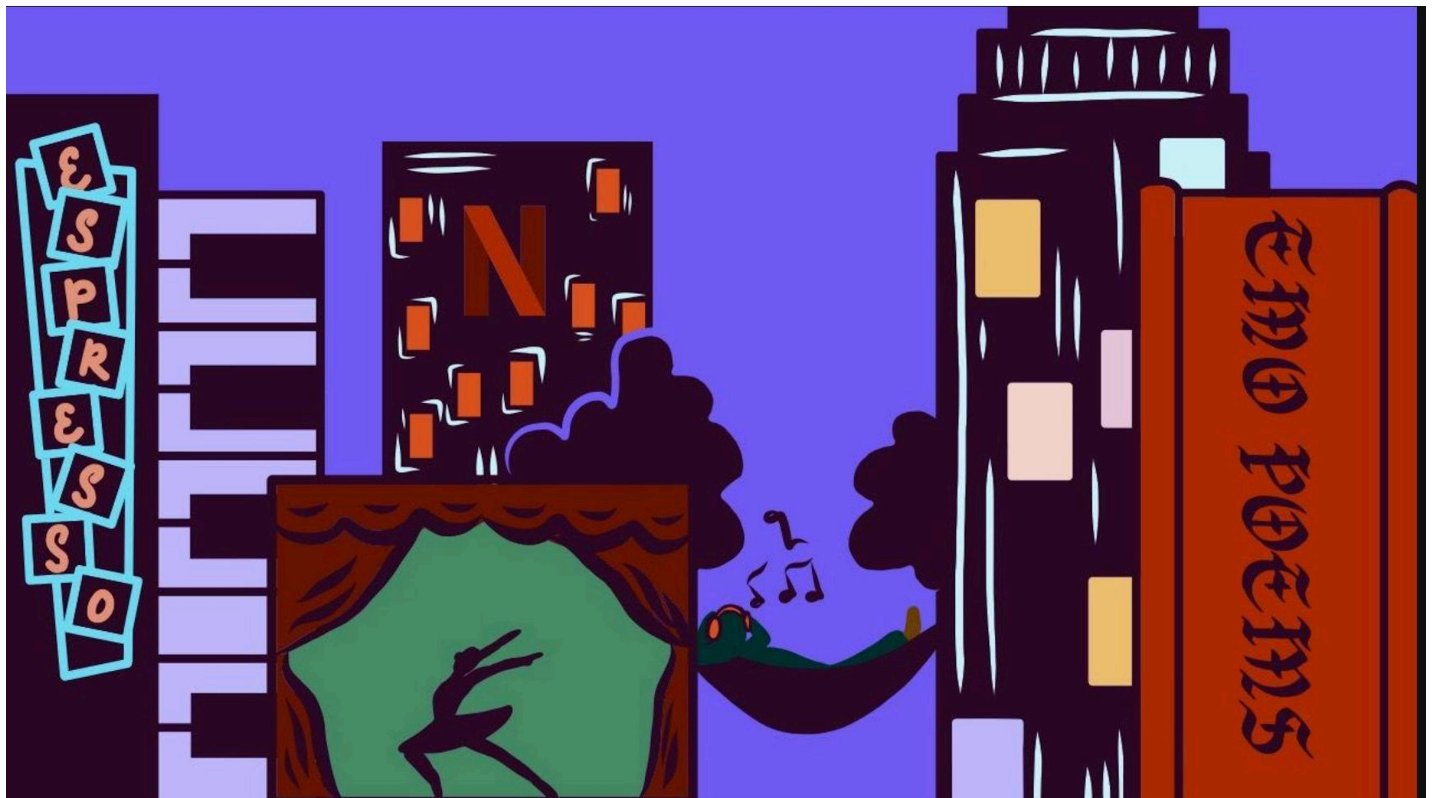


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Staff Picks 7/7 - 7/12

By [The Daily Staff](#)

July 14, 2025, 6 a.m.



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What we're watching

Mackenzie Oliver, *Specials Editor* (X: [@kenzieroliver](#). Bluesky: [@kenzieroliver](#).)

This week, I've made it my mission to slowly but surely finish a rewatch of the extended editions of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, which run over three hours each and over nine hours total. I hadn't seen these films in their entirety in over five years, and after a few brief conversations with my roommates last week, I knew it was time for a rewatch.

