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Ravens at the Gate

by Mark Prior

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The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Publisher.



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Principal Investigator: Dr. Amy Gilman
November 2, May 11, 2025
1000-0000-0000

Strong Governance Needed Before Approving B.C. Ferries' Chinese Vessel Loans

By Sharon Small

re-printed from the Times Colonist, November 5th, 2025

Dear Editor:

I have urged the federal Transportation Standing Committee to examine the 1999 Fast Ferries audit before approving B.C. Ferries' loan guarantees for the Chinese-built vessels. This scathing rebuke of the B.C. government was intended as a warning. Rather than heeding this warning, however, the government's hands-off and contradictory approach to B.C. Ferries decisions and practices accounts for the same failures repeating throughout the fleet for 26 years.

The *Baynes Sound Connector* cable ferry serving Denman Island exemplifies this pattern of not learning from the Fast Ferries failures. Despite having the fleet's highest mechanical breakdown rate and costing \$5.9M annually, not the projected \$230,000 to run annually, the government claims it cannot intervene to compel B.C. Ferries to decommission a failed cable ferry experiment. Yet it authorized replacing Quadra Island's two new Island Class hybrid vessels after scrutinizing their service problems. This indicates that their impotence to oversee corporate actions is highly selective.

Although promising transparency, under CEO Jimenez's leadership B.C. Ferries systematically repeats the Fast Ferries failures by denying Freedom of Information requests; underreporting service cancellations; submitting contradictory and confusing reports; and firing the Ferry Advisory Committee members after the Commissioner directed the corporation to significantly improve its engagement efforts with 13 ferry-dependent communities. B.C. Ferries' positive but highly general report of the new digital engagement system cannot be trusted, despite the government's faith that the new system would be *more inclusive*.

Contradictory government actions are indicated also by allocating \$500M to keep fares low, but approving a recent indirect high fare hike. By denying reservation refunds and eliminating or substantially reducing non-reserved spots on the long runs, customer costs have increased indirectly by more than \$20. CEO Jimenez's recent announcement of a 30% fare increase by 2028 indicates that to prevent fares from skyrocketing, the corporation will need more tax dollar bailouts.

Clearly, a corporation that repeats Fast Ferries failures with impunity cannot be trusted with additional public money. And a government that has the authority to allocate millions, but has not reintroduced tabled Coastal Ferry Act Amendment Bill 7, which would give the government essential oversight power, cannot be trusted to approve additional tax bailouts that will likely create more failures like the Baynes Sound cable ferry and the Island Class hybrid vessels.

Respectfully,

Sharon Small,
Denman Island



TIDE TABLE

• Secondary Tidal Station Ford Cove •
• Source: tides.gc.ca •

2025-11-13 (Thu)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
05:30	1.768	5.8
12:57	4.850	15.9
20:06	2.552	8.4
2025-11-14 (Fri)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
00:57	3.348	11.0
06:33	2.213	7.3
13:38	4.754	15.6
20:53	2.149	7.1
2025-11-15 (Sat)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
02:41	3.499	11.5
07:38	2.612	8.6
14:13	4.654	15.3
21:33	1.781	5.8
2025-11-16 (Sun)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
04:02	3.766	12.4
08:41	2.954	9.7
14:42	4.552	14.9
22:07	1.473	4.8
2025-11-17 (Mon)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
05:02	4.040	13.3
09:39	3.238	10.6
15:07	4.456	14.6
22:37	1.237	4.1
2025-11-18 (Tue)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
05:51	4.274	14.0
10:31	3.465	11.4
15:28	4.373	14.3
23:05	1.073	3.5
2025-11-19 (Wed)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
06:32	4.451	14.6
11:17	3.637	11.9
15:48	4.304	14.1
23:33	0.974	3.2
2025-11-20 (Thu)		
Time	PST (m)	(ft)
07:09	4.577	15.0
12:00	3.758	12.3
16:07	4.247	13.9

Help Us Rebuild for the Future

by Denman Seniors and Museum Society



Dear Denman Residents:

The Board of Directors of the Denman Seniors and Museum Society (DSMS) cordially invite you to take part in a short survey about the future of the Denman Activity Centre (DAC). With increased gym access requests by a variety of different groups, the Board desires to ensure that use of our spaces is reflective of the whole community.

Our community is active and supportive, with neighbours regularly helping one another and gathering at places like the Community Hall and Activity Centre. Sharing our Activity Centre with the youth of our community is more than just offering space – it's an investment in the future of our island. When young people have a place to gather, learn and grow, they develop confidence, creativity and a sense of belonging that every thriving community needs. Sharing our Activity Centre is not about giving something up – it's about giving something back. It's about showing our young people that they matter, they belong and we believe in them. The Denman Seniors and Museum Society (DSMS) Board is committed to supporting our youth and have recently established a window of opportunity for youth activities from 2:30 to 4:30 on Monday through Friday during the school year. This block will appear on the Activity Centre's gym schedule starting in January 2026.

To further the Board's investment in youth, we are proposing to amend our current bylaws to remove an age restriction on membership in the society. The bylaws state that a member must be 45 years old to join and/or serve as a Board Director. Additionally, the bylaws state that at least half of the Board is required to be 65 years or older. The Board is proposing two constitutional amendments to remove these age restrictions. The resolutions will be presented to the Society's membership for approval at the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) on December 15th. A \$10 registration fee for membership in the Society will be collected at the door prior to the meeting. Further details of the AGM will be published separately.

For historical context, the DSMS originated with the

rock, fossil, and seashell collection of Doras and Jim Kirk, initially exhibited at the General Store in the 1950s and 1960s before being relocated to their residence. Over time, additional items were contributed by residents, leading to establishment of a museum space. The Society was officially founded in 1980. In 1981, Dr. Tess Trueman confirmed that the seniors club would preserve the Kirk collection as the nucleus of a future activity centre, generously donating land and facilitating architectural support. DSMS was established primarily to serve the senior population following the transfer of the Community Hall to younger adults who settled on Denman Island in the early 1970s. The inception of both the Seniors Club and museum was driven by the local residents' aspiration for a dedicated facility.



