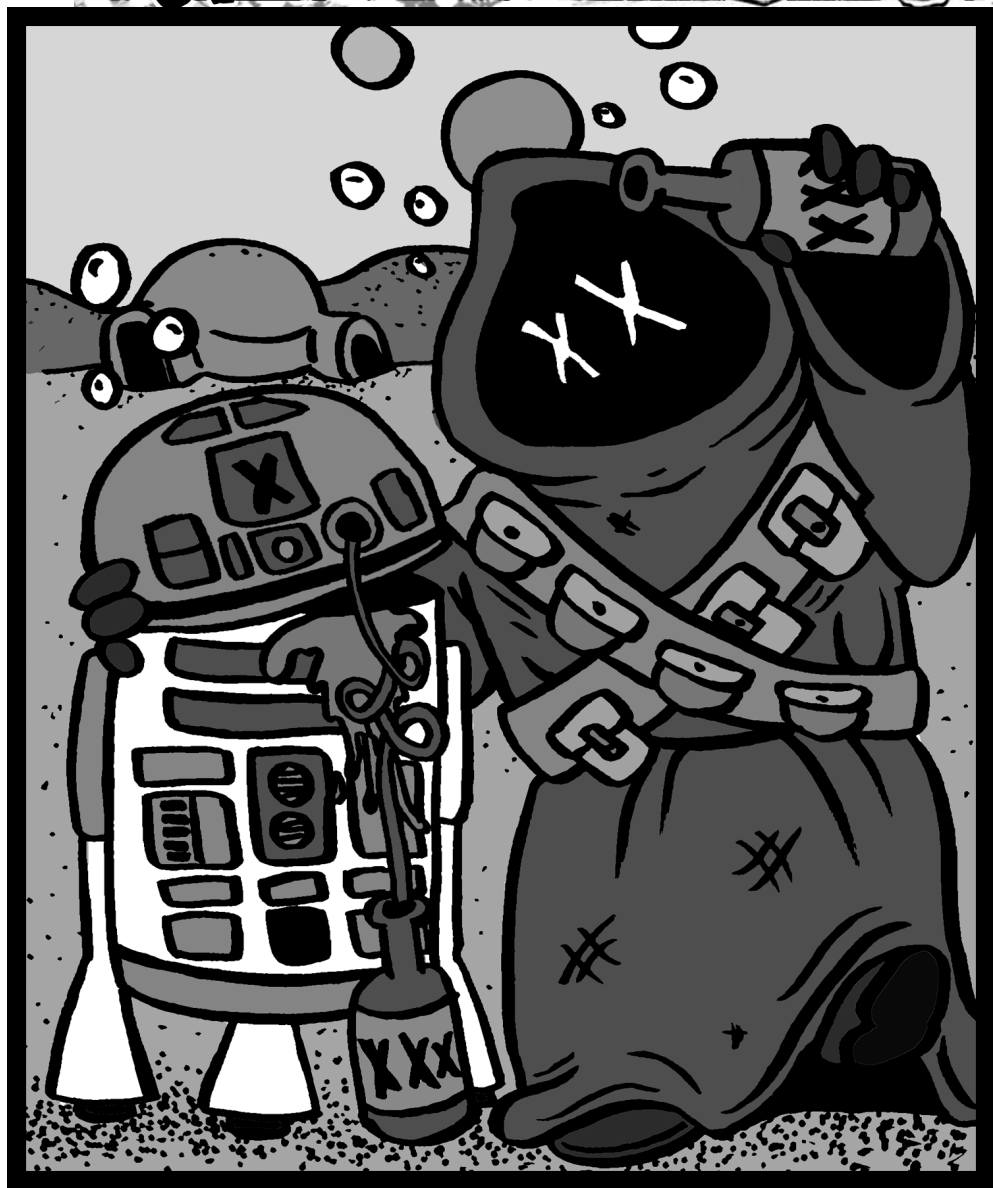


97.9 REPRESENT



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979Represent is a local magazine
for the discerning dirtbag.

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On the Internetz Cloud Thingy at

<http://www.979represent.com>

Email to admin@979represent.com

Materials for review & bribery can be sent to:

979Represent

1707 Austin Ave.

College Station, TX 77840

979-204-4850



A Problem Without Solution

I have been largely mum in the days following immediately after the 12/14 elementary school shoot-up in Newtown, CT. Mainly because I haven't really been able to think about the human price of such a calamity without tearing up in shock and without imagining my two sons in the place of the 20 young victims, killed senselessly in the last place you'd ever expect to worry about your child's safety. You worry about grades, classroom behavior, lunch money, etc. You have tornado drills, in my day you had nuclear safety drills (remember those Gen X'ers?), now the CSISD has to set parents' nerves at ease by detailing their shooter safety plans. It's a different day and age out there, and I wasn't quite prepared to take my place in the guns/no guns debate that will largely be the outcome from this tragedy.

