very best offers some help in processing or helping us move through a very confusing world and offer some healing. And that is ultimately the type of work that I want to make.”

Hsu began her acting career on Broadway, where she played Karen the Computer in “SpongeBob the Musical,” and Christine Canigula in “Be More Chill.” She was born in California and moved to New York to study at New York University, graduating in 2012.

She showed off her work ethic by combining a punishing eight-show-a-week Broadway schedule with filming “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” on Mondays, her only day off.

“The discipline that forced me into, I think, really prepared me for everything that has happened since. And I feel really grateful that I was given the opportunity to work that hard,” she said.

Hsu will next be seen in Rian Johnson’s Peacock anthology series “Poker Face.” She’ll also star opposite Ashley Park in “JFC,” a raunchy, R-rated comedy directed by Adele Lim.

“What I’m excited to do next, honestly, is to develop more of my own work,” she said. “In order to make this career sustainable and joyful is to be able to dig in and not always just fill shoes for someone else.”

— Mark Kennedy

Iman Vellani resting after marvelous year

With countless auditions, constant rejection and a calendar that’s often in flux, acting professionally can be anxiety-inducing. Once success comes, there can then be added pressure to keep the momentum going, book more jobs, be seen in the right places, and strike while the iron is hot.

Iman Vellani, who had her big break this year as the star of “Ms. Marvel” on Disney+, and will next appear in “The Marvels” movie alongside Brie Larson and Teyonah Parris, is pacing herself and not concerned with the Hollywood rat race.

“I am taking a bit of a break right now,” said the actor over Zoom. “The Marvels’ was extremely stressful on my body, physically and mentally, and it was a lot. I was away from home for like two years and I was only 17 when I left. I am spending time with my family right now and living the nice, calm Ontario life.”

Vellani’s maturity, enthusiasm and acting skills have led to her becoming one of The Associated Press’ Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

Now 20, Vellani could attribute some of her Zen perspective to wise words from Samuel L. Jackson while filming “The Marvels.”

“I remember when Sam Jackson was on set, I had this whole laundry list of questions for him. And I was asking him like, ‘What are the best characteristics of an actor?’ And he was like, ‘Patience.’ I was like, ‘Yes, Sam, you’re right, patience.’ After that, I never complained, ever. If anything took longer than 5 minutes or 10 minutes or coming to set and not even working, you know, it’s all part of the job.”

While she wants to continue with showbiz beyond Marvel, Vellani remains open to possibilities and has two criteria: “I just want to meet cool people and do cool things.”

“I have so much to learn ... I feel Marvel Studios compared to the rest of Hollywood is such a different world. I want to experience what’s out there. I’m in a very lucky position where I’m able to do that, and I’ve built so many incredible connections at this point. So yeah, I don’t know where life is going to take me, but I’m excited and obviously I will work for Marvel until the day I die. I’m loyal.”

Vellani read the comics and watched the films before the opportunity to act in “Ms. Marvel” was even on her radar. She’s especially encouraging and open to those who recognize her and want to chat.

“I’ve lost my anonymity now. I don’t really mind,” said Vellani. “Yes, it’s annoying to kind of lose the ability to have a first impression, but it means so much when people tell me how much the show meant to them. I’ve had so many great conversations with people. I just like to picture them watching the show.”



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Vellani says she had “a two-year countdown” to prepare her for fame. “I got cast during the pandemic. How rare is that, that someone actually gets to mentally prepare for two years to know how their life is going to change?”

— Alicia Rancilio

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STARS AND STRIPES



WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – BREAKTHROUGHS

Joaquina Kalukango, in paradise

Winning a Tony Award as best lead actress in a musical cemented Joaquina Kalukango's place in the Broadway firmament. But it also, surprisingly, cemented Kalukango's belief that she could actually do musicals.

"It was truly a powerful moment, especially for me, because I had such a fear of doing musicals for a very long time. I was an actor at heart," she says. "I think it was a great moment in my trajectory of owning a new side of myself that I wasn't that comfortable with sharing for a while."

Kalukango's show-stopping performance in "Paradise Square" and especially her heartfelt searing second act song "Let It Burn" routinely drew audiences to their feet, a triumph of the 2021-2022 season. Kalukango's astonishing acting and vocal outpouring has made her one of AP's Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year.

The Tony win capped an intensely creative period for Kalukango, who earned a 2020 Tony nomination for her work in the harrowing "Slave Play," a groundbreaking, bracing work that mixed race, sex, taboo desires and class.

On film, she played Betty X opposite Kingsley Ben-Adir in Regina King's "One Night in Miami."



MATT LICARI, INVISION/AP

She also had a recurring role on the HBO series "Lovecraft Country" and appeared in Ava DuVernay's Netflix series "When They See Us."

After graduating from The Juilliard School, Kalukango made her Broadway debut as an understudy in "Godspell" and went on to join the ensemble in "Holler if Ya Hear Me," a musical inspired by Tupac Shakur's music and as Nettie in the 2015 Broadway revival of "The Color Purple" starring Jennifer Hudson.

Kalukango's breakthrough happened when she landed a part in "Paradise Square" about Irish immigrants and Black Americans jostling to survive in New York City in 1863. Her role was widened and deepened until she was the star. Amazingly, she didn't need to audition.

"It had to pinch myself," she says. "I was like, 'OK, kid, here we go. This is something you said you wanted to do and you're about to face a fear. Let's see you do it.'"

— Mark Kennedy



DREW GURIAN, INVISION/AP

Simone Ashley finds magic

Simone Ashley was busy working and traveling when "Bridgerton" debuted on Netflix in December 2020 and was an immediate smash with viewers. The Shonda Rhimes-produced series about the romantic pursuits of a large family in Regency-era London wasn't on Ashley's radar. So, when the audition for season two came about, she didn't quite grasp what a big opportunity lay before her.

"It kind of came at a time of my life where I was living between Los Angeles and London and all of my stuff was in the States," recalled Ashley. "I was just on the road the whole time."

In hindsight, it worked to Ashley's benefit that she wasn't fully aware of what a high-profile project "Bridgerton" would be, so it didn't overwhelm or distract her during the audition process.

"A lot of the time when you audition for something, there is a bit of pressure and you can't help but feel emotionally invested and get your hopes up and all of those things that every actor goes through. This one all happened in like 10 days, and I just didn't really understand what was happening," she said.

Ashley got the role of Kate Sharma, a fiercely independent, sharp, protective older sister who

wins the heart of Anthony Bridgerton, played by Jonathan Bailey. It's Ashley's charisma, charm and grace that make her one of The Associated Press' breakthrough entertainers of 2022.

Although she was already a working actor when she got the job and best-known for the Netflix series "Sex Education," Ashley realizes filming season two of "Bridgerton" was a "once in a lifetime" experience she can never duplicate. "I don't think I'll ever be able to approach a project with that kind of obliviousness, because there will always be a slight expectation and pressure now."

A big part of the magic was her chemistry with Bailey, whom she calls Johnny.

"Among all the chaos and the craziness, as soon as we were in front of the cameras and they were rolling, it was just better. We didn't have to warm up to anything," she said, adding they had a kind of "tunnel vision" while working together.

She's intent to enjoy the ride and "just have fun with it. It's a very fun industry that we're in. It's a lot of hard work, but, you know, it's the entertainment industry."

— Alicia Rancilio

Danielle Deadwyler goes all in for 'Till'

Just the idea of playing Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till, was enough to make Danielle Deadwyler pause.

Playing Till-Mobley meant immersing herself in one of the ugliest chapters of American history, when the 14-year-old Till was lynched in 1955 Mississippi. Just the scene Deadwyler would audition with — when Mamie first sees her son's brutalized corpse — was wrenching. Deadwyler gathered her resolve.

"I wanted to be the person to bear the weight," she says.

In Chinonye Chukwu's "Till," Deadwyler gives one of the most powerful and intensely expressive performances of the year, charting Till-Mobley's profound

metamorphosis into a civil-rights leader. Deadwyler, herself, is undergoing a transformation. In her first lead role in a film, Deadwyler, 40, has come through the other side of playing Mamie with her equilibrium intact but some changes to those internal "dynamics." For her, there will be before, and after, "Till."

"Life is just different," says Deadwyler. "It's learning a new selfhood. Art is self-revelation."

Deadwyler has been making her mark for several years in series like "Station Eleven" and "Atlanta," and in the Western "The Harder They Fall." But her performance as Mamie has catapulted her fame. It's made Deadwyler a top contender for best



DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

actress at the Academy Awards, and an easy choice to be among The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

— Jake Coyle



DAVID CLIFF, INVISION/AP

Daryl McCormack's grand year continues

Daryl McCormack is the zen master.

It's not a new acting role or a level of spiritual enlightenment, it's a nickname he got on set for being extremely laid-back.

The Irish actor is having a busy and rewarding year with ensemble appearances on TV in brutal period drama "Peaky Blinders" and dark comedy thriller "Bad Sisters," plus a star-making performance in the film "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande."

McCormack portrays a sex worker hired by Emma Thompson's frustrated widow character, and the movie got them a best joint lead performance nomination at the British Independent Film Awards. This led to his first ceremony experience. He took his mom.

"I've never had awards season, so I'm just

taking it as it comes, you know. This film was so small, and it's received so much love. ...

"As far as personally, I'm just kind of taking it all in my stride and enjoying the moment," he said, smiling.

Among the honors McCormack has received during a standout career year is being named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

McCormack is on a short break from shooting BBC-Showtime series "The Woman in the Wall," a gothic thriller that involves the Magdalene Laundries — church-run institutions in Ireland for unmarried women and their children, which has been investigated for allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

McCormack, who plays a policeman, calls

it an "important" story that has been "intense, good and rewarding" to film.

Not that he minds hard work.

"I always like to pick projects that I believe in the message behind. In a way, if the work is tiring, it feels rewarding because you know that you're doing something you care about."

Next McCormack would like to play an American character. He's confident his accent skills are up to the task.

As ever, he remains zen about whatever is to come.

"There's no other option. You know, I'm very content and feel very grateful and yeah, I'm very, very happy to see where it all continues to go."

— Hilary Fox

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – BREAKTHROUGHS

Sadie Sink
no stranger
to drama

When Sadie Sink joined the cast of “Stranger Things” in its second season, the then-14-year-old was already a fan of Netflix’s megahit show. But with the series turning many of the teen stars into household names overnight, attempting to carve out her own lane wasn’t easy.

“I kind of knew what I was stepping into, but I didn’t really know until I was in it,” said Sink. “Being the new kid, I think it really gave me a perspective on everything. So, I kind of liked coming in a little bit later, even though I definitely had like the biggest imposter syndrome, like, ever.”

Sink is far from an imposter. Her “Stranger Things” character, Max, was more integral to the storyline last season, and her performance when she freed herself from the evil trance of the monster Vecna while listening to Kate Bush’s “Running Up That Hill” became a huge cultural moment for both the song, which roared back onto the charts, and Sink.

The 20-year-old has joined her “Stranger Things” co-stars as a household name, leading to her selection as one of The Associated Press’ Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

The Texan has built an impressive résumé first rooted in theater, and now blossoming with “The Whale,” Darren Aronofsky’s buzzy new film touted as Brendan Fraser’s comeback role as an obese English teacher whose health issues prompt him to reconnect with his estranged daughter, played by Sink.

“This has definitely been a big year just in terms of career milestones,” she said. “It’s just nice to have these opportunities and to have kind of found acting at a young age and to be able to stick with it.”

Sink, who’s also become a high fashion front-row regular at top shows like Chanel and Kate Spade, is preparing herself for the fifth and final season of “Stranger Things,” set to begin production next year.

— Gary Gerard Hamilton



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Tenoch Huerta now a global hero

The opening credits of “Wakanda Forever” fittingly say “introducing Tenoch Huerta.”

What an introduction it’s been.

Huerta’s role as Namor in the “Black Panther” sequel has wowed audiences, catapulting him onto the global stage and sparking conversations about race and identity, both in his native Mexico and abroad. It’s also led to Huerta being named one of The Associated Press’ Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

Like many of the Breakthrough Entertainer honorees, Huerta isn’t a newcomer. He’s appeared in numerous films such as “The Forever Purge” and series like “Mozart in the Jungle” and “Narcos: Mexico.” But “Wakanda Forever” has given him a new level of global exposure, which he’s using to advance several causes like inclusivity and social justice.

Huerta grew up in Ecatepec, a suburban area of Mexico City, infamous for its high levels of delinquency and often referred to disparagingly by the people in the capital.

“It’s not easy to come from there,” said Huerta. The area is close to the capital, but “you can spend a couple of hours to reach the nearest subway station, there’s violence.”

Huerta, 41, acknowledged that the fact that he didn’t see “brown skin people” like him on screen or theater, and definitively not in advertisements, made him believe that acting wasn’t a serious possibility. “You can’t dream of something that you can’t see,” he said.

He spent many years playing American football, and it wasn’t until his father prodded him that he considered acting. “When I was 16, my father insisted to me to become an actor; he pushed me to take workshops,” said Huerta. “... I liked it a lot but, (it) never was my life plan; it was just a hobby.”

He kept going to casting calls and was selected to play a gardener who entertains white rich youngsters in Gael García Bernal’s debut feature “Deficit” (2007). That took him to the Cannes Film Festival for the first time, a journey he repeated in 2011 with Everardo Gout’s “Days of Grace,” for which he won the Ariel, the Mexican equivalent to the Oscars, as best actor.

His “Wakanda Forever” character is the leader of Tlalokan, the subaquatic world where Namor lives. It is a vibrant world inspired by pre-Hispanic architecture and culture, created with help from Mayan experts.

“Finally people like us, we’re able to see ourselves in this movie, so proud, so beautiful and so powerful, that’s a gift,” said Huerta.

Seeing himself as a breakthrough artist brings Huerta hope.

“I don’t know how my life is gonna be changed from this point on, but I hope this movie affects the people, affects the kids and if the kids are able to look at themselves on the mirror and feel proud,” he said. “If they are able to look at them and feel proud of themselves, for me, that’s perfect.”

— Berenice Bautista

Tobe Nwigwe lives with purpose

Tobe Nwigwe didn’t expect to be nominated for best new artist after he submitted his music to the Grammys, but he’s learned to embrace the unexpected.

“I felt like it was going to add to our underdog story,” explained the Houston emcee. But bringing his index finger and thumb closely together, he added, “That underdog story’s about that small now.”

Nwigwe has become one of music’s most buzzworthy rappers despite no major label, booking agent or marketing machine. He has already performed at the BET Awards, headed an NPR Tiny Desk Concert with more than 4 million views, was featured on the “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever” soundtrack, and whose “I’m Dope” song earned a spot on Michelle Obama’s 2020 workout playlist.

The first-generation Nigerian American, whose latest release is the EP “momINTs,” is a breath of fresh air to hip-hop, welcomed by celebrity admirers like Beyoncé, Dave Chappelle, Erykah Badu and Jill Scott, who called him a “genius.”

“My purpose specifically is to be a conduit to the realization of purpose in other people’s lives, in whatever vehicle God would have in me,” he says. “The what I do ain’t as important as who I am.”

Nwigwe has been named among The

Associated Press’ Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022.

Lauded for his creative rhyming styles, Nwigwe built his following through social media with virtually no radio play. His #getTWISTEDsundays campaign gained attention by delivering stunning visual content, including music videos with gorgeous cinematography and syncopated choreography.

Songs like “FYE FYE” featuring his wife, Fat, and “Been Broke” featuring Fat, 2 Chainz and Chamillionaire, showcase his high-energy swag, while records like “Try Jesus” and “Make It Home” highlight his soulful artistry.

Rarely using profanity, Nwigwe’s Christian faith is often infused in his rhymes, though he intentionally aims his message toward as wide a base as possible.

Nwigwe cites an eclectic group of artists as influences, including Nigerian icon Fela Kuti, Lauryn Hill, Andre 3000, The Notorious B.I.G. and ’70s soul.

These days, it’s not just major music labels who are courting Nwigwe, but Hollywood, too. Thanks to a friendship with comedian and fellow Houstonian Mo Amer, he co-starred in Amer’s Netflix series “Mo,” and he landed a role in the upcoming blockbuster film “Transformers: Rise



MICHAEL WYKE/AP

of the Beasts” — his first acting job.

As Nwigwe garners more attention, some may wonder how much longer his small, close-knit team can handle the demand. But he isn’t worried, saying they’ve never been allergic to hard work.

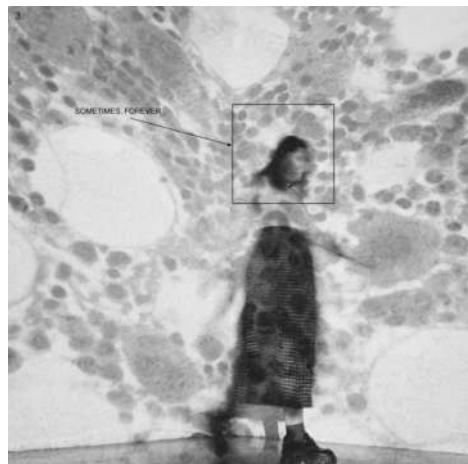
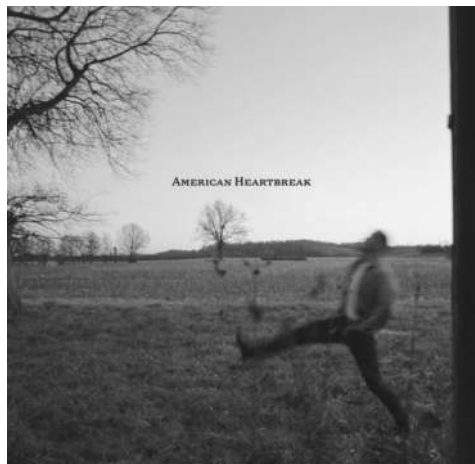
“I tell people all the time, just die empty. Just don’t leave no potential on the table. Just do everything that you can do with every single day that you got,” he said. “Tomorrow’s not promised — live like it.”

— Gary Gerard Hamilton



TAYLOR JEWELL, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – MUSIC



The year in music

Beyoncé, The Weeknd, Zach Bryan among 2022's best albums

Associated Press

The following are 10 of the best albums of the year, as selected by The Associated Press entertainment journalists.

Beyoncé, 'Renaissance'

Few would be shocked that Beyoncé's "Renaissance" makes our top albums list, but just because it's low-hanging fruit doesn't negate how delicious it is. Dropping her first album in six years, Queen Bey once again proved why she's worth the wait. Led by the multi-format dance track "Break My Soul" and the TikTok-crazed "Cuff It," which both reached No. 1 on various Billboard charts, including "Soul" reaching the top of the Hot 100, "Renaissance" boasted plenty of fan favorites including "Cozy," "Alien Superstar," "Church Girl," "Plastic off the Sofa" and "Virgo's Groove." But beyond the two-stepping and body-rolling was the messaging within the music, championing Black women and reminding the LBGQT community they have an ally in her. Whether meticulously planned or purely coincidental, her highness released the album as the coronavirus pandemic moves behind us; if her goal was to get us out of our houses and out dancing again, then mission accomplished.

— Gary Gerard Hamilton

The Weeknd, 'Dawn FM'

Making a low-key entry last January, "Dawn FM" is a concept album that The Weeknd likened to listening to a radio station in purgatory, hence its mix of

styles and effects from the '70s, '80s and '90s mixed in with modern production. Much of it is downright weird: The fake British accent, a spoken-word interlude by Quincy Jones, the funny radio ads, narration by Jim Carrey and the singer digitally aged on the cover. It is also brilliant, a dance record with lyrics of hopelessness, with nods to Michael Jackson, New Wave, neo-soul, Prince and Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. If this is what purgatory sounds like, heaven is overrated.

— Mark Kennedy

Rosalía, 'Motomami'

Spanish singer Rosalía turned three years of anguish and home sickness into mega successful third album "Motomami" ("biker chick"). It was perhaps impossible not to make lemonade out of lemons for such a bold artist whose ease in playing with genres and words are her greatest strengths. Described as an alternative reggaeton record, the 16-track "Motomami" delivers something for everyone and every mood. From "Candy's" stripped-down reggaeton, to "Chicken Teriyaki's" playfulness and "Diablo's" experimental sound, "Hentai's" piano power ballad or "La Fama's" classic Latin beats, Rosalía shows her prowess as a singer. Her four Latin Grammys for the album were just the beginning. Next stop: the world.

