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FROM STUDENTS,
FOR STUDENTS

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EDITORIAL NOTE

As the New Year has begun, so have new challenges. In this issue we would like to encourage You to grab every occasion and opportunity that emerges this year. Of course, sometimes it won't be easy but getting out of Your comfort zone will help You develop and become stronger. Risk is crucial in our lives, although we may not really like it. However, without taking risk Bill Gates wouldn't have created Microsoft and Harry Potter wouldn't have defeated Voldemort.

Do remember not to overestimate your abilities, though!

Aurelia Adamczak, The IB Times Editor-in-chief

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As per usual, the beginning of the New Year means new promises made to ourselves, commonly known as the New Year's resolutions. What we wish for may differ from person to person, however the constant need to improve ourselves or to change something accompanies us throughout the entirety of the year. This is a small part of our risk-taking nature that pulls us towards the unknowns of happiness hidden beneath the change. Not everyone is born as a risk-taker and some may find it more difficult than others. Although, it's always worth a try. I would like to share the story of my close friend, a rather shy person who didn't fancy the idea of public appearances. However she has always admired performers, acting, dancing and singing on the stage. Finally, she decided upon taking up dancing herself and has been regularly attending dance classes. The beginnings, as always, weren't easy and the path was full of minor embarrassments. She will probably never make her appearance on stage but the feeling of self-accomplishment itself made her happier and more confident. She is very proud of herself to have undertaken the risk. Let this story be an inspiration to all of You who are hesitant about taking risks and fearing that You are lacking in any way.

Julia Chwatko, The IB Times Executive Editor

CONTENT

3 IN THE COSMETIC
WORLD

6 WHY IS RISK-TAKING
FUN?

7 BEHIND THE SCENES
OF RISK TAKING

9 COMPLETE GUIDE TO
ASTROLOGY PART 4

14 GET ENTERTAINED!

17 A MOVIE FOR THE
MONTH & A MONTH
FOR THE MOVIE

19 DINOSAUR WITH A
SACRED COLLAR

20 MUSICK - YOUR
MONTHLY MUSIC FEVER

23 COMIC

24 POEM

IN THE COSMETIC WORLD

Part 2: Emulsifiers, preservatives and fragrance extravaganza

In the previous article, you learned the basic terms regarding cosmetics and found out what the abbreviation INCI stands for. You were also able to familiarise yourself with what surfactants are and how they influence the functioning of a cosmetic. In this part, I'm going to continue explaining the function of different substances used commonly in cosmetics, like emulsifiers, preservatives and fragrances, on the example of micellar water from Uriage which is a part of my personal skin care routine. For the record, these are the ingredients listed on its label:

Ingredients: AQUA (WATER), POLYSORBATE 20, POLOXAMER 184, GLYCERIN, CAPRYLYL/CAPRYL GLUCOSIDE, CETRIMONIUM BROMIDE, POLYAMINOPROPYL BIGUANIDE, PARFUM (FRAGRANCE), VACCINIUM MACROCARPON (CRANBERRY) FRUIT EXTRACT, CITRIC ACID

The next ingredient after water and Polysorbate 20, which I both discussed in the previous article, is called Poloxamer 184 and is an emulsifier. The vast majority of cosmetic products have a form of emulsion which is a type of colloid where the Tyndall effect occurs. A colloid is one of the three primary types of mixtures, with the other two being a solution and suspension. In colloids, one substance is evenly dispersed in another and its particles are able to remain evenly distributed throughout the solution. The Tyndall effect, on the other hand, is the scattering of light as a light beam passes through a colloid. The individual suspension particles scatter and reflect light, making the beam visible. The components of emulsions are hard to be mixed together permanently since they have different properties. Adding an emulsifier enables the creation of an emulsion. For example, water and oil won't mix together as water is built from molecules that have polar structure, and molecules forming oil have nonpolar structure. Emulsifiers work as binding agents between the fat and water - they ensure that water and oil can remain combined and don't separate.

There are two types of emulsions: water-in-oil (W/O) and oil-in-water (O/W). W/O is when a hydrophobic (water-fearing) substance is the dominant component of the emulsion and a hydrophilic (water-loving) substance is dispersed (spread) in it. The molecules of the emulsifier surround the water molecules, which are dispersed in the oil phase. O/W is when a hydrophilic substance is the dominant one. Molecules of the emulsifier surround the fat molecules, which are dispersed in the aqueous phase, and prevent them from combining. The O/W emulsion occurs mostly in moisturizing cosmetics (e.g. day creams), whereas W/O in cosmetics that are supposed to lubricate the skin (e.g. night creams). The next ingredient is glycerin. Glycerin has hydrating and skin-soothing benefits. It can be derived from animals or plants but is also produced in laboratories. It is a humectant, which means it naturally attracts water. Other commonly used humectants are Alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs) that also remove dead skin cells, salicylic acid which is used for getting rid of blackheads (a mix of sebum and dead skin cells clogged in pores) or very well-known hyaluronic acid. Another ingredient is called caprylyl/capryl glucoside. It's a very gentle cleansing surfactant (a compound that lowers the surface tension of water and facilitates the removal of dirt from skin or fabric) derived from fatty acids and glucose. Cetrimonium bromide is also a surfactant. It has antiseptic properties (works against fungi as well as bacteria). However, in high concentration, it is considered to be toxic for certain types of cells so direct contact with eyes should be avoided. Polyaminopropyl biguanide is used as a preservative. Preservatives are various compounds that prevent bacteria, fungi and other harmful microorganisms from growing or at least slow this process. They can be either natural or artificially manufactured. It's necessary to add preservatives to cosmetics since they could expire before we manage to finish using them.

The second to last ingredient is a fruit extract derived from cranberry (in Latin: *vaccinium macrocarpon*). You'd think cranberries are used only as consumables but they also have a great value when it comes to our skin and complexion. Cranberry has the ability to deeply moisturize since it contains oil with omega-3, omega-6 and omega-9 fatty acids (they enable to lock the hydration in the skin). It is also a source of antioxidants. Antioxidants are substances that can prevent or slow damage to cells caused by free radicals, unstable molecules that the body produces as a reaction to environmental and other pressures. It also contains salicylic acid, which contributes to reducing visible signs of aging as well as facilitates acne treatment. The very last ingredient is citric acid. It is an alpha-hydroxy acid which helps to adjust the pH of the skin - the optimal natural pH value of skin on most of our face and body lies between 4.7 and 5.75 so it's mildly acidic - and removes dead skin cells. It is naturally found in citrus fruits, giving the characteristic sour taste.

Now that you know the function of some of the most common components of cosmetics, I invite you to analyze the composition of one of the beauty products you use on a daily-basis and find out what substances it contains. I hope I managed to draw your attention to the importance of being aware of what you apply onto your skin and treat it with the respect it deserves. If you wish to find out more about the ingredients used in cosmetics, stay tuned for the following issues of the IB Times. For now, I wish you to stay safe and have a happy new year!