I realize this is Texas, and personal freedom trumps just about everything else (unless you are a woman and then, of course, personal freedom ends at your uterus). Gun control means using both hands, amiright? I am no stranger to this point-of-view. I may have moved to College Station from Seattle, but I spent the first 22 years of life in-between Kentucky and Tennessee. I know the powerful part that firearms play in rural society. People hunt with them. People protect livestock with them. Sometimes it is just fun to shoot holes in tin cans with them. Our homes had hunting rifles in them, or shotguns. Guns were tools and sometimes toys. No one I knew growing up had access to assault rifles, 9mm pistols or any high-capacity weapons. What would you need those for? You want to EAT the deer and not blow it to pieces!

Yet there is a portion of our society that is fascinated by these weapons. In general those who own them keep these weapons under lock and key and they are not abused. We only hear about them when a horrendous crime is committed with them. Personally, I don't see the point in owning high capacity weapons but I'm sure gun folks don't see the point in owning a dozen guitars either. The sad point of all this is that there really isn't a need for any citizen to have such a tool for mass killing. I fall far short of asking that these weapons be banned entirely, but it is long past due that our legislators and neighbors begin to talk honestly about gun rights without falling back on NRA or anti-gun talking points. It's time to ask sensible questions and develop sensible policies. In our current political climate "sensitivity" is sadly a luxury.

It is also high time we begin to talk about mental health in a serious fashion too. In most instances of mass shootings the shooter is mentally disturbed in some fashion, and it is beyond current laws to do anything about it. America is a wild land, or so our story would have you believe. We have been unfettered and rebellious since day one. Personal freedom is dyed in the wool of our collective fabric. You cannot force a person to seek out mental health unless that person has committed a crime or has demonstrated beyond any other interpretation that he/she is a danger to themselves or society at large. Most people who are such a danger are capable 95% of the time to keep it together to fool friends, family, colleagues and societal entities to their sanity. That other 5% is often just not enough. Not to mention that mental health facilities have a poor track record with treating illness and, at least in Texas, prisons are often used as a place to hold those mentally ill. If you love someone who is ill, how can you condemn them to such a fate? If you're rich, you don't have to, as you have plenty of opportunities to seek help. If you aren't...God help you.

That is why I have largely kept my mouth shut about this shooting. Not just because it's almost too horrifying to think about, but because the problem these shootings presents to our society is so complex it is almost without solution. How do you stop a lone gunman bent on destruction from obtaining the means to destroy? How do you identify that tendency in someone and get them help before it leads to violence? I have absolutely no idea.—**KELLY MINNIS**



Second Fermentation (Part I)

"The recipe calls for a batch of dry hops in the second fermentation," she said, pulling a pint glass towards her face. "But I think I can live without it. Spend all that time cleaning shit out of the first batch just to throw it back in on the second run? Doesn't make any sense. I say screw the recipe."

She stopped talking long enough to take a swig on her beer, a bright orange ale with white belt laces marking progress along the insides of her glass, while Alan marveled again how much she looked like a man. He even found himself second-guessing her with his eyes. Checking her profile. Her chest. Her throat for an Adam's apple. She hadn't said her name - his name? - yet. And Alan wondered.

"What do you think?" she asked, rubbing her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Yeah. No, yeah, I agree," Alan said. "If a second fermentation does anything, it filters out the crud. You gotta keep it loose till bottling."

She smacked Alan's arm, "I'm saying!" He grinned back, assuming she approved of his off-the-cuff banter. Alan had never seen this new friend, who was at the Tap Room bar when he arrived for his afternoon pint, before today. Five minutes later they were talking beer recipes and fermentation cycles, which Alan knew nothing about. Alan bluffed his way through the conversation, nodding and moaning agreements to the tones of his new friend's voice rather than the soundness of her brewing philosophies. She didn't seem to notice or mind, and he, surprisingly, appreciated the distraction. Alan came almost daily to the Tap Room looking for a quiet afternoon, for a few good beers served by - or near - a pretty waitress. Instead, he found an androgynous chatterbox working through a solid beer buzz. Alan instantly liked her.

Alan's new friend swatted the bartender walking by, the one who tried to put money on the hi-def tennis match playing above the bar. Thumbing a gesture at Alan, she said, "Dale, this guy knows what I'm talking about. He said skip the dry hops, too. Shit, pour him another something good."