— Cristina Jaleru

Zach Bryan, 'American Heartbreak'

In the age of streaming, the musical floodgates are wide open as artists release multiple projects in a single year: EPs, double albums, deluxe albums and on and on. Country artist Zach Bryan upped the ante by dropping the 34-song album "American Heartbreak" as his major label debut in 2022. The Navy veteran's stories span the vast landscape of his Oklahoma upbringing with coming-of-age ragers like "Heavy Eyes," the wanderlust on "Highway Boys" and odes to the towns he's outgrown like "Oklahoma City." His stripped-down production and confessional, narrative lyrics have earned him comparisons to Jason Isbell and Taylor Swift (He's a Swiftie). But he's at his best when he's describing the colors of those Western vistas in the standout track "Something in the Orange," as he dwells in the loneliness of heartbreak. Bryan has proved he's providing both quality and quantity.

— Kristin M. Hall

Larry June, 'Spaceships on the Blade'

Drake. Kendrick Lamar. Nas. These hip-hop heavyweights released some of the best albums of the year. Some might even think Earl Sweatshirt's "Sick" was just as top notch. But the musician who

has stood above them was rapper Larry June through "Spaceships on the Blade." It's the San Francisco-based rapper's 10th solo studio album and most impressive body of work since his 2018 debut. With his laid-back demeanor and infectious ad lib "Aye, Aye, Aye," June thrives throughout on songs such as "Extra of Um" featuring Babyface Ray, "Don't Check Me," "Another Day, Pt. 2" and "Breakfast in Monaco." On well-produced tracks, he takes listeners on a journey of a successful hustler who makes driving luxury cars, living in high-rise condominiums and spending \$50,000 during vacation seem like an easy feat. But he also shows a deeper side of his rap persona. On "Appreciate It All," he talks about grinding hard for his son, learning how to love from his mother and acquiring real estate in hopes of achieving generational wealth. Throughout "Spaceships," June is a force to be reckoned with.

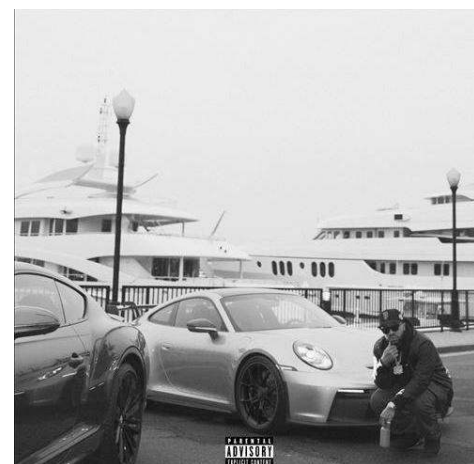
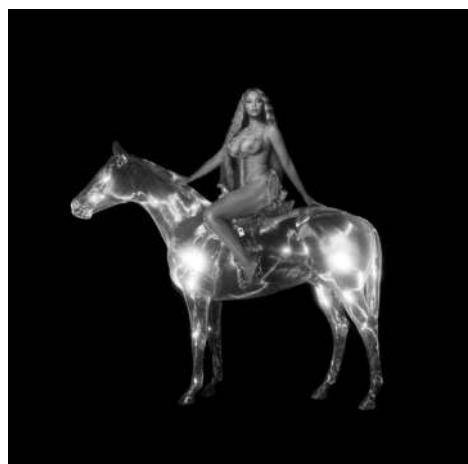
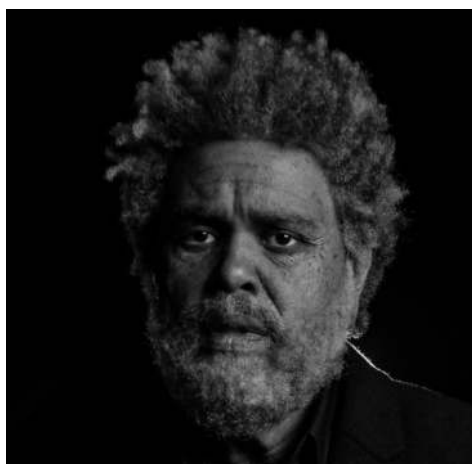
— Jonathan Landrum Jr.

Jackson Wang, 'Magic Man'

Former pop idol Jackson Wang turned solo artist turned "Magic Man" on his sophomore album. With an incisive, cohesive sound that harks back to '90s rock mixed with '80s synths, Wang's record shows he's ready for a leading role; the character he plays in "Magic Man" is a debonair, seductive stranger who likes the pleasures of life. The singer rises up to the challenge of delivering some sultry vocals off the back of classic guitar riffs in "Blow," "Cruel" and "Champagne Cool."

SEE ALBUMS ON PAGE 29

Top row, from left: "American Heartbreak," Zach Bryan; "The Man From Waco," Charley Crockett; "Sometimes, Forever," Soccer Mommy; "Magic Man," Jackson Wang. Bottom: "MOTOMAMI," Rosalía; "Dawn FM," The Weeknd; "Renaissance," Beyoncé; "Spaceships on the Blade," Larry June.



WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – MUSIC

‘Bad Habit,’ ‘Unholy,’ ‘Cuff It’ top best songs list

Associated Press pair of Beyoncé songs — “Cuff It” and “Break My Soul” — along with undeniable hits “Bad Habit” from Steve Lacy and “As It Was” by Harry Styles — are among the The Associated Press’ selection of top songs of 2022.

Lizzo delighted fans all year with the infectious “About Damn Time,” while Taylor Swift was the year’s “Anti-Hero.” This year was full of great collabs including “Die Hard” by Kendrick Lamar featuring Blxst and Amanda Reifer, “Unholy” by Sam Smith and Kim Petras and “Spitting Off the Edge of the World” by Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Perfume Genius. The off-kilter “Part of the Band” by The 1975 doesn’t fit in any genre, but found a spot in the roster.

Ten of the best songs of the year, as selected by Associated Press entertainment journalists.

Steve Lacy, ‘Bad Habit’

It took nearly three months, but Steve Lacy’s “Bad Habit” topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart and has continued to thrive. The multi-genre song, a single from his album “Gemini Rights,” became the first record to ever top the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop, Hot R&B, Hot Rock and Alternatives charts simultaneously. With a funky bass line, Lacy shows some regret after missing an opportunity to approach a love interest.

— Jonathan Landrum Jr.

Harry Styles, ‘As It Was’

Harry Styles could take some advice from the lyrics to his chart-topper “As It Was,” a bit-sweet and brightly packaged



This combination of photos shows musicians Steve Lacy, left; Beyoncé, center; and Harry Styles.

bop: “Nothing to say / when everything gets in the way.” The song is deceptively upbeat with a jingly synth-pop beat. But the lyrics are self-referentially melancholic as he accepts the reality of change that even he is not quite ready for.

— Kristin M. Hall

Beyoncé, ‘Cuff It’

This feel-good dance track captures the spirit of fun, romance and infatuation all in nearly four minutes of music, and while that’s longer than most radio hits these days, the song leaves you wishing Queen Bey would’ve extended the track even more.

— Gary Gerard Hamilton

Taylor Swift, ‘Anti-Hero’

Self-loathing never sounded so good as on “Anti-Hero,” which went to the top of the Billboard singles chart for weeks. It is peak

Swift: Confessional to the point of horror, depressing in its inevitable tears. “I’m the problem,” she sings. “It’s me.” “This song really is a real guided tour throughout all the things I tend to hate about myself,” she has written. Yet it deserves adoration.

— Mark Kennedy

Kendrick Lamar, ‘Die Hard’ featuring Blxst and Amanda Reifer

Kendrick Lamar has several standout tracks off his Grammy-nominated album “Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers.” But one of the most vibrantly enjoyable is “Die Hard” featuring singer-rapper Blxst and Barbadian singer Amanda Reifer.

The artists collectively blend their voices on the hit song — which delves into trust and battling demons.

— Jonathan Landrum Jr.

Lizzo, ‘About Damn Time’

Lizzo’s infectious bop hit the indoor-dazed populace right in the solar plexus and shattered the dance floors. This song says it’s OK to claw back a little happiness after our collective pandemic trauma with the help of some pop music.

— Cristina Jaleru

The 1975, ‘Part of the Band’

“Part of the Band” is the off-kilter jewel in The 1975’s excellent album, “Being Funny in a Foreign Language.” It caroms from cellos to lounge ballad to sax solo, with dense, funny lyrics. “Am I ironically woke? The butt of my joke? Or am I just some post-coke, average, skinny bloke calling his ego imagination?” frontman Matty Healy sings. It makes you stop and listen.

— Mark Kennedy

Sam Smith and Kim Petras, ‘Unholy’

If there was one good song to start the cold season, it’s the sensuous, risqué “Unholy” — leaning on Sam Smith’s translucent vocals and Kim Petras’ petulant energy. A startling departure from Smith’s weepy ballads, this slow but electrifying tune got its general stripes first on TikTok with the singers’ dance challenge.

— Cristina Jaleru

Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Perfume Genius, ‘Spitting Off the Edge of the World’

Post-punk rockers Yeah Yeah Yeahs returned with their first new album since 2013, and the opening dark synths of their first single “Spitting Off the Edge of the World” delivered the kind of fist-pumping energy that Karen O and company are known for. Karen O’s distinctive vocals on the opening line, “Cowards, here’s the sun, so bow your heads,” are aptly matched with Perfume Genius’ delicate and glamorous voice. It’s a great return to form.

— Kristin M. Hall

Beyoncé, ‘Break My Soul’

The house track “Break My Soul” spanned genres, dominating airplay on R&B, pop and dance formats. The song reached No. 1 on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart and also reached the top of the R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart, and along with “Cuff It,” marked the first time since 2003 that the icon had multiple No. 1s on the chart in the same year.

— Gary Gerard Hamilton

Albums: The list of the year’s best includes Bad Bunny, Soccer Mommy

FROM PAGE 28

But where it all takes off is the pop ditty “Drive It Like You Stole It,” which lights up the disco-ball section of the amygdala. Some magic stuff indeed.

— Cristina Jaleru

Soccer Mommy, ‘Sometimes, Forever’

Sophie Allison and her band Soccer Mommy’s third album is a wonderfully varied mix, from the industrial harshness of “Unholy Affliction” to the eerie “Following Eyes” to the airy “With U.” The title “Sometimes, Forever,” suggests a push-and-pull of light and dark, happiness and sadness, from song to song but also within songs.

One connection with another album on this list is producer Oneohtrix Point Never, who helped shape The Weeknd’s “Dawn FM.” He gave Soccer Mommy a layered, dark-synth gloom. One highlight

is “Shotgun,” a song of devotion, with the lyric “Cold beer and ice cream is all we keep / The only things we really need.”

— Mark Kennedy

Blxst, ‘Before You Go’

Blxst is considered as the preeminent voice of Los Angeles R&B after the release of his mixtape album “No Love Lost” in 2020. But the singer-rapper expanded his reach with his impeccable album “Before You Go” along with his recent Grammy nominations for work on Kendrick Lamar’s single “Die Hard.” On “Before You Go,” he delivers an assortment of catchy hooks and smooth melodies that earned praise from critics and fans. He cleverly works through the matters of handling relationships on “About You” and “Still Omw,” a fan favorite. He talks about experiencing the ocean views and driving down the Pacific Coast Highway while escaping the fake element of his hometown in “Fake Love in LA,” featuring Arin

Ray. In all, Blxst put together a full collection of infectious songs from start to finish.

— Jonathan Landrum Jr.

Charley Crockett, ‘The Man From Waco’

Americana standout Charley Crockett sets the scene in his cinematic “The Man From Waco,” an album that interlinks Western filmmaking, the mythmaking of cowboy culture and the R&B and soul of the Gulf states. The Texas-born singer is a prolific independent musician with a strong hustle formed in his early street musician years. The title track centers on a lonesome gunman who accidentally kills his lover in a jealous rage, with a beautiful horn section over the loping acoustic guitar. Crockett punches deep in the Stax-inspired ’70s groove on “I’m Just a Clown,” and a swinging piano and trumpet winds along in “Trinity River.”

Crockett’s old soul isn’t just a nostalgic trick, as this postmodern troubadour is

creating new ties to classic themes.

— Kristin M. Hall

Bad Bunny, ‘Un Verano Sin Ti’

Bad Bunny is a bona fide global superstar, and if you weren’t aware, “Un Verano Sin Ti” snapped you into reality. Spending 13 weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200, the Puerto Rican artist expertly blended reggaeton, pop and EDM, effortlessly transporting you to a beach on his home island for a temporary reprieve.

Party-ready songs such as “Tití Me Preguntó” and “Me Porto Bonito” featuring Chencho Corleone each racked up half a billion views on YouTube. He also used his music to criticize issues on the island such as gentrification and repeated power outages.

Did it matter that “Un Verano Sin Ti” is mainly in Spanish? No. While dancing, his music motivates you be curious and learn more. That’s what great art does.

— Gary Gerard Hamilton

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW – TELEVISION

Worthy options abound

Washington Post writers select favorite TV series

As the so-called Golden (and Silver) Ages of television continue to recede in the rearview mirror, we've entered what can best be described as the Overwhelming Age of TV. That's not necessarily a bad thing! But there was so much small-screen fare to choose from that 2022 became a year featuring not one, not two, but (at least) three shows about tech startups. (And to think some people call TV the idiot box.) It was the year Star Wars grew up and pandemic shows got boosted into second seasons. The same year that found HBO Max with so many shows, its parent company simply began deleting them. From chefs to teachers, serial killers to murder detectives, 2022's slate included a little something for everyone. It was also the year that ended with The Washington Post seeking its next TV critic, so the Style department's most telly-minded writers culled together a list of their favorite series from the past 12 months:

1. 'The Bear'

"The Bear" may be a lengthy undertaking for the anxious television pausers among us, but boy is it worth it. Few series this year so effectively enveloped viewers in the physical sensations of a setting — in this case, the hectic kitchen of Original Beef of Chicagoland, a Chicago sandwich joint run by Carmen "Carry" Berzatto (Jeremy Allen White), a fine dining chef who takes over the family business after his older brother's suicide. Praised as a wincingly honest depiction of restaurant kitchens, Hulu's "The Bear" also proves revelatory in how it explores the way grief informs Carry's sense of duty. White delivers a convincing performance alongside pitch-perfect co-stars Ayo Edebiri and Ebon Moss-Bachrach, whose characters often butt heads in the Original Beef kitchen.

— Sonia Rao

2. 'Abbott Elementary'

"Abbott Elementary" is good. That applies to what's happening on screen in this excellent Emmy Award-winning sitcom and for how the show makes you feel. In its second season on ABC, Quinta Brunson's comedy about overworked teachers in an underfunded public school still feels hopeful without being preachy. Sure, all



"Abbott Elementary" creator Quinta Brunson and Tyler James Williams have to deal with their underfunded school's many problems.



FX Networks

"The Bear" (above: Jeremy Allen White, Lionel Boyce and Ebon Moss-Bachrach) depicts restaurant kitchens with honesty.

the toilets in the building are broken, but someone's got a plan. There's always a plan. In a time when the world's problems seem insurmountable, "Abbott" consistently delivers small steps forward with sharp observations from the stellar cast — including Brunson, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Tyler James Williams and Janelle James — about what the best of us do when the crap can't even hit the fan because the fans don't work. The message underneath each punchline is obviously "pay these people more!" but also the somehow surprising "teachers are human, too."

— Helena Andrews-Dyer

3. 'The White Lotus'

Showrunner Mike White already walked a tightrope when he created, wrote and directed the entirety of "The White Lotus," an HBO show set on a Hawaiian resort that aired during a global pandemic that kept us all in our homes. His reward was 10 Emmys. Ours is the second season, which flips the Aloha State for Sicily and introduces an excellent, almost entirely new cast including Aubrey Plaza, F. Murray Abraham, Michael Imperioli and Haley Lu Richardson. White's creation remains as scathing (and hilarious) as ever — and again showcases his ear for sharp but realistic dialogue. The more tightly plotted second season focuses less on class divides and more on sexual politics. One theme, though, remains clear: Try as we

might, we can never escape ourselves, even during vacation.

— Travis M. Andrews

4. 'Atlanta'

Donald Glover's "Atlanta," the FX dramedy about two cousins navigating Atlanta's rap scene, ended this year after airing Seasons 3 and 4 nearly back-to-back after a four-year hiatus. The series always offered a unique and groundbreaking mix of slice-of-life and surreal narratives that elevated the coming-of-age story at its heart, and its final two outings were no different. The third season — which followed Earn (Glover) and Alfred, aka Paper Boi (Brian Tyree Henry), as the rapper embarked on a European tour — was punctuated by stand-alone episodes that skewered white privilege and cultural appropriation. The fourth season stayed closer to home, but one of its best episodes took the shape of a mockumentary that made a case for "A Goofy Movie" as "the Blackest movie of all time." Naturally.

— Bethonie Butler

5. 'Andor'

"Andor" is the most grown-up, gritty, sexy and serious Star Wars that has ever been on the screen, and undisputedly an unrivaled achievement during the streaming renaissance of this far-away galaxy on Disney+ — and yes, that includes any-



HBO

Many would agree docu-comedy "The Rehearsal," Nathan Fielder's first HBO reality show (Fielder, above left), is unlike anything else that has ever been on TV.

thing with Baby Yoda in it. Inspirational speeches, espionage and despair highlight this 12-episode season, as showrunner Tony Gilroy isn't so much interested in lightsabers and the Dark Side as he is the little people who are affected by those staples. A fearless Diego Luna (Cassian Andor) shines in the titular journeyman role, alongside outstanding performances from Stellan Skarsgård (Luthen Rael) as the architect of a rebellion with no soul left to spare, and Genevieve O'Reilly (Mon Mothma), who can't become the heroine she's destined to be without first getting her hands dirty.

— David Betancourt

6. 'The Rehearsal'

One aspect of Nathan Fielder's comedic mission — inspired partly by reality TV — has always been to see how just how far people are willing to go, particularly when they're being watched. Could he convince a small business to sell poo-flavored frozen yogurt, for example, and convince customers to try it? The answers, as seen in "Nathan For You," were yes, and yes. "The Rehearsal," his nearly indescribable first project on HBO, at first feels like an extension of that show. Can he convince people to rehearse real-life situations, from offering an apology to raising a child, until they've exhausted every potential

SEE WORTHY ON PAGE 31



FX

"Atlanta," about the city's rap scene, released its third and fourth seasons this year. Above, Brian Tyree Henry, LaKeith Stanfield and creator Donald Glover.

WEEKEND: YEAR IN REVIEW — BOOKS

Turning the pages of 2022's best books

BY CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
Chicago Tribune

It was a particularly good year for excellent books and 10 is way too few. In order of authors' names:

"Planes" by Peter C. Baker: A criminally underrated novel about the ways our choices resonate far beyond ourselves, without our knowledge, in directions we never anticipate. Baker tells compassionate parallel stories: A Muslim woman in Rome pieces together redacted letters from her husband, held in an American black site during the George W. Bush administration; meanwhile, in North Carolina, a real estate agent spars with a conservative school board while having an affair with a businessman who owns a small airline leasing planes to the government for terrorist renditions. Baker does not write victims or villains — just complicated people.

"Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands" by Kate Beaton: A vast graphic memoir about a young cartoonist (Beaton) who leaves her home in Nova Scotia for the supposed gold rush to be found in rural Alberta, where dinosaur-giant machinery carves bleak scars through lush forests. Keaton needs to pay down college loans, but ends up with a street-level view of Canada's most controversial (and rich) landscape. History rears up, as well as sexual harassment, but also a humane profile of struggling workers, the sorts who produce sneakers, smartphones and fossil fuels but remain faceless.