Laura Tomczak

WHY IS RISK-TAKING FUN?

Every day we take risk, whether it's not getting an A because we didn't want to study enough or being late for school for the sake of staying in bed for 5 more minutes, it's normal. Every activity has its consequences, therefore there also is a possibility that those consequences won't satisfy us. However, on a daily basis we try to avoid those negative effects by simply reducing the amount of potential risks. We tend to avoid uncertain situations as they usually make us extremely nervous and unable to be efficient in our current tasks. It is difficult for a normal person to imagine working in a highly stressful environment containing a lot of risks. But what if someone totally loved such risk? What if someone was looking forward to being close to that risk? Those people must be crazy, right? The answer is yes- one can call them crazy but in my opinion they are just the bravest of the brave, they are racing drivers.

When you think about racing, you probably imagine fast cars going around in circles doing pretty much the same thing every time, accelerating, braking and turning, what's so brave in that, then ? Well, that's only how it looks from the outside. Real 'racing' looks completely different. The cars are only tools, with huge engines and lots of horsepower, however the "racing" itself is done by the person sitting behind the wheel. Wait a minute, but pretty much every person nowadays can drive a car, so again what can be so brave in just using your hands to turn the wheel and feet to access the pedals? It's true it is difficult to find someone who cannot drive a car today but in this case it is not about regular driving around the city, going 40 KPH, waiting peacefully as the red lights turn green, it is about driving 340KPH on a racing circuit or 180KPH through a forest at night. That is when the whole "risk" part takes place.

At such speed one cannot rest in the car, listening to their favourite music and drinking their favourite coffee, the only music they hear is the engine and the wind going past them. At such speed concentration and skills are the most important, that's why it is mainly about the drivers. They have to be totally aware of their abilities and surroundings, knowing when, how and what they should do. At such speed one bad could be their last move ever. So why do they still do it ? Why do they keep racing if a single bad decision could end their life? Aren't they afraid ?

No one knows, to be honest. If you ask a racing or rally driver about it, they usually reply that they never think about accidents or deaths, even though they are often on the verge of those. They say it gives them a sense of freedom, a feeling of actually being alive and independent. They simply love it. It's usually their families that worry the most even though they are never racing with them, the mothers worry about their sons but the sons rarely worry about themselves.

They speed through a narrow forestry road at nearly 200KPH without thinking about dying or crashing. For a regular person it sounds insane. How can you be so close to a tragedy so many times and never feel scared ? Sounds strange, huh ? Well, that's not strange for the drivers. They do not really have time for worrying, everything happens really fast and the only thing they worry about is how to enter the next corner as fast as possible. Choose the optimal racing line, brake properly without locking the tires, downshift and then accelerate out of that corner. That's the most important thing for them at a time. They do everything to be fast even if they have to take huge risks. Those risk factors are generally related to breaking some barrier. Being fast is crucial to win the competitions and without winning nobody would notice you. There is a famous saying in sports: "Nobody remembers who finished second but the guy who finished second", as brutal as it may sound it's completely true. Only one person can be the fastest and only one person is able to win.

Risk, pressure and stress, that's what motorsport is generally about. That's why racing drivers can be sometimes called aliens. They do not feel such pressure the same way we, normal people, and instead of fearing the risk, they truly love it.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF RISK TAKING

It's quite ironic that in the middle of a pandemic which, in itself, is quite devastating for the wellbeing of many people and forces us to stay at home, I've chosen to talk about taking risks. However, this time I stumbled upon a question about the preconditions of the human tendency to gamble. That's because I realized that it should be registered somewhere inside us, shouldn't it?

Quite obviously, there's no easy answer to this question, as almost nothing in genetics is simple. However, the increase in probability of taking risks has been attributed to numerous genes. The first one is the Dopamine Receptor D4 gene, of just DRD4. As its name suggests, it attaches dopamine to the brain and belongs to a group of at least 5 more receptors. It can be found on the 11th chromosome. The idea connected to that particular gene is that each version of it correlates with one's risk taking abilities at higher or lower levels. In fact, versions with more repeats (elements that occur multiple times through the genome) mean greater levels of influence.

The main issue with that claim is that it hasn't been fully proven, as one study approves it, while the other doesn't. The only thing that all of them have in common is an opinion that existence of more than one gene which helps people take risks is much more likely. I should also note that most of the studies don't really consider the influence from other factors (like upbringing, for example) as it's not their subject. The study about DRD4 I found was based upon the example of smoking, and the author of it treated picking up the first cigarette as a certain risk. The key thing is that most smokers are addicted to nicotine, which causes the release of dopamine, and that makes the influence of DRD4 much more likely. On the other hand, it's harder to apply its role to other examples of things we consider risky, like gambling or speeding.

According to different opinions, the levels of presence of neurochemicals called glutamate and GABA are directly linked to our risk tolerance instead of genes like DRD4. To clarify things, glutamate is the most abundant neurotransmitters, which to some extent "triggers" a reaction of a group of neurons in almost every major excitatory brain function (it works quite similarly to dopamine), and GABA (γ -aminobutyric acid) is one of the most important neurotransmitters in hippocampus and gray matter, which may be linked to mood disorders and severe anxiety at low levels.

Jonathan Beuchamp from University of Toronto assumes that brain regions connected with processes of decision-making, such as midbrain or prefrontal cortex, might also be the ones fused with risks. A group of researches alongside him has also found out that genetics account for around 1,6% of one's risk tolerance. That number doesn't look that impressive, but it's not been fully approved yet. "Genetic variants associated with more risk tolerance tend to also be associated with more speeding, drinking, smoking, and cannabis consumption, and with riskier investments and sexual behavior", the scientist said. At the same time he noted that environment and demography play a much greater role in shaping the risk tolerance. He also claims that he expects thousands, if not millions of genetic variants to have an influence in this area. For now, only 124 such variants have been located across almost a hundred regions of our genome.

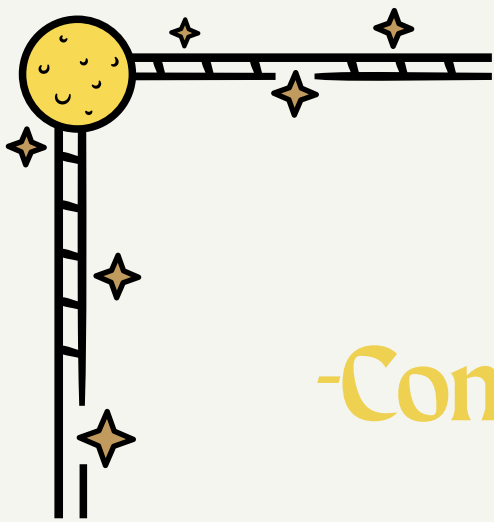
While doing research for this article, I've found some information about the MAOA-L gene, known as "the warrior gene". People, who "own" it (it's located at the X-chromosome), are said to be better at recognizing probability of success in critical situations, as well as taking risks. It's been previously connected to increased aggression, but as of now, scientists tend towards a consensus that it's rather making people more aware of the potential winning solution, and that's been quite successfully proven by Cary Frydman from California Institute of Technology.