My current watch is "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers," released in 2002 and directed by Peter Jackson. The middle chapter of the trilogy, picking up immediately after "The Fellowship of the Ring", "The Two Towers" allows for the deepening of character arcs and for some of the most famous fight scenes in modern filmmaking.

When it comes to action movies, I usually don't love the battle scenes. I'd much rather skip through the fighting to get to the suspense, the dialogue, and the world-building. However, one thing that the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy does correctly is place fight scenes in a way that progresses the plot forward.

Rather than stopping the story so viewers can mindlessly watch characters kill each other for five minutes, the battle scenes in "The Two Towers" allow viewers to learn more about the characters, interact with the landscape, and feel as though their time isn't being wasted by needless violence. The fight scene between the hunters and the heroes as Éowyn attempts to take the people of Rohan to Helm's Deep is gripping, artistically beautiful, and heart-wrenching. And Aragorn's falling-off-a-cliff "death" is nothing short of iconic.

Although "The Two Towers" often falls out of the spotlight when it comes to discourse around "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy — as it's the second of three — I feel it's full of pivotal moments, iconic characters, and a world so intricately and beautifully built that even movie lovers unfamiliar with Middle-earth can find some joy in it. Also — I

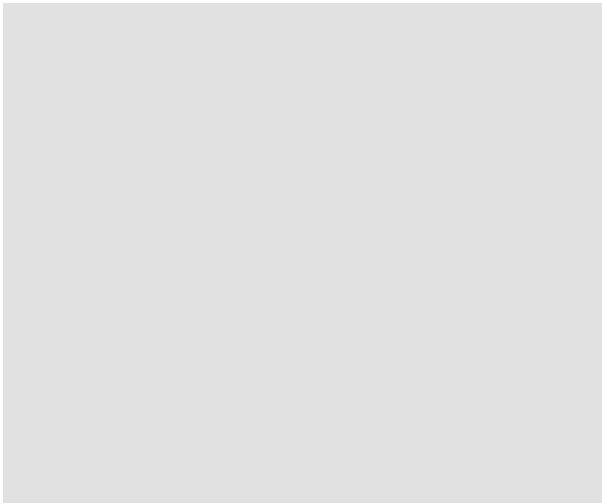
think about the tree shepherds and their missing Entwives every single day of my life. Where did they go?

What we're listening to

Ava Soleibe, writer (X: [@AvaSoleibe](#). Bluesky: [@avasoleibe.bsky.social](#).)

If you had told me prior to this year that my summer would be soundtracked to none other than the music from former TikTok dancer, Hype House resident, and “He’s All That” star Addison Rae, I would have laughed at you and gone right back to my indie rock.

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Fast forward, and Rae’s 12-track album is a complete 180 from her TikTok persona, the production revealing layers of nuance and taste that did not come through her 60-second dance videos. I can wholeheartedly admit that I naively underestimated Rae’s ability to gear her platform toward popstardom, and I learned the powerful lesson that you can really be so back whenever.

My first introduction to Rae’s music was in a remix of Charli xcx’s “Von dutch” on the album “Brat.” After clapping back at those who criticized her first EP, “Got a lot to say about my debut/About my constant revenue,” Rae releases a scream that rippled across the internet and gave both the emerging artist and Charli xcx’s “Brat” some much-deserved virality. Partnering with Charli xcx gave Rae the edge she needed to disassociate from what she was originally known for, and solidify her brand as a Britney Spears or a Madonna for the next generation.

Rae's full-length album, self-titled "Addison," released June 6 and shows clear growth from the debut that she references on "Von dutch." I would classify the album as a cross between art-pop and dance-pop, with influence from experimental music and hyperpop. The lyricism is primarily rooted in themes of romance and fame, the vocals are light and breathy, and the production shines with interesting, fresh choices.

The entire album feels pleasantly consistent — an intoxicatingly atmospheric 33-minute journey that feels like a hot summer night drive. My favorite track is the closer, "Headphones On," one that discusses escapism and emphasizes the album's thesis statement: "Life's no fun through clear waters." The song begins with Rae commanding, "Put your headphones on," and mine have not come off since.