"Glory" by NoViolet Bulawayo: If the premise of this Zimbabwean author's Booker Prize finalist sounds familiar — an allegorical satire of the ruling class in an African nation, with horses, dogs and goats playing characters clearly inspired by tyrannical former Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe and others — you're thinking "Animal Farm." Yet that costume is worn lightly for this tale of resilience and revolution, documenting the cruelty of the old regime and the performative promises of the new one. The result is an epic that argues with laughter and a lot of anger for the boundlessness of storytelling.

"The Philosophy of Modern Song" by Bob Dylan: Oh, boy, yup — just what you'd expect from the inscrutable Nobel Prize winner, and yet nothing you'd expect. To put it another way: classic Dylan. And a bit more: a big smile of a read. That academic title is a wink. Dylan selects



CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI, CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS

more than 60 of his favorite songs — nothing more recent than The Clash, many from the 1950s — then leaps into freewheeling history, lots of associative memories and, here and there, thoughts on songwriting and creativity and even a few subjects he has long avoided (such as protest music). It's also just a joy of smart design, a scrapbook of 20th century America, photos and aesthetics.

"The Rabbit Hutch" by Tess Gunty: Unstable in the very best ways, ambitious without driving you to distraction and touching without sentiment, this snapshot of loneliness in a Midwest apartment block is a transcendent debut. Gunty (now a National Book Award winner for fiction) displays a love of language and rhythm without shortchanging the individuality of every resident. A century after "Winesburg, Ohio," she updates our American patchwork with spectacular results.

"The Devil Takes You Home" by Gabino Iglesias: Vintage noir, with an air of "Heart of Darkness," played at America's southern border, with all the racism and heartache that is implied. (Iglesias calls it "barrio noir.") What you're not expecting is magic realism (and that bit of horror) paired to pitch-dark crime fiction about cyclical violence.

"South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation" by Imani Perry: The recent winner of the National Book Award for nonfiction,

this is not quite the travelogue that's promised but is way more interesting: a genre-trip full of detours into history, folklore, memoir and art, moving state by state, told by an author determined to push past the archetypes of one region to get at the ways in which the entire country's legacy of contradictions protects us from hard truths.

"My Phantoms" by Gwendoline Riley: Get on the Riley train. Though unknown in this country, the English writer with a half-dozen short novels to her name has seemed a quiet patron saint of awkward family bonds. Few capture so well the ticklish unease of how adult children relate to difficult parents. Fewer still capture that minefield of everyday conversation. Here, a 40-something academic visits her hermit of a mother, which Riley depicts with a stark, cackle-out-loud precision.

"Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne" by Katherine Rundell: What a blast. And how strange to say that about the biography of an Elizabethan poet more associated with unenthusiastic English class assignments than a breezy, bloody, delightful portrait of 17th century England and celebrity. As Rundell — a children's book author whose premium on clarity is refreshing — writes about Donne: "It's a little like mounting a horse only to discover that it is an elephant: large and unfamiliar."

"Sandy Hook: An American Tragedy and the Battle for Truth" by Elizabeth Williamson: At first I read this slowly, almost resistant — the first 50 pages or so is a ground-level, ticktock recounting of the 2012 massacre of New England school children. Your blood pressure spikes. Then Williamson, a New York Times reporter, delivers release: an exacting, moral reckoning for Alex Jones and the online trolls who used the killing as a vehicle to buckle the reality beneath society itself.

Notable books and honorable mentions: "Trust" by Hernan Diaz; "American Midnight: The Great War, a Violent Peace and Democracy's Forgotten Crisis" by Adam Hochschild; "Fairy Tale" by Stephen King; "What Moves the Dead" by T. Kingfisher; "Art Is Life: Icons & Iconoclasts, Visionaries & Vigilantes, & Flashes of Hope in the Night" by Jerry Saltz; "His Name Is George Floyd: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice" by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa; "Lost & Found" by Kathryn Schulz; "Camera Man: Buster Keaton, the Dawn of Cinema, and the Invention of the Twentieth Century" by Dana Stevens; "An Immense World" by Ed Yong; "Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow" by Gabrielle Zevin.

Worthy: No shortage of serious, funny television options this year

FROM PAGE 30

outcome? As is always the case with Fielder, though, the insane premise is merely a launch pad for something far more peculiar, as he begins to grapple with the parts of life he's missed out on in pursuit of his career, and the potential damage he's caused with his docu-comedy pranks. It's difficult to recall a more polarizing piece of television. By its final, truly-difficult-to-watch episode, some will adore it, many will despise it, but everyone can agree that nothing like this has ever been on TV.

— T.M.A.

7. 'The Patient'

Steve Carell takes a dramatic turn in FX on Hulu's 10-episode thriller about a therapist who gets kidnapped by one of his patients: Sam (Domhnall Gleeson), a serial killer desperate to stop murdering. The acclaimed series is grounded in the nail-biting suspense of its novel premise — rarefied territory in today's TV landscape — as it explores the petty motivations that

fuel Sam's repeated killings, as well as the childhood trauma behind his inescapable rage. But "The Patient," from "The Americans" creators Joel Fields and Joe Weisberg, also peers into the life of Carell's Alan Strauss, a Jewish man grieving the death of his wife and his estrangement from their increasingly religious son. As he's confined to his patient's basement, Alan reflects on his past and a future that seems achingly improbable.

— B.B.

8. 'The Dropout'

Amanda Seyfried portrays Elizabeth Holmes, disgraced founder of the failed biotech company Theranos, in Hulu's absorbing eight-episode miniseries. Created by Elizabeth Meriwether, "The Dropout" traces the downfall of Theranos from Holmes' brief time at Stanford University — where her idea for a revolutionary blood-testing company first took underdeveloped shape — to the company's improbable rise in Silicon Valley despite clear problems with its technology. The

cast features a worthy ensemble including Kate Burton, William H. Macy, Laurie Metcalf and Sam Waterston. But it's Seyfried's Emmy-winning performance (and pitch-perfect voice modulation) that nails the unique mix of desperation and entitlement that fueled Holmes' downfall and makes the series so compelling.

— B.B.

9. 'This Fool'

Comedian Chris Estrada's existential comedy on Hulu is one of several working-class sitcoms that helped to define the year in television with its irreverent and observational humor. Based loosely on his experience as a Mexican American who grew up in Inglewood, Calif., and South Los Angeles, "This Fool" follows Julio (Estrada) as his cousin Luis (Frankie Quinones) returns to his family's multi-generational household after completing an eight-year prison sentence. The hilarious misadventures mount as co-dependent Julio — employed at a gang rehabilitation program called Hugs Not Drugs — tries to

help his cousin adjust to life on the outside, which has changed almost as much as it has remained stagnant.

— B.B.

10. 'Under the Banner of Heaven'

In Hulu's haunting Utah-based true-crime miniseries, Oscar and Tony nominee Andrew Garfield gives a virtuoso performance as Jeb Pyre, a devout detective whose faith as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is shaken while investigating the brutal murder of a woman and her child that might have ties to the church, widely known as the Mormon church. Based on the nonfiction book of the same title by Jon Krakauer and guided by the steady hand of showrunner Dustin Lance Black, the show never condescends, preaches or particularly judges — even during flashbacks depicting Joseph Smith's founding of the religion. Rounding out the cast are Daisy Edgar-Jones and Wyatt Russell.

— T.M.A.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA VILLARI/Stars and Stripes

Caring for your skin this winter

Experts offer their tips on keeping the body's largest organ healthy when temperatures drop and the air gets dry

BY LESLY GREGORY

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

While summer months require you to protect your skin with layers of sunscreen, you're not out of the woods when winter arrives. As the air turns from hot and humid to cold and dry, skin can quickly lose moisture.

"Dry skin is one of the most common skin issues that arise in winter," said Dr. Elizabeth Richwine, board-certified dermatologist at Marietta Dermatology & The Skin Cancer Center in Marietta, Ga.

Running your heater to keep warm also plays a part in taking moisture out of your skin, potentially causing it to become dry, itchy and flaky. For older adults, additional factors can make skin more susceptible to drying out in winter.

"As people age, their skin loses collagen and becomes thinner and more prone to damage," said Dr. Sivan Ben-Moshe, assistant professor of medicine in the Emory University Department of Medicine, Division of General Medicine and Geriatrics, in Atlanta.

When skin is too dry and thin, it's more vulnerable to cracking and bleeding. Many people over 55 also are on medications that can dry out the skin, or have a pre-existing skin condition that the cold weather exacerbates. Eczema and psoriasis, for example, can flare up when your skin dries out. Since the conditions that cause dry skin are somewhat unavoidable, the best approach is to appropriately care for your skin. Even before applying topical products, it's best to remember to hydrate.

"Drinking enough fluids will keep your skin hydrated,"

Ben-Moshe said.

Building on the idea of hydration, Richwine suggested you use a humidifier during the winter to put the moisture back into the air your heater is pulling out. To help keep your skin hydrated longer, use mild soaps and moisturizers without a heavy scent.

"Heavily-scented products can increase skin dryness and irritation due to the perfumes used in them," Richwine said.

All the added chemicals and perfumes in heavily-scented products can cause allergic reactions, Ben-Moshe said. This can cause even more irritation for delicate skin. In the winter especially, look for a thicker moisturizer to combat the dry air. A heavy cream or ointment may work better than your daily body lotion. Once you find a product that works best for you, when you apply it also matters. Since soap and water can wipe away the natural oils in your skin, using a moisturizer while you're still damp from a bath or shower can be beneficial, as long as you rub it in well.

Speaking of showers, Richwine suggested you swap a hot, steamy shower for a warm one during the winter months. The hot water itself can also contribute to skin dryness. It's also important to not ignore your skin when you leave the house. The cold air is damaging as well and can dry you out.

"Protect your skin from the elements by wearing gloves, scarves and protective clothing if out in the cold," Richwine said.

Additionally, try not to remain in the cold for too long.

"Our bodies aren't good at self-regulating temperatures

as we age, and people may not realize they're becoming hypothermic," Ben-Moshe said.

Winter also brings about an increase in hand washing as the flu and other viruses become more prevalent. This puts the skin on your hands especially at risk of drying out. Even using sanitizer can lead to dry skin.

"In the winter, we often see cracking of the skin on the hands, which is both painful and can become an entryway for infection," Richwine said.

This is why moisturizing is so important.

But skin care for those over 55 shouldn't only happen in the winter. Dr. Richwine suggested getting yearly skin checks with a dermatologist to check not only for skin conditions but skin cancer as well.

According to Ben-Moshe, sunscreen can also play a year-round role in keeping skin healthy.

"Wearing sunscreen or UV protective clothing year-round will help protect your skin's natural components and decrease your risk of skin cancer," Ben-Moshe said.

Keeping skin healthy is important because it plays an important role in overall health.

"The skin is the body's largest organ ... it is our barrier against the outside world. It keeps hydration in and defends us from invasion by harmful bacteria, fungi and toxins," Richwine said.

When skin dries and cracks, the risk of infections, such as cellulitis, increases. Being aware of the condition of your skin can also help you catch other abnormalities early.

"If you have swelling, redness and pain in a localized area, your skin may be infected," Ben-Moshe said.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

Experts say there are three dimensions of empathy kids need to learn: emotional, cognitive and compassion.

Encouraging kids' empathy

Experts advise parents how to teach children to value others' perspectives

BY ELIZABETH CHANG

The Washington Post

Politicians making fun of an 82-year-old man who was attacked with a hammer. Online commenters calling anti-vaxxers who died of COVID-19 “stupid.”

At a time like this, it can seem to parents more urgent to promote empathy — but also more difficult.

“It’s hard to have a shared morality when you don’t have a shared reality,” said Richard Weissbourd, a psychologist and senior lecturer at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. Weissbourd is also director of the Making Caring Common Project, which focuses on helping parents, schools and communities raise kids who care about others and the common good.

“The challenge for parents is to cultivate kids’ capacity for empathy for people who are different from them or not in their immediate circle,” Weissbourd said. “So, different in gender, different race, different class, different sexual orientation. Different in political orientation and different religious orientation.”

That doesn’t mean parents should encourage kids to agree with people who don’t share their views, he noted. “They may fiercely disagree, but it is a matter of listening and trying to take other people’s perspective and valuing other people as human beings.”

Most researchers concur that there are three dimensions of empathy, according to Jamil Zaki, a Stanford University neuroscientist. “One is emotional, vicariously sharing what other people around us view. The other is cognitive, which is trying to understand what other people feel and why. And the third is compassion or empathic concern,” said Zaki, author of “The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World.”

A truly empathetic person must have all three, Weissbourd said. After all, “Con men and torturers and politicians and salespeople can take other people’s perspective.” That’s why the third aspect of empathy, which he calls the moral or ethical aspect, is so essential.

So how do parents encourage their children to be proficient in all three dimensions?

“I think learning empathy is like playing an instrument or learning a sport. It’s a lot about practice,” Weissbourd said.

One of the things parents can practice with kids is talking about and labeling emotions. This helps them recognize emotions in themselves and in others, which is likely an essential step for empathy.

Weissbourd says that the tougher work these days, especially with older kids, involves understanding

what other people feel and feeling compassion or empathy.

“Most kids are growing up in quite politically homogeneous communities,” he said. “And there isn’t a lot of effort in schools typically — or in homes — to encourage kids to take the perspective of those who don’t share their political views.”

Practicing “cognitive empathy” — or understanding another person’s mind or what they feel — involves “having conversations that alert kids to how other people may feel in the family and outside the family in different situations,” Weissbourd said. “It’s talking about the news and having conversations with your kids about what people are experiencing in this country and other countries that might be different from them. It’s helping out neighbors and understanding neighbors who may be different in some way. It’s noticing and talking about the contributions that different people are making to kids’ lives,” including people who might not be on their radar, such as the school secretary or custodian or bus driver.

Weissbourd calls this expanding kids’ “circle of concern” and through this approach, “we’ve increased the number and diversity of people that kids have empathy for.” A study of the impact of “Facing History and Ourselves,” an educational program that uses lessons about racism and genocide to encourage social-emotional learning, found that middle school students who participated in the program “reported higher levels of empathy, prosocial behavior and stronger participatory citizenship beliefs” than that of a control group.

Zaki also says that older kids benefit from a different approach to empathy — one that is peer-based. His Empathy Lab conducted an experiment that showed that seventh-graders who believed empathy was popular among their classmates were more likely to engage in empathetic behavior. Parents can help make empathy contagious by asking tweens and teens to point out examples of empathy they’ve seen among their peers and praising actions they’ve taken on their own.

“It’s critical that if we want our kids to be empathic, that we also recognize and celebrate when they do it, when they do something kind and we ask them about the kind of things that they do, just as much as we ask them how much they’re learning in math, science, and in reading and writing,” Zaki said. In a national survey conducted by Making Caring Common in 2014, about 80% of middle and high school students polled reported that their parents were more concerned about achievement or happiness than caring for others.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



After the merriment, a powerful urge to purge

When the holiday is over, the opened presents have been stashed and the leftover ham has been made into bean soup, there’s a part of me that just wants to savor it all. To snuggle up on the couch with the family in my new pajamas, nibbling from the tin of stale Christmas cookies, basking in the glow of the dying Christmas tree, watching movie marathons until my eyeballs bleed.

These days, there’s so much hustle and bustle associated with the holidays, it’s nice to linger a while. Let it all sink in. Take a moment to stop and appreciate the richness of life, our families and our traditions before another hectic year is in full swing.

However, there’s another part of me that gets antsy. Like the plaque accumulating in my arteries from too much cheese dip, or the needles piling up under the tree, or the mounting credit card bills — the holiday builds. Something takes over in me, and after weeks of excess and sloth, I’m hell bent on eating enough fiber, taking 10,000 steps a day, keeping accurate financial records, compulsively vacuuming and fundamentally changing my entire personality.

By New Year’s Eve, I’m feeling the urge to purge.

“Is it time?” I think to myself as I sip my coffee and stare at our lifeless Christmas tree. I could flip the switch to electrify the tiny lights, top off the stagnant water and blur my eyes to the curling branches for one more week.

Or, I could take the whole dang thing down.

I consider my options. I sigh, remembering her lovely pine smell on that first night. This tree had been with us for a month of celebrating, shopping, eating, baking and gift giving. Shouldn’t we keep her for one more week?

In my sentimental haze, I reach out to touch a lovely blown glass ornament, and as my hand brushes against the branch, I set off an avalanche of dead pine needles.

“That’s it,” I think. “She’s gotta go.”

I remove our tree decorations, packing them away in the basement. Using a turkey baster, I suck the scummy water out of the tree stand and detach the naked tree, lugging her across the room, out the front door and across the porch, finally heaving her into the gutter in front of our mailbox.

Feeling a colossal sense of relief, I reenter the house, going room by room to purge all evidence of Christmas. I shake candy wrappers out of the stockings, pack away the Nativity, derail the train, wrap up my ceramic Christmas trees, store the Santa mugs and silence the jingle bells.

I fill garbage bags with dying poinsettias, stale cookies, burnt candles, wrinkled wrapping paper, used doilies, broken candy canes, half a cheese ball, a whole fruitcake, a carton of eggnog and a stripped turkey carcass.

Invigorated, I storm out onto the porch and unwind the garland from the railings, tug until the twinkle lights give way from the gutter and tear the wreath from the door, hurling it like a flying disc onto the curb with our discarded tree.

I exhaust the remainder of my cathartic frenzy by firing up my vacuum cleaner. With crazed eyes, I suck up thousands of pine needles, glitter, crumbs, cookie sprinkles, red and green M&Ms, snips of ribbon, scraps of tissue paper and a few gumdrops fringed with dog hair.

I dump the canister’s contents in the trash along with several boxes and bags, and wheel the whole shebang out to the curb next to the tree cadaver. Grabbing the mail from the mailbox, I head back inside. I sit at the kitchen table in my freshly expunged house, pleased to have wiped my slate clean and ready for a fresh start to the New Year.

But then, I open the credit card bill and leaf through a month of reckless spending memorialized on paper. And inevitably, I glance down and notice my protruding stomach.

That’s the moment I realize, the real battle to purge myself of the excesses of the holiday has only just begun.

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

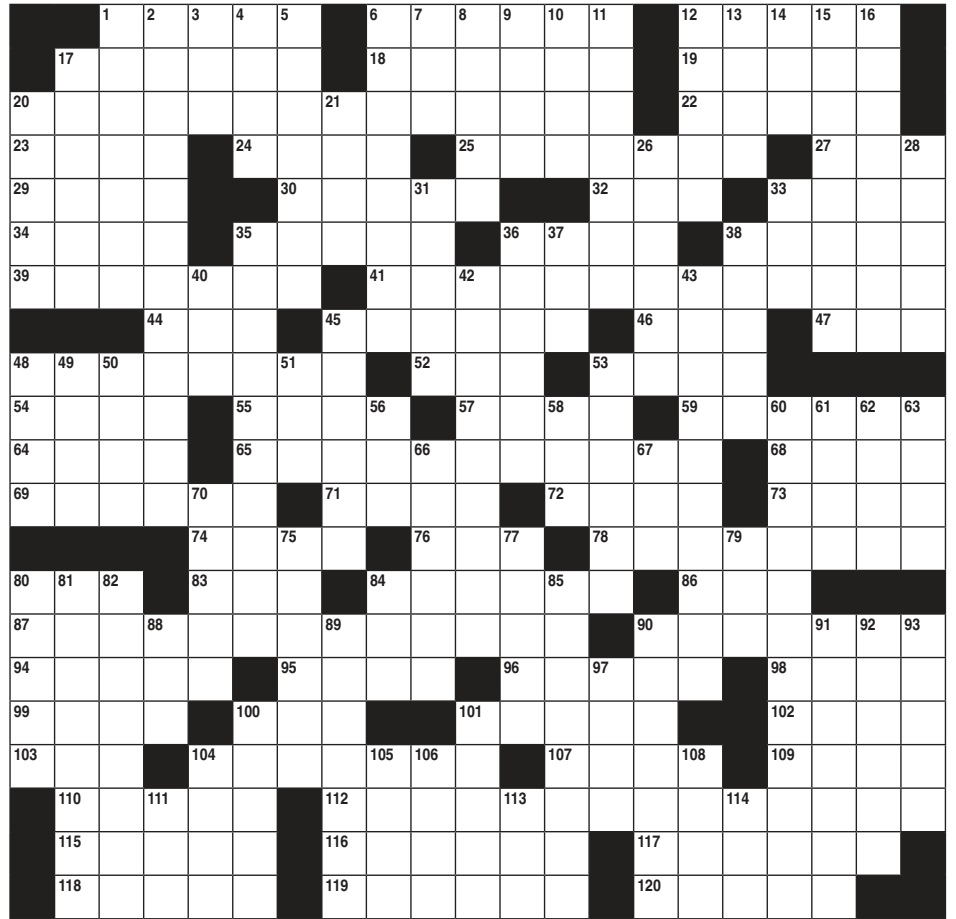
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

WHAT'S SHAKING?