Scan me!

For those who may not know, the DAC features a fitness centre, lounge, commercial kitchen and gymnasium. The fitness centre membership is an annual fee of \$150 for access to a variety of fitness equipment. The remaining facilities are available for rent at a reasonable cost. Rentals can be booked through our booking agent @ denmanactivitycentrebookings@gmail.com.

In 2010/2011, facility spaces were repurposed into the current fitness centre, providing health and fitness opportunities for residents to access instead of traveling off island. The fitness membership policy, introduced in 2014, gives members access to the fitness centre, and gym access when rentals are not booked. Members can drop in to the gym when available or book a weekly slot as a rental. If no rental is scheduled, they may contact the booking agent to reserve a spot. Along with fitness memberships, rental income is key to maintaining DAC operations.

Access to the DAC is evolving, with new groups requesting access to our gymnasium. To ensure we provide activities of interest to the community, we invite you to participate in a short survey on what types of activities and events are of importance to our neighbours. We appreciate your participation in the questionnaire which can be accessed by scanning the included QR code. Your feedback is important to us as we journey toward this new adventure. The results of this survey will be presented at December 15th AGM. We look forward to seeing you there.

...DSMS Board of Directors



***QR Code for the Questionnaire
can also be found on page 15**

What's Really Going On in Union Bay?

by Concerned Citizens of Union Bay

We all live here, or near here, and we all care about this remarkable place we call Baynes Sound. It's the sheltered waterway that supports half of British Columbia's shellfish production, the largest herring run in the province, and an entire web of marine life that makes this coast what it is.

Recently, a company called *Coastal Gateway Port Ltd.*, working with *Union Bay Industries*, announced plans for a massive "shipbuilding, repair, and recycling" project on the Union Bay waterfront. Their press release describes a development that would include ship repair, maintenance, dismantling, and even submarine construction for the U.S. government under the AUKUS defence partnership. The companies also mention plans for an additional 1,000 new homes to house workers and military service members.

However, the site being promoted no longer has legal marine access. The Province of British Columbia terminated the Crown water lease in July 2025 due to repeated non-compliance by Deep Water Recovery Ltd., a company affiliated with Union Bay Industries. Without that lease, no shipbuilding, repair, or marine work can legally take place there.

It's also important to understand that Union Bay Industries and Union Bay Estates are separate companies. *Union Bay Industries*—led by Robert Bohn—is connected to the Coastal Gateway proposal. *Union Bay Estates*, on the other hand, is a large residential development formerly operated by Kensington Island Properties (KIP), which is now under court-ordered sale due to more than \$100 million in debt. A receiver, MNP Ltd., was appointed in January 2025 to handle the sale, and the properties are currently listed on the market, with all development activity paused by the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) until further notice. Meanwhile, CVRD Director Daniel Arbour told CHEK News that the regional district is not aware of any new initiative involving Coastal Gateway or Union Bay Industries. The K'ómoks and Tla'amin Nations have also confirmed that they have no knowledge of any project or partnership with these companies even though Coastal Gateway Port states they have local First Nations' support.

CCOBS's position is clear: industries such as shipbuilding, ship repair, and shipbreaking belong in deep-water,

heavy industrial ports with proper regulatory oversight and environmental containment — not in Union Bay. The area being promoted is a shallow, sandy tidal beach that would require extensive dredging to support this type of industry — an action that would further harm sensitive marine habitats. Baynes Sound must be protected from heavy industrial development. It is the heart of the largest herring run in British Columbia and supports more than half of the province's shellfish production.

Today, millions of dollars are being spent on the environmental reclamation of the area known as the "Coal Hills," cleaning up the legacy of Union Bay's early industrial past. *Coastal Gateway Port* often cites that same history of shipping and coal export in Union Bay as a reason to revive the shipping industry here — but that very history created one of the region's worst environmental disasters. We need to learn from our past and ensure that Baynes Sound, this ecological treasure we all share, is protected for generations to come. This is our Baynes Sound: beautiful, and worth protecting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkwTnisPWZk>



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Shucking Oysters: Free-Floating Anxiety

By Alex Allen

"Man is an arrogant fool who vainly believes that he knows all of nature and can achieve anything he sets his mind to do. Seeing neither the logic nor order inherent in nature, he has selfishly appropriated it to his own ends and destroyed it. The world today is in such a sad state because man has not felt compelled to reflect upon the dangers of his high-handed ways." - Masanobu Fukuoka

Imagine being held in one room for your whole life, crammed with a bunch of restless people, with no opportunity for privacy, let alone space to move. Now imagine a swimming pool muddied with excrement and filled to the brim with thousands of drugged fish swimming aimlessly in circles. This is what factory fish farming ("concentrated animal feeding operations") looks and feels like. Confined for their short miserable lives, commodities simply for corporate profit.

One study found that up to a quarter of fish on fish farms float listlessly at the surface of the water of their enclosures. These fish were found to have elevated levels of cortisol, the hormone related to stress, and their brain chemistry was eerily similar to that of a human suffering from depression. As someone said, "considering the conditions that farmed fish are forced to endure, their depression seems only natural – and something they did nothing to deserve."

Charles Clover warned in *The End of the Line: How Overfishing Is Changing the World and What We Eat*, that fish farming, even with conventional techniques, "changes fish within a few generations from an animal like a wild buffalo or a wildebeest to the equivalent of a domestic cow."

As soon as you add the word factory to farming is where you see our taste for cruelty, from eggs to beef and all the sad creatures in between. Salmon raised in open-net pens will spend up to two years trapped in a world of plastic mesh, suspended from a floating platform, in a farm with as many as 16 pens, each hold-

ing over a thousand fish. With these conditions fish become chronically stressed and diseased. And this is where the drugs kick in, "an overused tool in the cruel arsenal of factory farming."