The bartender looked to Alan, "You ready for another beer?"

"How about a burger?"

"How you want it?"

"Everything on it. Add blue cheese. And could you burn the meat?"

The bartender flitted his eyebrows in amusement. "Alright, everything, blue cheese, burnt. I think we can do that."

Alan thanked him and sipped his pint.

"I tell you though," she started again, "only thing I love more than beer is being on the river. Them trees and that water. The sky full of . . ." Alan turned to listen but saw a waitress bouncing between tables over his new friend's shoulder. She was a pretty girl. Maybe nineteen or twenty. Short skirt. Long socks. Firm thighs. She was tall. Light brown hair fell over her collar. Alan wondered what her hair, tucked behind her ears, smelled like. Flowers. Fruits. Time? Imagined the softness of her neck. Moisture of her words. A thin vertical line of pale skin descended from chin to chest downward. Alan felt a tide of hot flush his veins, charged by this form but familiar before, and he remembered Aubrey. Aubrey. Breath and touch, spent, reinvested in motion. Freezing this wait. And Alan swirled back again to his glass. His new friend.

"My brother and I kayak once every three months or so," she was still talking. "Shit, I came in town today to grab some camping equipment at REI. Bought a new pair of waterproof boots on sale while I's at it. Girlfriend damn near bleeds out everything I come to town. On meds for anxiety. But she knows, even though I'm coming to get camping gear, I hit the Tap Room. Do it everytime. How could I not? All these taps of good stuff. Dale here knows me. These girls, my God, I know all them." She waved a hand towards the restaurant.

Alan did not look back. He flagged the bartender instead.

"What can I get you, my man?"

"Another stout when you get the chance."

"Same thing? Wanna switch it up?"

"This one works just fine."

"Alright. Coming up."

Alan looked to his new friend, anxious to get lost in more conversation. "So does your girlfriend ever come to town with you? You always come alone?"

Swigging her beer she nodded vigorously while holding the glass upright to her jaw. Alan saw a glob of foam slop from the glass around her cheek and slide down her chin. He instantly looked to back to the tennis match over the bar, smiling to himself, wondering if that precise moment answered his question.

"My girl's great on the river. Throws up a tent like a strike pitch. But she don't like the city. Too busy. Too many people with opinions. Again: damn anxiety."

Alan nodded. "Does she worry about you hauling all the way back to Kinston after being at the Tap Room?" He felt instantly foolish for asking. She was once again the bumbling scaredy-cat in the locker room staring at the coach's office door, asking but what if we get caught while his friends passed a joint. To save face here and now, he covered up his question with another question. "I mean, you know, there's some little towns between here and Kinston that rely on more than local tax money. They'll nab you for three miles an hour over."

His new friend appeared unfazed by the question. She swigged her beer again and, this time, swished her head back and forth in the universal gesture of no. More beer coursed her chin, which Alan thought poured as much ale as any tap on the wall. "Hell, my girl knows I love her. Knows I wouldn't jeopardize nothing. And she knows I have my three pints here before driving back to Kinston, which is a straight shot through nothing I get much worried about. So."

Alan envied her faith. He also thought his new friend's voice sounded like she'd stopped smoking five years before but ten years too late. And he suddenly wanted a cigarette. He didn't even smoke, but all this reckless talk made him want something that would burn his throat. He wondered if his new friend smoked Winstons. His dad had smoked Winstons, which meant Winstons were the first cigarette Alan smoked. Twelve years old, he and his friend Michael hocked a pack from his dad's carton on top of the fridge and skittered down to the woods behind the house. They, being boys overly familiar with bubble gum and watermelon seeds, did not know how to inhale, so they pulled in and puffed out, feigning coughs every few breaths. Alan remembered the way they leaned back against the trees, crossing their arms over their chests, their legs at the ankle. Occasionally, one would spit on the ground, grinding his throat to a crusty-gurgle, and then cough again. But by the time Alan was old enough to buy cigarettes, Michael wasn't there to practice leaning on car-hoods or blowing smoke rings, so Alan didn't care anymore. Without his old friend, there wasn't a reason to bother with smoking, even when all his classmates were trying to look cool, leaning against their own cars, blowing holes around boasts of bagging this goal or scoring that girl. To Alan, there were many things in life, including some people, that were easy to relinquish.

Others, unfortunately, were not.