BY LAURA TAYLOR KINNEL / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Laura Taylor Kinnel of Newtown, Pa., teaches math and is the director of studies at a Friends boarding school near Philadelphia. She has been solving crosswords since childhood but just started constructing them a little over a year ago. A cousin who solved a 2018 Christmas puzzle of Laura's encouraged her to make more. She was pleasantly surprised to discover all the help available online to new puzzle makers. This is her second Times crossword, both Sundays. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Boasts
 - 6 Longtime anthropomorphic aardvark on PBS
 - 12 Australia's national women's basketball team
 - 17 Sounds "everywhere," in a children's song
 - 18 Gloomy
 - 19 Soup server
 - 20 Add insult to injury
 - 22 "Whenever I want you, all I have to do" is this, in an Everly Brothers hit
 - 23 Farming prefix
 - 24 "Gracias a ____"
 - 25 Jam producer
 - 27 Jack Frost's bite
 - 29 Bits of terre in la mer
 - 30 Churns
 - 32 Author Harper
 - 33 He loved Lucy
 - 34 Dry
 - 35 Tea type
 - 36 "A Life for the ____" (Mikhail Glinka opera)
 - 38 1940s vice president who went on to become president
 - 39 "In Praise of Folly" writer
 - 41 How to take glib promises
 - 44 Dog/dog separator
 - 45 Subject of many a negotiation
 - 46 Days ____
 - 47 Jeanne d'Arc, e.g.: Abbr.
 - 48 Enlivens
 - 52 Big feller?
 - 53 Fails to be
 - 54 City on the Brazos River
 - 55 Propeller blades?
 - 57 ____ Crunch
 - 59 Gobs
 - 64 Item often numbered from 3 to 9
 - 65 Boardwalk buy
 - 68 Gush
 - 69 Time magazine's Person of the Century runner-up, 1999
 - 71 Strain
 - 72 ____ Westover, author of the 2018 best-selling memoir "Educated"
 - 73 Big name in theaters
 - 74 Till compartment
 - 76 "Silent Spring" subject, for short
 - 78 Nothingburger
 - 80 Descartes's conclusion
 - 83 Energy
 - 84 Least interesting
 - 86 It gets the ball rolling
 - 87 2002 Winter Olympics locale
 - 90 Looks through
 - 94 Abdominal-pain producer
 - 95 Way of securing payment
 - 96 Fizzy drinks
 - 98 Knitting stitch
 - 99 "Holy ____!"
 - 100 Word after bargain or overhead
 - 101 Emulated a kitten
 - 102 ____ expense (free)
 - 103 Org. with the slogan "Every child. One voice."
 - 104 Brand with the slogan "The Art of Childhood"
 - 107 What flies usually become
 - 109 Wimp
 - 110 It's held by a winner
 - 112 You, according to Jesus in Matthew 5:13
 - 115 Follow
 - 116 Reflexive pronoun
 - 117 Fishes
 - 118 Moved like Jagr?
 - 119 Shaded growths
 - 120 Lil Nas X and Billie Eilish, to teenagers
- DOWN**
- 1 Orlando ____, two-time Gold Glove Award winner
 - 2 Almost won
 - 3 Martial artist's belt
 - 4 Appurtenance for a T.S.A. agent
 - 5 Many Dorothy Parker pieces
 - 6 Big 12 college town
 - 7 Column crosser
 - 8 Brings (out)
 - 9 Time of day
 - 10 Sch. with 50+ alums who went on to become astronauts
 - 11 Warning sign
 - 12 Blast from the past
 - 13 Setting for a classic Georges Seurat painting, en français
 - 14 Fruity quaff
 - 15 South American cowboys
 - 16 Like Havarti or Muenster
 - 17 Reveille player
 - 20 Jack up
 - 21 Repeated part of a pop song
 - 26 Kind of wheel
 - 28 Peak
 - 31 Heroine of Bizet's "The Pearl Fishers"
 - 33 Cozy spot
 - 35 Shows how it's done
 - 36 Climate change, notably
 - 37 State
 - 38 Refried bean
 - 40 Astronaut Jemison of the space shuttle Endeavour
 - 42 Reduction in what one owes
 - 43 Headaches
 - 45 Nursery-rhyme couple
 - 48 Gulp
 - 49 Prefix with medic or military
 - 49 Princess Diana, for one
 - 51 Negotiator with G.M.
 - 53 Suckling
 - 56 Disco ____ ("The Simpsons" character)
 - 58 Memorized
 - 60 Exasperate
 - 61 Fabric with sheen
 - 62 Actress ____ Rachel Wood
 - 63 Potential source of a political scandal
 - 66 Evasive maneuver
 - 67 Opposite of "to"
 - 70 Behave like a helicopter parent
 - 75 Attendant of Desdemona in "Othello"
 - 77 Lightly roast
 - 79 Continental abbr.
 - 80 Clustered
 - 81 Meted out
 - 82 Best-actress Oscar winner between Streep and Field
 - 84 Agent of change
 - 85 Attention seekers
 - 88 Critical
 - 89 Fictional exemplar of Christmas spirit
 - 90 Stir-fried noodle dish
 - 91 Sews up
 - 92 Senator Joni and Dadaist Max
 - 93 What water in a bucket might do
 - 97 Source of the line "Man does not live by bread alone": Abbr.
 - 100 Boxer, for example
 - 101 Handcuffs
 - 104 This, for one
 - 105 "____ be in England"
 - 106 Not so much
 - 108 Post
 - 111 "Tut-tut"
 - 113 Argentina's leading daily sports newspaper
 - 114 Super ending



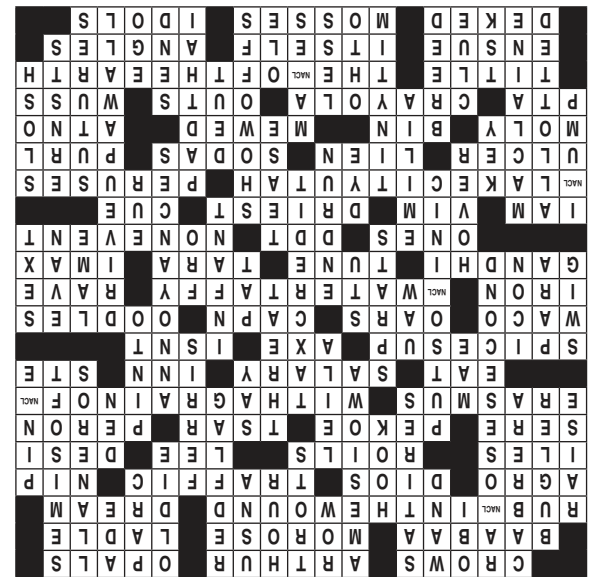
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GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

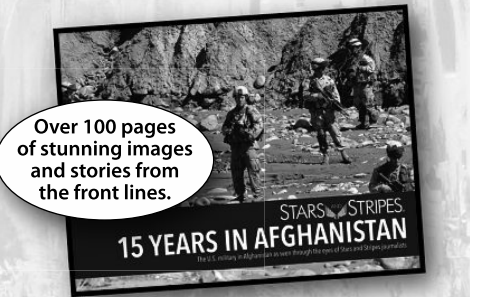
RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES

Broadcasting responsibly

After Cohen's drunken dig, Seacrest is all for CNN's sobered-up New Year's show

BY ALEXANDRA DEL ROSARIO
Los Angeles Times

Ryan Seacrest is raising a (nonalcoholic) toast to CNN for its decision to scale back the booze during its New Year's Eve broadcast.

The television personality, who has long hosted ABC's "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve," said in an interview with Entertainment Weekly that he thought the network's move to sober up its coverage was a step in the right direction.

"I don't advocate drinking when one is on the air. I don't know how that started as a tradition, but it's probably a good idea [to scale back], CNN," he told the magazine on Monday. "There's some pretty respectable people, or at least one, right? I think there's a serious journalist and then a friend of mine who has a lot of fun, but it's probably a good idea."

Seacrest's comments come nearly a year after CNN "New Year's Eve Live" co-host Andy Cohen, joined by Anderson Cooper, threw some shade at ABC's coverage. During CNN's 2021 sendoff, the "Watch What Happens Live" star referred to ABC's New Year's spectacle as "Ryan Seacrest's group of losers that are performing behind us."

"I mean, with all due [respect], if you've been watching ABC tonight, you've seen nothing," he added. "I'm sorry."

Although Seacrest did not mention Cohen by name, he said the controversial comments were "from the alcohol, because I don't think they would say what they said about our performers if they weren't drinking." The "American Idol" host touted ABC's show as "bigger, broader" and said he wasn't exactly above getting back at their programming rivals.

"I might send them some Casa Dragones tequila just to tempt them while they're on the air," Seacrest told EW.

Days into 2022, Cohen revisited his drunken dig.

"I really like Ryan Seacrest, and he's a great guy, and I really regret saying that," he said in a January episode of his radio show. "I was just stupid and drunk and feeling it. ... I just kept talking, and I shouldn't have."

Cohen isn't the only personality known for getting tipsy during CNN's New Year's broadcast. In the past, Don Lemon has repeatedly gone viral on social media for his various New Year's Eve shenanigans — from getting his ear pierced under the influence in 2016 to telling anyone who doesn't want him to share his "point of view on television" to "kiss my behind" in 2021.



GAVIN BOND/ABC

Ryan Seacrest, who hosts ABC's "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve," is taking CNN "New Year's Eve Live" co-host Andy Cohen's insulting comments from last year in stride.

'Avatar' sequel glides to \$1B faster than any other 2022 film

Disney and 20th Century Studios' "Avatar: The Way of Water" has officially surpassed \$1 billion at the global box office faster than any other film released this year, the studio giant announced Wednesday.

As of Tuesday, James Cameron's motion-capture blockbuster had amassed \$1.03 billion. It is the sixth title ever to reach this milestone within the first two weeks of its release and the first to achieve this feat since Sony Pictures' "Spider-Man: No Way Home" crossed a billion late last year, according to Disney.

By Wednesday morning, the hit sequel had bested Universal Pictures' "Jurassic World Dominion" as the second-biggest global release of the year and the third-biggest global release of the pandemic era. Paramount Pictures' "Top Gun: Maverick" is still the highest-grossing movie of 2022 with a global cumulative of \$1.49 billion.

Cosby plans return in 2023

Disgraced comedian Bill Cosby is eyeing a return to performing in 2023, despite recent accusations of sexual assault from multiple women.

In a 15-minute interview on Marion, Ohio, internet radio station WWGH, the 85-year-old responded to a question about whether 2023 would be the year for his return with, "Yes. Yes, because there's so much fun to be had in this storytelling that I do."

Cosby was convicted in 2018 of drugging and sexually assaulting Andrea Constand, a former university basketball official, at his mansion near Philadelphia in 2004. Dozens of other women had also accused Cosby of drugging and assaulting them.

Pennsylvania's Supreme Court overturned Cosby's conviction in 2021 due to an earlier nonprosecution agreement.

Other news

■ New Orleans music legend **Walter "Wolfman" Washington**, a cornerstone of the city's musical nightlife for decades, died Dec. 22 of cancer, just days after turning 79. Washington and his band, the Roadmasters, mixed blues, R&B, funk and soul, punctuating songs with his trademark howl. Washington's death was reported by The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate.

From wire reports

Creator explains why '1883' didn't get a second season

BY TOMMY CUMMINGS
The Dallas Morning News

When Taylor Sheridan's "1883" was heading for a second season, a problem arose. Many of the main characters were dead.

The even bigger problem? Studio executives apparently didn't know it.

"I know they read the scripts, but they don't read scripts, so when they read the last episode of "1883," I don't think they digested what had just happened, even though I made it quite clear from the very beginning," Sheridan told Deadline last week.

"The story I heard is Bob Bakish [Paramount Global CEO] watched it and said, 'Wait a minute, she dies! They all die? What do we do in season two?' I said, 'There is no season two.'"

Bakish, in Sheridan's telling, said there better be one because the studio "already picked it up."

Paramount+ had already greenlit the second season of "1883," a spinoff of "Yellowstone."

But key characters, including those played by Sam Elliott and Isabel May, were knocked off in the season finale.

It was a miscommunication, but it's also the reality of settlers who headed west in the 1800s. In "1883," the Dutton family history is laid out as its members leave Texas for Montana. As anyone who's played The Pioneer Trail simulation video game can attest, frontier settlers die at a high rate.

Studio execs met with Sheridan and asked him to pick up with season two as if the deaths had never happened. Instead, Sheridan of-

fered up another spinoff, which fast-forwards the Dutton family legacy 40 years. "1923" premiered earlier this month.

Sheridan, who's living the ranch life near Weatherford, Texas, told Deadline that he wasn't sure how to write the next season of "1883." Topics including World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic struck him as potential plot points. They eventually spawned his pitch for what became "1923."

"It's the one great thing about the Dutton family; you can skip generations and put them in all these unique situations, and it has nothing to do with "Yellowstone," nothing to do with "1883" and yet it's tethered completely to them, but they're all standalones," Sheridan said. "That's what I find so intriguing about it."



EMERSON MILLER/Paramount+

Show creator Taylor Sheridan, left, instructs actor Sam Elliott on the set of the Paramount+ original series "1883."

Sheridan's "1883" narrative isn't complete. "1883: The Bass Reeves Story" is on the way, but its release date is not yet known.

The limited series follows the

story of Bass Reeves, a real U.S. Deputy Marshal in the 1880s. David Oyelowo will play Reeves, whose jurisdiction covered what is now Arkansas and Oklahoma.

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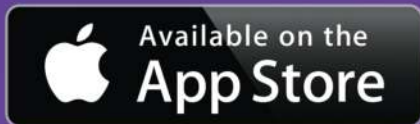
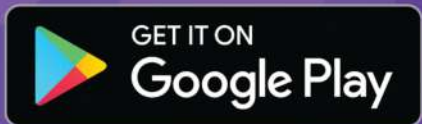
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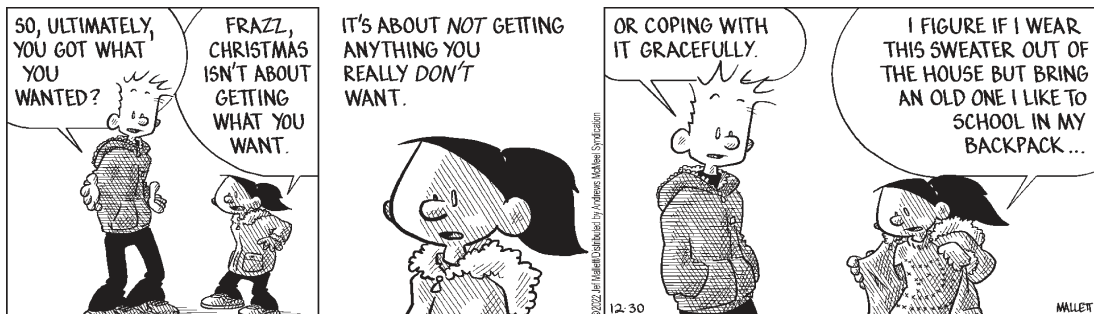


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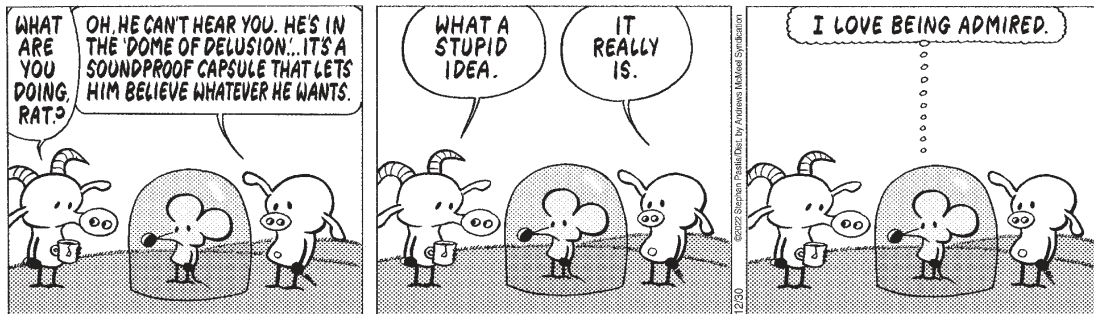
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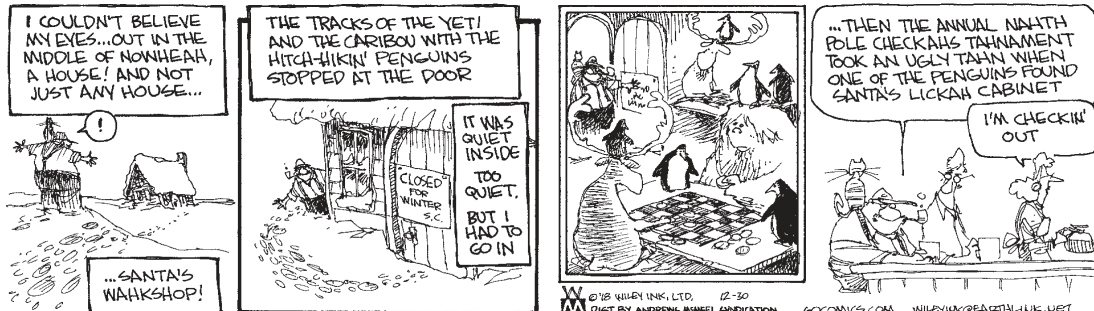
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



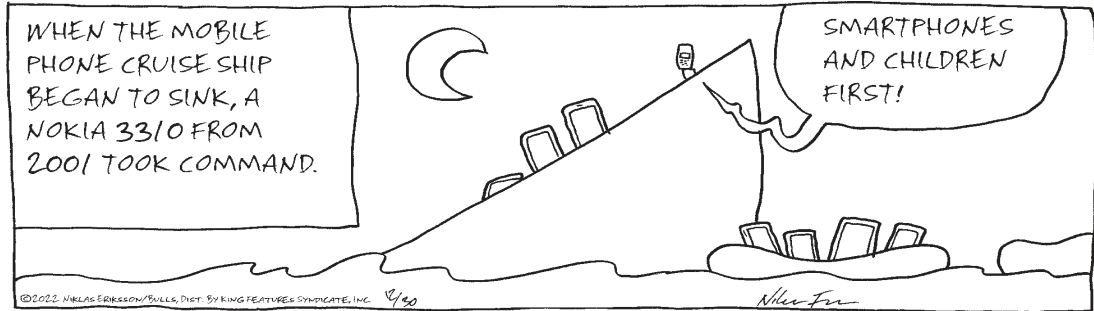
Non Sequitur



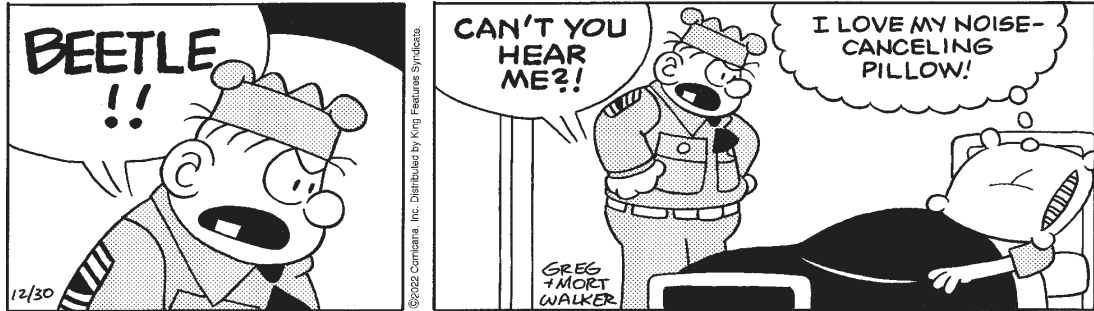
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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46					47					48		
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ACROSS