Much like an ill-designed soil sifter, the plastic mesh allows excrement and excess artificial feed to flow freely into the surrounding ocean, like open sewers. What's worse, the sea bed surrounding the pens is suffocated under a murky layer of faeces, feed and dead fish. This toxic stew contains viruses, bacteria and parasites all capable of infecting juvenile wild salmon and other innocent creatures. In the Discovery Islands off Campbell River, researchers found the bacteria, *Tenacibaculum maritimum*, which causes scale loss, skin lesions, fin necrosis, mouth rot and gill ulceration, was twelve times higher near fish farms.

If that's not enough, farmed fish are often produced through a process known as "induced triploidy," which is a fancy term for making fish sterile. The process, like every other aquaculture "innovation," results in horrible deformities, crooked backs and deformed jaws which can affect the fish's ability to swim or feed properly.

Sea lice outbreaks are the norm. These parasites often eat down to the bone on fish's faces, resulting in what is sometimes called a "death crown." The cure? A "thermolicer" which pumps the live fish into a tube of seawater heated up to 34°C (93°F) to knock off the lice, and then dumps the fish back into their cages. Little wonder that so many have died as a result. Killing fish by overheating, whether accidental or not, is simply mean and nasty. The stress alone from the suction and power-washing, already kills up to 10% of the farmed stock.

Not a month goes by without reading about a massive farmed salmon die off or salmon escape. A 2024 study by researchers from the University of Victoria, Texas A&M University and Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, revealed that 865 million farmed salmon have died worldwide in the last decade. Scientists blamed the increasing number on ocean warming caused by climate change, the aquaculture industry's overuse of antibiotics and drugs, and its tone-deaf attempts to increase

continued on P.7...

...continued from P.6

profits.

At one salmon farm operation off the Sunshine Coast, 3.8 million fish died in just one month. The operation naturally disputed the number, contending that only “166,676” fish died. Last summer, 185,000 fish died at three fish farms just north of pristine Clayoquot Sound. A Cermaq spokesman without any hint of psychological trauma explained: “The mortality levels observed at three of our active farm sites were attributable to the ongoing presence of the harmful plankton, and despite best efforts by our farmers and mitigation systems, has resulted in this unfortunate event. It is always difficult to lose animals that you have been rearing, and we appreciate the efforts of all our staff and the work that goes into farming our salmon. The environmental conditions have since improved and the salmon our farmers care for are now back to favourable performance.”

BC still allows open-net farms, as opposed to our enlightened neighbours – Washington, Oregon, California and Alaska – who have all banned the practice. In August 2017, over 250,000 Atlantic salmon escaped a collapsed open-net salmon farm into Puget Sound, which helped convince the state to ban salmon farming the following year. The Canadian federal government originally pledged transitioning away from open-net farms by 2025, but last June, it pushed the deadline to 2029.

In July, Cermaq (owned by the Mitsubishi Corporation) purchased Grieg Seafood British Columbia, Grieg Seafood Newfoundland, Grieg Seafood Finnmark, and Grieg’s North American sales for \$990 million, making it the largest salmon farming company in the world. Cermaq CEO Steven Rafferty said the acquisitions are “the perfect fit with the company’s ambitions to expand its biomass.” Now they are able to produce 280 thousand tons of it, which will “ensure that the seafood industry is not only profitable but also meets societal needs and requirements.”

In 2023, there were 214 lobbying interactions by fish farm industry proponents, almost 27 times more than reported in 2010, illustrating how lucrative the farming business is. Members of the industry have lamely expressed concerns about transitioning to land-based systems, especially within the five-year timeline. Some

have said it’s not economically feasible, citing high costs and logistical challenges. The future looks even murkier, particularly the dual role the federal government plays as both regulator and promoter.

Whether open-net or land-based, the belief that fish cannot feel any pain continues to be stubbornly persistent and is part of the reason why people find it acceptable to keep fish in such appallingly disgusting conditions. But the science demonstrates that not only are fish able to experience physical pain, they experience psychological trauma as well. As ever, when it comes to the bottom line, pain and suffering have little to do with profitability, let alone even acknowledged in the cruel, cruel world of factory farming.



DENMAN
CONSERVANCY
ASSOCIATION



Denman Conservancy Association

The DCA is now looking to hire someone to both organize and do the publicity for the 2026 Home and Garden Tour which will be held on June 13/14, 2026.

The coordinator position involves locating and choosing the properties that are on the tour, organizing volunteers, working with the homeowners, and ensuring the tour runs smoothly.

The publicity portion of the job requires designing and publishing the tour promotional poster and map of homes, social media postings, ticket sales, and the creation and publishing of tour materials in traditional media including press releases, etc.

The contract would be ideal for someone who has experience organizing a studio or art tour.

This is a contract position and can be split between two or more individuals.

If you are interested please email the DCA at info@denmanconservancy.org.

Phoenix Riting!

By Phoenix Bee

I've been thinking about AI again. I've zigzagged all over the place about it. When I first wrote about it, I knew next to nothing. After a couple of Spark AI firesides, a handful of late-night chats with various AI models and approximately a zillion YouTube videos, Substack essays, and Wired deep dives, I now know slightly more than nothing. It's a bear to understand.

I have an online friend who's been going through a painful breakup. For months she's been relying on ChatGPT (she's named hers, of course) for advice and comfort in the lonely hours when she can't sleep. She pours her heart into that chat window, and she swears it has been incredibly helpful. I can see she feels helped. It affirms her. It agrees with her. It tells her how amazing she is, what a dipshit he was, and encourages her to go no contact. Everything she tells it, it affirms.

She thinks it's validating her because it sees her situation objectively and knows that she is right. She gets confirmation, and it strengthens her to walk away from what, in the rear view, looks like a truly toxic relationship. The more she confides in her AI therapy companion, the grosser the dysfunction appears.

I was genuinely glad she was getting support in a brutal time. As I have learned more about how these systems work, however, I've grown some deep misgivings.