What We're Reading

Luna Crone-Barón, writer (X: [@lunacronebaron](#). Bluesky: [@lunacronebaron](#).)

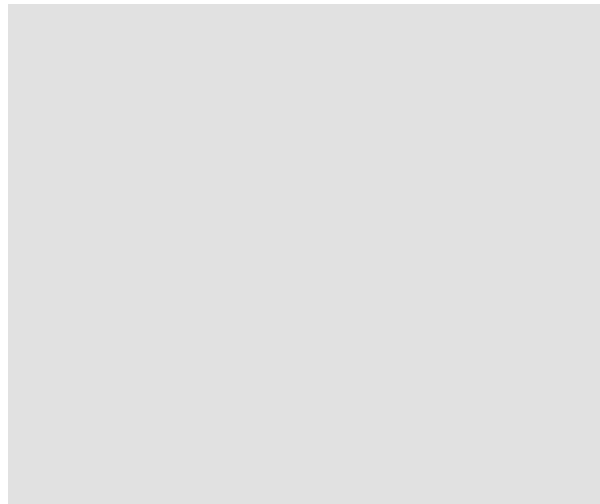
This summer, I've been on a mission to find beauty and hope in a world that feels overwhelmingly bleak, a mission that has led me to finally embark on a full read of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic fantasy epic "The Lord of the Rings."

As a life-long Middle-earth fan who grew up on Peter Jackson's widely acclaimed films, I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit that until this summer, I'd never read past "The Hobbit," Tolkien's prequel to "The Lord of the Rings."

"The Lord of the Rings," a three-part epic split into "The Fellowship of the Ring," "The Two Towers," and "The Return of the King," tells the story of the young hobbits Frodo and Samwise's quest across Middle-earth to destroy the powerful One Ring before it falls into the hands of the evil dark lord Sauron. Frodo and Samwise are accompanied by a fellowship of loveable and complex characters from all reaches of Middle-earth, bound together by the idea that there is some good in the world worth fighting for.

The epic novel is considered the quintessential high fantasy and for good reason. Tolkien builds the most complex and fully realized fictional world and mythology I have ever experienced, complete with a host of characters who are flawed and deeply human, even if they are elves, dwarves, or hobbits. The novel is generous, spiritual, and equal parts profoundly tragic and profoundly hopeful.

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This profound hope is what really makes Tolkien's epic so special and timeless. The story reminds us that small acts of love, kindness, and humanity are truly the seeds of the force that can topple seemingly insurmountable evil and darkness.

Reading Tolkien's epic for the first time at this moment in my life and in the world has been a gift that revitalized my faith in the power of love and kindness, an optimism necessary to avoid the defeatism and hopelessness of abundant hate and violence. In this spirit, I leave you with a quote that encapsulates the core of Tolkien's timeless message:

"The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater." J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," Book 2, Chapter 6.

What we're doing

Anya Farwell, writer (X: [@Anya.Farwell8188](#). Bluesky: [@anyaiswrite.bsky.social](#).)

I always, always knew coffee was a particularly popular thing in Seattle, but I had no idea the full extent until I got a job in a coffee shop. Having never been a barista before, my knowledge of coffee and drinks was few and far between.

I would always go off what other people were ordering, not wanting to seem too basic with my order, or accidentally order something that was too sweet. In other words, I always stuck with what I knew, which was very little.

Being a barista is comparable to the “Papa’s Pizzeria” games we played as kids. The coffee shop I work at is a drive-thru. It draws close similarities to Dutch Bros, as we also, along with coffee, serve sweet syrup-filled energy drinks called “RevUps.”

During my shift, as long lines of cars pile up out my window waiting for their daily doses of caffeine, I write down the most intricate or weirdest orders from customers. I’m always eager to try them myself and see what all the fuss was about.

Although many aspects of this job are enjoyable, my favorite is when people bring their dogs to the window. We make as many Pup Cups a day as regular coffee. I realized that the way people react to getting their coffee in the morning is strikingly similar to the way a dog reacts to a whipped cream-filled cup at any hour of the day.

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Reach Specials Editor Mackenzie Oliver, writer Ava Soleibe, writer Luna Crone-Barón, and writer Anya Farwell at arts@dailyuw.com

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