- 1 Spasm
- 4 Fall bloomers
- 8 Hindu hero
- 12 Green prefix
- 13 Oklahoma tribe
- 14 "East of Eden" twin
- 15 Jessica of "Zero Dark Thirty"
- 17 Gradually withdraw
- 18 "Oops!"
- 19 Diminish
- 20 Taxi ticker
- 22 Info
- 24 Job-safety org.
- 25 Hold back
- 29 Chinese chairman
- 30 Postpone
- 31 Brit's restroom
- 32 JFK Terminal transport
- 34 Asset
- 35 Bigwigs
- 36 Like forest stones
- 37 Purse fastener
- 40 Heart of the matter
- 41 Loathe
- 42 Organizer for door openers
- 46 Oodles
- 47 "— la Douce"
- 48 Sony rival

- 49 Sings like Cardi B
- 50 Sprint
- 51 Dine

- 22 Sandwich shops
- 23 Slippery — eel
- 25 Harvest
- 26 Elite athletes
- 27 Debtors' notes
- 28 Inquisitive

DOWN

- 1 Sleuth
- 2 German pronoun problem
- 3 Book collaborator
- 4 Engine
- 5 Six-sided state
- 6 French pronoun book
- 7 Capitol VIP
- 37 Blacken on a grill
- 8 Seafood eatery
- 38 In — land
- 9 Vicinity
- 39 Perched on
- 10 Castle defense
- 40 Workout venues
- 11 Green
- 42 Josh Gables girl
- 16 — butter period
- 19 Lawyer (Abbr.)
- 44 Hosp. section
- 20 NYC gallery
- 45 Snooze
- 21 Actor Morales

Answer to Previous Puzzle

K	E	G	S		H	E	R		A	L	B	A	
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N	O	R	A		J	R	S		A	N	T	S	
G	L	E	N	D	A		I	O	T	A			
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12-30

CRYPTOQUIP

D P I K F I Z F Q I Y G M S N T I K Q C

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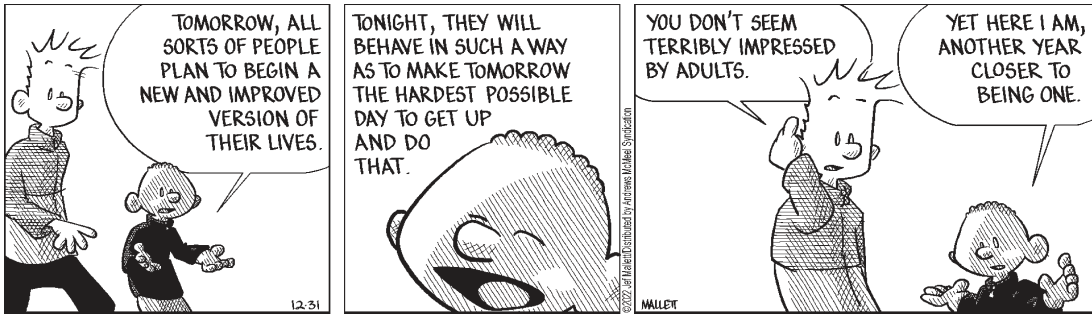
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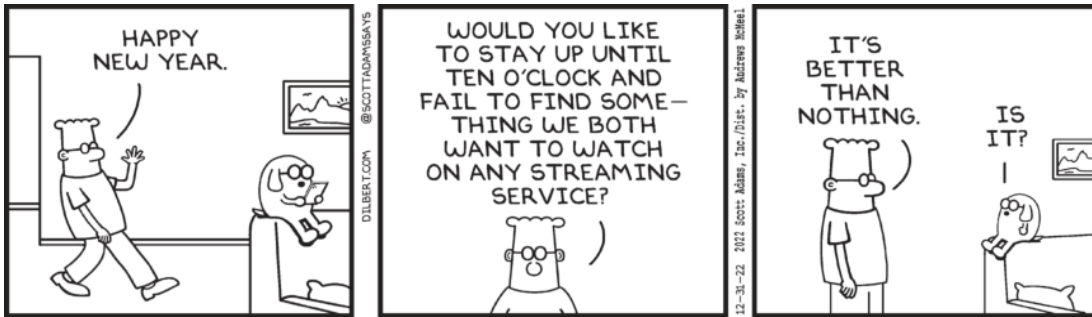
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: MAKE SURE YOU DON'T OVERPAY WHEN SHOPPING FOR A FLOWER-HOLDING ITEM. TAKE IT AT VASE VALUE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals P

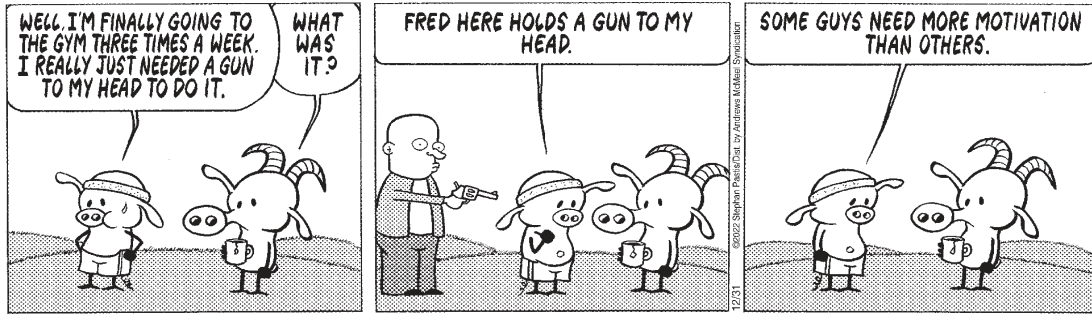
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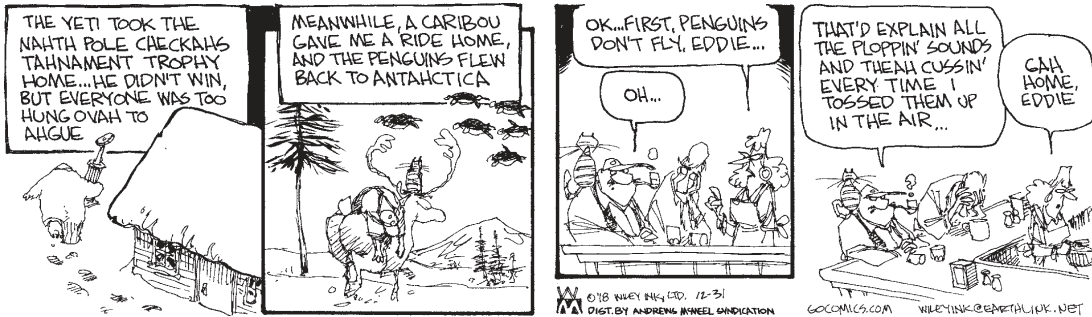
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



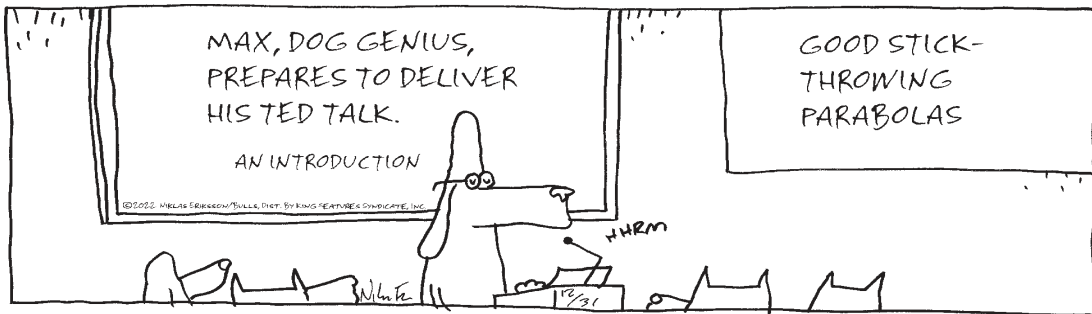
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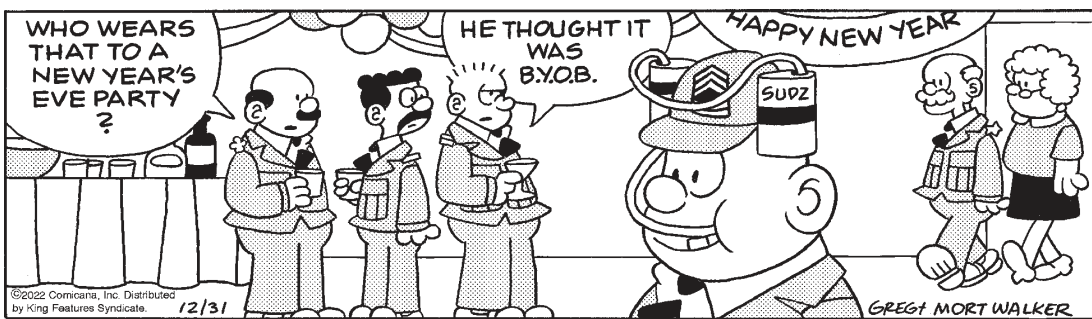
Candorville



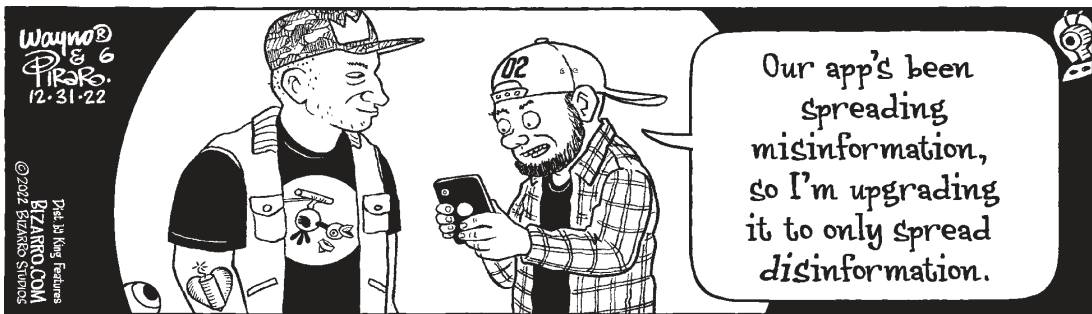
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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39	40	41			42	43				44	45	46	47
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ACROSS

- 1 Avocado dip, for short
- 5 Poses
- 9 "Ray Donovan" actor Voigt
- 12 Foot fraction
- 13 Beige
- 14 Mil. address
- 15 Actress Gershon
- 16 Witticism
- 17 Conk out
- 18 Thing
- 19 "Born in the —"
- 20 Film spool
- 21 Omega preceeder
- 23 Dad on "Black-ish"
- 25 Ankle woe
- 28 Glide
- 32 Royal authority
- 33 Planet circlers
- 34 Register (for)
- 36 Re offspring
- 37 Compass pt.
- 38 Tempe sch.
- 39 Microwaves
- 42 Fun and games
- 44 Skater Lipinski
- 48 "— Town"
- 49 RBI, for one
- 50 Tehran's country
- 51 Tramcar contents
- 52 To boot
- 53 Getting the job done

- 54 Tree fluid
- 55 Color worker
- 56 Auction signals

DOWN

- 1 Leslie Caron role
- 2 One
- 3 Dreaded breakout
- 4 New Year's Eve quaffs
- 5 Dress spangle
- 6 Hosp. areas
- 7 Three-note chords
- 8 Dine
- 9 Green gem surgery
- 10 Mayberry young 'un
- 11 Yuletide tune
- 20 January 1 commitment
- 22 Cranial cavity
- 24 "Caddyshack" director
- 25 Soon-to-be grads
- 26 Architect I. M. —
- 27 Equip
- 29 — polloi
- 30 Navarro on "The View"
- 31 Designer monogram
- 35 In a sassy way
- 36 Element
- 39 Madhouses
- 40 Mystique
- 41 Ready, as for surgery
- 43 Lighten
- 45 Florence's river
- 46 Incursion
- 47 Colony denizens
- 49 Feeling down

Answer to Previous Puzzle

T	I	C		M	U	M	S		R	A	M	A	
E	C	O		O	T	O	E		A	R	O	N	
C	H	A	S	T	A	I	N		W	E	A	N	
			U	H	O	H			A	B	A	T	E
M	E	T	E	R			D	A	T	A			
O	S	H	A		R	E	S	T	R	A	I	N	
M	A	O		D	E	L	A	Y		L	O	O	
A	I	R	T	R	A	I	N		P	L	U	S	
			V	I	P	S		M	O	S	S	Y	
C	L	A	S	P			G	I	S	T			
H	A	T	E		K	E	Y	C	H	A	I	N	
A	L	O	T		I	R	M	A		R	C	A	
R	A	P	S		D	A	S	H		S	U	P	

12-31

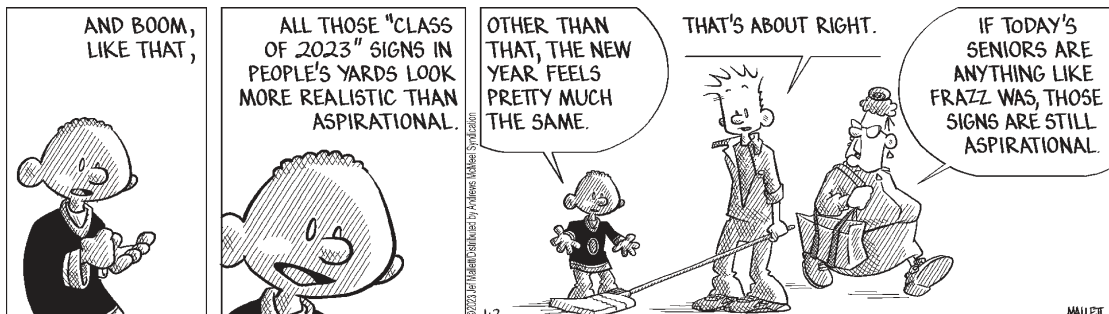
CRYPTOQUIP

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 FXAUT'H QXHY HBQNYBXBH
 AXIGU WXQCH, YFX FCAC YSCT
 ZXA ZSAHY NGUGKC.

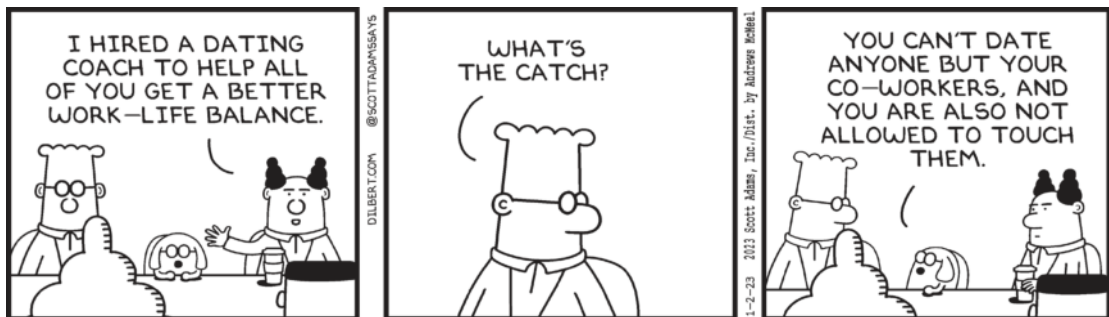
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN PEOPLE MISTAKENLY ATTACH ORNAMENTAL DROPS TO THEIR LOBES BACKWARD, THAT'S EARRING ERRING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals W

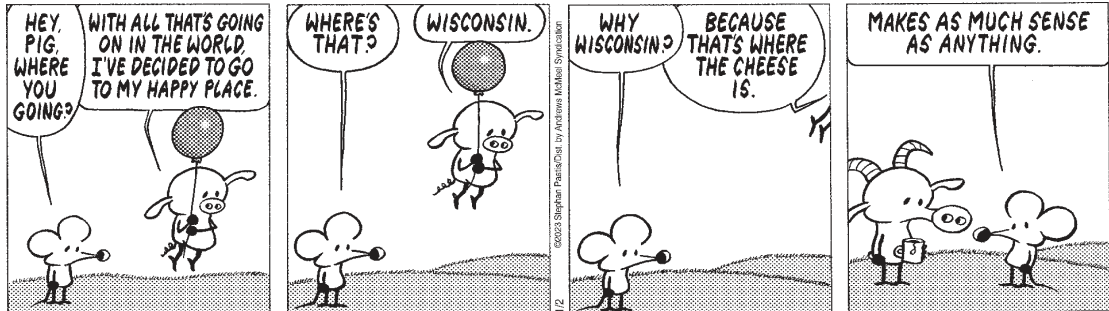
Frazz



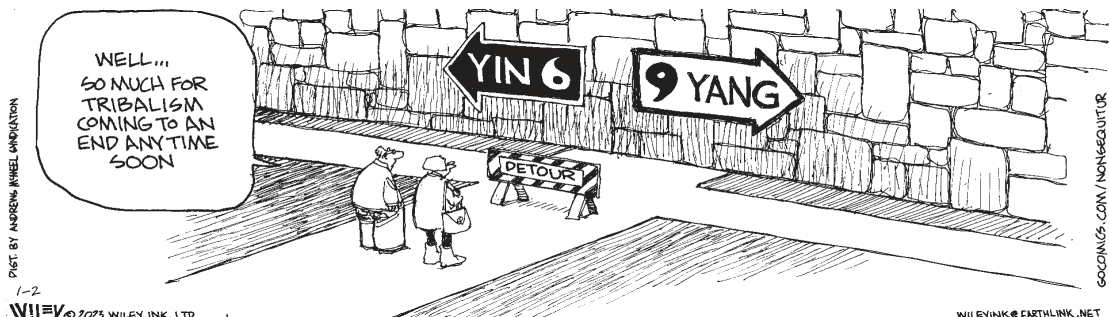
Dilbert



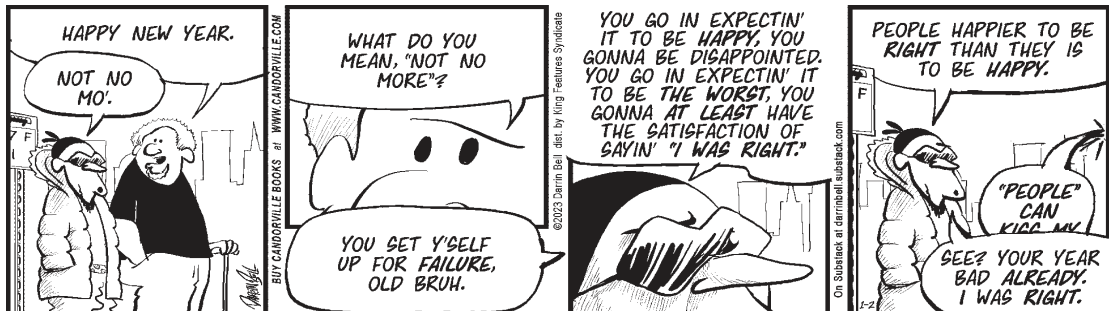
Pearls Before Swine



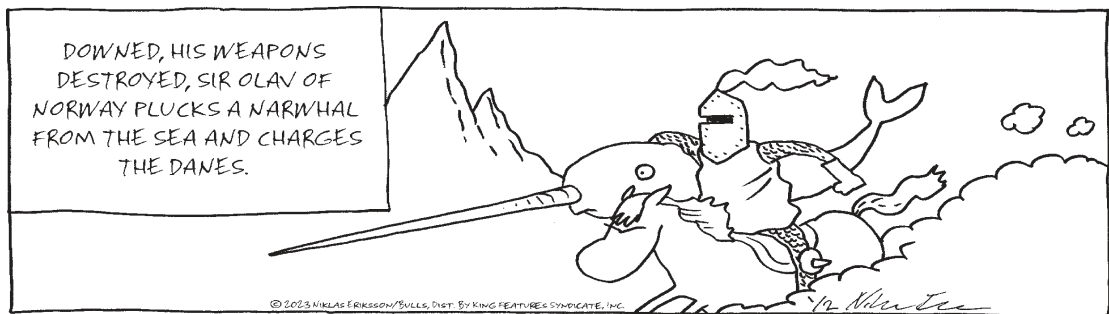
Non Sequitur



Candorville



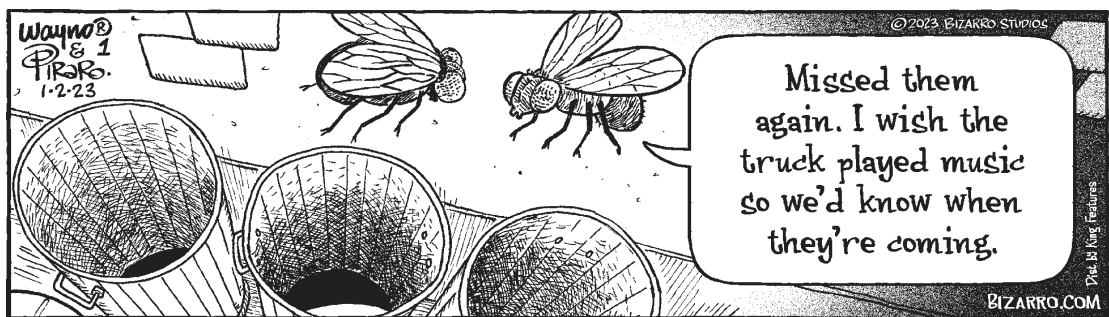
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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47						48							
49						50				51			

