

# VOICES

MAGAZINE FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

march 2026





**W**hen was the last time you were thinking about what you are actually consuming?

Every day, we are bombarded with news and advertisements, making us feel increasingly detached from our emotions. Buried under advertisements for the latest micro trend, I see my brain screaming for help, overwhelmed by all the bad news.

So, fleeing into the safety of our like-minded bubbles online makes it easy to forget the world around us, but also that there are other opinions and views as well.

But like Hegel said: "Genuine tragedies in the world are not conflicts between right and wrong. They are conflicts between two rights."

Therefore, being open-minded towards each other's opinion or at least respectful is becoming more and more important, especially when people start to feel too comfortable behind their anonymous online persona, removing the fear of consequences. This shield allows users to abandon social norms, creating dangerous, dehumanized environments.

So, let us become more mindful in our actions and read the articles of this edition with conscience.

Nelli Winzer

**К**ога последен пат размислувавте за тоа што, всушност, конзумирате?

Секој ден сме бомбардирани со вести и реклами, што нè тера да се чувствуваме сè повеќе одвоени од нашите емоции. Закопани под кампањи за најновиот микро тренд, го гледам мојот мозок како вреска за помош - преплавен од сите лоши вести.

Значи, бегането во безбедноста на нашите истомислечки меурчиња на интернет го олеснува заборавањето на светот околу нас, но и дека постојат и други мислења и ставови.

Сепак, како што рече Хегел: „Вистинските трагедии во светот не се конфликти помеѓу доброто и лошото. Тие се конфликти помеѓу две права.“

Затоа, отвореноста кон мислењето на другиот или барем почитувањето - станува сè поважно, особено кога луѓето почнуваат да се чувствуваат премногу удобно зад својата анонимна онлајн личност, отстранувајќи го стравот од последици. Овој штит им овозможува на корисниците да ги напуштат општествените норми, создавајќи опасни, дехуманизирани средини.

Затоа, да станеме повнимателни во нашите постапки и да ги читаме написите од ова издание со совест.

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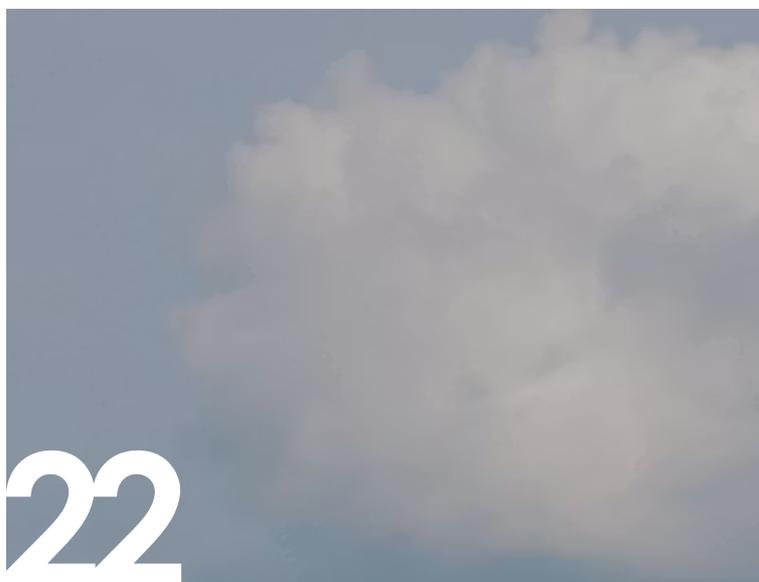
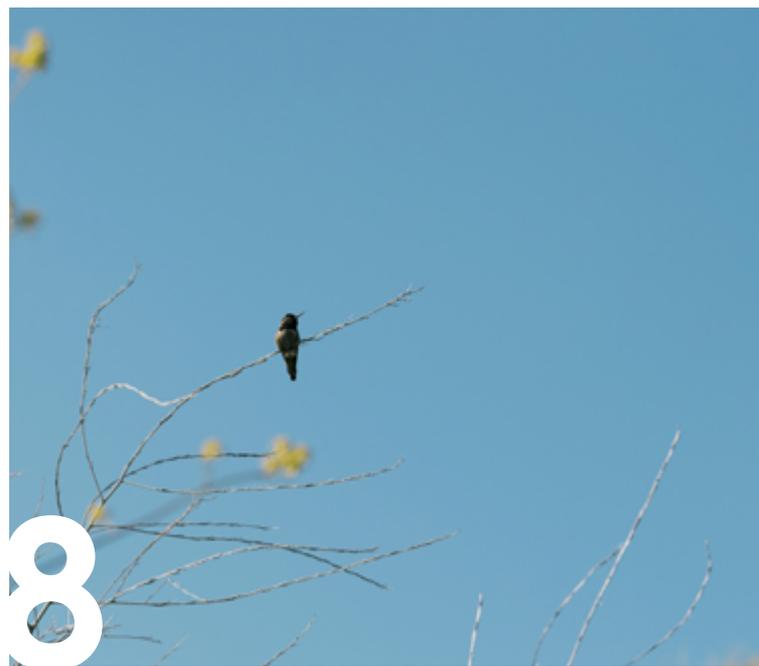
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# The Fog of Your 20s

There is a particular kind of fog that settles over your twenties. It doesn't arrive all at once. It creeps in quietly, like early morning mist, softening the outlines of everything you thought you understood about yourself, about love, about where you were supposed to be going.

One day you wake up and realize you are no longer standing at the edge of life, waiting for it to begin. You are inside it now. Expected to choose. To decide. To become.

And yet, you feel less certain than ever.

Your twenties are not a straight road.

They are a field without signs.

You walk because standing still feels unbearable, but you do not know where the path leads. Everyone around you seems to be moving with purpose, building futures, speaking with certainty.

Meanwhile, inside, everything shifts.

You change your mind. You change your dreams. You change your idea of love, of success, of home.

Sometimes you change so much you no longer recognize the person you used to be. This is the fog.

It is the strange in between where childhood is no longer a shelter, but adulthood does not yet feel like a place you belong. You carry memories that still ache, wounds you once thought were normal, patterns you inherited without noticing. In the quiet moments, you begin to see them clearly.

You realize how much you normalized.

The silence.

The tension.

The ways you learned to shrink yourself.

The ways you learned to survive.

And then comes the hardest part: deciding what to do with that awareness.

Some people stay where they are, because staying is familiar. Because pain, when known, can feel safer than the unknown.

Others begin the slow, trembling work of moving forward.

Of unlearning. Of forgiving. Of trying to build something softer inside themselves.

Neither path is easy.

There are days when you feel stuck in place, as if your feet were rooted to old versions of yourself.

Days when the past speaks louder than the present. Days when moving forward

feels like betrayal: of who you were, of what

you endured, of the coping mechanisms that once kept you

alive.

But there are also days when courage appears quietly.

Not as a grand transformation, but as a small shift: telling the truth, setting a boundary, allowing yourself to rest, daring to imagine a different life.

We are told that these years should be exciting, free, full of possibility. And they are. But they are also heavy. Melancholic. Tender. Your twenties ask you to meet yourself without disguise.

You fall in love as if it will last forever.



And when it ends, you believe you will never recover.

Yet heartbreak becomes a mirror. It shows you what you tolerated, what you feared, what you longed for. It strips away illusions and leaves behind something more honest. At the time, it feels like destruction.