Alan's new friend raised her glass for a toast. "But you can't blame my lady for caring. And sometimes it's just good to let a woman talk her fill, right?" Alan lifted his own glass, clinked the lip to hers, and drained the final bits of his first beer. Yes, Alan, thought, looking at his new friend, an even better distraction from than these pints. Sometimes it's more than good to let a woman talk her fill.—KEVIN STILL

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Todd On Film: *Silver Linings Playbook*

I never thought I would actively want to see a Bradley Cooper movie. Of the latest class of actors and actresses to become A-list stars in recent years he had definitely been one of the least impressive in my eyes. Looking back at *The Hangover*, which by the way is still not better than *Old School*, Cooper was the guy that was just there to look good and be normal while everyone else created antics around him. The same can be said about *The A-Team*, an underrated action film where he played the right-hand man who gets the girl and occasionally blows stuff up. After scanning over the rest of his filmography I realize that he has even made appearances in a couple other films I've seen but cannot recall him being in them at all. But when I saw the trailer for *Silver Linings Playbook* I felt like I was seeing a completely different person on the screen, and my immediate interest in this among other things moved it to the top of my films to see during the holidays.

In this movie Cooper plays a history teacher named Pat who has just been released from a multi-month stay at a mental hospital after a violent episode which led him to be diagnosed as bipolar. He's a normal-enough guy but gets very wrapped up in everyday problems and cannot seem to tell when he is about to slip over the edge. These mood swings are sometimes played to comedic effect and other times stumble into extremely dramatic scenes, making you unable to guess what is about to happen to his and other characters as you go along. Pat goes home to live with his parents in Philadelphia while he gets his life back in order and tries to concoct a plan to reconnect with his estranged wife, which is made more difficult by the restraining order filed against him and a local policeman assigned to watch over his case. Despite this predicament Pat insists that his mission is not impossible and can be accomplished with enough hard work and a positive outlook, but the path he has designed in his head will not be so directly accomplished.

Silver Linings Playbook may be the only movie I have seen to ever successfully intertwine the activities of football and competitive dancing. Everyone in the town is obsessed with the Eagles, none more so than Pat Sr., who is trying to save up money made from bookkeeping to start his own restaurant. (An aside, Pat Sr. has a friend who cheers for Dallas and bets against him when the Eagles play the Giants at one point in the season, and to drive the point home wears a Giants sweatshirt during the game. No self-respecting Cowboys fan would ever wear apparel from any of our divisional opponents. It made me sick.) Anyway, certain events lead Pat to make the acquaintance of a local girl named Tiffany, who blackmails him into training to compete with here in the Philadelphia Dance Championships. Through both Pat is able to connect with people and focus on something other than the seemingly impossible goal of winning his wife back.

Director David O. Russell does a fantastic job of keeping all of this craziness in view while making it believable at the same time. I only know a couple people other than me that love *I Heart Huckabees*, and at times some of the hilarity in this movie reminded me of the absurdity in that one. Also of note, Chris Tucker is back in a non-*Rush Hour* film for the first time since the mid-90s and is great every time he is on screen. At other points in the movie the heaviness of a scene was just as painful as that of Russell's last film, *The Fighter*, with complex family and partner relationship problems that have no clear answers. *Silver Linings Playbook* is not a romantic comedy, nor is it (*500 Days of Summer*). There are times to get really pissed off, times to crawl into your shell, and times to move on, and this movie captures all of them in the lives of the family and friends it introduces to us. And yes, it turns out Bradley Cooper can act after all.—TODD HANSEN

Still Drinking Hijacked

This Christmas break I sat around and drank like a proper sot. Mostly in my pajamas, in the evening, drinking big bomber bottles of my well-earned spoils. I drank some right awesome beers, some so-so beers, beers that were unmemorable and beers I couldn't wait to forget. The smashing beers are the ones that I have to wax on a tad while I've got space to waste.

Let's start with **Dogfish Head Bitches Brew**. I bought this on Wonko the Sane's recommendation. He chatted me up one day and asked if he could borrow my copy of Miles Davis's electro-jazz ambient tone poem masterpiece double LP *Bitches Brew*, the album that fired that first salvo for properly blending rock, raga, jazz, 20th century European orchestral works and musique concrete into what became generically referred to as "fusion". It is murky listening, as Miles used a ton of musicians on the recordings, often taking his working quintet and doubling them up (two drummers, three keyboardists, etc.), frequently punctuated by the tape echoed blasts from Miles's trumpet, like a boxer bobbing and weaving and jabbing his punches. Dogfish Head took inspiration from this classic recording for a limited edition imperial stout, even go so far as to get the Miles Davis Estate's permission to use the album cover and font for the beer's label.