ACROSS

- 1 Green gem
- 5 Flop
- 8 Thick chunk
- 12 From Roma or Napoli
- 14 Just adorable
- 15 Dutch painter Piet
- 16 Some TVs
- 17 Dawn goddess
- 18 London insurer
- 20 Discover
- 23 Stagger
- 24 Pivot line
- 25 King Arthur's realm
- 28 Auction action
- 29 "A Farewell to Arms" director
- 30 Nonstick spray
- 32 Bamboozled
- 34 Antitoxins
- 35 — Domini
- 36 Open a toothpaste tube
- 37 Kampala'sland
- 40 Solid-rock insert
- 41 Loud noises
- 42 French title
- 47 Madame Bovary
- 48 Partially coincides
- 49 Antique cars

- 50 Slangy denial
- 51 Legal action

- 20 Science room
- 21 Way out
- 22 Verdi heroine
- 23 CBer's device
- 25 Donut flavor
- 26 Oil cartel
- 27 Skater Lipinski
- 29 Peddle
- 31 Pirate's chart
- 33 "Dust in the Wind" band
- 34 Slowpokes
- 36 Cold War initials
- 37 Taxi alternative
- 38 Up for it
- 39 Arsenal supply
- 40 From the top
- 43 Lab eggs
- 44 — Claire, Wisc.
- 45 AP rival
- 46 Letters after Q

DOWN

- 1 Muppet master Henson
- 2 From — Z
- 3 Author Brown
- 4 Church leaders
- 5 Lectern locale
- 6 Italian article
- 7 CNN news anchor
- 8 Piece of parchment
- 9 Historic sitcom star
- 10 Slightly
- 11 Porgy's love
- 13 Golf bag item
- 19 Lusty look

Answer to Previous Puzzle

G	U	A	C		S	I	T	S		J	O	N			
I	N	C	H		E	C	R	U		A	P	O			
G	I	N	A		Q	U	I	P		D	I	E			
I	T	E	M		U	S	A			R	E	E			
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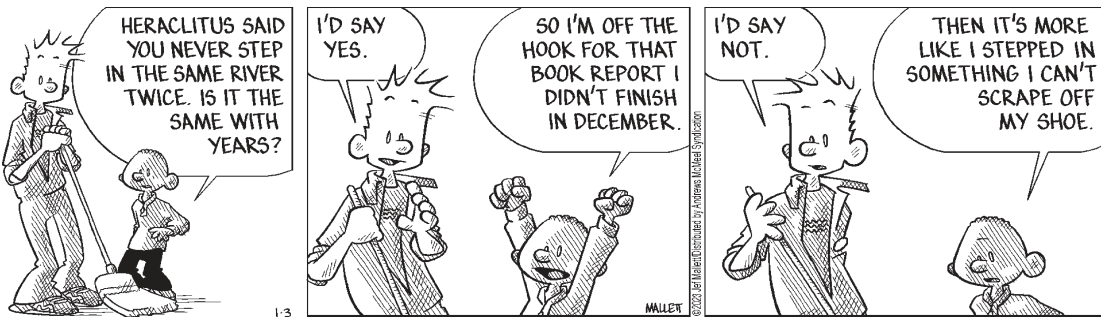
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CRYPTOQUIP

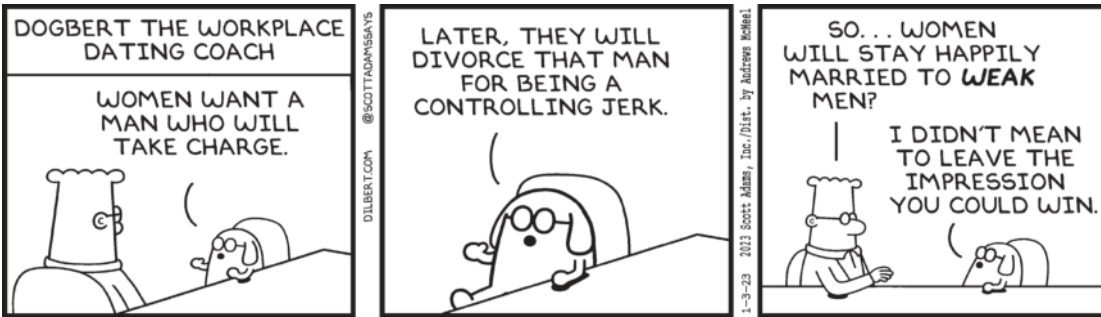
RD Z YLPNVJ GLPL SV DRB
 ERJJLP DVP Z YPLHRVTN GRDL
 VP ATMMU, GAZS AZHL SALU
 EVJL? DLE LB.

Saturday's Cryptoquip: IN A RECENT LIST OF THE WORLD'S MOST SUMPTUOUS ROYAL HOMES, TWO WERE TIED FOR FIRST PALACE.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals W

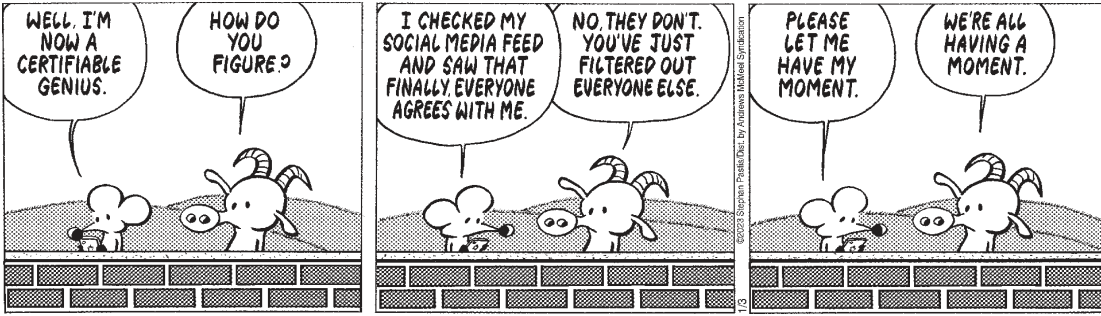
Frazz



Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



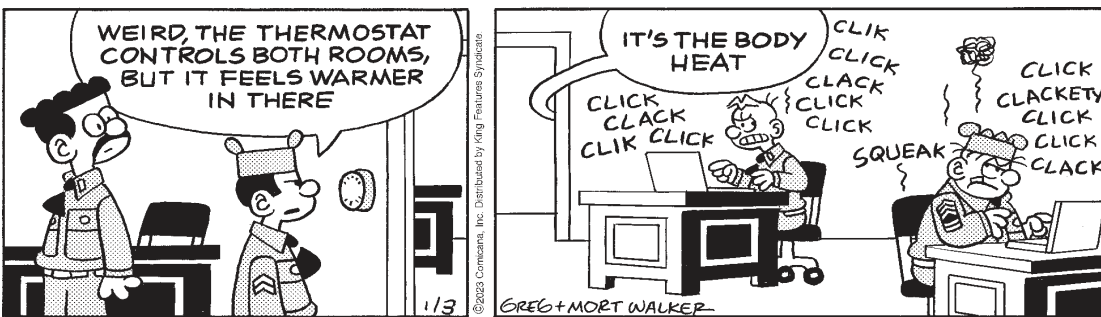
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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42					43	44				45	46	47
48					49					50		
51					52					53		

- ACROSS**
- 1 Scorch
 - 5 Norwegian saint
 - 9 Inlet
 - 12 "Waterloo" group
 - 13 Spanish ayes
 - 14 Before
 - 15 Slip-resistant footwear
 - 17 Director Howard
 - 18 "This — outrage!"
 - 19 Piggy bank filler
 - 21 Macaroni shape
 - 24 Undecided
 - 25 Reddish horse
 - 26 Showed indifference
 - 30 Fine, at NASA
 - 31 Audition CDs
 - 32 — -mo
 - 33 Anatomy class prop
 - 35 Snitch
 - 36 Pouchlike parts
 - 37 Rib
 - 38 Dolphins' home
 - 40 French waterway
 - 42 Web address
 - 43 Sore losers
 - 48 Sock part
 - 49 Termini
 - 50 Golfer's cry
 - 51 Em halves
- DOWN**
- 21 Eventful periods
 - 22 Take a gander
 - 23 School fundraisers
 - 24 1982 sci-fi film
 - 26 Collections
 - 27 Med. plan
 - 28 Right angles
 - 29 Mete (out)
 - 31 Loudness unit
 - 34 Felon's flight
 - 35 Start a round
 - 37 Recipe abbr.
 - 38 Trumpet muffer
 - 39 Pressing need
 - 40 Probability
 - 41 Actress Rae
 - 44 Singer DiFranco
 - 45 Tier
 - 46 Prefix with athlete
 - 47 Stitch

Answer to Previous Puzzle

J	A	D	E	D	D	S	L	A	B		
I	T	A	L	I	A	N	O	C	U	T	E
M	O	N	D	R	I	A	N	R	C	A	S
		E	O	S	L	L	O	Y	D	S	
L	E	A	R	N	R	E	E	L			
A	X	I	S	C	A	M	E	L	O	T	
B	I	D	V	I	D	O	R	P	A	M	
	T	A	K	E	N	I	N	S	E	R	A
		A	N	N	O	U	N	C	A	P	
U	G	A	N	D	A	A	S	A			
B	A	M	S	M	O	N	S	I	E	U	R
E	M	M	A	O	V	E	R	L	A	P	S
R	E	O	S	N	A	W	S	U	I	T	

1-3 CRYPTOQUIP
 IGV DNNH GXO PVVH KVVHQHA
 NYI NK ONCIO FXIVFL, PYI Q
 ECVOYDV QI'O NHFL ANQHA
 IGCNYAG X EGXOV.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A PERSON WERE TO FIX DINNER FOR A PREVIOUS WIFE OR HUBBY, WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? FED EX.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals G

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Bowl schedule

Friday, Dec. 16
Bahamas Bowl
 Nassau, Bahamas
 UAB 24, Miami (Ohio) 20
Cure Bowl
 Orlando, Fla.
 No. 23 Troy 18, No. 22 UTSA 12
Saturday, Dec. 17
Fenway Bowl
 Boston
 Louisville 24, Cincinnati 7
Celebration Bowl
 Atlanta
 NC Central 41, Jackson St. 34, OT
New Mexico Bowl
 Albuquerque, N.M.
 BYU 24, SMU 23
LA Bowl
 Inglewood, Calif.
 Fresno St. 29, Washington St. 6
Lending Tree Bowl
 Mobile, Ala.
 Southern Miss. 38, Rice 24
Las Vegas Bowl
 Las Vegas
 No. 17 Oregon St. 30, Florida 3
Frisco Bowl
 Frisco, Texas
 Boise St. 35, North Texas 32
Monday, Dec. 19
Myrtle Beach Bowl
 Conway, S.C.
 Marshall 28, UConn 14
Tuesday, Dec. 20
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
 Boise, Idaho
 E. Michigan 41, San Jose St. 27
Boca Raton Bowl
 Boca Raton, Fla.
 Toledo 21, Liberty 19
Wednesday, Dec. 21
New Orleans Bowl
 New Orleans
 W. Kentucky 44, South Alabama 23
Thursday, Dec. 22
Armed Forces Bowl
 Fort Worth, Texas
 Air Force 30, Baylor 15
Friday, Dec. 23
Gasparilla Bowl
 Tampa, Fla.
 Wake Forest 27, Missouri 17
Independence Bowl
 Shreveport, La.
 Houston 23, Louisiana 16
Saturday, Dec. 24
Hawaii Bowl
 Honolulu
 Middle Tennessee 25, San Diego St. 23
Monday, Dec. 26
Quick Lane Bowl
 Detroit
 New Mexico St. 24, Bowling Green 19
Tuesday, Dec. 27
First Responder Bowl
 Dallas
 Memphis 38, Utah St. 10
Birmingham Bowl
 Birmingham, Ala.
 East Carolina 53, Coastal Carolina 29
Camellia Bowl
 Montgomery, Ala.
 Buffalo 23, Georgia Southern 21
Guaranteed Rate Bowl
 Phoenix
 Wisconsin 24, Oklahoma St. 17

Wednesday, Dec. 28
Military Bowl
 Annapolis, Md.
 Duke 30, UCF 13
Liberty Bowl
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Arkansas 55, Kansas 53, 3OT
Holiday Bowl
 San Diego
 No. 15 Oregon 28, North Carolina 27
Texas Bowl
 Houston
 Texas Tech 42, Mississippi 25
Thursday, Dec. 29
Pin Stripe Bowl
 New York
 Syracuse vs. Minnesota
Cheez-It Bowl
 Orlando, Fla.
 No. 13 Florida St. vs. Oklahoma
Alamo Bowl
 San Antonio
 No. 12 Washington vs. No. 21 Texas
Friday, Dec. 30
Orange Bowl
 Miami Gardens, Fla.
 No. 6 Tennessee vs. No. 10 Clemson
Duke's Mayo Bowl
 Charlotte, N.C.
 No. 25 NC State vs. Maryland
Sun Bowl
 El Paso, Texas
 No. 18 UCLA vs. Pittsburgh
Gator Bowl
 Jacksonville, Fla.
 No. 19 Notre Dame vs. No. 20 South Carolina
Arizona Bowl
 Tucson, Ariz.
 Wyoming vs. Ohio
Saturday, Dec. 31
Peach Bowl
 Atlanta
College Football Playoff Semifinal
 No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 4 Ohio St.
Fiesta Bowl
 Glendale, Ariz.
College Football Playoff Semifinal
 No. 2 Michigan vs. No. 3 TCU
Music City Bowl
 Nashville
 Kentucky vs. Iowa
Sugar Bowl
 New Orleans
 No. 5 Alabama vs. No. 11 Kansas St.
Monday, Jan. 2
ReliaQuest Bowl
 Tampa, Fla.
 No. 24 Mississippi St. vs. Illinois
Citrus Bowl
 Orlando, Fla.
 No. 16 LSU vs. Purdue
Cotton Bowl Classic
 Arlington, Texas
 No. 8 Southern Cal vs. No. 14 Tulane
Rose Bowl
 Pasadena, Calif.
 No. 7 Utah vs. No. 9 Penn St.
Monday, Jan. 9
College Football National Championship
 Inglewood, Calif.
Semifinal winners
FCS playoffs
Championship
 Sunday, Jan. 8
 South Dakota St. vs. North Dakota St.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST
 Davidson 57, Fordham 43
 Harvard 74, Maine 73, OT
 Md.-Eastern Shore 74, Columbia 67, OT
 Penn 93, Wilkes 61
 UConn 74, Villanova 66
 UNC-Wilmington 68, Monmouth (NJ) 55
 Xavier 84, St. John's 79
SOUTH
 Alabama 78, Mississippi St. 67
 Auburn 61, Florida 58
 Belmont 63, Bradley 60
 Georgia 78, Rider 72
 LSU 60, Arkansas 57
 Richmond 83, Coppin St. 65
 Samford 78, Mercer 69
 Temple 59, East Carolina 57
 Tennessee 63, Mississippi 59
 UCF 52, Wichita St. 45
 Virginia 66, Albany (NY) 46
MIDWEST
 Ball St. 70, Chicago St. 63
 Dayton 69, Duquesne 57
 Ill.-Chicago 55, Illinois St. 51
 Missouri 89, Kentucky 75
 Missouri St. 79, N. Iowa 67
SOUTHWEST
 Baylor 85, Nicholls 56
 Houston 89, Tulsa 50
 TCU 103, Cent. Arkansas 57
 Texas A&M-CC 88, Our Lady of the Lake 74
FAR WEST
 Fresno St. 58, Wyoming 53
 Gonzaga 120, E. Oregon 42
 Nevada 74, Boise St. 72
 New Mexico 88, Colorado St. 69
 S. Utah 79, New Mexico St. 75
 Sacramento St. 72, CS Stanislaus 51
 San Diego St. 71, Air Force 55
 San Jose St. 75, UNLV 72, OT

Men's AP Top 25 schedule

Friday's games
 No. 11 UCLA at Washington St.
 No. 14 Miami at Notre Dame
 No. 15 Wisconsin vs. W. Michigan
 No. 25 North Carolina at Pittsburgh
Saturday's games
 No. 2 UConn at No. 22 Xavier
 No. 3 Houston vs. UCF
 No. 4 Kansas vs. Oklahoma St.

No. 5 Arizona at Arizona St.
 No. 6 Texas at Oklahoma
 No. 10 Gonzaga vs. Pepperdine
 No. 12 Baylor at Iowa St.
 No. 13 Virginia at Georgia Tech
 No. 17 Duke vs. Florida St.
 No. 18 TCU vs. Texas Tech
 No. 19 Kentucky vs. Louisville
 No. 22 New Mexico at Wyoming
 No. 24 West Virginia at Kansas St.