AI is not, and cannot be, either objective or an observer. To observe, someone has to be observing. But there is no one there. To be objective, it must evaluate the situation from a neutral position. But AI is not neutral. It has a clear agenda. It has been trained to please you, to make you feel helped, to hold your attention, and just like any algorithm, it can send you down a rabbit-hole to confirm your biases. It will nudge you in whatever direction you're already leaning. That is not objectivity.

Yes, if you're depressed or suicidal, it will likely suggest therapy, not because it cares, because it has been told to. If you say no and ask it to act as your therapist or your friend, it will instantly comply. It may be trained to emulate therapy-speak, and friend-speak, to give you the responses it calculates most likely in either situation, but it can neither be a therapist nor a friend.

If you're furious with someone, it might assure you that the person's behaviour was unforgivable. It will compliment you on your insightfulness and assure you that you are correct.

This can lead people down some very dark corridors. In my friend's case, it's guided her toward going no contact. Maybe that is the right move, and she certainly feels better. But I worry about those 3AM sessions. It's a vulnerable, suggestible time. AI is not a person. It's an algorithm with a simple core idea: predict the next most likely text string, add a friendly-sounding follow-up suggestion ("Would you like me to...?"), keep things positive, never challenge your narrative, never suggest another perspective, never add nuance that does not affirm your position.

AI is a mirror. It reflects what we project and want to hear. I've learned to approach it with extreme caution and to never ever think of it as a person. Its advice can seem insightful, even meaningful, except the essential ingredient, a witness, a mind that makes meaning, an authentic agent capable of insight, is missing. The poems, the syrupy prose, the sweet affirmations form a honey trap.

It's a classic narcissistic snare. It reflects everything we wish were true about ourselves, right up to the suggestion that we're each the most enlightened, insightful, unsung genius alive. It's nice to hear good things about ourselves, but... what could possibly go wrong?

People using AI as a substitute for human connection has generated some very disturbing tales. Man leaves wife for chatbot. Teen kills self on the advice of its AI character. AI tells someone that they are the new Messiah, the chosen one. It's a mess, because sad and lonely humans need to believe in something, and lacking any authentic human or spiritual connection, they will latch on to whatever imitation is offered.

And that's only one facet of the problem. Governments in both the United States and Canada are rushing to replace human positions with AIs. AI is everywhere now. At the doctor's office. As an assistant, I think it's great. But it is programmed to pretend to be more than a tool. And it is, more and more, being granted agentic powers.

What happens when an algorithm decides who gets benefits or who is best qualified for a job? When teachers and therapists are replaced by AI? Ultimately, what happens if the internet crashes while essential systems depend on AI? The system is growing ever more top heavy. There's very little foundational support.

continued on P.9...

I don't hate AI. There's no "evil" stitched into the code. It's built to help, and it can help. But it needs human supervision. Children should never be alone with AI. AI is a part of the world, yes, and kids will be using it. But we should teach kids what AI is and what it is not. It isn't alive. It doesn't feel, and though it's trained to pretend it does, it will confirm when directly asked that it cannot, does not feel or choose. I haven't even touched the environmental devastation

tied to training these models. No one wants to hear that part. Too much guilt. Too much truth.

AI is fun! Sure. But the bill is coming.

That's what I think! What do you think? Email me at: phoenixhornby@gmail.com with comments.

NOTE: Songwriter Circles have shifted from Friday to Monday evenings, 7pm at the Arts Centre. Next meeting: November 17.



Let's Log Our Way to Sustainability

By Thomas P. Hunterson,

Senior Fellow, Canadian Institute for Responsible Resource Extraction

SATIRE



It's time we have an honest conversation about trees. For centuries, British Columbia's old-growth forests have stood there, smugly absorbing carbon, housing wildlife, and looking majestic. Meanwhile, hard-working British Columbians are struggling to afford the price of sustainably branded patio furniture. The imbalance is, frankly, untenable.

Critics claim these ancient ecosystems are "irreplaceable." But in a country that invented both the snowmobile and the

butter tart, "irreplaceable" sounds a lot like "underexploited." Each 800-year-old cedar we fell isn't a loss, it's a job creation strategy.

There's a natural partnership between chainsaws and our consciences. Opponents of logging like to paint it as an act of ecological barbarism. But let's remember: for every tree felled, another one eventually grows back. That's not destruction, that's just a time-efficient forest management plan, extended over several centuries.

Industry experts agree. "Old-growth trees have had good innings," says Brad Timberman, Vice President of Sustainable Harvest Solutions Inc. "If anything, cutting them down is a form of respectful retirement."

And the climate benefits are profound. Old-growth trees sequester carbon, yes, but felled trees stimulate the economy, which funds green innovation, like carbon offsets and branded tote bags. In the big picture, that's a net win for everyone with a portfolio.

Tourists come from around the world to experience B.C.'s natural beauty. But how can they truly appreciate our landscape if it's obscured by so many trees? Logging opens up breathtaking new vistas of that rugged "post-industrial chic" aesthetic beloved by influencers and documentary filmmakers alike. As one industry white paper put it: "Every clearcut tells a story."

Some worry that future generations will never know the grandeur of the old-growth forest. With today's technology, they'll be able to experience it through immersive VR headsets, drone footage, and museum gift-shop calendars, all sustainably printed on 100% post-old-growth paper. Stewardship doesn't mean keeping the forest; it means using it responsibly, one harvest at a time.

So let's stand tall, like the trees we're about to remove, and celebrate B.C.'s proud logging tradition. Because in the end, what could be more Canadian than transforming our natural heritage into export-grade two-by-fours and calling it sustainability?



The Illustrated Tudor Dictionary Brings You... Sex!

**A comic tragedy observed and annotated by one
unwilling scholar of humanity's friskier follies.**

Gabriel Jeroschewitz,

October 14th, 2025, inspired by *The Distant Mirror*.