So what does *Bitches Brew* have in common with Bitches Brew? Well, the beer is 75% imperial stout with 25% honey beer with gesho root. Gesho is an African root that is used in the same manner as hops for brewing of a sort of mead-style honey beer in Ethiopia. I had to look that shit up. What does it mean for the ultimate flavor? It means that Bitches Brew is superbly smooth, the way you expect a can of Guinness or bottle of Samuel Smith to be (but never really are). Not particularly chocolaty or heavy on coffee notes. It is fairly alcoholic, coming in at 9 ABV but you don't get that sort of plummy alcohol flavor. It's just, well, completely smooth. Much different than the music the beer is named for. I'm gonna say right now they really should've named this one for Billy Dee Williams instead. We all know that motherfucker's smooove. Dogfish missed out on an opportunity there, but completely nailed it with this beer.

We spend a lot of time in this 'zine French kissing Harpoon beers. Look right there -> for some love of their Chocolate Stout, and we've waxed appreciative over Winter Warmer and many other of their line. Last month I stumbled onto their 100 Barrel Series. As you might guess, it's a limited series of beers. While there are others in the series, the one I was instantly drawn to was **El Triunfo**, a coffee porter. The Harpoon dudes teamed up with Equal Exchange coffee to brew a perfect blending of espresso bitterness and dark chocolate porter notes. That good espresso shot quality stays firmly upfront from the time you open the bottle til you pour the very last drop, and when it warms up the coffee flavor overwhelms the porter enough to fool you into thinking you are drinking a solid cup of joe that cooled off a little too much, unlike other coffee beers like Lagunitas Espresso Stout (look that a way ->) and Kona's Pipeline Porter where the coffee flavor is more a hint and weakens as it opens up. It's a good solid 6 ABV so you can drink it liberally, and the series is quite inexpensive (\$5 bombers at Specs) and is this year's put-away beer around my place. I have a couple of bombers left over and I intend on buying up as much as I can.

I've had a few other interesting beers this season, and a close second to the above-mentioned quaffs I was also quite impressed with **Delirium Noel**, a Christmas beer out of Hungary (those are the folks that make Tremens and Nocturnum—both quite nice) that was SERIOUSLY alcoholic at 12 ABV but had the awesome fruitcake plumminess and a bit of the wild yeasty banana sweetness that makes many of Central Europe's beer so desirable. A wee heavy beer that really didn't feel wee heavy, and as far as wintery barleywine style drunk warmers, this was the one I had this season that definitely captured that of Janx speert for what I believe a good Christmas beer should be about. All of these beers can still be found at Specs and a few at H.E.B. Better get to those El Triunfos before I do.—KELLY MINNIS

winter beer throwdown

We gathered at Kelly's. It was December. Almost cold in Texas. Wonko and Katie and I had a helluva time finding a Christmas beer worthy of the night's title. BCS hurt for Xmas beers in 2012. So we bought the Sam Adams Holiday 12 pack and the Newcastle Winter IPA: both purchases destined for regret. The entire drive consisted of chatter begrudging a bad delivery to a beer tasting. It's not professional. Hell, it's not even neighborly! And we took it personally. Except for the fact that Michael and Katie produced a MASSIVE bottle of 2011 Anchor Christmas Ale for the sharing. An amazing offering, if I do say so. The beers poured a plenty, as did the opinions. I tackled the dialogue as accurately as possible, but, again, the beer poured a plenty. You can see the effects of such on the scribe eventually, even upon the congregation. So it goes. Thanks to our participants. May these quips offer the most honest reviews a beer can expect, even more than www.beeradvocate.com. We had no reason to hold back.

NEWCASTLE WINTER IPA :

"Y'all are in for a treat." - Wonko
"It should be river brown and nutty." - Kelly
"Tastes like rubbing alcohol." - Wonko
"Tastes like flat Bass." - Kelly
"Doesn't taste like an IPA." - Alex
"The second drink is not so bad." - Katie
"What the fuck does this have to do with Winter?" - Kelly

ALASKAN SMOKED PORTER :

"You can smell the smoke!" - Kelly
"Really smoky." - Aron
"Oh shit! It tastes like smoked salmon." - Kelly
"Tastes like ham." - Aron
"Smoked ham." - Alex
"Hey, this is a way you can drink meat without eating meat." - Kelly
"I really like it, but I'm not sure I could do a whole beer of it." - Aaron
Unanimous love for this one.