Later, you recognize it as revelation.

Being lost hurts. Being stuck hurts. Healing hurts. But pain is not proof that you are failing. It is proof that something is moving. We are not taught how to wander. We are taught to arrive.

But wandering is where life happens.

The fog is not an obstacle. It is a landscape. It forces you to slow down, to listen differently, to feel your way forward rather than rushing toward a destination that might not even belong to you.

There is a quiet beauty in not knowing.

It leaves room for surprise.

For transformation.

For encounters you could never have planned.

Absurd, isn't it?

We walk without certainty, loving, losing, rebuilding, searching for meaning

in a world that offers none in advance. Yet something in us keeps moving. Keeps hoping.

Keeps choosing to stay.

Life is hard. That is undeniable. But this is also the season where you discover what makes your heart beat loudly enough to keep going. Not what impresses others. Not what looks stable from the outside. But what makes you feel alive.

I don't know where I am going.

But I am moving.

And that has become enough.

There were moments when I thought about stopping. When exhaustion felt heavier than hope.

When the idea of fighting for a future I couldn't see seemed pointless. If I had stopped then, I would have missed one of the most beautiful experiences of my life so far: coming to Skopje, arriving in a place that was once only a name on a map, and finding pieces of myself in unfamiliar streets, new languages, unexpected connections.

Nothing about that journey was certain. I did not arrive fully formed, healed, or fearless. I arrived curious, fragile, and open. And that was enough for life to meet me halfway.

The fog did not disappear.

But I learned to walk inside it.



Now, I wait with a quiet kind of trust to see what the future holds: the good and the difficult, the tenderness and the loss. Both belong. Both shape us. There is a balance in everything.

We harvest what we plant, even when we do not see the seeds taking root.

If you are lost right now, if you feel stuck, if your heart is heavy and your direction unclear, do not be afraid. You are not broken. You are becoming.

The fog is not the end of the path.

It is where you learn to see differently.

And maybe, one slow step at a time, you will discover that not knowing where you are going does not mean you are lost.

It means you are alive.

---

Cassandre Journoud

**H**orses and unicycling. This has basically been everything my head was turning around when I was thinking of doing sports all my life.

Moving to Macedonia, I wanted to change this. I longed for something new, finding my unknown passion.

In the endless weeks before getting my visa, waiting and waiting and holding conversations with ChatGPT about how long it would take for my visa to finally arrive (I tOtALLy UnDErstAnD ThAt yOu ArE uPseT. HErE arE sOME StePS to DeAl wIH yOuR cURReNt SitUAtioN.....), I made a list.

- Badminton
- Swimming
- Bouldering
- Volleyball

...

So, I arrived in Macedonia, filled with dreams and hopes for my new sports life. Looking back, it feels like I expected someone to approach me going out of the airplane saying ““Hi. This is the list of sports you can do in 5 minutes around you. We will bring you to every single place and cheer you until you are a super talent.” Hah, little did I know.

First of all, it might have been a little too motivated of me to believe that I would arrive and immediately have the time and capacities to even do anything other than fall in my bed at the end of the day, completely overwhelmed.

But, after around a week of arriving and settling in, I decided it was time. I would start my sports journey, and I would go swimming.

I packed my stuff, and started the twenty minute walk to the next swimming pool, filled with motivation and excitement for the next hour.

Happily, I walked towards the building that had definitely seen better days before. I had no idea about the ticket prices, but was hoping for something similar like around 4 euros at home, or even cheaper.

Entering the swimming hall, the first shock came fast. There was just as little separation between areas where people ran around in their swimwear as there was between men and women. A gender-neutral swimming pool – how progressive.

Looking at the woman standing in the shower 10 metres away from me, I asked for a ticket. “One ticket, 8 euros,” reached my ear. What? 8 euros?!

Okay, I did not care. I had gotten myself here, I wanted to do this, I wanted to swim. I found myself in one of the changing rooms soon. What do I usually do when going swimming? I just put my stuff in the locker. Taking a deep breath and convincing myself that this was just all part of the amazing journey I put myself on, I went back into the hall, towards the lockers. A woman approached me, talking in Macedonian. She seemed to disagree with my actions. Okay, apparently I had to give the stuff to her, she would put it in the locker. Weird, but I could adapt to that.

There I was, in my swimsuit, in the middle of an entry hall, not having any clue what was written on the signs around me, how the customs here were or what the people were telling me. I did not expect this to be that difficult.

# HOW TO DO SPORTS IN MACEDONIA



# EASY, FAST



After a shower, where I was splashed by more water through the tap behind my back than the shower head, I finally went to swim. A 50-meter long pool opened up in front of me. Amazing! I entered, and I was actually swimming! Haha, I felt like I could rule the world. I continued paddling in the pool for some time, again letting myself get splashed by this luxurious shower head from all possible angles except the one that comes from above, and changed.

I went outside, and sent a long and very annoyed audio to my mother about the prices, and the shower, and oh, why must life be so hard?

The first try was done!

The next weeks came, and my excitement about the sports I wanted to try was clashing with reality as hard as my lungs with the incredibly polluted air every time I decided to just get out of the house and go for a run.

We went bouldering. But for my German mind, it was impossible to comprehend that the kids were just climbing under and above me, and that I was in the wrong for going off the wall before falling onto them and burying them under myself.

I went to the gym, but my determination to do everything there was wronged by my lack of knowledge about what to do with all these giant, black machines in front of me. These machines that looked like I had just entered the door to hell, a very torturous one, interested me a lot, but I could not use them at all. Cardio it was then.

I started home workouts with another volunteer. But the space in our rooms was very limited, and soon she left and left me all alone with my desire to do something and my incapability to actually do it. I did not expect this to be that hard. Nothing was easy. I was drowning in my self-pity.

I started swimming again. I told myself that it was okay to spend the money for the tickets, even though I still did not feel ok with that at all.

I went to the gym with a new volunteer. We had a very nice trainer explaining to us how some of the machines work, so that we don't look so incredibly dumb anymore.

We went to the pool, which by now raised the prices and closed the 50-meter pool. Aqua gymnastics in a one-meter-deep pool is funnier than you would think!

I even learned that there is a badminton class close to our home. In the end, after blaming it all on my surroundings and everything and everyone, maybe the solution was to redirect my expectations. Maybe the solution was to wait. And by now, I actually am discovering new sports. I discovered that I like hiking, despite hating it with every single bone in my body when I used to do it with my parents.

Today, I will go buy waterproof hiking shoes. Maybe I will go to the swimming pool later. And maybe, maybe I will play badminton this week. Only volleyball is missing, and I can check my bucket list after all.

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Lea Schwegmann

## Dallëndyshja e pranverës

Shkuan stinët, u gris moti.  
Erdhën e ikën disa pranvera.  
Dallëndyshja s'erdhi kurrë.

E prita... O sa e prita  
të vinte këtë fillim prilli,  
t'më lajmëronte, si dikur, pranverën.

Verorja mu kalb në dorë  
nën diellin pranveror.  
Hija e saj la shenjë.

Dallëndyshja e pranverës më harroi.  
Më harroi mua.  
Harroi... edhe pranverën.

.....

Jona Cenameri

## The Swallow of Spring

Seasons passed, the weather tore apart.  
Some springs came and went.  
The swallow never came.