Last, but surely not least, I'd like to bring up a thesis proposed by Emma Clifton from University of Cambridge. Team of researchers alongside her suggested that the hippocampus, prefrontal cortex and hypothalamus are linked to certain personality traits strongly connected to risk-taking. The example used by Clifton is the hippocampus- it controls behavioural inhibition, which basically means the ability to avoid the unknown.

All the scary-sounding names of different parts of the brain don't sound really encouraging in this context. However, the same team of scientists found a connection between risk-taking and the immune system. It may sound surprising, but there's a logical explanation behind it. By now, it's quite well-known that the immune system has a high probability of having an impact on mood and certain problems connected to behavior, such as depression. Because of that, links with personality seem to be more and more likely as well.

As I went further and further into the article I've found even more interesting claims. The genetics of risk-taking can be related to the genetics of body composition (childhood obesity was mentioned), lifestyle choices (smoking, which brings us back to DRD4), and even schizophrenia. Also, a link between one's BMI and risk-taking has been detected. According to the study, carriers of the more risk-increasing genes (number of them in its opinion vary from 20+ to even around 100) tend to consume more proteins and calories overall. But Clifton also clarifies that risk-takers aren't always more prone to obesity.

In this article I've tried to synthesize the most accessible points of view on the topic of genes, body functions and risk-taking, but I haven't addressed the question whether risk-taking is more related to our genome or environment. That's because nobody really knows yet. It's both irritating and fascinating at the same time. It's really tempting to search for even more evidence to support different perspectives. For example, Marvin Zuckerman from University of Delaware claims that the heritability of traits attributed to risk-takers is roughly 60%, which is relatively high for a personality trait, because the average range is between 30 to 50% margin. This leaves only 40% to the environment or possible calculation errors. But that's just one opinion among many, as Beuchamp attributes much lesser role of genes in risk tolerance, which makes the heritability of them not that important. So it's not only the matter of where the body hides our tendencies, but also if it's really that important in comparison to our surroundings.

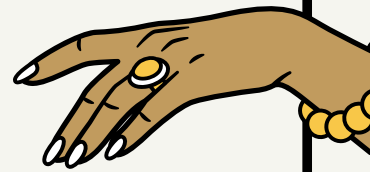
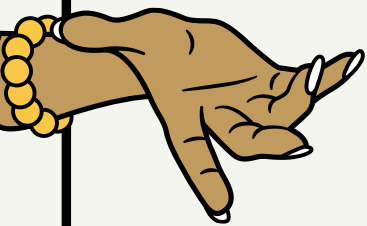


-Complete Guide to- Astrology

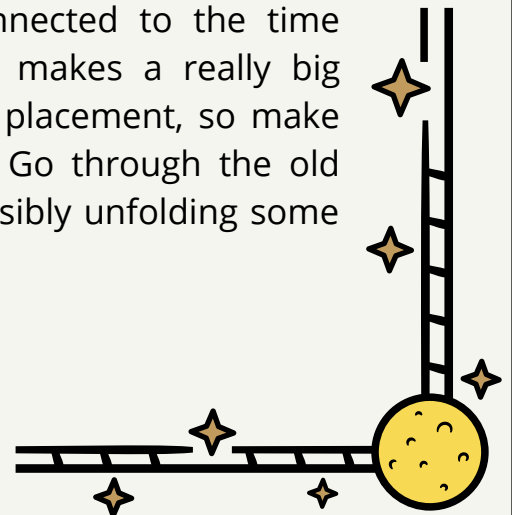
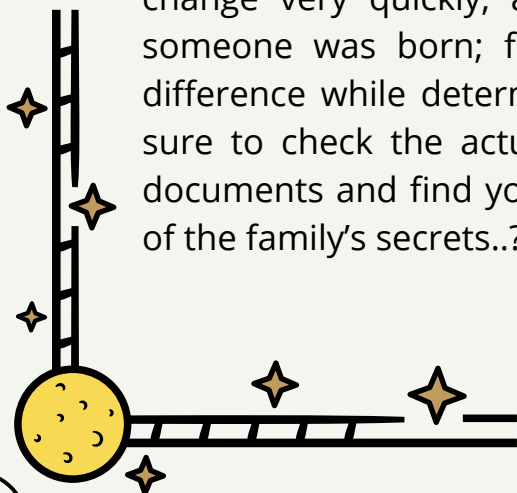
By Aleksander Skutnik

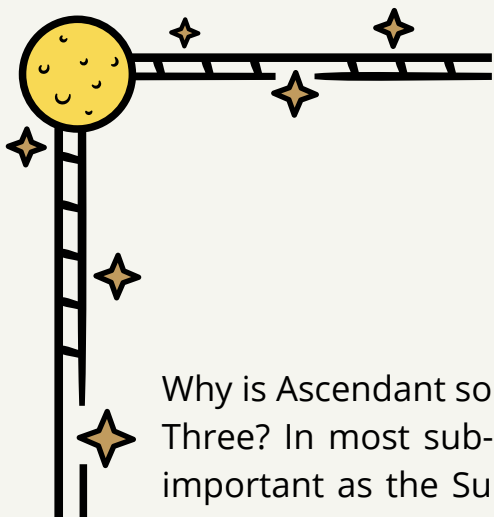
Part 4: Placements' Meaning: Ascendant Sign

Hi! I'm Alex and I'm glad to have you here at our December issue of The IB Times. As usual, I brought you yet another dose of astrological knowledge and divination. Today, we're moving onto the next sign of the big three: The Moon. I hope you'll enjoy! :)



Before explaining what your Ascendant sign is, we have to define the four directions of each natal chart: Ascendant, Descendant, Imum Coeli and Medium Coeli. The first two are the two horizons of the chart, Eastern and Western, while the last two are the Northern and Southern points of the chart. These elements of the chart change very quickly, and they're strictly connected to the time someone was born; for example, one hour makes a really big difference while determining your Ascendant placement, so make sure to check the actual time of your birth! Go through the old documents and find your birth certificate (possibly unfolding some of the family's secrets..?)