SAM ADAMS HOLIDAY PORTER :

"This fairly tastes carbonated." - Wonko
"This is nice. I like this." - Aron
"I would have liked it better if we'd had it before the last one." - Alex
"Better after pretzel." - Alex
"Has some spice." - Aron
"Sierra Nevada Centennial is the gay pride parade of hops." - Kelly

DESCHUTES JUBELALE FESTIVE WINTER ALE :

"They make the Black Butt-ee" - Wonko
"I. Love. This. Brewery." - Kelly
"This has essence of Pine Sol." - Kelly
"This is not what I want in a Winter Beer." - Wonko
"On the front of the tongue it's really good, but now it's just hops on the back of the tongue." - Aron
"It's more of a Hammakah beer because it Jew-belale." - Wonko
Consensus: cool but not a Christmas beer
"So far out of all the bottles, it's the prettiest. Should be plummy and really frickin' drunk." - Kelly
"Does anyone else get really drunk on Christmas?" - Alex

BROOKLYN WINTER ALE :

"This is called 'beer' because that's all you'll remember. Brooklyn: you fahgetaboutit." - Wonko
"Doesn't smell like anything." - Kelly
"This is another one that tastes like beer but where's the Christmas?" - Alex
- There was a chat about Michael's bathroom and the poo on the back of his potty -

ALASKAN WINTER ALE :

"Ah! This is my favorite Winter beer so far." - Kelly
Juniper and Spruce and is it wintery
"Smells like cream soda." - Dan
"But with spruce tips you expect it to taste different." - Kelly

- there was a chat about where Harpoon is from, which turned into a chat about who loves what city and why and what they drink there -

HARPOON CHOCOLATE STOUT :

"Is this what I think it is? Oh! Fuck yeah!" - Kelly
Now there's a chat about places that don't flush toilet paper
Lots of groaning and moaning
There was talk about making a float out of this, pouring it on ice cream

"You could pour it on a shoe." - Katie

To Aron - you got drunk faster than any of us

Comparison talk between Harpoon Chocolate Stout and Brooklyn Chocolate Stout

LAGUNITAS CAPPUCINO STOUT :

-Chat about last year's skunk beer from Lagunitas
"Not what I expected." - Kelly
"Almost tastes like that jalapeno beer." - Wonko
"I'm just picking up alcohol." - Aron
"I would need to share this with someone, but I would drink my share happily." - Alex

There's a talk about doing a tasting night with whiskey. But then there's another talk about poeing

SAINT ARNOLD SAILING SANTA (year old and in Dan's truck for a few days) :

"Nothing about this is specifically non-Jewish" - Patrick (somehow talking of Jubelale)
"It's like the Jubelale but different." - Wonko
- Hops up front, alcohol plummy on the back - scribe
"So high-falooten." - Katie
"So high falloppian?" - Michael

There's a talk about child birth and c-sections and vaginal births of twins. Crowning mentioned at least once.

GREAT DIVIDE HIBERNATION :

"I really like this." - Wonko
"This is what hoppy should be like." - Wonko
- Pairs with hard cheese and ginger ice cream and apple crisp - the bottle
- Now there's a talk about meth - all of us

ROGUE PUMPKIN PATCH ALE :

"Smells like a pumpkin patch." - Alex
"Smells like nutmeg." - Aron
- There's some yelling about whether or not it's legit to compare this to Pumpkinator
- Talk of BJ's Brewpub pumpkin beer. And BJ's menu.
"BJ's Pumpkin beer doesn't have enough Chewbacca." - Wonko
"Enough Jewbacca!" - Katie
- Talk of the best fish-n-chips in Bryan
- Talk of ice cream and A&M's famed (but forgotten) ice cream department
"You can get quarts of DNA Neopolitan style at A&M." - Wonko

SAMUEL ADAMS WHITE CHRISTMAS :

"Tastes pretty White. Definitely not Black." - Alex
"It's got a little bit of a, I don't want to say tang, but something." - Kayla
Looks and tastes like Hoegarden, dammit - scribe

ABITA CHRISTMAS ALE (year old on Wonko's fridge) :

"That smells unsavory." - Aron
"It's like swampgas." - Katie
"Smells like salt." - Kelly
There's a talk about mushrooms. Both kinds of mushrooms.

ANCHOR CHRISTMAS BEER 2011 (on top of fridge for one year) :

- Very first seasonal beer from the 70s - agrees a few, though we're all uncertain, does the bottle say, fuck it
"Oh shit! Yes, this is good." - Kelly
"Even drunk this stuff is good." - Alex
- I'm tripping on the green bottle, surprised I'm still typing.
"You're supposed to drink that much water today." - Kelly (pointing at the size of the giant baby dinosaur bottle)

SAINT ARNOLD PUMPKINATOR :

"I want to say for the story that Pumpkinator is the best beer we've had." - Wonko
"It's like they can draw all this stuff with their left hand, but then suddenly they drew the Pumpkinator with their right hand." - Katie
"Tastes like I'm drinking a craft store. Like a Michaels. But that's a good thing." - Bobby