I waited... I waited so long  
for it to come at the start of April,  
to announce spring, as before.

*Verorja*\* rotted in my hand.  
Beneath the springish sun,  
its shadow left a mark.

The swallow of spring forgot me.  
Forgot me...  
Forgot... even spring.

.....

Jona Cenameri

*\*Verorja (from Verore) - a traditional Albanian red-and-white braided thread bracelet, usually worn on the wrist at the beginning of March to welcome spring and ward off bad luck, it's often kept on until you see the first swallow (or until spring is well underway), then tied to a tree or left outdoors.*

**M**igraines belong to the group of headache disorders, which are among the most common nervous system disorders. To be more precise, 3.1 billion people suffered from headache disorders in the year 2021.

Migraine is an octopus, long tentacles wrapping slowly around my head  
Ready, waiting for the right moment to strike  
Bursting my head into just lost memories

Sometimes, just pressing or stabbing me in the eye  
Making me want to pull my teeth out one by one

My migraine is a spider, crawling in my brain, all thoughts become reality  
Nothings sensible anymore  
Is it you, mother, or just a nurse

My migraine is a mosquito, sucking all the life out of my veins, draining me of my will  
Is it just a dream?  
Is that me, but who am I?

Migraines often start to show during puberty and mean recurring attacks for life, appearing in most cases in episodes lasting around 4 to 72 hours. Most typically, being the one-sided headache.

A migraine attack is divisible into four phases, starting with the Prodrome, which is the pre-headache phase, noticeable by concentration problems, irritability, sleeping problems, speaking problems and more. Afterwards, the aura phase follows, typically including visual and sensory problems, like seeing bright, flashy dots or dark spots and perceptual disorder.

It can even lead to changes in smell and taste and a numb, tingling feeling in your limbs.

The following phase is the headache, being the peak of the attack, it is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, fatigue, loss of consciousness, feeling warm or shivering and being sensitive to light and sound.

The attack ends with the Postdrome, casually called migraine hangover, with symptoms like concentration and speech difficulties, depression and again fatigue.

Not every migraine must be accompanied by a headache, and not everybody experiences an aura either. Migraine is a disorder as individual as the person suffering from it, making it hard to find the exact cause.

Latest research leads to the belief that it is a result of the release of pain-producing inflammatory substances around the nerves.

The brain activity differs as well, showing in a high network activity and thus stronger functional connectivity in the auditory, visual, and sensorimotor circuits of the brain.

It is also believed that genetic neurotransmitter abnormalities play a significant role in migraine attacks.





# WHEN THE BRAIN JUST SCREAMS

Neurotransmitters are the body's messengers between our nerve cells, muscles and glands, ensuring communication that controls everything we feel and do.

Serotonin, for example, is a neurotransmitter that can impact blood vessel constriction and dilation, potentially influencing migraine attacks.

So migraines are not psychosomatic but an actual neurological disorder.

Still, headache disorders are quiet and invisible, leading to being overlooked easily in not just our society, but also in healthcare, because of a lack of knowledge.

Getting diagnosed and treated seems like a miracle when, in some countries, medications against migraines are not even available. Explaining why it is estimated that half of the people are self-treating, some being more successful than others.

When it comes to constraining health care costs, many governments tend to overlook how much smaller the costs of treating headaches are in comparison to the huge indirect ones caused by, e.g., sick days.

Therefore, suffering from headache disorders is so much more complex than just recurring headaches, but also a damaged quality of life and a high financial cost.

Furthermore, chronic migraines are closely connected to depression due to the added stress from the physical pain, limiting career potential and making it harder to pursue relationships.

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Nelli Winzer

Sources:

Migraines and Depression: A Connection That Should Not Be Overlooked | Bangkok International Hospital (Brain x Bone)

Migraine Stages in NYC & NJ | Advanced Headache Center

Migraine and other headache disorders | WHO



*Looks like a kiwi, acts like a bird*

## What is it?

Yes, you heard right in the heading—it looks like a kiwi ball with feathers and a long beak. Its name is kiwi, New Zealand's national symbol and treasure. So, you may wonder why this bird is so special and weird-looking... Keep reading this and you will find out many interesting things about one of many rare species of animals that are native to New Zealand!

### How does the kiwi look?

**S**urprisingly, it has many unique features that help it live easier in the wild.

It has quite big claws and legs that are strong and used for running, since the kiwi is flightless and the only way it can escape from predators is to run.

It also has powerful claws that can be useful to attack predators like stoats and ferrets that come to their burrows wanting to take their eggs.

What's even more interesting is that this bird has a long beak but the nostrils are not at the beginning of its beak like other species of birds, but actually at the tip of it.

This is very useful since the way it finds food is by digging its beak into the ground and detecting the worms in the

soil; its sense of smell is very strongly adapted.

Kiwi's feathers are long and loose, unlike other birds and makes it look more like fur. The feathers around the beak have developed into whiskers just like ones that cats have so that they can sense vibrations and touch.

### Isn't it bizarre?

There are several species of kiwis, actually five official: Kiwi Pukupuku, Kiwi Roroa, brown Kiwi, Rowi Kiwi and Tokoeka Kiwi.

Their distant relatives are the Australian emu bird and the ostrich of the classification called ratites. They also have some similar features like the kiwi, for example, all of them cannot fly and have muscular legs to use as a defence mechanism against threat.

Kiwis are not active in the day time, since it's more dangerous for them to come out of their burrows. They are nocturnal animals that spend most of their time in the dark forest running around, rustling through the leaves searching for food. Their eyes are small and not very useful as their eyesight is poor, however they use their amazing hearing ability and sense of smell to

detect any predators or just to orient themselves in the dense forests of New Zealand.

Kiwis may look scary at first sight or when they make sounds that literally may sound like some prehistoric dinosaur. Instead, they are harmless little creatures.

In fact they are vulnerable and are endangered species that need our help for their conservation and growth of population.

They face many predators like stoats that were brought by the Europeans in the past to hunt rabbits and decrease their population. Instead, they have chosen the kiwi as an easier prey, especially their eggs as a source of food. If we didn't intervene in the kiwi's protection, 95% of hatched newborn kiwis wouldn't have survived in the wild.

### So, how do we save the kiwis?

A very fascinating strategy was brought by the people in New Zealand that really helped the population of kiwis to rise. All of the kiwis that are in the wild are tagged with tags or microchips in order to locate and supervise them from a distance. A team of kiwi experts take the eggs from the kiwi and they bring it to a wildlife centre, where it is hatched safely. When a kiwi hatches, it is blind and helpless, thus at risk in the wild. The first three to four weeks the kiwi spends the time in the wildlife centre to grow strong and independent.

Like that it can be finally released back into its habitat to continue its journey of life.

Kiwis have been residents of New Zealand for millions of years and it's extraordinary how these birds have adapted to life. Once there were millions of kiwis roaming through the forests of New Zealand, now about less than seventy thousand are left.

However, hopes are high as wildlife centres, conservation parks, other institutions and the people of New Zealand are working hard to save the amazing kiwi species and to ensure they can continue to thrive and be a proud symbol of New Zealand for the future generations.

Once again, the mysterious kiwi reminds us of the rarity of species that live on our planet and the impact they bring to animal conservationists, wildlife biologists and, of course, animal lovers that can contribute by sharing awareness and knowledge about this incredible species!