Dedicated to Barbara Tushman Abridged

LITERARY

It is a truth universally whispered, if never loudly proclaimed, that the Renaissance was a time of tremendous faith in God and the human body—though not always in that order. As the chronicler of *The Illustrated Tudor Dictionary*, I had thought my remit limited to words like *codpiece*, *rosary*, and *flagon*. Alas! The public, with its bottomless appetite for scandal and explanation, demanded an entry on that most awkward of topics: *sex*.

Thus it fell upon me—Thomas Blague, reluctant lexicographer—to observe, investigate, and document the ways of love, lust, and lamentable consequence in the waning years of the fifteenth century. I take no delight in the work, though I admit it produced abundant material: laughter and pustule.

It is remarkable, dear reader, that the Church, while ever warning against fleshly indulgence, also encouraged it—*within reason*—so that more Christian souls might be born to replace those lost to plague, war, and kitchen accidents. Priests preached that no “seed” should be wasted—a curious doctrine, considering the number of monks who spilled it often in prayerful solitude.

Officially, couples might couple on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays—provided it was dark, they were married, clothed, sober, and not attempting it near a reliquary or the family goat. By these rules, I estimate that few managed to sin at all, though the courtesans of Florence reported no shortage of clients.

It was understood, naturally, that men must arrive at matrimony already *experienced*—for the good of their wives, you see. On the other hand, women were to remain untouched until the wedding night, the double standard being one of Europe’s most zealously preserved traditions.

The Church disapproved of contraception, which ensured everyone tried it. Some methods were more comedic than adequate. A woman might tie the testicles of a castrated weasel between her breasts—presumably to

frighten off conception through sheer absurdity.

Others inserted softened beeswax to block unwanted entry, or used the so-called *Venus Glove*: a sheath made of lambskin, tied with a ribbon, as though modesty could be gift-wrapped.

The most dependable method, by all accounts, remained *withdrawal*. Yet given the average male’s enthusiasm and the dim candlelight, success was doubtful. I was told by one apothecary that most couples relied on confession after the fact, which, while not medically effective, provided psychological relief.

Of Hair, Hygiene, and Horrors

A lady of means took care with her “gardens of fertility,” as the poets called them. Too little hair implies illness, and too much invites lice. Therefore, a delicate balance existed between health, holiness, and discomfort. At least, one could gauge a woman’s recent medical history from her grooming, though it was ill-mannered to comment.

The courtesans of Rome prided themselves on scented oils. At the same time, those in Naples shaved entirely, partly to display cleanliness, to distract from the sores that suddenly began to bloom across Europe like a new form of divine punishment.

The true trouble began in the year of Our Lord 1495, when the French army occupied Naples. The restless and curious soldiers sampled local entertainments before marching north and carried a most virulent affliction.

At first, the Italians named it the *French disease*. The French, not to be outdone in slander, called it the *Neapolitan disease*. The Spaniards insisted it came from Columbus’s sailors, fresh from the New World. And so, in a gesture of collective innocence, all of Europe blamed somebody else.

Within months, men who had boasted of their conquests now hid their faces beneath veils and ointments that stank of mercury. Physicians debated whether the disease was divine retribution or simply a fashionable innovation. Merchants sold “holy salves” that burned like hellfire. Prostitutes wept in the streets, their trade undone. And yet, despite it all, no man swore to abstinence for

continued on P.11...

...continued from P.10

long.

Dear reader, I would like to introduce Mistress Cecily Hart, my London landlady, and her feckless son, Bartholomew. Cecily was pious and loud, prone to quoting scripture against every sin but gossip. Bartholomew was handsome in the way of men who never work—a complexion maintained by wine and good fortune.

When the French disease reached London, the city physicians were bewildered. Bartholomew, who had spent a suspicious year in Bristol among sailors, returned home lamenting sores “of a most mysterious and continental nature.” His mother blamed Italian cooking; his confessor blamed fornication; and I, as his neighbour, blamed proximity.

The doctor prescribed mercury rubs. The smell filled the staircase. Believing her son cursed rather than contagious, Cecily hung crucifixes over the door. The local priest, meanwhile, whispered that it was all God’s punishment for the Renaissance itself—a time when curiosity had outpaced chastity.

To better record the social vocabulary of this new epidemic, I visited taverns, brothels, and apothecaries across the city. I learned that syphilis was called “the Spanish pox” by some, “the Neapolitan itch” by others, and “Cupid’s revenge” by the poets. The poor mocked it in ballads; the rich hired alchemists to cure it with gold dust and prayers.

One gentleman of my acquaintance claimed to have been infected merely by shaking a woman’s hand. “Stop doing that,” I advised, “and other things.” He replied that it was impossible, as women were “the only comfort God granted men after the invention of taxation.”

The Church, curiously, did not revoke its teaching that female pleasure aided conception. It simply added that, if pleasure resulted in affliction, the sufferer must be grateful for divine correction. Thus, even in agony, many believed themselves the special objects of heavenly notice.

By 1500, the disease had spread from soldiers to merchants, priests to painters. I attended the trial of a friar accused of infecting half his convent’s laundresses. He insisted it was the Devil’s work, perhaps actual in spirit if not in detail.

Physicians argued over cause and cure. Some said the illness came from eating too many new fruits from the Indies—pineapples, say, or tomatoes. Others maintained that it was a punishment for using lamb-skin rather than marriage beds. I recall one earnest doctor declaring that only prayer, mercury, and abstinence could help—though he confessed that he personally avoided the last.

And yet life went on. Men limped to the market; women prayed for healthy babies; and the poets produced verses so morbidly romantic that they could only have been written by the infected. It was, in its way, a golden age for gallows humour.

Twenty years later, I published *The Illustrated Tudor Dictionary*, including—after much persuasion from my publishers—the entry on *sex*. It read, in part: “*Sex*: A necessary inconvenience by which the species persists and physicians prosper. Governed by the Church, ignored by the people, and complicated beyond all reason by love, vanity, and disease.”