People went home. People stayed later. I went home. That's all I know.—KEVIN STILL





Still Drinking 4 Realz: Southern Star & (512)

I mentioned last month that I would focus on hard ciders, particularly Texas brewed ciders, in this month's Still Drinking. Well, it turns out I have a lot to learn about hard ciders. They're a completely different type of beverage. Even as I attempted to taste various ciders, I realized complexities far greater than I imagined. I simply need more time and more tastings before I can say anything of value about ciders. However, I can say now that the two best ciders I've tasted thus far are **Leprechaun's Dry Cider** (Texas brewed but not available in BCS as of yet) and **Julian Hard Cider** (brewed in California, available at our local SPECS). If I've learned anything through my cider tastings it's I mostly enjoy the dry ciders. I just don't know why or what that even means, except that dry ciders seem - to this ignorant dolt, at least - to be a bit less sweet and more like a Brut champagne than anything Woodchuck cideries have yet to produce. Oh, and I also have learned that Woodchuck Cider is an unfair example of hard cider's potentials. But that's all I know for now. More to come in this department.

Take note: Harvey Washbangers and **Southern Star** - our somewhat local Conroe Brewery - are teaming up on the evening of January 17 for a Southern Star Takeover event not to be missed. Southern Star, with access to all of Washbangers' tap handles, will feature new ales including an Extra Pale Pine Belt Pale Ale (self explanatory), Cherry Hatchet Stout (a cherry infused version of their Buried Hatchet Stout), Buried Hatchet Nitro Stout (should be creamy), Smoked Lager, Jasmine Infused Bombshell Blond, and Old Pontificator (I don't know what that one is: I'm just looking forward to it). Of course, representatives and brewers from Southern Star will be in attendance to greet glad drinkers, and I'm sure they'll have a little schwag on hand. And if there's anything I've learned about beer geeks it's that they love the brewery schwag nearly as much as they love the beer. Check Harvey Washbangers' Facebook page for scheduling and details.

A feature beer this month that I can't seem to get enough of is (512)'s Pecan Porter (*ed. We concur. That's the royal we.*). Dear my Lord - this is an amazing beer. I tried the Pecan Porter on tap several years ago at the Flying Saucer in Austin and found it to be both boring and totally pecanless. Well, either (512) changed their recipe or I changed my palette because the Pecan Porters I've enjoyed recently are already in the running for Best Beer of 2013. Weighing in at 6.5% ABV, (512)'s Pecan Porter is a malty miracle, full bodied, complex and dark as a Confederate heart, enriched boldly by Texas grown pecans. (Buying pints of this beer supports several local economies!) (512)'s Pecan Porter is a part of (512)'s year round "Core 4", along with their Wit, Pale Ale, and IPA. I don't know enough about this brewery, and I've never tried any of the other Core 4 offerings, so I'm thinking a little Saturday excursion to Austin is in full order.

- KEVIN STILL

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Mustache Rides

By James Gray



TRASH
c 2012

Pedal Pushing: A Tale of Five Rats

There are a handful of instantly iconic dirt pedals out there, the ones that have graced pedalboards since the late 1970s. Pedals like the classic Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, the MXR Distortion +, The Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, the Dunlop Fuzzface, and the ProCo Rat. I am a devotee to the latter, as to me that wide open cranked Marshall in a box sound of the original sounds like what I think a rock guitar should sound like.

The design of the Rat is really quite simple. You have three controls: one for volume, one for filter (a simple low pass filter that rolls off highs) and one for distortion. Op amps are used for distortion and most Rat aficionados swear by the LM308 chip that was used in the American made models that provides a less fizzy, fuller distortion sound. There are many varieties on this theme but essentially this is what the Rat is at its heart. I have owned five different models of Rat (still own four of them) and each has something different to offer that the other just doesn't quite nail.

The first pedal is my #1 Rat that is basically the guitar pedal that I will be buried with. It is made by Upstate Analog, a one-man shop in upstate New York. His pedal is made slightly different than current production Rats, more in line with the original big box Bud box late '70s era Rats. It has controls for volume, tone (as opposed to filter) and distortion. It has the magic LM308 chip, and has a very warm, full tone all the way up its settings. With volume cranked and distortion barely on the Upstate Analog is the perfect overdrive pedal, adding a tad bit of hair to your tone and goosing your preamp just a tad to make for a very nice, open rhythm guitar sound. Turn the distortion up to noon and you have a great early '80s L.A. kind of sound. Think *High & Dry* Def Leppard, that sort of Marshall JTM sound. This pedal works great with other pedals either in front or behind it, but it will brighten significantly when boosted, so I often have to set a paired pedal a little darker than normal to mate with it. Upstate Analog is currently taking preorders on another batch of their Rat clone. Mine was \$100 two years back, not sure what the cost will be this time around. You can find out more information about them on Facebook.