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST
 Columbia 81, Ohio 59
 Cornell 93, Clarion 49
 Fordham 85, Post (Conn.) 54
 Princeton 56, Rhode Island 54
 Seton Hall 72, Georgetown 62
 UMass 77, Dartmouth 58
SOUTH
 Davidson 65, Morgan St. 62
 Florida Gulf Coast 89, Brown 75
 Howard 79, VCU 67
 N. Kentucky 73, Wright St. 50
 Tulane 81, Tougaloo 30
MIDWEST
 Butler 79, Xavier 65
 DePaul 78, Providence 69
 E. Michigan 76, Hillsdale 61
 Loyola Chicago 60, Saint Louis 47
 Michigan 76, Nebraska 59
 Ohio St. 81, Northwestern 48
 UConn 72, Creighton 47
 Villanova 54, Marquette 52
SOUTHWEST
 Texas 96, Texas A&M Commerce 53

Women's AP Top 25 schedule

Friday's games
 No. 10 UCLA at No. 17 Oregon
 No. 11 Utah at Washington St.
 No. 16 Maryland vs. Minnesota
Saturday's games
 No. 2 Stanford vs. Arizona St.
 No. 3 Ohio St. vs. No. 14 Michigan
 No. 8 UConn vs. Marquette
 No. 15 Iowa St. at Texas Tech
 No. 18 Arizona at California
 No. 19 Gonzaga at Loyola Marymount
 No. 20 Oklahoma at West Virginia
 No. 21 Creighton at DePaul
 No. 22 Kansas at Oklahoma St.
 No. 23 Baylor vs. TCU
 No. 25 St. John's at Georgetown

PRO HOCKY

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	35	28	4	3	59	135	78
Toronto	35	22	7	6	50	116	86
Tampa Bay	33	21	11	1	43	119	98
Detroit	33	15	11	7	37	103	109
Buffalo	32	16	14	2	34	127	109
Florida	35	15	16	4	34	114	120
Ottawa	34	15	16	3	33	103	108
Montreal	35	15	17	3	33	96	122

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	35	23	6	6	52	109	90
New Jersey	35	22	11	2	46	116	90
Pittsburgh	35	19	10	6	44	119	105
Washington	37	20	13	4	44	115	102
N.Y. Rangers	36	19	12	5	43	116	100
N.Y. Islanders	36	20	14	2	42	117	99
Philadelphia	35	11	17	7	29	90	119
Columbus	33	10	21	2	22	89	135

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	36	21	9	6	48	128	101
Winnipeg	35	21	13	1	43	112	92
Minnesota	34	20	12	2	42	110	96
Colorado	33	19	12	2	40	99	90
St. Louis	35	16	16	3	35	109	129
Nashville	33	14	14	5	33	84	101
Arizona	33	12	16	5	29	93	120
Chicago	33	8	21	4	20	75	125

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	38	24	12	2	50	127	109
Los Angeles	38	20	12	6	46	125	130
Calgary	37	17	13	7	41	115	114
Seattle	33	18	11	4	40	116	108
Edmonton	36	19	15	2	40	128	123
Vancouver	34	16	15	3	35	120	131
San Jose	36	11	19	6	28	110	135
Anaheim	36	10	22	4	24	88	149

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Tuesday's games

Carolina 3, Chicago 0
 Washington 4, N.Y. Rangers 0
 Ottawa 3, Boston 2, SO
 N.Y. Islanders 5, Pittsburgh 1
 Dallas 3, Nashville 2
 Minnesota 4, Winnipeg 1
 Toronto 5, St. Louis 4, OT
 Arizona 6, Colorado 3
 Edmonton 2, Calgary 1
 Vancouver 6, San Jose 2
 Los Angeles 4, Vegas 2
 Buffalo at Columbus, ppd

Wednesday's games

Tampa Bay 4, Montreal 1
 Boston 3, New Jersey 1
 Detroit 5, Pittsburgh 4, OT
 Anaheim 3, Vegas 2, SO
 Calgary 3, Seattle 2

Thursday's games

Detroit at Buffalo
 Montreal at Florida
 N.Y. Rangers at Tampa Bay
 Ottawa at Washington
 Columbus at N.Y. Islanders
 Chicago at St. Louis
 Dallas at Minnesota
 Vancouver at Winnipeg
 Los Angeles at Colorado
 Toronto at Arizona
 Philadelphia at San Jose

Friday's games

Nashville at Anaheim
 New Jersey at Pittsburgh
 Florida at Carolina
 Edmonton at Seattle

Saturday's games

Buffalo at Boston
 Montreal at Columbus
 Nashville at Vegas
 Montreal at Washington
 Philadelphia at Los Angeles
 Arizona at Tampa Bay
 Minnesota at St. Louis
 Ottawa at Detroit
 Toronto at Colorado
 San Jose at Dallas
 Vancouver at Calgary
 Winnipeg at Edmonton

GOLF

World rankings

Through Dec. 26

1. Rory McIlroy	8.65
2. Scottie Scheffler	8.41
3. Cameron Smith	7.57
4. Patrick Cantlay	7.26
5. Jon Rahm	6.53
6. Xander Schauffele	6.19
7. Will Zalatoris	5.80

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Buffalo	12	3	0	.800	420	263
Miami	8	7	0	.533	365	370
N.Y. Jets	7	8	0	.467	284	282
New England	7	8	0	.467	318	291

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Jacksonville	7	8	0	.467	353	331
Tennessee	7	8	0	.467	269	312
e-Indianapolis	4	10	1	.300	248	357
e-Houston	2	12	1	.167	254	358

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Cincinnati	11	4	0	.733	391	306
x-Baltimore	10	5	0	.667	321	272
Pittsburgh	7	8	0	.467	264	319
e-Cleveland	6	9	0	.400	323	343

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Kansas City	12	3	0	.800	438	332
x-L.A. Chargers	9	6	0	.600	332	343
Las Vegas	6	9	0	.400	348	350
e-Denver	4	11	0	.267	232	304

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Philadelphia	13	2	0	.867	445	308
x-Dallas	11	4	0	.733	434	303
N.Y. Giants	8	6	1	.567	311	339
Washington	7	7	1	.500	285	313

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	7	8	0	.467	266	304
Carolina	6	9	0	.400	313	337
New Orleans	6	9	0	.400	303	325
e-Atlanta	5	10	0	.333	315	350

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Minnesota	12	3	0	.800	378	373
Detroit	7	8	0	.467	392	401
Green Bay	7	8	0	.467	313	334
e-Chicago	3	12	0	.200	303	393

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-San Francisco	11	4	0	.733	375	230
Seattle	7	8	0	.467	365	379
e-L.A. Rams	5	10	0	.333	281	334
e-Arizona	4	11	0	.267	308	391

e-Eliminated from playoffs
 x-clinched playoff spot
 y-clinched division

Thursday's game

Dallas at Tennessee

Sunday's games

Arizona at Atlanta
 Carolina at Tampa Bay
 Chicago at Detroit
 Cleveland at Washington
 Denver at Kansas City
 Indianapolis at N.Y. Giants
 Jacksonville at Houston
 Miami at New England
 New Orleans at Philadelphia
 N.Y. Jets at Seattle
 San Francisco at Las Vegas
 L.A. Rams at L.A. Chargers
 Minnesota at Green Bay
 Pittsburgh at Baltimore

Monday's game

Buffalo at Cincinnati

Sunday, Jan. 8

Arizona at San Francisco
 Baltimore at Cincinnati
 Carolina at New Orleans
 Cleveland at Pittsburgh
 Dallas at Washington
 Detroit at Green Bay
 Houston at Indianapolis
 Kansas City at Las Vegas
 L.A. Chargers at Denver
 L.A. Rams at Seattle
 Minnesota at Chicago
 N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia
 N.Y. Jets at Miami
 New England at Buffalo
 Tampa Bay at Atlanta
 Tennessee at Jacksonville

DEALS

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	25	10	.714	—
Brooklyn	23	12	.657	2
Philadelphia	20	13	.606	4
New York	18	17	.514	7
Toronto	15	19	.441	9½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	18	17	.514	—
Atlanta	17	18	.486	1
Washington	15	21	.417	3½
Orlando	13	23	.361	5½
Charlotte	9	26	.257	9
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	22	12	.647	—
Cleveland	22	13	.629	½
Indiana	18	17	.514	4½
Chicago	15	19	.441	7
Detroit	9	28	.243	14½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	22	12	.647	—
Memphis	20	13	.606	1½
Dallas	19	16	.543	3½
San Antonio	11	23	.324	11
Houston	10	24	.294	12
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	22	12	.647	—
Portland	18	16	.529	4
Utah	19	18	.514	4½
Minnesota	16	19	.457	6½
Oklahoma City	15	19	.441	7
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	21	15	.583	—
Phoenix	20	16	.556	1
Sacramento	18	15	.545	1½
Golden State	18	18	.500	3
L.A. Lakers	14	21	.400	6½

Wednesday's games
 Washington 127, Phoenix 102
 Detroit 121, Orlando 101
 Brooklyn 108, Atlanta 107
 Miami 112, L.A. Lakers 98
 New Orleans 119, Minnesota 118
 Chicago 119, Milwaukee 113, OT
 Sacramento 127, Denver 126
 Golden State 112, Utah 107

Thursday's games
 Cleveland at Indiana
 Oklahoma City at Charlotte
 L.A. Clippers at Boston
 Memphis at Toronto
 New York at San Antonio
 Houston at Dallas

Friday's games
 Washington at Orlando
 L.A. Lakers at Atlanta
 Phoenix at Toronto
 Detroit at Chicago
 Minnesota at Milwaukee
 Philadelphia at New Orleans
 Miami at Denver
 Portland at Golden State
 Utah at Sacramento

Saturday's games
 L.A. Clippers at Indiana
 Brooklyn at Charlotte
 Cleveland at Chicago
 Dallas at San Antonio
 New York at Houston
 Detroit at Minnesota
 New Orleans at Memphis
 Philadelphia at Oklahoma City
 Miami at Utah

Sunday's games
 Boston at Denver
 Sacramento at Memphis
 Washington at Milwaukee

Scoring leaders					
Through Wednesday					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Embiid, PHI	25	280	256	843	33.7
Doncic, DAL	32	365	254	1076	33.6
Antetokounmpo, MIL	29	330	237	919	31.7
G.-Alexander, OKC	31	325	294	976	31.5
Tatum, BOS	33	337	242	1026	31.1
Curry, GS	26	262	124	779	30.0
Durant, BKN	34	362	232	1016	29.9
Mitchell, CLE	31	307	149	882	28.5
James, LAL	27	295	106	751	27.8
Davis, LAL	25	255	166	685	27.4
Young, ATL	31	268	240	847	27.3
Morant, MEM	28	263	183	758	27.1
Booker, PHO	29	283	153	786	27.1

AROUND THE LEAGUE

Uncertainty remains only certainty

Associated Press

DENVER — There was a time when an NBA team had some sense of how things were shaping up by Christmas. Even if just a glimmer of its place in the overall landscape.

Then the Boston Celtics made a run to the 2022 NBA Finals after being under .500 about this time last year.

Nobody is feeling too cozy this winter in the injury-riddled NBA.

“I don’t know if you can make any sense of anything nowadays,” Nuggets coach Michael Malone said.

Going into Thursday’s games, Boston sat atop the Eastern Conference while Denver and New Orleans were tied in the West. But both races could simply depend on who heals the fastest or who can stay the healthiest.

The reigning NBA champion Golden State Warriors are missing Stephen Curry (shoulder), the Los Angeles Lakers are without Anthony Davis (foot) and the Minnesota Timberwolves are minus Karl-Anthony Towns (calf).

The Phoenix Suns will be without Devin Booker for at least four weeks after he reaggravated his groin Sunday, and Domantas Sabonis is day-to-day with a hand injury as the Sacramento Kings try



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, left, works the ball inside as Phoenix Suns guard Chris Paul defends during overtime of Sunday’s game in Denver. The Nuggets won 128-125.

to make the playoffs for the first time since 2005-06.

Meanwhile, Jayson Tatum has the Celtics humming along, and Nuggets big man Nikola Jokic is threatening to join Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain and Larry Bird as the only players to win three

consecutive MVP awards.

Despite those two playing some of the best basketball in the NBA, injuries have led to some early season chaos.

Four teams are within four games of the first-place Celtics in the East, and six clubs are within 4

games of the co-leaders in the West.

“The talent and skill levels may change because of injuries,” Suns coach Monty Williams said. “But playing with a great level of competition should never change for any team.”

At 38, LeBron clear on still wanting title shots

BY TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

MIAMI — It was 2006. LeBron James wasn’t even midway through his first stint in Cleveland. He made the playoffs for the first time, was already a globally recognized star and well on his way to becoming the game’s best player.

As a 21-year-old, he averaged 30.2 points.

Fast forward 16 years. He’s left Cleveland, gone to Miami, won two championships, gotten married, became a father of three, gone back to Cleveland, won another championship, left for Los Angeles, won a fourth championship with the Lakers, still a giant star, still in the best-player conversation.

As a 37-year-old, he averaged 30.1 points.

James turns 38 on Friday, midway through his 20th season. Nobody in NBA history has averaged so many points as a 37-year-old. Not even close. Karl Malone averaged 23.2 points at that age, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar averaged 20.2 and Julius Erving averaged 20.2. There have been 150 players in NBA history who played at 37; the average scoring clip of the other 149 was 8.3 points per game.



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James hugs Heat forward Udonis Haslem after a game Wednesday in Miami.

Yet here is James, simply not slowing down. He averaged more points at 37 than he did at 22. Or 23. Or 24. Or any other age over the last 16 years.

James is closing in on passing Abdul-Jabbar for the NBA career scoring record — they’re separated by only 574 points — and he’s as prolific a scorer as he’s ever been.

“He constantly works at his craft,” said Miami coach Erik Spoelstra, the only coach to win more than one championship with

James. “So, he’s going to continue to develop new skills to put in his toolkit. He doesn’t get bored with that process. You can tell. He’s like a computer. When he sees another player work on something, or do something in the game, he says, ‘Oh, I want to try that.’ ... He never gets bored with that.”

He has, however, gotten bored with losing.

The Lakers are 14-21 and are without perennial All-Star big man Anthony Davis, who remains out with a foot injury with no ti-

metable for his return. They’re mired near the bottom of the NBA and need a big rally in order to avoid missing the playoffs for a second consecutive season. Since James and Davis led the Lakers to the 2020 NBA title, the team hasn’t won a playoff series; it went out in the first round in 2021, and didn’t make it in 2022.

James will be a 38-year-old All-Star when the game rolls around in February; only five other players have been in that game at 38 or older. The Lakers are only three games out of the last play-in tournament spot, so it’s not like there’s no hope for this season.

But he’s not playing for All-Star longevity marks, or the chance to squeak into the playoffs, or even scoring records. He doesn’t know how much longer he wants to play, but knows what he still wants to do.

“I’m a winner. And I want to win,” James said. “I want to win and give myself a chance to win and still compete for championships. That has always been my passion, my goal since I entered the league, an 18-year-old kid out of Akron, Ohio. I know it takes steps to get there. And once you get there, you know how to get there.”

YEAR IN REVIEW/NFL

Griner saga in Russia AP's top sports story

Associated Press

The return of Brittney Griner to the United States in a dramatic prisoner swap with Russia marked the culmination of a 10-month ordeal that captivated world attention, a saga that landed at the intersection of sports, politics, race and gender identity — and wartime diplomacy.

Griner had for years been known to fans of women's basketball — college player of the year, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and WNBA All-Star who dominated her sport. But her arrest on drug-related charges at a Moscow airport in February elevated her profile in ways neither she nor her supporters would have ever hoped for, making her by far the most high-profile American to be jailed abroad — and her saga the AP Sports Story of the Year.

Her case not only brought unprecedented public attention to the dozens of Americans wrongfully detained by foreign governments, but it also emerged as a major inflection point in U.S.-Russia diplomacy at a time of deteriorating relations prompted by Moscow's war against Ukraine.

"I think her celebrity and the coinciding with the time of the invasion of Ukraine, those two points together is what made her case national news, international news, international news."

Kimberly St. Julian-Varnon
Russian historian and doctoral student
at the University of Pennsylvania

After months of strained negotiations, and an extraordinarily rare public revela-

tion by the Biden administration that it had made a "substantial proposal" to get home Griner and another detained American, Paul Whelan, the case resolved Dec. 8 with a prisoner swap in which the WNBA star was exchanged in the United Arab Emirates for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

"It feels so good to be home! The last 10 months have been a battle at every turn," Griner posted on Instagram. "I dug deep to keep my faith and it was the love from so many of you that helped keep me going. From the bottom of my heart, thank you to everyone for your help."

The deal drew criticism from some prominent Republicans, who lamented that the U.S. had not gotten Whelan home and who complained that the administration had given up a convicted felon as notorious as Bout. Administration officials, for their part, conceded that such prisoner swaps can carry a heavy price but also said it was unacceptable for Griner to remain locked up and that the deal that they reached was the only one that could secure her release.

For weeks after Griner's arrest at a Moscow airport in February, where Russian authorities said a search of her luggage revealed vape cartridges containing cannabis oil, her supporters kept a relatively low profile in hopes her case would be quickly resolved. In May, however, the State Department announced she'd been designated as a wrongful detainee, giving the U.S. government's top hostage negotiator the authority to try to secure her release outside the legal system.

She pleaded guilty over the summer, admitting that she had the canisters in her lug-



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Brittney Griner had been known for years as a two-time Olympic gold medalist and WNBA All-Star. Her 10-month ordeal in Russia captivated world attention.

gage but that she packed them inadvertently in her haste to make her flight and had no criminal intent. From there, attention turned to the possibility of a prisoner swap, especially after Secretary of State Antony Blinken's announcement of a "substantial proposal."

All the while, Griner's saga sparked discussions about pay equity for WNBA players that leads women to play overseas to supplement their salaries. During her journey, Griner also drew support from her teammates and the league — the WNBA honored her with a floor decal — as the case received more attention and as her imprisonment put pressure on the administration to negotiate her release. Her wife, Cherelle, and her agent met with Biden at the White House as other officials worked behind the scenes on the case.

St. Julian-Varnon said Griner's status as a Black and openly gay woman — two minority identities "at the flashpoints of national politics in the United States right now" — cut both ways, with members of those communities seeing her as a representative. But it's "also made a lot of people

think that she doesn't matter, that she deserves a nine-year sentence in a Russian penal colony."

Now that she's back in the U.S., Griner plans to be out of the public spotlight for a while to spend time with her wife. No longer just a generational women's basketball player, Griner is standing at a much larger crossroads.

She said in a statement that she plans to play this season for the Phoenix Mercury.

"I look forward to being able to say 'thank you' to those of you who advocated, wrote and posted for me in person soon," Griner said.

Off the court, the Griners do plan to continue to be advocates for the release of other wrongly detained Americans like Whelan.

"President Biden, you brought me home and I know you are committed to bringing Paul Whelan and all Americans home, too. I will use my platform to do whatever I can to help you," Griner said. "I also encourage everyone that played a part in bringing me home to continue their efforts to bring all Americans home. Every family deserves to be whole."

Raiders bench QB Carr, will start Stidham for last 2 games

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — Las Vegas Raiders quarterback Derek Carr has missed only three games in nine years, all because of injury.

Now, for the first time, he won't play because of what coach Josh McDaniels said Wednesday were offensive performance reasons.

McDaniels will not only start Jarrett Stidham the final two weeks, including Sunday's home game against the San Francisco 49ers, but Carr will be inactive. Practice squad quarterback Chase Garbers will be the backup.



Carr

Carr has not completed more than 55% of his passes in any of the past four games, and he has thrown seven interceptions and six touchdown passes in that span.

Including three games with the Raiders this season, Stidham has completed 32 of 61 passes for 342

yards with two touchdowns and four interceptions. He has never started.

"I don't think anybody feels like we've done enough offensively certainly in a couple of these games," McDaniels said. "We couldn't put enough points on the board, so I don't think anybody's really happy with what we've done."

Wide receiver Davante Adams, who also played with Carr at Fresno State, helped orchestrate a trade from the Green Bay Packers in March largely because he wanted to play with him.

"I don't think anybody was excited about it in here," Adams said of Carr's benching. "I wouldn't be here right now if he wasn't here. I think everybody knows how I feel about him. ... Obviously, I support my guy."

Adams said his focus is on the final two games rather than what his options might look like after the season.

Carr was not at the Raiders' facility, and Stidham was expected to address reporters Thursday.

"You've got to kind of take the emotions out of it and realize the only thing that can be productive is

support Jarrett going forward," tight end Darren Waller said. "The guys are excited about him being able to get an opportunity, so we're rallying around him and letting him know we believe in him."

By not playing Carr, the Raiders eliminate the possibility of a serious injury affecting his contract status. The club has until Feb. 15 to decide whether to release or trade Carr — who has a no-trade clause but could waive it — or he would receive \$33 million for 2023. A serious injury would guarantee that money plus another \$7.5 million for 2024.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Baker's Series title among best moments

By JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

Dusty Baker's run to a World Series title win was one of the several memorable sports stories in 2022, on and off the field.

One of the most respected people in baseball, the one thing missing from Baker's résumé: a World Series ring as a manager.

Baker finally got the elusive ring with the Houston Astros while erasing some of the taint of the sign-stealing 2017 title in one of the best moments of the year in sports.

"Had this happened years ago, I might not even be here," Baker said. "So maybe it wasn't supposed to happen so that I could hopefully influence a few young men's lives and their families and a number of people in the country through showing what perseverance and character can do for you in the long run."

Baker won a World Series with the Los Angeles Dodgers, but had gone 25 years without winning one as a manager. He had been to the Fall Classic twice before without winning and was the winningest manager without a title before the Astros beat the Philadelphia Phillies in six games.