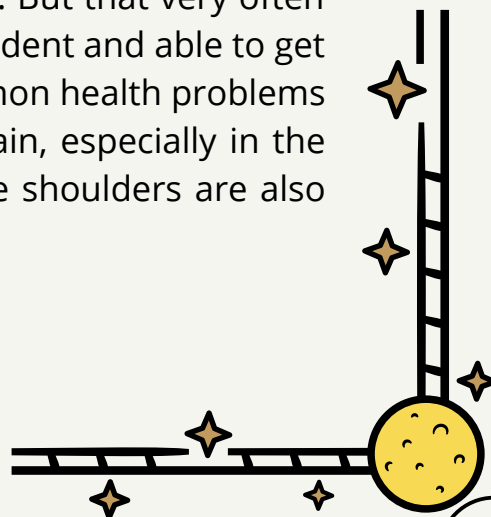
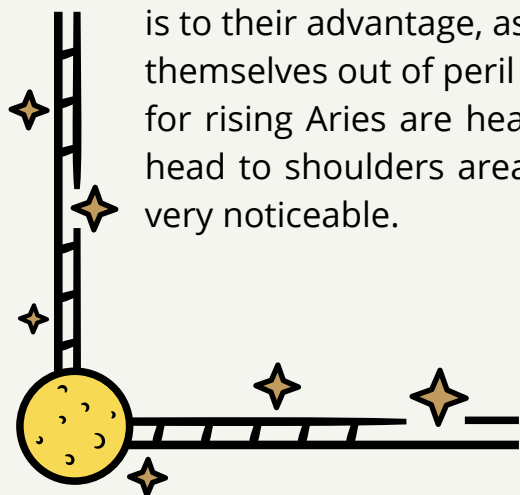


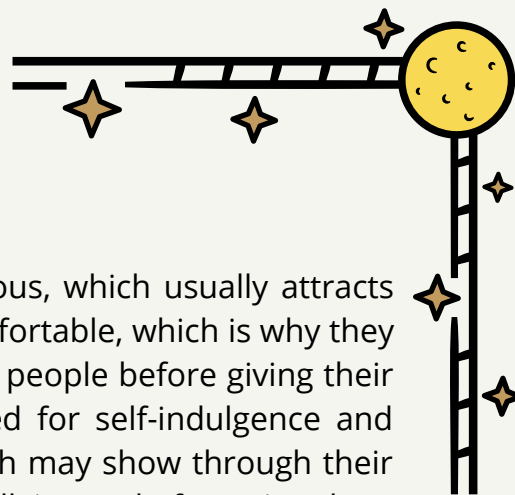
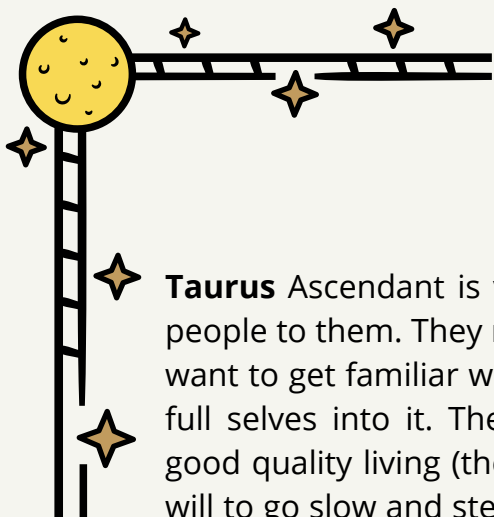


Why is Ascendant so important that it made its place into The Great Three? In most sub-schools of astrology, the Ascendant sign is as important as the Sun placement, if not more! That is because the Ascendant sign is the sign that is rising on the Eastern horizon at the time of your birth, and it represents the first house in your natal chart. Many astrologers say that the Eastern horizon represents the Sun rising at the beginning of a new day- therefore the Ascendant sign symbolises the new person coming to life, the beginning of their life path, and also the process of their development. Because it is strongly connected to birth, Ascendant is said to define the physical traits and overall health of a person.

But most importantly, the Ascendant placement is all about perceptions- how we perceive others and how we are perceived. Many people say that it is a 'mask' that each person shows to the world, but I and many experienced astrologers believe that it's more about how we adapt, present ourselves, the impressions of the outside world and of ourselves. Having explained the significance of the Ascendant sign, let's start with each of the individual signs.

Starting of with **Aries** Ascendant, I've never met more spontaneous people than them. They're very distinctive souls who keep their head high and very often act before they think. But that very often is to their advantage, as they are really independent and able to get themselves out of peril quickly. The most common health problems for rising Aries are headaches and muscle strain, especially in the head to shoulders area. Narrow hips and wide shoulders are also very noticeable.



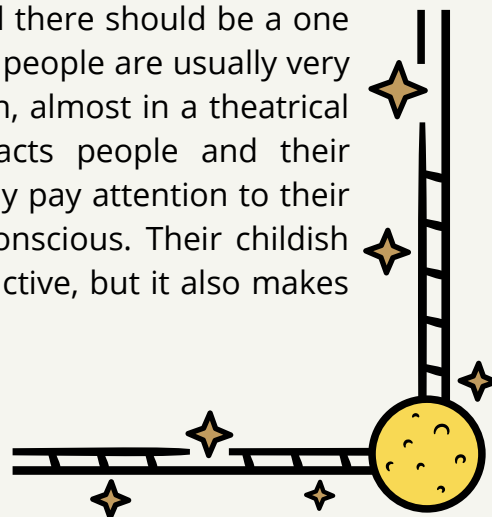
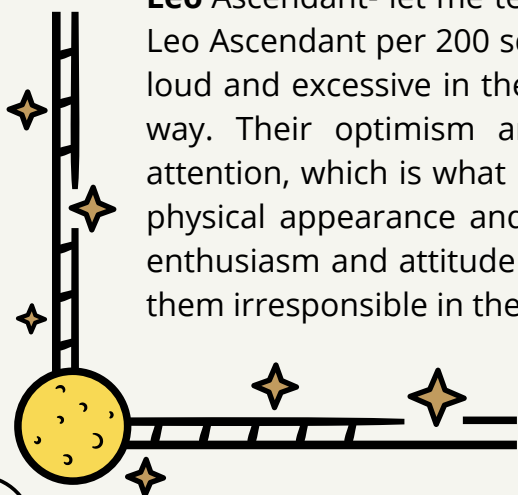


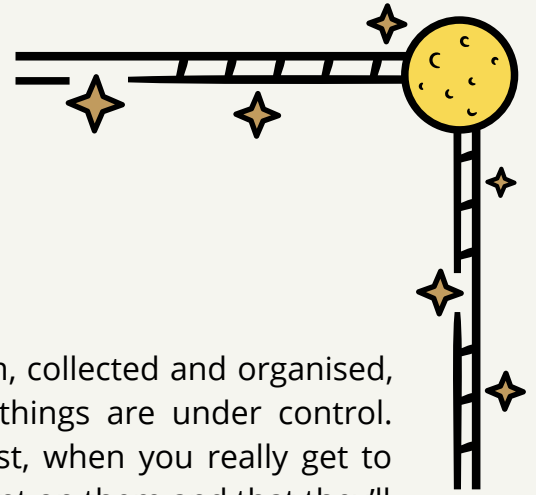
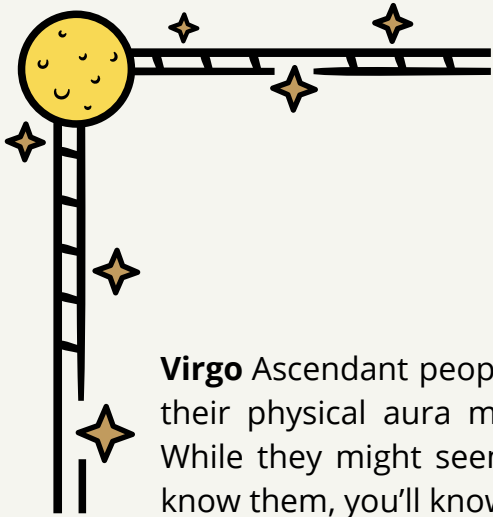
Taurus Ascendant is very stable and harmonious, which usually attracts people to them. They need to feel safe and comfortable, which is why they want to get familiar with a new environment or people before giving their full selves into it. They are people with a need for self-indulgence and good quality living (the little things in life), which may show through their will to go slow and steady with pleasure and chill, instead of running deep and wild up the river (the total opposite of Aries). You can sense their welcoming and warm aura in their physical appearance.