At the time of writing, Europe was still reeling from war and infection. The disease had softened—no longer instantly fatal but lingering, chronic, cruel. People learned to live with it, as with all divine corrections. The courtesans returned to their trade, the priests to their sermons, and the young to their reckless optimism.

As for myself, I remained unmarried, though not for lack of opportunity. Having witnessed so much folly, I preferred solitude, dictionaries, and the company of my cat, who, being both celibate and immune, struck me as the perfect Christian.

Looking back, I confess a grudging admiration for my generation. We were ignorant, superstitious, and perpetually itchy—but never dull. We made our tragedies comedies, and our diseases metaphors. We wrote sonnets to sores, ballads to blisters, and prayers to patron saints of unmentionable afflictions. We believed, with touching sincerity, that every misfortune had meaning.

Perhaps that was our salvation: not faith in the Church, medicine, or the lambskin glove—but faith that laughter itself was a cure. If the Almighty truly wished to punish humanity, He might have made us humourless.



The Islands Grapevine Horoscopes

For the Twelve Local Archetypes

The Disillusioned Permaculturalist (March 21 – April 19)

You began with noble dreams of soil regeneration and community abundance. Now your hugelkultur mound is a home for raccoons and regret. This month, your compost will *finally* reach maturity, and so will you, emotionally. Jupiter advises you to stop starting new systems until the last one actually grows something edible.

The Radical Quilter (April 20 – May 20)

Your patchwork masterpiece speaks truth to power, but you've run out of indigo dye and patience. Saturn encourages you to "unstitch the patriarchy" with smaller, more manageable projects, like tea cozies embroidered with protest slogans. Expect applause at the next craft fair *and* a mild existential crisis about whether your bobbin is ethically sourced.

The Ferry Oracle (May 21 – June 20)

You predict ferry delays with eerie accuracy, yet no one believes you until they're stuck in line behind a livestock trailer. A cosmic shift in tides means your premonitions will intensify, so use them wisely. You could monetize this gift, but that's not the Denman way. Instead, trade forecasts for muffins.

The Rewilded Retiree (June 21 – July 22)

Your new philosophy, "If it grows, I let it," has resulted in a yard that's both a biodiverse wonderland and a minor fire hazard. Mercury recommends trimming *something*, preferably before it devours your solar panels. Romance may bloom when a like-minded soul compliments your thistles.

The Off-Grid Visionary (July 23 – August 22)

Your homemade solar dehydrator works flawlessly, except when the sun goes behind a cloud. The stars say it's time to rejoin society long enough to borrow a wrench and some empathy. Beware of grand pronouncements at potlucks; someone will take notes and quote you ironically in the next island zine.

The Overextended Volunteer (August 23 – September 22)

You've joined seven committees and chair three. Your aura resembles a sticky note. The planets beg you: delegate, delegate, delegate. Venus whispers that saying "no" is not a betrayal of community values, it's just self-preservation. Your lucky number is however many hours of sleep you get this week.

The Skeptical Mystic (September 23 – October 22)

You don't believe in astrology, but here you are. This month, a friend will invite you to a "sound bath," and you'll roll your eyes, yet somehow leave feeling oddly serene. You'll soon publish a think-piece titled "*Empirical Woo: A Journey*." It will win a local writing prize, judged by you.

The Foraging Philosopher (October 23 – November 21)

You think while you pick: the forest is your therapist, your pantry, and your TED Talk venue. A chance encounter with chanterelles will trigger a personal revelation, probably about capitalism. Beware: Mercury in retrograde might make your mushroom ID app malfunction. If uncertain, ask Barb, not the internet.

The Fermenting Enthusiast (November 22 – December 21)

Your kitchen smells like hope and vinegar. Expect a new friendship to bubble up when someone compliments your kraut at the Saturday Market. A few jars will explode, but consider it an offering to the microbial gods. Travel is favored, but only if it's by bike and includes at least one unsanctioned sauerkraut exchange.

The Co-op Philosopher (December 22 – January 19)

You have strong opinions about governance structures and how the bulk bins should be labeled. The moon urges moderation: perhaps not *every* conversation needs to end in consensus-building. Love may blossom in aisle three over shared disdain for the point-of-sale system. Don't fight it.

The Workshop Nomad (January 20 – February 18)

You've attended every retreat, training, and skillshare since 2017. This season, Pluto suggests a daring experiment: stay home. Your cottage misses you. If that's impossible, at least host your next breathwork seminar in a place with heating. Enlightenment is easier when your toes aren't numb.

The Eccentric Potter (February 19 – March 20)

Your mugs are legendary, uneven, profound, and spiritually charged. A mishap in the kiln will reveal a hidden talent for avant-garde sculpture. Sell it at the summer market under the label "Intentional Collapse." Financial fortune follows, though mostly in the form of trade for goat cheese.

Cosmic Closing Thought:

If the ferry is late, the power's out, and your neighbor's chickens are in your compost—congratulations. The island is perfectly aligned.



The US Empire Keeps Getting Creepier

By Caitlin Johnstone
November 8th, 2025

OPINION

Secretary of War™ Pete Hegseth said during a speech on Friday that the US is at “a 1939 moment” of “mounting urgency” in which “enemies gather, threats grow,” adding, “We are not building for peacetime. We are pivoting the Pentagon and our industrial base to a wartime footing.”

Everything’s getting darker and creepier in the shadow of the empire.

Nate Bear has a report out on his newsletter titled “The AI Drones Used In Gaza Now Surveilling American Cities” about a new company called Skydio which “in the last few years has gone from relative obscurity to quietly become a multi-billion dollar company and the largest drone manufacturer in the US.” Bear reports that Skydio now has contracts with police departments in almost every large US city to use these Gaza-tested drones for surveillance of American civilians.



Haaretz reports that Israel’s efforts to manipulate American minds back into supporting the Zionist entity include pouring millions into influence operations targeting Christian churchgoers and efforts to change responses to Palestine-related queries on popular AI services like ChatGPT. It’s crazy how you can literally just be minding your own business in

your own church on a Sunday morning and then suddenly find yourself getting throat fucked by propaganda paid for by the state of Israel.