"To be the team that was able to pull it off for him, I know how much it means to him and it means so much to us," Astros pitcher Justin Verlander said.

Aaron Judge also made the headlines by breaking the American League record with his 62nd homer, leading to a record nine-year, \$360 million contract.

There were several off-field stories that made headlines — Brittney Griner being arrested and convicted in Russia on drug charges, and the workplace complaints against Commanders owner Dan Snyder and Suns owner Robert Sarver — but Baker's long-awaited title win wasn't the only redemptive sports story in 2022.



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Kansas' Ochai Agbaji celebrates after the Jayhawks mounted the biggest comeback in national championship history, rallying from 16 points down to beat North Carolina.



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Houston manager Dusty Baker Jr. and the Astros celebrate their World Series championship. Baker finally earned his first ring in 25 years as a manager in one of the most memorable moments of the year.

On the courts

■ In the NBA, the Golden State Warriors regained their past magic and solidified their dynasty with a fourth NBA title in eight years, but first since 2018. Stephen Curry was again the catalyst, solidifying his claim as the greatest shooter in NBA history with another dynamic performance.

■ In men's college basketball, Kansas re-established its blue-blood status in college basketball by mounting the biggest comeback in national championship history, rallying from 16 points down to beat North Carolina for its fourth national championship. The win came after an epic Final Four matchup between Tobacco Road rivals North Carolina and Duke.

■ In women's college hoops, South Carolina did something no other team had been able to accomplish, handing UConn's Geno Auriemma his first lost in 12 national title games.

■ The veterans ruled most of the men's tennis majors, with Rafael Nadal winning the Australian Open and French Open to stretch his Grand Slam record to 22 titles. Novak Djokovic won Wimbledon, but didn't get a chance to play in Australia or the U.S. Open because of his vaccination status.

■ Spain's Carlos Alcaraz was the lone youngster among the Grand Slamers, breaking through to win the U.S. Open at 19. Iga Swiatek won two Grand Slam titles in 2022, including a U.S. Open that saw the farewell of Serena Williams after 23 titles.



NATACHA PISARENKO/AP

Nathan Chen, of the United States, competes in the men's free skate program at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Chen won gold after his flameout at the Pyeongchang Games four years earlier.

On the ice

■ The Colorado Avalanche cranked up the way-back machine, winning their first Stanley Cup title since 2001 by beating the reigning champion Tampa Bay Lightning in six games. The uber-talented core that suffered through several early postseason exits looks like a group that could be more than one-and-done with the Cup.

On the gridiron

■ The Los Angeles Rams proved that home cooking is best, beating the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 to become the second straight team to win the Super Bowl at their home stadium after Tampa

Bay did it the year before. The Super Bowl title was the Rams' first since 2000, when the franchise was in St. Louis.

■ In the College Football Playoff, Georgia pulled off a similar move in football, knocking off Alabama and Nick Saban for the program's first national championship in 41 years.

At the Olympics

The Winter Olympics in Beijing, still grappling with the effects of the pandemic, saw American figure skater Nathan Chen earn gold after his flameout at the Pyeongchang Games four years earlier.

Lindsey Jacobellis, long known for her blunder at the 2006 Torino

Games, finally won gold in snowboard cross and added another in the mixed-team event.

Chloe Kim proved she was the queen of the halfpipe, winning her second straight gold, and Finland won its first hockey gold by beating favored Russia in the final.

Out on the fairways

■ LIV: The Saudi-backed LIV made waves that reverberated across the golf world, with several major players abandoning the PGA and European tours to cash in on the riches of the lucrative tour.

■ On the PGA Tour, the young guys moved to the forefront. Scottie Scheffler won The Masters, Justin Thomas the PGA Championship, Matt Fitzpatrick took the U.S. Open and Cameron Smith won the British Open, marking the first time the majors were won by players under 30 in the same year.

On the track

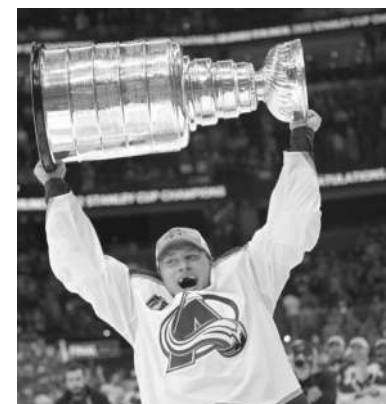
Youth prevailed at the Daytona 500 as well, with rookie Austin Cindric taking the checkers. Marcus Ericsson, a former Formula One backmarker, became the second Swedish driver to win the Indianapolis 500 by holding off some of the biggest names in North American auto racing.

Off the field

■ Griner's arrest and imprisonment on drug charges became international sports and political news as the U.S. tried to free the WNBA star.

■ Sarver was suspended one year and fined \$10 million on Sept. 13 by the NBA over workplace misconduct that included racist speech and hostile behavior toward employees. Sarver then announced his intention to sell the team.

■ Snyder had problems of his own with a House committee investigating hundreds of instances of sexual harassment by men at the top levels of the organization. The franchise was fined \$10 million.



PHELAN EBENHACK/AP

Avalanche defenseman Erik Johnson lifts the Stanley Cup after Colorado defeated the Tampa Bay Lightning.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Women's sports saw pivotal growth in 2022

By ALANIS THAMES
Associated Press

South Carolina coach Dawn Staley has been around women's basketball long enough to see the growing pains of a young WNBA league gradually shifting to increased interest in the sport at all levels.

"We probably are bursting at the seams for the people that are decision-makers in our game to allow us to be just that," said Staley, who led the Gamecocks to their second women's hoops title this year.

Popularity across women's sports has grown steadily over the past few years, but 2022 marked a pivotal moment as several sports saw increases in viewership and ratings, sponsorship deals and prime-time coverage.

This past WNBA regular season was the most watched since 2006. And storylines were plentiful as the league contended with the detainment of Phoenix Mercury center and two-time Olympic gold medalist Brittney Griner, as well as the retirement of one of the league's most popular players in Seattle Storm point guard Sue Bird.

According to ESPN, which aired 25 regular-season games and the entire postseason, the 2022 playoffs averaged 456,000 viewers — up 22% over 2021's postseason — making it the most-viewed WNBA postseason since 2007. The WNBA Draft averaged 403,000 viewers, which was the most since Diana Taurasi was the top pick in 2004.

WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said her league and the women's college game build off each other.

Engelbert said the NCAA Women's Tournament, which had the most viewed championship game in nearly two decades, built momentum for the women's game heading into the WNBA season. Now she wants to see how far that

growth can go.

"I'm never satisfied," Engelbert said. "My team is like 'Ask for more.' When you're in hyper growth mode that's how you have to do it. We don't rest. We have to take advantage of the momentum when you have it. ... You have to keep pushing, too."

"We're underinvested and undervalued."

The league has a deal with ESPN/ABC through 2025 where the company paid the WNBA \$27 million in 2021 and \$28.5 million this past season. That number goes up \$1.5 million per season until it hits \$33 million in 2025.

At the collegiate level, division I football players continue to exponentially out-earn athletes in all other sports. But name, image and likeness (NIL) deals have been a game changer for female collegiate athletes, particularly in non-revenue producing sports. NIL allows women to take advantage of large social media followings and earn sponsorships with brands like Champs and Adidas.

Olivia Dunne, a gymnast at LSU, has over 8 million followers across all of her social media platforms, more than any other female collegiate athlete. Her sponsorships include deals with the clothing brand Vuori and American Eagle.

From the July 2021 inception of NIL through November, women's sports occupied six of the top 10 highest-earning sports by NIL compensation, according to the NIL technology and marketing company Opendorse.

"The student-athletes are using social media to build their own audiences, which is driving more interest and tune in to their sports," said Blake Lawrence, CEO at Opendorse. "The industry is feeding itself ... the more marketable the women's sports athletes, the more engaged their audience will be, the more engaged the audience will be, the more marketable the athletes become."



ERIC GAY/AP

South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley celebrates after the title game of the Women's Final Four against Connecticut on April 3 in Minneapolis. South Carolina won 64-49 to win the championship.



FRANK GUNN/AP

Katie Ledecky, of the United States, celebrates after breaking the world record in the 1500-meter freestyle at the FINA Swimming World Cup in Toronto on Oct. 29.

Ledecky gets 2nd nod as AP Female Athlete of Year

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

A change of scenery worked out just fine for Katie Ledecky.

Shifting coasts and coaches after last summer's Tokyo Olympics, the American swimmer turned in another stellar performance at the world championships, set a pair of world records and capped 2022 as The Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year, selected by a panel of 40 sports writers and editors from news outlets across the country.

Ledecky, who previously won the award in 2017, edged out American track star Sydney McLaughlin in balloting announced Wednesday.

The two tied in total points, but Ledecky got the nod based on 10 first-place votes to McLaughlin's nine. Basketball standout A'ja Wilson finished third.

"I know so many great athletes have won this honor," Ledecky said. "I'm really happy — happy with how my year went, and also excited about the future."

Ledecky, who won her first Olympic gold medal in 2012 at age 15, has managed to stay on top in female freestyle swimming's longest pool events for the better part of a decade.

She has held the long-course world record in both the 800- and 1,500-meter free since 2013, rarely facing a serious challenge in either of those grueling races.

At this year's world aquatics championships in Budapest, Hungary, Ledecky touched first in the 800 by more than 10 seconds and won the 1,500 by nearly 15 seconds.

She also claimed gold in the 400 free and was part of the winning U.S. team in the 4x200 free relay.

Before 2022 was done, Ledecky added two more world records to her ledger. She set short-course marks in both the 800 and 1,500 a week apart — even though she rarely competes in the 25-meter pool.

But the real enjoyment for Ledecky comes when no one is cheering her on, when it's just her and her coaches and teammates, putting in the long, lonely hours of training.

"I might be one of the few swimmers who loves the training even more than the racing," she said. "Don't get me wrong, I love the racing, too. But I truly enjoy going to practice every day. I'm excited when I go to bed for practice in the morning."

Last year, after an Olympic performance that was a slight disappointment by her lofty standards, Ledecky left coach Greg Meehan and the Stanford University team where she had competed and trained while earning a psychology degree.

Her top priority was getting closer to her family in the Washington, D.C., area. She was intrigued by the program that Anthony Nesty, a rising star in the coaching ranks, had built at the University of Florida.

One of Nesty's freestylers, Bobby Finke, surprisingly swept gold in the men's 800 and 1,500 free at Tokyo. Another, Kieran Smith, captured an unexpected bronze.

So, Ledecky moved nearly 2,800 miles from Palo Alto, Calif., to Gainesville, Fla.

"It's been a lot of fun every day," she said. "This is the right place for me to be at this point in my career. I'm training really well and learning a lot along the way."

The shift to Nesty and a program where she usually trains with the men seems to have pushed the 25-year-old Ledecky to even greater heights.

Nesty said one of his main challenges is making sure Ledecky doesn't train too hard.

"She needs to understand that once you get older, the body is different," the coach said. "I have to tell her, 'Katie, you've got to understand you're not 18 anymore.' The body will get tired. When it gets tired, it's OK to throttle back a little bit."

Moving to Florida has led to other changes.

Always a bit reserved, Ledecky now seems far more willing to speak up — even holding her own in good-natured trash talk with her male teammates, according to Nesty.

"This group is a very competitive group, a fun group and, at times, pretty chatty," he said. "It seems to have made her pretty chatty. You've gotta be with our group. I think our group has kind of made her come out of her shell a little bit."

Ledecky agreed.

"Guys are guys. They love to trash-talk with each other," she said with a smile. "I'll poke a little fun at some of the guys, give them a little push here and there. I'm definitely pretty comfortable in this environment now."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF



JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

Running back Kenny McIntosh has started 12 games for Georgia and leads the Bulldogs with 709 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns. The Bulldogs have been rotating four running backs to keep them healthy.

Georgia uses RB depth with eye on title repeat

By CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia coach Kirby Smart's plan for a deep running back corps was based on more than making it through a 12-game regular season.

Smart wanted his backs to be fresh for the College Football Playoff. The No. 1 Bulldogs will take a group of four running backs, led by Kenny McIntosh, into the Peach Bowl semifinal against No. 4 Ohio State on Saturday.

McIntosh has started 12 games for Georgia (13-0) and leads the Bulldogs with 709 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns. At times, however, it's difficult to distinguish the senior's hold on the No. 1 role because Daijun Edwards is a close second, with 681 yards and eight touchdowns.

Kendall Milton and Branson Robinson have combined for more than 800 rushing yards and eight scores. That depth gives the defending national champion Bulldogs a strong running complement to quarterback Stetson Bennett's passing game.

The depth and balance at running back and other skill positions is Georgia's answer to Ohio State's high-scoring offense led by quarterback C.J. Stroud.

Smart says his plan at running back is about "health and necessity" and is based on an examination of Southeastern Conference offenses.

"Throughout our conference

**Peach Bowl
(CFP semifinal)
No. 4 Ohio State (11-1)
vs. No. 1 Georgia (13-0)**
AFN-Sports
2:10 a.m. Sunday CET
10:10 a.m. Sunday JKT

we've done studies, and very few backs have made it through the entire year with a large burden," Smart said. "They tend to get injured. ... We try to build it where three to four backs can contribute and play."

Georgia's best chance at making a run for another national title may be provided by its depth at running back and other skill positions.

"We don't want to get into this part of the season and not have depth," Smart said. "That's what the rotation provides us."

Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg said the Georgia running backs boast similar skills and strengths.

"Some are faster than others, but I'd say overall they're all great running backs," Eichenberg said.

Georgia has taken a similar approach at other skill positions.

Starters also are bracketed with "OR" designations on Georgia's depth chart at wide receiver and even at tight end, where starter Brock Bowers was the John Mackey Award winner as the nation's top player at the position. Massive Darnell Washington (6-7, 265) and freshman Oscar

Delp provide good reason to consider two-tight end sets.

"Kind of a friendly competition," Bowers said when asked about the depth at the position.

Ohio State coach Ryan Day says Georgia's depth, especially after losing a record 15 NFL Draft picks from last year's national championship team, is proof that Smart and his staff "have done a great job recruiting."

"There's guys who roll in the front, there's guys who roll in the back end, multiple running backs, multiple wide receivers," Day said. "So when you're playing against a really good team who plays with a lot of depth and has recruited really well, that's one of the things you have to prepare for. What does that mean? Well, you just have to know that you're not going to just hone in on one or two guys. You've got to be aware of more than one of those guys, and that's the sign of a good team."

Ohio State also has utilized a committee approach at running back.

"Most of it's been by originally by design, but then with the injuries that we've had a couple times with those guys, they've all practiced well," offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson said.

The Buckeyes lost their second-leading rusher, TreVeyon Henderson, to foot surgery. Leading rusher Miyan Williams has been slowed by a leg injury, but "had a really good go" in Monday's practice, Wilson said.

Study: Michigan loves big personnel packages

FROM PAGE 48

Offensive line coach Sherrone Moore is also Michigan's co-offensive coordinator now, handling play-calling duties with Weiss. The two were promoted after Josh Gattis left for Miami following last season's playoff appearance by the Wolverines that ended in an Orange Bowl semifinal loss to Georgia.

"I think (Moore) does a really good job of knowing what our strengths are," Hayes said. "It's great having him in our room. We get extra intricate detail of why are we doing this as a whole offense. He kind of lets us know what the whole offense is doing and that helps us."

Adding to all that beef up front, Michigan loves its big personnel packages. The Wolverines will regularly use two, three, even the occasional four-tight end formation.

It is an offense Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh's mentor, Bo Schembechler, would be proud of.

"It's going to be quite a bit different from what we've gotten to see week in and week out," TCU defensive coordinator Joe Gillespie said. "But I also feel like there's some differences that we'll bring to the table as well."

The 3-3-5 defense TCU plays was born as a counter-measure to spread offenses that proliferated college football — especially the Big 12 — in the 2000s and 2010s.

Those offenses often abandon the tight end position altogether, instead going with four or five wide receivers.

Ohio State dabbles in the 3-3-5, but for the most part Michigan didn't see much of it this season.

"So, it's really hard to watch the tape and say, 'OK, this will definitely work, but this won't,'" Weiss said about game planning

for TCU.

The Horned Frogs are not exactly undersized up front on defense. Nose guards Damonic Williams and Tymon Mitchell both weigh in north of 315 pounds. But usually only one of them is on the field at a time. All three of TCU's starting linebackers are listed at 230 pounds or more.

But if TCU wants to stick with its usual five defensive backs against Michigan, those players are going to be forced to get physical in ways they typically haven't faced this season.

Advantage, Michigan? Neither side is about to concede that.

"They look like NFL safeties and DBs," Weiss said of the TCU secondary. "They fly up there, they tackle, they're physical, they're really good tacklers and they're fast. That erases a lot of those problems."

The Horned Frogs ranked fourth in the Big 12 — but 65th in the country — in yards per carry allowed at 4.10. By far their best defensive game came against Texas and All-American Bijan Robinson, who had 29 yards on 12 carries.

In two games against Kansas State, though, the Frogs allowed 363 yards and 4.9 yards per carry.

Meanwhile, Michigan's offense ranked fourth in the country in yards per carry at 5.64, ninth in rushing attempts (571) and hardly dropped off when All-America running back Blake Corum went out with a knee injury in Game 11.

Donovan Edwards moved into starting role for the final two games and ran for 401 yards on 47 carries against Ohio State and Purdue.

"If they establish the run," TCU linebacker Johnny Hodges said, "it's going to be a long game for us."



SAM HODDE/AP

The Horned Frogs aren't exactly small up front. Tymon Mitchell is one of two TCU nose guards that weigh in north of 315 pounds.

SPORTS

Ledecky earns top honor

Swimmer voted Female Athlete of Year by Associated Press » Page 46



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

A study in contrasting styles

TCU will try to utilize its speed against Michigan's size, power

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Asked to consider what previous opponents were similar to Michigan, TCU's defensive players and coordinator mention Kansas State a lot.

A bigger Kansas State.

"We see that they have a pretty huge O-line," Horned Frogs linebacker Dee Winters said Tuesday.

As for the Wolverines, they don't have much experience to draw upon when it comes to facing a defense like TCU's that uses three down linemen and three safeties.

"This is all new to us," Michigan offensive tackle Ryan Hayes said.

No. 2 Michigan brings its smashmouth ways into the College Football Playoff semifinal on Saturday to face No. 3 TCU. It's tempting to boil the Fiesta Bowl matchup down to Big Ten power vs. Big 12 speed, especially when the Wolverines have the ball.

Tempting, but not entirely accurate.

"I think maybe it's an oversimplification," Michigan co-offen-

Fiesta Bowl (CFP semifinal)
No. 3 TCU (12-1)
vs. No. 2 Michigan (13-0)
AFN-Sports
10:10 p.m. Saturday CET
6:10 a.m. Sunday JKT

sive coordinator Matt Weiss said.

For the second straight season, Michigan won the Joe Moore Award given to the best offensive line in the country.

This season's group might be even better than last year's, which added center Olusegun Oluwatimi to a veteran group. The Virginia transfer won the Outland Trophy (best interior lineman) and Rimington Trophy (top center) this season.

Oluwatimi, tackles Hayes and Karsen Barnhart, and guards Zak Zinter and Trevor Keegan average 308 pounds, but what makes them different from even the best Big 12 lines is they also are long and rangy.

The 6-foot-3 Oluwatimi is the only one of five starters under 6-5.

SEE STUDY ON PAGE 47



PAUL SANCYA, ABOVE, AND STEPHEN SPILLMAN, LEFT/AP

Above: Taking over after starting running back Blake Corum suffered a knee injury, Donovan Edwards has rushed for 401 yards on 47 carries in Michigan's last two games. Left: TCU safety Mark Perry brings down Texas running back Bijan Robinson. The Horned Frogs held Robinson to 29 yards on 12 carries.

INSIDE

Georgia's RB depth built with an eye on keeping them healthy for repeat title run

Page 47



Raiders bench QB Carr for final two games » NFL, Page 44