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Lara Mihajlovikj

#### Sources:

newzealandtrails: Kiwi Bird | The New Zealand National Bird  
 animals.sandiegozoo: Kiwi | San Diego Zoo Animals & Plants  
 Department of Conservation: Kiwi: New Zealand native land birds  
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 youtube: The Kiwi: What do we know about our national bird?





# You Are

You are so kind.  
Too kind, I find —  
and maybe that is why I ache.

I don't want you to change a thing,  
I only wish that what's between  
us, quiet, soft, unseen, unheard,  
would not just fade away unblurred.

The wish, it lives in shadowed light,  
I try to save it — lose the fight.

Perhaps I'm not the one designed  
for feelings laughing in the mind,  
that grow and bloom and dare to speak —  
perhaps I'm built for \*not\*, for weak.

For what just whispers, never shows,  
for silent longing as it goes.

And yet — when your brief glance is caught,  
not meant, not deep, not fully thought,  
I wish — just for that fragile sign —  
to be your heart for one short time.

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Elisa Ryschkow



# THE SIX NATIONS

**THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH**



So, you've heard the roar. You've seen the beefy athletes collide. But the Six Nations can look like a chaotic pile of bodies if you don't know what you're looking for. Don't worry. Let's break down the beautiful game before we dive into the magnificent spectacle.

But please, I beg you, don't think it's like American football. Let's see the rules and you will understand why.

#### The Golden Rule: Go Forward

The entire sport boils down to one simple idea: you must take the ball and run with it towards the opponent's goal line. You cannot pass the ball forward. You can only pass it sideways or backwards. To advance, you run with the ball, or you kick it ahead and chase it.

#### The Objective: Tries

The ultimate prize is a try, worth 5 points. This is when a player grounds the ball in the opponent's in-goal area (the end zone). After a try, you get a conversion kick for 2 more points to put the ball through the H-shaped uprights. You can also kick penalty goals (3 points) if the other team commits a major foul, or score a drop goal (3 points) by drop-kicking the ball through the posts during open play.

#### The Main Events: The Set-Pieces

When play stops, it restarts in two iconic ways:

- The Scrum: eight players vs. eight players, all locked together creating something looking like a bridge of humans. The ball is thrown into the tunnel between them, and they fight to hook it back with their feet. It's a raw contest of pure power.
- The Lineout: When the ball goes out of bounds, it's thrown back in between two lines of jumpers. It's like a perfectly choreographed high-jump competition, where players are lifted by their teammates to catch the ball in the air.

The game is played with 15 players per side, in two 40-minute halves. It's fast, it's ferocious, and the clock only stops for serious injuries or scores. It's a game of continuous effort, courage, and split-second decisions, it's not like in football where sometimes you have the opportunity to rest a bit.

Now, Forget the Rules for a Moment... And Feel the Championship!

The Six Nations Championship. It's not just a tournament; it's a gladiatorial theatre, a rolling saga of pride, passion, and raw emotion played out across six ancient nations. This isn't a cold, sterile competition; this is folk history written in mud, sweat, and glory.

The six competitors are not just teams; they are emblems of identity, carrying the hopes of millions on their shoulders:

- **England:** The old empire, the inventors of the game, with the largest player pool and a relentless, forward-dominated power game. They carry the weight of expectation on their white shirts, and their Twickenham fortress is a cauldron of noise. They are often the villain, always the team to beat.
- **Wales:** The land of dragons, where rugby is the national religion. They are always extreme, extremely good or extremely bad, no in between allowed, and 2026 isn't their best year to say the least.
- **Ireland:** The island unites to create a team that shows tactical genius on the field. Their recent history is one of dominance, built on many years of effort. They are one of the best teams worldwide, but they are not the only.
- **Scotland:** Clearly they are the underdogs with a point to prove. They play well but not enough to be considered favourites yet good enough to not be at the bottom, so people are often forgetting them.

- **France:** Les Bleus! The artists, the troublemakers, the first non-British team to have joined the tournament. They are capable of breathtaking, almost impossible flair one moment and sublime nonchalance the next. It's "Champagne rugby", they play for the beauty, the spectacle of the sport. France is always wonderful to watch and has many players that could be pretenders to the title of best players in the world.

- **Italy:** The proud gladiators, forever fighting, improving, and carrying the hopes of a nation that isn't that good at rugby. But with time and years of effort they are no longer just participants; they are a team capable of historic upsets. So, when they win it's always wonderful.

Now you know who plays, let's talk about how the tournament is made. Each team plays each other, where there are no weak matches.

The ultimate glory is the Championship Trophy, but it's the Grand Slam that truly makes people scream in the stadiums, to own the title you need to beat everyone. To have a perfect record, beating 5 of the best teams in the world in 5 weeks, and with the injuries, the energy management, it's very rare to be able to achieve it.

But, on the opposite side, let's not forget the Wooden Spoon, a symbolic "prize" for the team that finishes last after losing every match. Let's hope it will fuel determination and not just be seen as a humiliation from the players

So, now you know the biggest part to appreciate all the emotions of that competition. It is, quite simply, the greatest championship in rugby, and one of the most compelling, emotional spectacles in all of world sport.

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Arthur Bonhoure—Tolfo

# THE THIRD CHOICE

According to an old legend, chess was invented in an ancient kingdom of India, at the court of a powerful ruler whose palace stood at the center of a fertile land. Merchants crossed its roads, soldiers guarded its borders, and granaries filled with rice sustained its life.

One day a wise man, known for his sharp mind and creativity, asked to see the king. He wanted to present his latest invention, which will transform the daily life of many, change the battlefield and stay for the next thousands of years. Despite all the duties, the king's curiosity won and he accepted to see the inventor.

Carrying a small wooden desk and a small pouch of figures, the king was shocked and angry that his precious time was to be wasted with rubbish. However, as the inventor set up the game, set all the pieces on the chessboard and slowly started to explain to the king the workings of the game of chess, a smile

appeared on the king's face. King loved the depth of the game, a battlefield contained within a wooden board, armies moved by strict rules, victory achieved through foresight rather than force.

After one game, the king spoke: "I was not convinced at first, however, you, dear inventor, have brought a great gift to my kingdom and as such I think you deserve a reward. You may ask for anything you desire."

The inventor bowed and spoke: "Thank you, my dear King" and he thought for a while.

"Anything," smiled the King.

After a while the inventor spoke: "Well, my dear King, I would have a wish. I wish for a grain of rice to be placed on the first square of the chessboard, two on the second, four on the third, and so on, doubling the number of grains on each square until all sixty-four squares are filled."

King grinned at the thought of this trivial request and ordered his treasurer to carry out the task. But as the counting began, the mood has slowly changed. What started as a handful of grains became small piles, then sacks, then entire storehouses. With each square of the board, the required amount grew faster than King had anticipated. His smile was long gone before the last row. It became clear that the total number of grains exceeded all the rice in the kingdom— and more than could be harvested in many years to come.

End of the legend. It tells the story of a wise inventor, the hidden truth of exponential growth, the power of mathematics and errors in human thinking as we saw in King's misjudgement.

What if we update this story? Change it a bit... Adding to it the dilemma we face today, the very same dilemma faced in ancient India, and arguably, an identical one to the humans will face in the year 3000.

What if we shift the focus from mathematics to human psych e?

Everything stays the same until the King hears out the inventor's wish ...