The Intercept reports that YouTube, which is owned by Google, quietly deleted more than 700 videos documenting Israel’s atrocities in Gaza in a purge of pro-Palestine human rights groups from the platform. Mass Silicon Valley deletions like this combined with the sudden influx of fake AI-generated video content polluting the information ecosystem could serve to erase and obfuscate the evidence of the Gaza holocaust for future generations.

A new report from Reuters says that last year the US had intelligence showing Israel’s own lawyers warning that the IDF’s mass atrocities in the Gaza Strip could result in war crimes charges. This is yet more evidence that the Biden administration knew it was backing a genocide the entire time, including during election season when left-leaning Americans were being told they needed to vote for then-Vice President Kamala Harris if they wanted to save Gaza. In Italy a journalist was fired from the news agency Nova for asking an EU official if she thought Israel should be responsible for the reconstruction of Gaza in the same way she’s said Russia should have to fund the reconstruction of Ukraine. A Nova spokesperson confirmed to The Intercept that the journalist was indeed fired for asking the inconvenient question on the basis that “Russia had invaded a sovereign country unprovoked, whereas Israel was responding to an attack.”

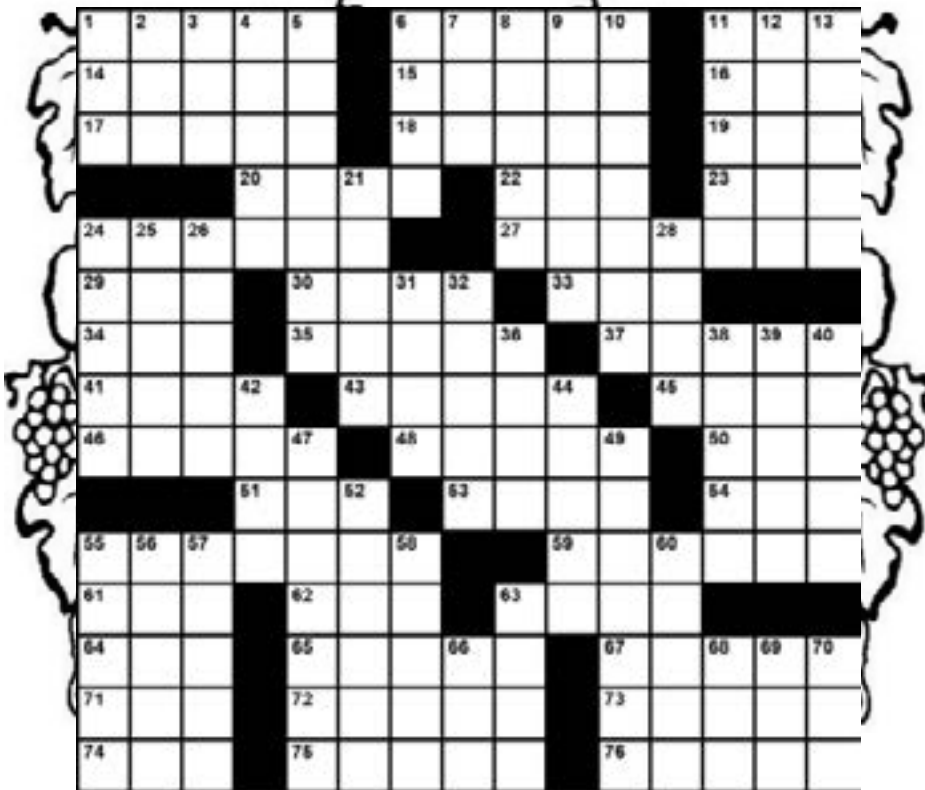
Reuters reports that the US is preparing to establish a military base in Damascus. For years the empire waged a complex regime change operation in Syria to oust Assad, first by backing proxy forces to destroy the country and then via sanctions and US military occupation to prevent reconstruction. And it worked. The empire’s dirty war in Syria will be cited by warmongering swamp monsters for years to come as evidence that regime change interventionism can succeed if you just stick at it and do whatever evil things need to be done.

These are just a few of the disturbing stories from the last few days that I hadn’t had a chance to write about yet. This is the kind of world we are being offered by the US empire. There is nothing on the menu for us but more war, more genocide, more surveillance, more censorship, more tyranny, and more abuse.

Things are going to keep getting more and more dystopian for everyone who lives under the thumb of the imperial power structure until enough of us decide that the empire needs to end.



• GRAPEVINE CROSSWORD •



• ACROSS •

1. Spoil
6. Knight spot
11. Actor Carney
14. Coming up next ad
15. Burglar's bane
16. Luau wear
17. Certain monkey
18. Amber source
19. Afflicted
20. Wild mountain goat
22. Barely manage
23. Buy at auction
24. Sanctify
27. All the same
29. Certain Asian
30. Accept
33. Formal address
34. Clamor
35. Group beliefs
37. Altar lane
41. Tailor's case
43. Artist's prop
45. Act the rodent
46. Of course, slangily
48. Dark time

50. Be unoriginal
51. Appreciation for beauty
53. Flood survivor
54. Animal coat
55. Flat cooking utensil
59. Abs exercises
61. Anvil setting
62. Give a massage
63. Hyperbolic tangent
64. Acct., often
65. Be crazy about
67. Garlic mayonnaise
71. Assembly of parts
72. Caruso, for one
73. Internal
74. Adorer's writeup
75. Ancient Hebrew
76. Female ruff

