

San Juan's "Animal Farm" is a Hauntingly Poignant Tale
written by Cecelia Joseph, a senior at Irvine High School

A lone meat hook hangs high in the air, two overhead lights shining on it. It glimmers, like a diamond, yet this diamond has a dark secret: it foreshadows the coming storm of desperation, exploitation, and even murder.

Set in an English farm factory, "Animal Farm" is adapted from George Orwell's 1945 allegorical novella of the same name, meant to mirror the Russian Revolution.

Jack Kirkner stands with a disciplined posture as Napoleon. Kirkner's hands are interlocked and held close to his chest as he speaks, and he carries an air of superiority when addressing the other animals in the factory. Opposite Kirkner's authoritative dictator is Viola Whitaker as the humble Clover. Whitaker takes long strides leading with her shoulders, exaggerating each step. She grasps two sticks in her hands, meant to emulate the long legs of her equine persona.

Liam Herd takes the stage at the top of the show, offering the audience a quick background before disappearing backstage and reappearing in a feathered coat with wings. Herd narrates with a strong, even tone before he transforms; he dons his feathered raven mask, his arms shift to his sides to mimic wings, and his head cricks and twists in quick, deliberate movements.

The Farm Animal ensemble perfectly encapsulates blind conformity as they move on and off stage in a tight pack. They especially shine in the fight scenes, alongside Molly McCabe as Mrs. Jones, as they toss her around the stage, carrying and spinning her with a smooth rhythm. McCabe's frantic movements add to the effect of a rowdy, panicked altercation.

Production Stage Manager Vanessa Roselli perfectly syncs numerous sound, lighting, and fly rail cues throughout the show, creating moments like a commanding, swirling storm with bolts of lightning flashing, followed by their ringing cracks.

Set designer Moth Golba's farm factory set is truly an incredible feat. Made up of towering flats painted like rusted, moldy metal, it's complete with details such as a lofty windmill with detachable planks for actors to remove and attach with ease and a minimalistic commandments board with sliding commandments that can be easily altered.

Extraordinary and eerie, San Juan's "Animal Farm" is magnificent thanks to the cast and crew but comes with a warning: power always corrupts.