The king takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, crosses his arms and leans back. He nods with his head slowly. He calls one of his advisors and after a brief whispering, he nods more and more, then he opens his eyes. Looks straight into inventor's eyes and speaks:

"I see you are a wise man... I see that both in the game of chess and your request... yet I am not foolish either... What's more, I am surrounded by wise people too. Your request starts small, but it is not a little... I know," he smiles.

The inventor nods, knowing that the King is wise and understands exponential growth.

"But be it!" shows with his hand and smiles, the King.

Then he raises one finger and speaks seriously: "Under one condition."

"Yes, sir," responds the inventor, full of expectations.

"There are two options, you can choose," he says calmly.

"The first is that you will leave this door, not asking for more, feeling truly satisfied, calm, at peace with what you have, not needing more ever! Not a single grain of rice more than you had when you came here."

"OR!" he exclaims... "You will leave through this door, carrying more than you can carry, with carriages full of rice, behind you, a long row of slaves, as far as the eye can see, carrying even more rice. Chessboard, after a chessboard filled with rice! Yet, you will never,

ever, be satisfied! Never at peace. Wanting more. Until you have all the rice in the world and then still want more."

The inventor was staring at the king, not making a sound.

"You heard me..."

"Yes, sir," said the inventor with a trembling voice.

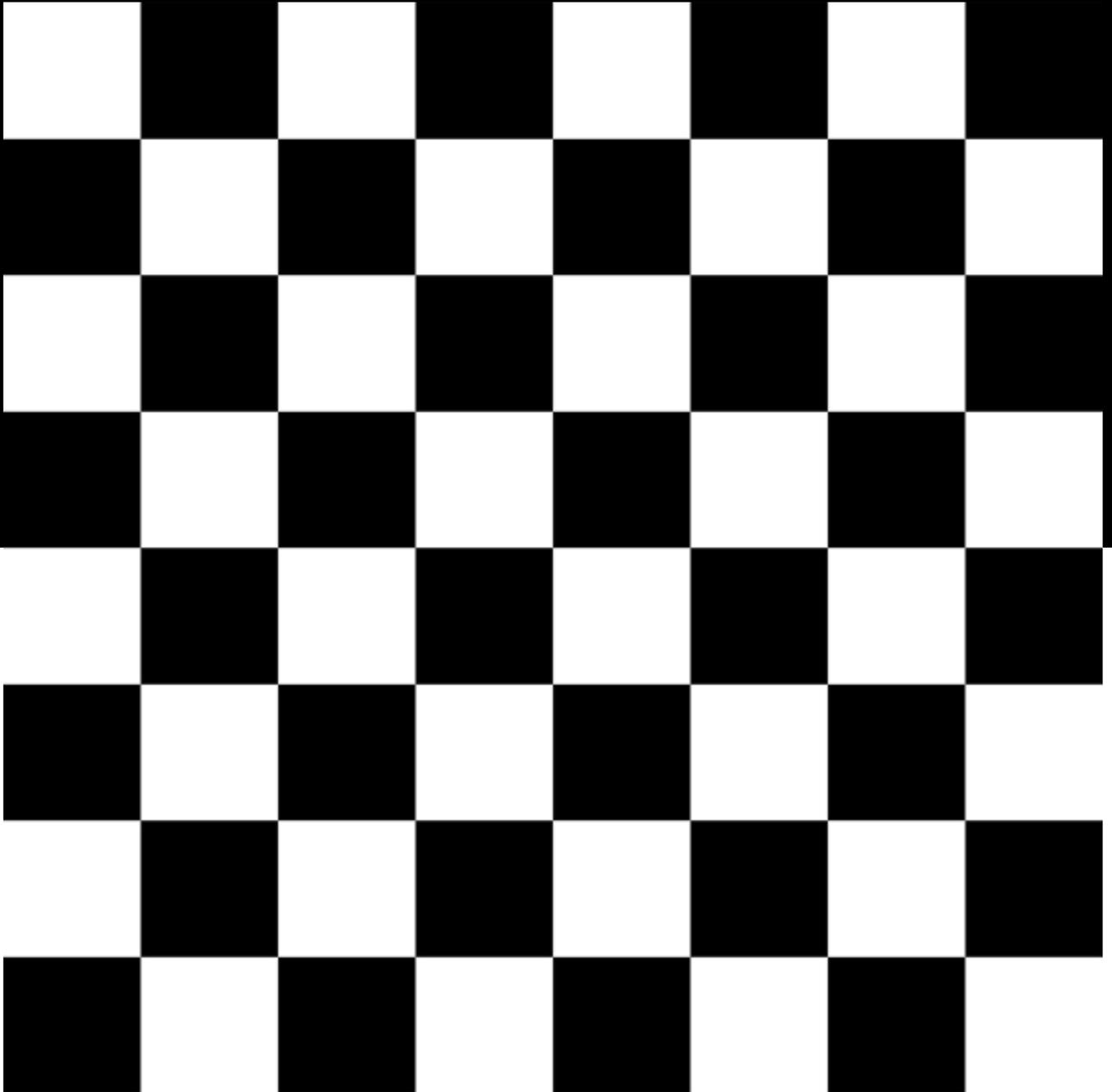
"Now, you may go and I expect to hear your decision tomorrow morning."

They both stood up and bowed to each other.

---

Boris Bielik

# THE THIRD CHOICE



What if we can't see the stars because of the clouds?





# DON'T THINK - U

Every day, we consciously and unconsciously decide what to spend one of our most important resources on: our attention.

Every morning we wake up, and where does the first look go?

Let's be honest, it is on the phone. Even if it is just to stop the alarm, the phone is always there from the start. Instagram, Facebook or TikTok are always just one thumb click away. From the beginning of our day, we are bombarded with news, whether important or not.

Leading us straight to cognitive overload and anxiety.

Still, we find doomscrolling weirdly gratifying and that is no coincidence.

But specifically designed to pull us closer to the screen.

Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and more share the feature of the never-ending, personal curated queue of shorts called "infinite scroll".

To ensure perfectly curated videos for the user, social networks use an algorithm. It collects user data, like what videos you interacted with or disliked, to try to identify patterns, after which it tries to predict the favourite content of the user. You liked a post with that one trending sound? Get yourself ready to see it at least four times a day till there is a new viral sound.

The algorithm is really one of the most important tools for social networks to keep your attention stuck to the screen, making your brain seek another reward with every scroll.

And it works quite well. Facebook itself had over 3 billion active users in February 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Another study tried to mimic the "Instagram experience" with a functional MRI paradigm viewing "liked" photos, which demonstrated increased neural activity in regions traditionally

associated with reward. Leading to seeing 'likes' as a form of showing social endorsement among users, making users crave the approval of others and attention.<sup>2</sup>

Pushing each other even more, though the only one that really needs our attention is the platform itself for profit.