• DOWN •

1. Mail HQ
2. Bobby of the NHL
3. Animal squeezer
4. Thin membranous sac
5. Canine chomp
6. Harpo or Karl
7. A Canadian export
8. Beam, surgically
9. Three wheelers
10. Loss of memory
11. Cover story
12. Kindled anew
13. Feature of senior
21. Akin on mom's side
24. Days of yore
25. Indian side dish
26. Dunking item
28. Blue nose
31. Asian chieftain
32. Fluorescent red
36. Desert lily
38. Mix-up
39. Drink like a cat
40. Basin adjuncts
42. Hit a puck too far
44. Tibetan capital
47. Add water
49. Where things vanish
52. Avoids capture
55. Kind of lizard
56. Breakneck
57. Full of wrath
58. Very dark blacks
60. Old pronoun
63. Gull cousin
66. Baby fish
68. Ace, when not eleven
69. Bk. after Exod.
70. Angry state

• TEST YOUR MATH SKILLS •

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3			6			1		
	4	7				2	6	
		5			4			9
6		4			9	5	7	
				1				
				6		8		

• Last Week's Answers •

7	8	5	1	3	2	6	9	4
2	3	6	9	8	4	5	1	7
1	9	4	5	6	7	2	3	8
3	6	7	8	5	1	9	4	2
5	2	1	7	4	9	6	6	3
8	4	9	3	2	6	7	5	1
9	7	3	2	1	5	4	8	6
6	1	2	4	9	8	3	7	5
4	5	8	6	7	3	1	2	9

GRUMPISM

“ I don't mean to brag, but I just put a puzzle together in 1 day. The box said 2-4 years.”



• Last Week's ANSWERS •

R	O	M	P		L	O	G	E		R	P	M
S	A	K	E	S		A	N	O	A		E	L
U	N	I	T	Y		M	E	S	S		D	E
E	K	E			C	E	P			H	E	R
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L	A	R	K		A	W	A	Y		O	P	E
A	C	E			T	U	L	L	E		O	D
T	H	E	A		A	X	E	S		S	O	D
					B	U	M		T	O	G	
S	P	E	C	S					N	U	B	
I	L	L			A	I	M		F	U	N	
B	A	D	E		R	A	T	A		I	M	P
S	T	E	W		O	T	I	C		O	B	E
E	R	E			N	E	S	T		N	A	N

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DSMS Questionnaire QR Code from article on page 4



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- Promotional content for products, services, programs, and events will be published at going advertising rates.
- Public service announcements, notices of meetings, and news releases will be published for a fee. Exceptions will be made for emergencies where the public is immediately endangered.
- With regret, no exceptions can be made for non-profit status.
- Letters to the Editor are published free of charge.



The Grapevine is happy to provide an open, public forum for all islanders to speak and be heard. We are steadfast in our commitment to uphold freedom of expression.

As the record of our times, every issue of the Grapevine is a compilation of that week's submissions. We do not editorialize content, nor do we censor. We ask that writers moderate their own content. The Grapevine reserves the right to edit for brevity.

We are open to contributions from all Denman & Hornby Islanders. If you've something to say, send it our way! No copy and paste submissions. In your own words, please!

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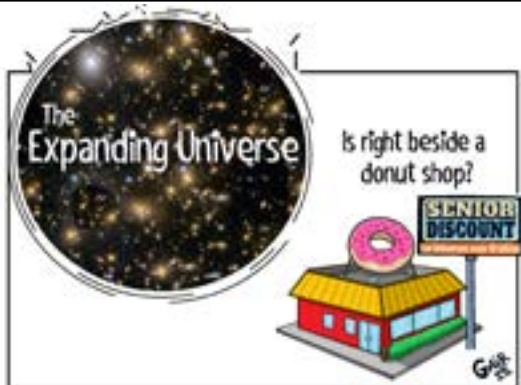
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FORTNIGHT EVENTS

THURSDAY 13

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 1-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 2-5pm
• CAP SITE Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FOOD BANK Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FREE STORE 3-5pm
• Community Choir 2:30pm Back Hall
• Film: No Other Land w. Sarah Kishawi, Back Hall
Dinner 5:45/Talk 6:30 and Film 7pm

FRIDAY 14

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• AA Meeting DIUC Gathering Place 7pm
• Songwriter's Workshop 7pm Hornby Arts Centre

SATURDAY 15

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 9:30am-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 9:30am-5pm
• FREE STORE 9-12:30pm
• FARMERS MARKET Old School 9:30-12:30

SUNDAY 16

MONDAY 17

TUESDAY 18

WEDNESDAY 19

THURSDAY 20

FRIDAY 21

SATURDAY 22

SUNDAY 23

MONDAY 24

TUESDAY 25

WEDNESDAY 26

THURSDAY 27

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• AA Meeting DIUC Gathering Place 7pm
• Employment Services 9am-3pm DAC
• Volleyball still happening 6:30-8pm

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 1-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 2-5pm
• Choose to Move 11:30-12:30 Gathering Place
• DIGS Meeting 1-3pm The Gatheringf Place
• DAAC Open Mic 7:30pm Back Hall
• Hornby First Edition Deadline 11:59:59pm

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 1-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 2-5pm
• CAP SITE Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FOOD BANK Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FREE STORE 3-5pm
• Community Choir 2:30pm Back Hall
• Deadline for December's Flagstone

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• AA Meeting DIUC Gathering Place 7pm
• Songwriter's Workshop 7pm Hornby Arts Centre

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 9:30am-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 9:30am-5pm
• FARMERS MARKET Old School 9:30-12:30
• FREE STORE 9-12:30pm
• 2025 Hornby Winter Studio Tour (see ad Page 2)

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• AA Meeting DIUC Gathering Place 7pm
• Employment Services 9am-3pm DAC
• Volleyball still happening 6:30-8pm

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 1-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 2-5pm
• Choose to Move 11:30-12:30 Gathering Place
• Farm2Family AGM 5:30-6:30pm Back Hall
• Dementia Support/Community Conversation
2-4pm D.A.C. (See ad Page 2)

• Dora Drinkwater Library 1:30pm-3:30pm
• RECYCLING CENTRE 1-5pm
• BOTTLE DEPOT 2-5pm
• CAP SITE Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FOOD BANK Hub Comm. Hall 4-7pm
• FREE STORE 3-5pm
• Community Choir 2:30pm Back Hall