I found Ascendant **Geminis** to be the main characters in every children's movie ever- I truly feel they were the smart, curious and odd (in a nice way) kids that always found themselves trying to sneak to the adult table at every family gathering. Geminis have a great curiosity of the outside world and the people in it, as you might remember from the Sun and Moon guides. Their physical appearance clearly shows their swiftness and freedom of movement, they value personal space. People perceive them as the fun and intelligent ones, which only gives them a better overall outlook.

Cancer Ascendant is a very gentle, innocent-appearing placement. Their physical presence is very soft and tender, as they are usually very caring people. When in danger or uncomfortable, they tend to back off and defend themselves completely, and it's hard to gain their trust later. Because of that, they might feel trapped or overwhelmed in public, as they are very delicate. Cancer Ascendant is usually very natural and connected to the Mother Nature sign- they will sign you up for those lovely picnic meets at the park.

Leo Ascendant- let me tell you, I'm one myself and there should be a one Leo Ascendant per 200 square meters limit. These people are usually very loud and excessive in their gesture and expression, almost in a theatrical way. Their optimism and cheerful energy attracts people and their attention, which is what Leos starve for. They really pay attention to their physical appearance and are usually very body-conscious. Their childish enthusiasm and attitude towards life may be attractive, but it also makes them irresponsible in their actions at times.



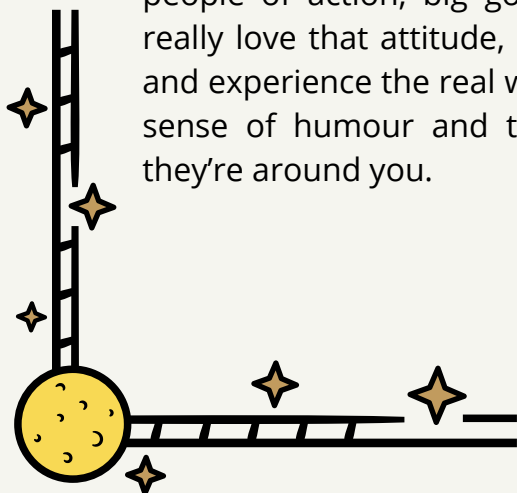


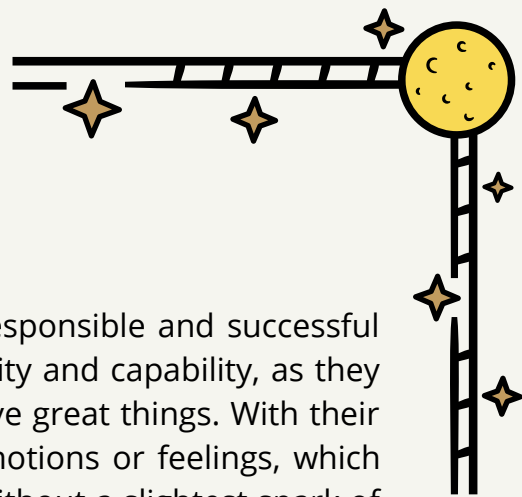
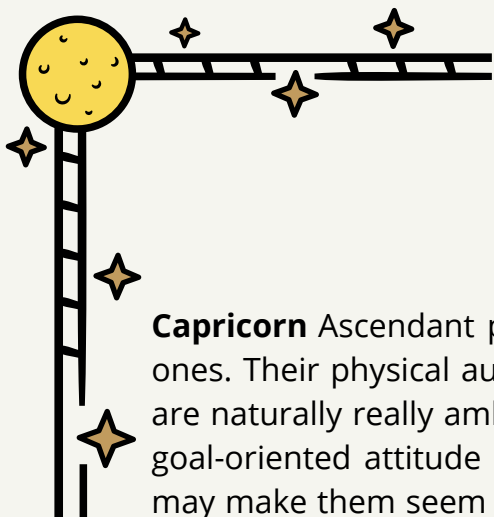
Virgo Ascendant people are very reserved, calm, collected and organised, their physical aura makes everyone feel like things are under control. While they might seem shy or distanced at first, when you really get to know them, you'll know that you can always count on them and that they'll always help you. They see the little things and take care over them, but they might also be really petty at times. This quiet charm of theirs needs no explanation, because that's the part of their mystery that you need to unfold.

Everybody just likes **Libra** Ascendant people, as they are naturally fair and friendly. They pay attention to others, especially in partnership. Their tendency to smooth and calm things down makes everyone amused. When it comes to their physical appearance, just as Leo, they want to be attractive, but more in a soft and plain way than the 'bling bling glamazon' way.

The presence of **Scorpio** Ascendant people is very strong and you know not to mess with these people when you encounter them. Again, just as Leo, they rarely come unnoticed, but it's not about them being attention-seeking, as it's more about how powerful they seem and how they face people. They're usually down-to-earth and they don't really care much about the opinion of others, as they know their value and their ability to judge the situation and themselves.

A **Sagittarius** Ascendant will probably get really mad at you if you refuse to run away with them and start a new life in some remote place. They're people of action, big goals, visions, oaths and adventure. Personally, I really love that attitude, as they make me come out of my comfort zone and experience the real world. Even if they're down, they have an amazing sense of humour and they won't let you worry about anything when they're around you.