TikTok's global advertising revenue is expected to reach approximately \$34.8 billion in 2026, an income purely based on the monetization of our attention.<sup>3</sup>

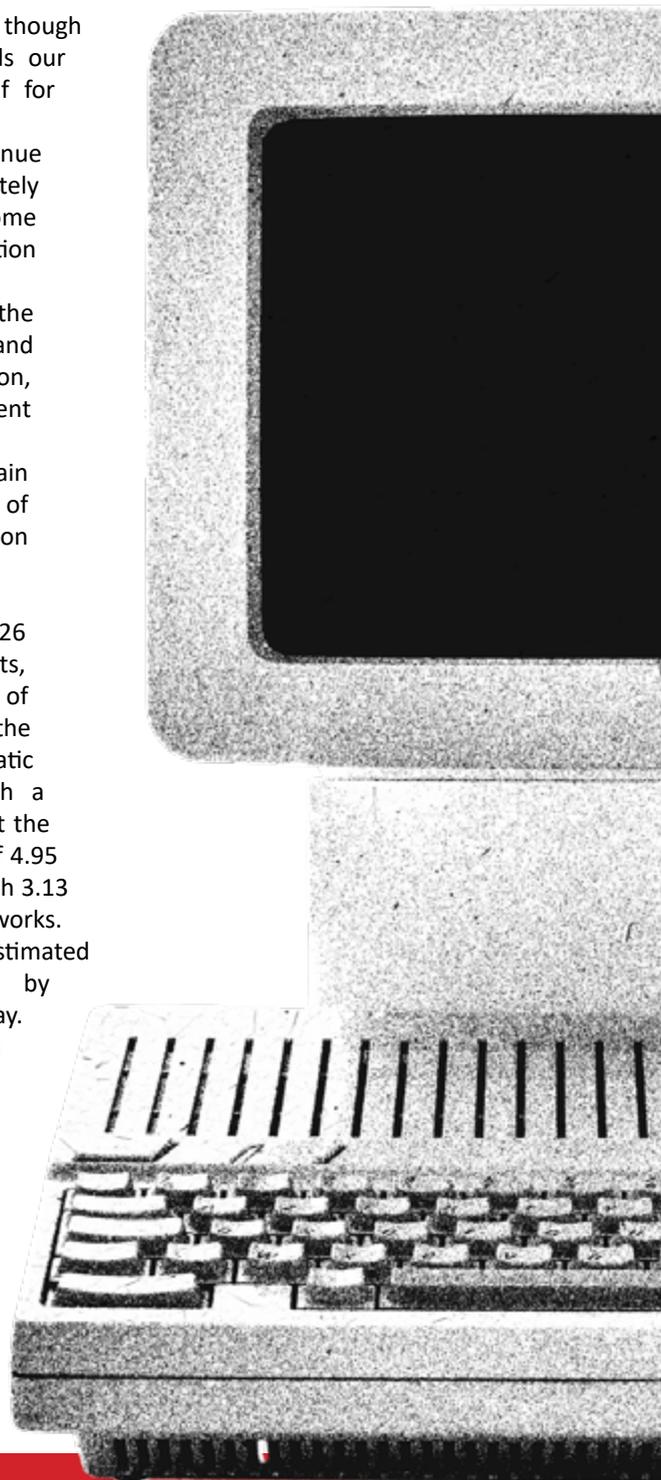
Leading to a shift from the traditional markets for goods and services to a market for attention, transforming time and engagement into a tradable asset.

All that while users often remain unaware of the monetization of their attention and manipulation through the algorithm.<sup>4</sup>

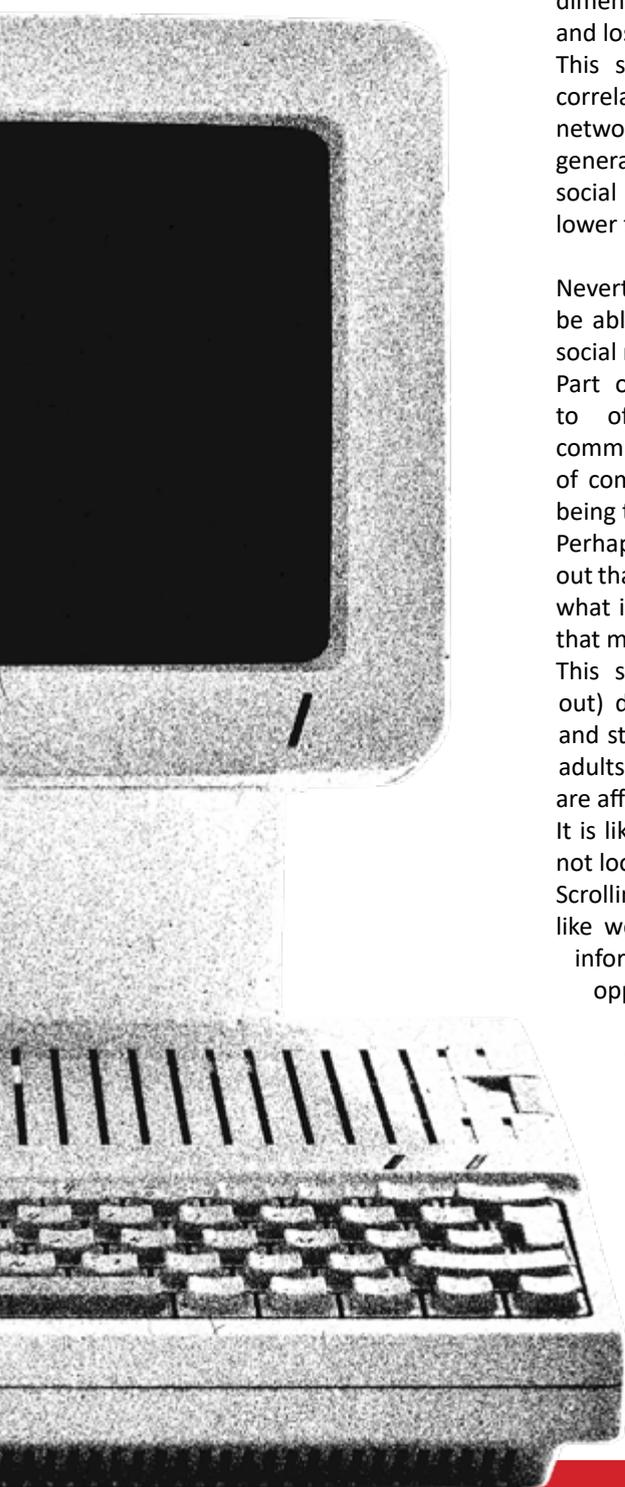
In a study involving 526 Spanish university students, usage patterns, indicators of addictive behavior, and the actual dimensions of problematic usage were examined through a questionnaire. It was found that the participants spent an average of 4.95 h per day on the phone, of which 3.13 h were exclusively on social networks. In general, participants underestimated their mobile phone use by approximately 40 minutes per day. So, when was the last time you checked your screen time?

PSNUSS is the "Problematic Smartphone and Social Network Use scale".

Validated in 2024, it measures the harm of social media and smartphone use with an 18-item scale, like in this study.



# JUST CONSUME



The participants who reportedly experienced an increase in social network use scored higher on the PSNUSS global score as well as on the dimension of psychological dependence and loss of productivity.

This showed that productivity loss is correlated with the time spent on social networks, as well as on the phone in general. It also indicated that the more social networks and time spent, the lower the productivity.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, it feels like we will never be able to free ourselves from the grip social networks have on our society.

Part of the appeal lies in the ability to offer immediate and dynamic communication, making you feel part of communities or happenings without being there in real life.

Perhaps, it is our growing fear of missing out that makes us think we need to know what is happening all over the world at that moment.