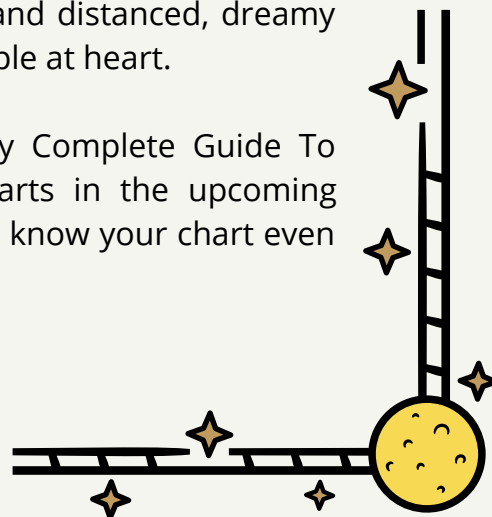
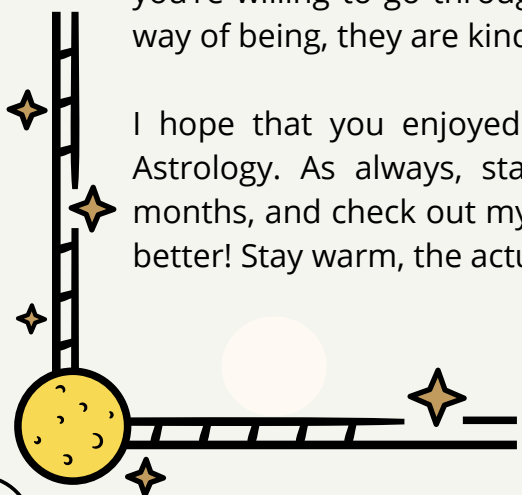


Capricorn Ascendant people are seen as the responsible and successful ones. Their physical aura just **screams** reliability and capability, as they are naturally really ambitious people who achieve great things. With their goal-oriented attitude often comes a lack of emotions or feelings, which may make them seem as cold-hearted people without a slightest spark of affection. This is a trait that is either loved or hated by others, and it's up for you to decide if you can put up with them distancing themselves emotionally.

Aquarius Ascendant people are really similar to Gemini Ascendant when it comes to being individual and different, but while Geminis are just more generally curious about the outside world and they stand out because of that, Aquariuses feel the need to express themselves freely and distinctively. They are usually universally liked and appear very smart and quirky in their behaviour and interests. They are also great at communication, as they speak their mind and are good in conversations—sometimes a bit too much, and they tend to force their opinions on others.

Last but not least, **Pisces** Ascendant people are perceived as shy at first, but really passionate about what they love when you gain their trust. As they are the last sign of the zodiac, they have a bit of all the other signs in themselves, that is why they may change their character very often. You can sense the dreamy aura in their gentle and usually delicate physical appearance. Pisces is known to be the most undecided sign ever, but if you're willing to go through their mixed attitudes and distanced, dreamy way of being, they are kind and compassionate people at heart.

I hope that you enjoyed this month's part of my Complete Guide To Astrology. As always, stay tuned for the next parts in the upcoming months, and check out my previous works to get to know your chart even better! Stay warm, the actual winter is coming <3



Get entertained!

UNDER THE SUN

Witalij Manski, 2015 North Korea

MOVIE - DOCUMENTARY, DRAMA

IMDB 7.4/10 - AVAILABLE ON YOUTUBE

The North Korean government hired Witalij Masnki to make just another propaganda movie but the Russian director seized the opportunity and made a movie which shows the realities of living in North Korea. The film shoots were taken under strict supervision of the government but sometimes the director managed to leave the camera on while no one was looking and got some really great "backstage frames" which sets it apart from the other propaganda style movies and gives the spectators a feeling of watching The Truman Show mixed with a documentary.



BABYTEETH

Shannon Murphy, 2019 Australia

MOVIE - DRAMA, COMEDY

IMDB 7.1/10 - AVAILABLE ON HULU

A terminally ill teenager meets a drug dealer and only then does she start living her life for real. The movie shows how it is to live your life to its fullest when there is nothing to be lost. We can see how her parents are trying to deal with their greatest fear of their daughter falling in love with a drug dealer only in order to bring some joy to their daughter's life.

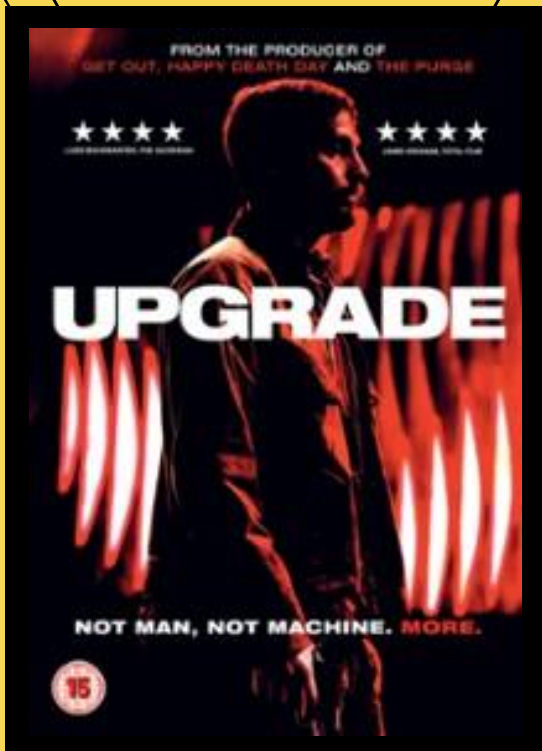
THE SWALLOWS OF KABUL

Zabou Breitman, 2019 France

MOVIE - ANIMATION, DRAMA

IMDB 7.3/10 - AVAILABLE ON HBO

A story about how three people living in Kabul, which has just become a war-torn city, try to survive every single day and make the best out of it. We can see how every single decision makes a difference, not only in our life but also in the lives of others. The animators also brilliantly depicted the day-to-day fear while living in a place engulfed by war.



UPGRADE

Leigh Whannell, 2018 Australia

MOVIE - ACTION, SCI-FI

IMDB 7.5/10 - AVAILABLE ON PRIME VIDEO

After losing his wife, a paralyzed man does his best to use the technology of the future to get revenge. The director uses a "Black Mirror" style narration to show the risks that may appear to be a problem in the not too distant future. At the same time I can not think of any other action movie which addresses the struggles of a disabled person in such a detailed and emotional way.

KIDDING

Dave Holstein, 2018-2020 USA

TV SERIES - DRAMA, COMEDY

IMDB 8.0/10 - AVAILABLE ON HBO

A legendary children's television icon sees that dealing with his own problems may be more complicated than being an international role model for both the youngest and the oldest members of our families. The series proves itself to be more hilarious and touching with every episode even when one may think that it can not get any more heart-melting.