This so-called FoMo (Fear of missing out) drew a lot of academic attention and studies showing that 72% of young adults from 18-33 in the U.S and the U.K. are affected by it.<sup>6</sup>

It is like a car crash, where you just can not look away.

Scrolling further and further, it seems like we find safety in that overload of information, even tho it has quite the opposite effect.

Our brain has different parts which are divisible into four main areas: the parietal, frontal, occipital and temporal areas. They are all connected, having their own specific job to control the nervous system.

Like the short-term memory located in the frontal area, it is a part of the central nervous system and an integral part

when it comes to processing information. Its main functions are to connect or match new information to existing ones and keep our focus on our environment. Short-term memory is like a temporary storage place, storing information between 10 seconds up to a minute, where you can easily access it.

But it can only handle a maximum of 4 - 7 items at a time.

Most TikToks being under 15 seconds means we see at least four items per minute, way too much for the human brain to handle.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious that the brain was never made to process that constant, never-ending stream of information, slowly destroying our attention.

And that is why we should be careful of our most precious possession, our attention.

---

Nelli Winzer

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# Маг Дата

на твоите дваесетти години



# 20

**И**ма специфичен вид на магла што се вдумува низ текот на твоите дваесетти години. Тивко се протнува, како рана утринска роса, заматувајќи ги границите на сè што мислиш дека имаш разбрано за себеси, за љубовта, за тоа каде требаше да продолжиш.

Еден ден се будиш и сфаќаш дека веќе не стоиш на работ на животот, чекајќи да почне. Сега си во него. Се очекува да одбереш. Да одлучиш. Да бидеш.

Но, сепак, ти си помалку сигурен од кога било.

Твоите дваесетти години не се прав пат. Тие се ливада без знаци. Чекориш затоа што неподносливо е седењето, а не знаеш каде патот те води. Сите околу тебе личат како да се движат со причина, градејќи иднина, зборувајќи со сигурност. А, пак, внатрешно сè се менува.

Се предомислуваш. Ги менуваш соништата. Ја менуваш идејата за љубовта, за славата, за дома. Понекогаш толку многу се менуваш што веќе не ја препознаваш личноста што си била.

## Ова е маглата.

Таа е чудноста меѓу која детството повеќе не е засолниште, но зрелоста сè уште не се чувствува како место кадешто припаѓаш. Носиш сеќавања што сè уште болат, рани што си мислел дека се вообичаени, примери што си ги наследил без да приметиш. Почнуваат да ти се разјаснуваат во тивките мигови.

Сфаќаш на колку многу си се навикнал.

## Тишината.

## Тензијата.

Како си научил да се смалуваш. Како си научил да преживуваш. И доаѓа најтешкиот дел: да одлучиш што да правиш со таа свест.

Некои луѓе остануваат каде што се, затоа што останувањето е познато. Затоа што кога болката е позната, побезбедна е од непознатото. Другите започнуваат со спората и треперлива работа за да продолжат. Да одучат. Да простат. Да изградат нешто понежно внатре во себеси.

Ниту една патека не е лесна.

Има денови каде што се чувствуваш заглавен на место, како твоите пети да се закоренети врз стари верзии од тебе. Денови кадешто

продолжуваш понатаму личат на предавство: врз тоа кој си бил, сè што си поминал, врз справувањата кои некогаш те држеле жив.

Но, исто така, има денови кадешто храброста тивко се појавува.

Не како грандиозна трансформација, туку како мала промена: кажувајќи ја вистината, поставувајќи граница, да си дозволиш одмор, да се осмелиш да замислиш поинаков живот.

Ни имаат кажувано дека овие години треба да се возбудливи, слободни, полни со можност. И тоа се. Но, тие се и напорни. Меланхонични. Кривки. Твоите дваесетти години бараат од тебе да се запознаеш без маска.

Се вљубуваш како тоа да трае вечно. И кога тоа завршува, веруваш дека никогаш нема да се опоравиш.

Но, неизмерната болка станува огледало. Ти го покажува сето тоа што си го поднесол, од што си се плашел, по кое си копнеел. Ги трга илузиите и остава нешто поискрено.

Тогаш се чувствува како пропаст. Подоцна го препознаваш како откритие.

Боли да си изгубен. Боли да си заглавен. Лечењето боли. Но, болката не е доказ дека пропушташ. Таа е доказ дека нешто се поместува.

Не сме учени на скитање. Учени сме да пристигаме.

Но, скитањето е таму каде што животот се случува.

Маглата не е пречка. Таа е пејзаж. Те убедува да успориш, различно да слушаш, да чувствуваш како е тоа да продолжуваш наместо набрзина да трчаш до цел што можеби и не ти припаѓа.

Има тивка убавина во тоа да не се знае.

Остава простор за неочекуваност. За преобразба.

За случки што не би можел ни да ги планираш.

Апсурдно е, нели? Талкаме без сигурност, саќање, губење, обновување, барање значење во свет што тоа не го дава однапред. Но нешто во нас продолжува да се движи. Продолжува да се надева.

Продолжува да избира да остане. Животот е тежок. Тоа не е спорно. Но, ова е, исто така, сезоната каде

што пронаоѓаш што е тоа што го тера срцето доволно гласно да ти чука за да продолжиш. Не тоа што на другите им дава впечаток. Не тоа што изгледа однадвор стабилно. Но, тоа што те прави жив.

## Не знам каде одам.

## Но, се движам.

И тоа ми стана доволно.

Имав моменти каде размислував да престанам. Кога заморот личеше потешок од надежта. Кога идејата за да се борам за иднина што не можев да ја видам изгледаше бесмислена. Да престанев тогаш, ќе го пропуштеш едно од најубавите искуства во мојот живот досега: доаѓање во Скопје, пристигнување до место што еднаш беше име на мапа, и барајќи парчиња од себеси во непознати улици, нови јазици, неочекувани сплотувања.

Ништо не беше сигурно за таа авантура. Не пристигнав целосно оформена, излечена, или бестрашна. Пристигнав заинтересирана, кривка и отворена. И тоа беше доволно за животот да ме сретне на половина пат.

## Маглата не исчезна.

Но, научив да чекорам внатре во нејзе.

Сега чекам со тивок вид на верба за да видам што ме чека во иднината: доброто и тешкото, кривкоста и загубата. И двете припаѓаат. И двете нè оформуваат. Има рамномерност во сè.

Го береме тоа што го засадуваме, дури и кога не ги гледаме семките како про'ртуваат.

Ако сега сте изгубени, ако се чувствувате заглавено, ако срцето ви е тешко и правецот несигурен, не се плашете. Не сте скршени. Станувате нешто.

## Маглата не е крај на патот.

Таа е место каде учите како да гледате поразлично.

И можеби, чекор по чекор, ќе откриете дека незнаејќи каде одите не значи дека сте изгубени.

Тоа значи дека сте **ЖИВИ**.

Касандра Журну

Превод: Симона Јолеска

# A WEDDING THAT TURNS INTO A ROCK PARTY

**H**ave you ever been to a wedding in Macedonia? I have. Very surprised at first that not everyone attends the ceremony at the church. That there is a break between the first part in church and the actual party afterwards. And that the party might end by midnight. But it also might start before noon. Now, let's skip the comparisons, let's not think of how we do weddings in Poland. Instead, I will try to grasp the essence of the experience I had here, in Macedonia.