THE PEDESTRIAN

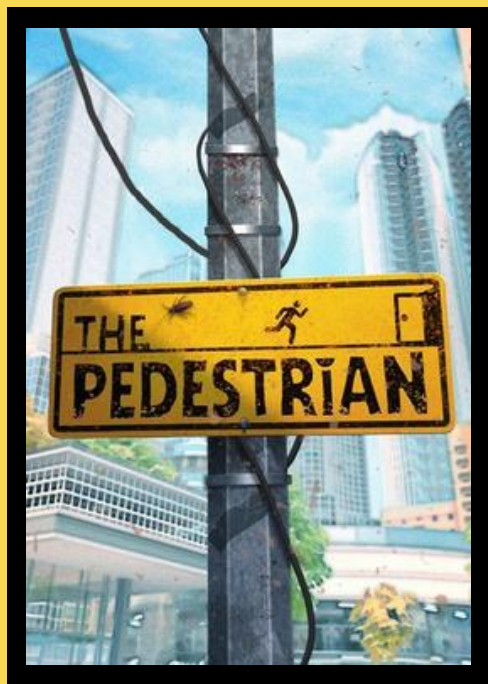
Skookum Arts LLC., 2020 USA

GAME - SINGLE-PLAYER PUZZLE-PLATFORM

METACRITIC 81/100 - AVAILABLE ON STEAM

A really great idea brought to life by Kickstarter and it's community, The Pedestrian can give you multiple occasions where you will doubt your own intelligence only by asking you to connect a couple of road signs. The game gets progressively harder with every minute. The main idea is to complete all the puzzles by going from one road sign to another by connecting

them in a proper order. Apart from the really marvelous graphics and level design, Logan Hayes did a terrific job with the sound design and honestly I haven't been able to stop thinking about his piece of music ever since. The game has a really affordable prize and what's more, there is a free demo on Steam which gives you no reason not to check the game out.



Jedrek

A movie for the month & a month for the movie

Happy New Year to all of our Readers! We are starting 2021 with lots of hope and a bit of Roy Andersson. *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* is one of his most recognizable works and a good first step for Andersson beginners (me included).

The absurd humour of the movie has earned the director a Golden Lion in 2014 and consecutive acclaim. The film consists of 46 tableaux and requires a lot of patience. Don't get discouraged! Andersson himself admits that he feels the cinema lacks the kind of artistry that paintings can convey. His pieces should be viewed as no different than that, since they are, indeed, very peculiar, literally moving paintings.

The film presents the viewer with a distinct and cold reality. It seems distant, one might say, artificial, and yet it perfectly resembles human nature in the form of a dark comedy. The camera is set in the middle-distance at all times, creating the position of an observer that is fenced off from the event itself. There is also no particular focus suggesting that the attention of the viewer should be paid to the whole scene - details are of great importance. It is rather easy to notice them, though, as the camera is stationary throughout the whole movie.



As if the piece wasn't odd enough, there is hardly any plot. The 'story' revolves around a unified community but it is not focused on any particular event, especially since it goes back in time, too. The scenes are un lively, almost still. The colours of the scenery seem rather faded and bland. The choice of music, which was not exactly my taste, did

discourage me a bit. It is definite that Andersson's works are neither easy nor trivial, but as far as I'm concerned, they are also quite difficult to enjoy. Don't get me wrong, there is plenty to derive from the movie and it is surely worth Your time. I just wish the aesthetics were a bit more entertaining. Or maybe the grey of the piece is crucial to understand the final message: Andersson's portrayal of life?



January: *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014)

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence mentions numerous matters of great meaning. Death, life and its futility - just to name a few. Even though several tragedies are displayed, the scenery does not break. Life goes on, the world doesn't stop. No matter what happens, the surroundings remain exactly as they were: neither enthusiastic, nor miserable, but rather melancholic and ashy. Human existence is conveyed with humour but no pink shades.

The oddly long title might be helpful to identify the message. The pigeon in question is a stuffed animal, trapped in a glass cage. It's pretending to be alive - just like the characters of the film. They lack company and warmth. Surrounded by others, yet living in solitude.

They accept their fate of isolation with disturbing calmness. Their existence is futile, what they don't seem to be concerned with. What's most surprising, and perhaps worrying as well, is that the movie appears to address the issues of the modern world. The world presented in the film seems artificial in its stillness, and yet



resembles the reality perfectly. Despite all, the humoristic aspect of the film manages to add some colour to the scene. It seems as though the constant repetition of failure is in fact comforting and brings some odd kind of hope.

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence seemed to be too much for me to handle when I first started watching it. Long pauses and basically no plot are definite obstacles, but they are worth enduring. Putting my personal preferences aside, it is possible for some cinema enthusiasts to even find those features enjoyable.

Looking back, I believe there is much more to unpack here than one would assume. This dark comedy, a mockery of life, might be interpreted in a number of ways. It is an amusingly confusing story, a worrying painting and finally, a warning - for all of us, not to isolate ourselves from life. Otherwise we may become the pigeons, locked away in our private cells. We may reflect on our existence forever, never experiencing it at all.

- m.a.

Dinosaur with a sacred collar the VelociPastor

“I DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT GOD”

“I don’t know much about dinosaurs”

Everyone needs to see a very, very stupid movie once in a while - coming from me, a person who in fact truly hates most of the mindless classics. Surely, the definition of it highly depends on what is it that you find (and don’t find) valuable and worth consuming as far as the media go, but there’s just something about a movie that hits all these guilty, fun spots and really lets your brain take a break. “The VelociPastor”, a movie I found recently, did it so well that I felt a deep need to let more people know about its



existence. I’d go as far as to say that its (mostly intended) stupidity could be a sign of an entertainment genius (and definitely takes you for quite a ride).

“The VelociPastor”, a 2019 comedy/horror/action movie, actually started out as a fake movie trailer eight years prior to the US release and somehow grew to full length. It tells the story of a young orphaned pastor who becomes infected by an artifact during a spiritual trip to China, which leads to him turning into a velociraptor everytime when anger strikes him. Initially terrified and disgusted, he grows to accept his condition and decides to use it to fight the evil of this world and avenge his parents. The movie also has ninjas, a love story and is very clearly low budget.

The movie itself is exactly what you would expect from its description - sweet, painfully stupid 70 minutes of approximately every single Hollywood cliché in a trenchcoat. The low budget solutions and truly fascinating acting only add to the movie’s unexplainable energy. What made me genuinely love this movie is how captivating it is - I have the attention span of a goldfish and need breaks around every 15-20 minutes of watching something, no matter how good it is and how much I enjoy it. I was so thrilled to see myself watch a movie for 70 minutes straight without getting distracted by anything. It’s funny and entertaining in a very simple, appealing way without being offensive, which tends to be the case for many stupid, “de-braining” movies and bugs me a lot. Here, the laughter comes from the awareness of how t e r r i b l e the movie really is, from the overdone plot points like the ninjas, war flashbacks and the good vs evil fight to the absolutely ridiculous execution of special effects (an obviously fake mannequin head covered in ketchup-like substance, you know the drill). “The VelociPastor” takes American cinematic culture and contorts it incredibly, making it a very clear parody of all the top action movies and their quirks.

Is it a good movie? God, no. However, it’s way better than you could potentially expect and very easy to enjoy and be incredibly entertained by as soon as you let go of the notion that a movie has to be “good” and “clever”. Overall, I’d recommend it, especially for when you’re desperately seeking for a fun distraction and are too tired to stomach an unironic, serious movie.

MUSICK - YOUR MONTHLY MUSIC FEVER

It's over. We've completed our annual orbital period as the citizens of Earth; one that was for some comparable to a test of patience; for others, a lingering nightmare. Whichever it may be, it wouldn't do any harm to embark upon this new beginning at a slower pace. Sit back and cherish the moments you possibly can, even if you're anxious about getting a tad too sentimental; harvest your nostalgia and channel it into getting ready to form brand new, even greater memories - and why not do all that while lending an ear to some of the later musical releases of 2020?

THE AVALANCHES - WE WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU [MODULAR RECORDINGS] DANCE/SAMPLEDELIA/PSYCHEDELIA

The Avalanches' fans had awaited their third studio album since the beginning of 2020, as the Melbourne-based electronic music duo preceded the release with two singles launching in the months of February and September. The aura of this record is well established already at its very beginning; Ghost Story kicks off with a rather eerie heartwarming message - a voicemail left by someone who's no longer there, trying to say goodbye. This atmosphere of bidding farewell - whether that be to a person or a time period - is sustained for the entirety of WWALY, each of its tracks flawlessly merging nostalgia-provoking samples and the classic, easy listening disco tunes one may know and love Avalanches for. Chater and Di Blasi, the members of the music group, have succeeded at seamlessly fusing the 25 component parts of the album which, combined with an abundance of guest collaborators, makes the record resemble a mixtape or perhaps a sentimental old-time radio transmission. These appearances provide quite some diversity with fierce verses by Denzel Curry on Take Care in Your Dreaming and more soothing, recitative lines of Kurt Vile presented on Gold Sky, amongst many others. The final product is both gently comforting and bursting at the seams with bittersweet nostalgia; the tracks range from slightly 'elevator music'-esque and mild on Overcome to deeply melancholic, yet nonetheless warm and fuzzy on Song for Barbara Payton, occasionally exploding with full-blown juicy funk during Music Makes Me High. Overall, the whole this record feels a bit like suddenly bumping into a good old friend; someone whom we've missed dearly. And we all deserve that kind of an encounter these days.

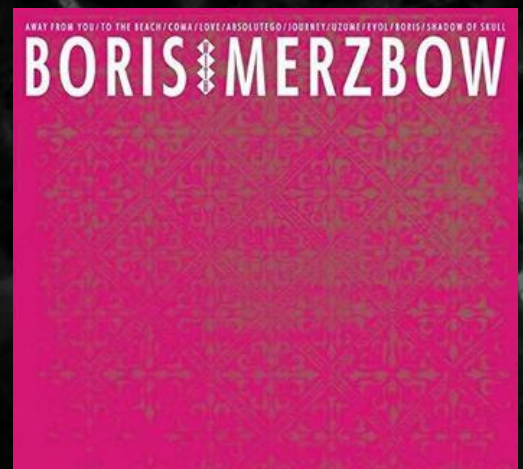


Verdict: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

BORIS, MERZBOW - 2R0I2P0 [RELAPSE RECORDS] EXPERIMENTAL/INDUSTRIAL/NOISE

This collaborative work is the brainchild of the experimental band Boris composed of three members and the man behind Merzbow, the master of noise by the name of Masami Akita - both projects originated in Japan. The artists, although they remain different, seem to complete each other wonderfully here, thanks for their mutual devotion to the East Asian experimental music scene; the combination of Akita's staple distorted and harsh, yet nonetheless melodic ambient sounds and the more psychedelic, growly style of Takeshi, Wata and Atsuo come off as a perfect match, complete with distant and eerie vocals of both the collaborators.

All these factors contribute for over an hour of material that is not quite easily digestible; as one may expect, the distortions are all over the place, paired with wailing, far-away lyrics and distressing synths that form intervals that someone unfamiliar with the kind of post-metal Boris and Merzbow both represent will find uncomfortable. 2R0I2P0 is conceivably one of the best fitting releases that could be considered a soundtrack of the



year 2020; even the initially tricky to decipher title is a fusion of 'RIP' and '2020'. The artists paint a painfully accurate picture of struggle and suffering this year has put many through. Although Away From You, the opening track, starts off fairly soft and steady, this bubble of tranquility bursts soon after. Starting with To The Beach and continuing throughout the rest of the record, the powerful rhythms and noise can overwhelm the listener, although they are counterbalanced with more delicate layers as Boris and Akita switch between tougher and softer tones. Despite the overall sombreness, though, 2R0I2P0 does not consist only of this rough turmoil; oftentimes, more uplifting themes strive to peek through the noise, like a shy glimpse of hope - a desperate yearning for better times. 2R0I2P0 may not be for the faint of heart or those simply seeking sheer comfort, but it does definitely provide an experience of catharsis - one that is astonishingly authentic and well-constructed.

Verdict: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

STEVE LACY - THE LO-FIS [L-M RECORDS] LO-FI/ALTERNATIVE R&B/NEO-SOUL

The American guitarist and member of the band The Internet has come back with another lo-fi treat. While not exactly a well-structured studio album, nor a long one, The Lo-Fis is nonetheless an intriguing compilation of Lacy's early works - namely tracks produced over the course of the artist's high school years. The album is composed exclusively of songs under 3 minutes in length, but this does not compromise their sonic depth to the extent it could have. Lacy jumps from unsophisticated melodies of I Think I Should and Thats No Fun to more complicated and stratified tracks like Hummer. Each track differs



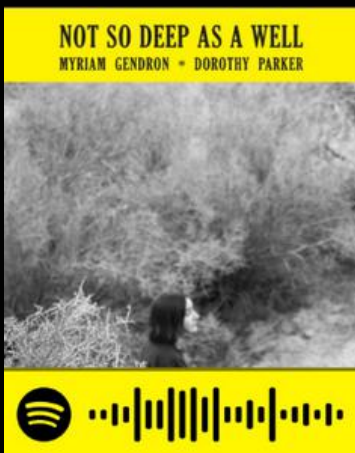
quite a bit from another, providing various beat switches and diverse layers creating a comforting, lo-fi piece that isn't hard to comprehend by its audience. Although still very much a demo, this collection serves as a good indicator of the niche that Lacy feels comfortable at; an extending branch of indie pop, so to speak. As the producer is still a very young artist, let us hope that this bite-sized release simply precedes more ambitious

projects of his, perhaps some that will include more complex renditions of songs The Lo-Fis is composed of.

Verdict: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

AMS





**WHAT IS THE SUN
WHAT IS A BEACH
WHAT ARE THE WORDS
THAT I JUST CAN'T REACH
WHAT ARE THE HANDS
THAT CAN'T BE HELD
WHAT ARE THE CARDS
WE HAVE BEEN DEALT
WHAT ARE THE WHISPERS
THAT SLIP THROUGH YOUR TEETH
WHAT ARE THE FOOTSTEPS
OF NOW GHOSTLY FEET
WHAT ARE THE RAYS
WHAT IS A TRACE
OF THE TOUCH THAT HAS AT LAST
LEFT MY FACE**

G.P.