It's **NOON**, more or less, we arrive at the groom's place, the house where he grew up. Walking down the street, before you reach the house, you can see where you should go and who is getting married in the neighborhood. The Macedonian flag is raised high, proud, marking the spot. Alongside, there are decorations that guide you from the fence surrounding the house to the yard, spacious, ready to welcome first guests and the first oro (Macedonian traditional dance that everyone—from a few to 100+ years old—knows how to dance).

It's February. I couldn't imagine a wedding in the wintertime but Macedonia can surprise you with +15 degrees when in other countries in Europe it is at this very moment -15. It greets us with the sun; the about-to-get-married couple is blessed with the best weather they could ask for, as if someone has ordered it for them directly from the heavens.

The groom awaits us; few guests have already been there before and more are coming shortly after. The number is growing, it's getting crowded in the house as well as outside at the terrace. The groom, his brother, mother and father ask us if we would like to have something to drink. From now on,

they will make sure that our glass will never empty and if we have eaten properly. The musicians are arriving a bit late, because the guy playing accordion was stuck in the traffic. (Nothing new in Macedonia that things might be later than planned but never too late to enjoy.) They are welcomed with an applause and every last guest throws themselves to join, either the dance or the sing. I dance too and I know perfectly that this oro will last not as long as one song but as the medley of songs, so at least the next half an hour. After that, everyone is invited inside, and all the people continue dancing and singing in the house, trying to make the best use of this little space we have (counting 30+ people inside together with the musicians with instruments that require space, especially the drum). The groom is the main figure, all eyes on him. We sing for him, we dance around him. The many hands of males in the room carry him up. The celebration escalates when he stands on the drum, reaching the ceiling with his head. We participate in the feast with all kinds of appetizers, salads, cheeses, meats and sweets. Somewhere between **13:00** and **14:00** it is time to go to "take the bride". The oro continues, we dance our way out the house and the yard, and dance around the cars parked and ready to take the guests on the journey. The groom's parents are giving flags to us. We have to attach them to the





cars' windows on the side, best if it's from both sides, so it is as clear as the sky on this day that we are wedding guests. We are moving in this car parade through Skopje. Music playing loud in each car. Let the world know.

15 minutes later and a few neighborhoods further we are at the bride's building. Announcing our arrival with music, we dance oro in front, being a spectacle for the whole neighborhood and then we are climbing the stairs to reach the bride's flat. The crowd is stuck halfway there, because apparently the groom's side has to break the door to get inside. We enter, eventually, and I can confirm that the door was removed from the frame. Two parties merge into one, the bride's and the groom's sides. The flat that is a home for one small family suddenly hosts over 50 people, two big families, with all the aunts, uncles, cousins and closest friends. The young couple shines the brightest. We repeat the ritual from the groom's place. Singing. Dancing. Eating. Celebrating. Everything more and with more people. I already know all the most beloved traditional songs. "Biser balkanski" (Pearl of the Balkans). "Ja izlezi Gjurgjo" (Come out, o Gjurgja). "Svadba e golema" (A big wedding). "Dosta vreme ergen odev" (I've been single for a long time). Outside, before going to church, we do one more big oro—"Makedonsko devojche, kitka sharena..." (Macedonian girl, a colorful bouquet...) Applause from the spectators on the balconies and off we go.



16:30. The ceremony in the church doesn't last very long. For me, the most interesting part is where pop (the priest) puts the crowns on the bride's and groom's heads. From now on they are the king and queen of their home, or be it their kingdom. The crowned couple with pop and closest family go around the sacramental table, bowing; their first steps together as a husband and wife... During this procession, a maid of honor throws the small packages with candy, coin and seeds inside for the guests to share wealth and health with them. Each small gesture or ritual is around the number three.

The circling of the table is counted to three. The incantations are repeated three times. The couple take three sips from the cup. And the number three symbolizes the Holy Trinity.

Just married and their guests are leaving the church, saying "see you soon" and coming back to their homes. Shortly. At 19:00 we are expected to celebrate at the restaurant. The ultimate party. The endgame. For me, the third party of the day, if you count the one at the groom's, the one at the bride's and now the joint one, where 100+ more guests show up. We take our places in a beautifully decorated restaurant on the rooftop, with a panoramic view of the city. The Champions League anthem comes unexpectedly and the parade of males led by the freshly baked husband enter the room. Proud. Strong. Manly. The bride, now wife, comes forward, and they waltz in the room, their first dance. Everyone smiles and applauds. Everyone is happy for them. Aren't they stunning? We, the other couples, join the spectacle. Soon, and according to plan and expectations one can have towards the Macedonian wedding, the oro comes. The biggest one. The longest you can imagine. We dance for over an hour—no joking at all—but no one shall quit. The whole eternity is passing and traditional Macedonian music is starting to be decorated with rock riffs. The band is going insane. Just married in the centre, everything is just like they wanted, the wedding is turning into a rock party. From the popular theme from Friends series, through Lenny Kravitz and Bon Jovi, even Eminem, to Balkan evergreens. We hear everything. It's energetic. Hypnotizing. Youthful. With style. Crazy as can be, just like the many nights spent in Marakana—not the stadium in Brazil, but one of the most iconic rock clubs in Skopje. We dance so much we barely notice that it is already past midnight and the restaurant service starts slowly wrapping up the party. It is done, the day and night to be remembered. An icon of the wedding. **Svadba golema.**

Ewelina Chańska

# HOW TO WRITE ARTICLES FOR VOICES



## TOPIC

Anything, except politics or hate speech

Think of topics that would interest **our audience** (youth)

Maybe a **current event or trend** that you could write about?

## RESEARCH

Use **credible sources** when researching your topic

**Double-check** any information you include in your article to ensure **accuracy**

**Don't plagiarize**

**Link the sources** at the end of your article

## STRUCTURE

Use **short, attention-grabbing headline**

Write an **introduction** at the beginning (what, who, when, why, how)

Include **body** and **conclusion** in your article, maintain a logical flow

Write your **full name** at the end

## WRITING

Use **clear and concise language** that your audience will understand

**Avoid** too technical terms and **hard language** unless necessary

**Be engaging** and try to make your article interesting to read

## FEW RULES

The article should be around 500 - 1000 words

**Don't** include images or illustrations in the document

Send possible **photos separately** (with sources and assured they're **free of copyrights**)

**Edit and revise** (clarity, grammar, and spelling error)

## WHAT ELSE?

You can write in **English, Macedonian and Albanian**

You don't need to be pro, **VOICES is open for everyone!**

Writing to the magazine is **voluntary**

We can provide you with a **certificate** if you become a writer for VOICES magazine





Our monthly magazine has a very simple, yet powerful, mission - to be the voice of youth. And how do we do that?

We encourage young people to take an active part in today's society through journalism and designing by giving them a platform to express themselves. VOICES is produced in Skopje, Macedonia, and published online every month and four times per year as a printed edition.

## Join VOICES team!

Contact us in our social media pages or write us an e-mail. What would you be interested in doing?



### Writing articles

VOICES accepts articles about anything, except politics or hate speech. Brainstorm your ideas with us and write articles once, twice, or every month!



### Translating articles

VOICES is published in three languages: English, Macedonian and Albanian. If you are a native speaker or fluent in these languages, join our translation team!



### Featuring your work

If you are an artist, photographer, designer or other, your work can be presented in the magazine. Send us your method of art and a short bio of yourself!



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