The second of my Rat clones is made by Stomp Under Foot, another small one-man operation in Florida. Matt, the guy at SUF, is forum-renowned for his Big Muff circuits and offers clones of pretty much every flavor of Big Muff that EHx or Sovtek ever released. The Skinner Box is Stomp Under Foot's attempt at the big box Bud era and, like the Upstate Analog, also has a tone control rather than a filter late later Rats. At low settings the Skinner and UA pedals are quite similar, still offering that full bottom end and more of a gravelly distortion. The Skinner tone control is less a straight high/low and more like a normal to counter-clockwise super treble and no bass response. Most of the pot's range comes from all the way counter-clockwise to noon and does not offer as full a range of EQ as the UA. Also, as you turn the distortion up the quality of the distortion is quite different and behaves much more like a tube amp than the UA does. As you turn up the Skinner it compresses hard and the distortion quality becomes more "blown out", like the amp is being pushed beyond capacity. The basic tone also becomes more dark, so the distortion and tone functions definitely depend more greatly upon each other. As a result, it doesn't have as much volume on hand to actually push a preamp like the UA does, and seems to be less "open" than the Upstate Analog. Makes the Skinner Box probably 3rd place for me, but would make a great Rat style pedal for someone using a clean pedal

platform like a Twin or a solid state amp. As this pedal is limited as long as Matt has the original parts (it is made mostly to 1978 spec) then it will be out of production. Since the other SUF pedals like that have appreciated over 100% in value picking one of these up is actually a good investment. \$160 for this one, but you will have to wait 6-8 weeks for delivery. You can find out more at www.stompunderfoot.com

Third is Idiotbox's D4- distortion pedal, made at 979Represent HQ by Atarimatt. Matt's pedal is really only loosely based on the Rat, also sharing (like the other four Rats discussed) the coveted classic LM308 magical chip. The D4- reacts more like a really good version of Boss's DS-1 Distortion. Unlike the other two pedals discussed, the D4- has no real overdrive style range. It is definitely meant to be a rocker's pedal and the distortion is very tight and compressed. The tone is a more normal lefty bass righty treble tone control. It reminds me of a cross between a DS-1 and Big Muff, a much more extreme pedal. I use it for overdrubs as I'm no big rocker, but if you are a single pedal for rocking kind of person, this one would certainly fit you. And inexpensive too at \$99. Find out more at www.sinkholetexas.com

#4 is the Alpha Dog from VFE, a one-man outfit in Seattle. VFE is just getting known nationally for his quality and wide range of products, and his rather low prices for a boutique pedalmaker. The Alpha Dog is a Swiss Army knife styled Rat clone, offering many switches and extra controls aside from the typical volume/filter/distortion controls. Many pedalmakers give you access to these type options inside the pedal itself with dipswitches and tiny pots but VFE brings them to the top for easy tweaking. The Alpha Dog has extra controls for varying the gain structure (EAT) and two switches for varying clipping, removing the diodes entirely for a clean boost stage, adding germanium for a more classic sound or LED clipping for a "turbo Rat" style sound. As a result you can get everything from big box, whiteface '80s, '90s Rat 2 and beyond, working as well as the Upstate Analog at lower gain overdrive-style tones. It comes in at \$150 and is currently undergoing a design restructure to all American parts and greater range on the gain pot, which should mean the v1 Alpha Dogs should start being closed out for less. One thing to say about VFE though...they kinda look handmade. None of the other boutique pedals I own have the same sort of hand-drawn graphics, but VFE's quality is very high. Search for them at www.vfepedals.com

And last, but not least, ProCo's original Rat 2. In the early '90s the Rat went a slight design change that tightened up the bottom end (great for palm-muted quick chording metal dudes) and made the distortion a bit more fizzy. But when pushed from behind by another overdrive it thickens up the bottom end. The current Chinese-made model is even fizzier up top due to the absence of the LM308 chip. These are widely available below \$100, but the Rat 2's now rate in the lower \$100s on Ebay and more towards the middle \$100s and more for the big box or whiteface reissues and well above \$200 for vintage '80s versions. www.proco.com

So we have five versions of virtually the same circuit was some small but key differences. The Upstate Analog and VFE pedals are the most versatile, the Stomp Under Foot and Idiotbox the most radical and, oddly, the actual production Rat was the least versatile but still more recognizable to its roots than the radical examples. Search Youtube for redchatterjubilae and hear audio samples of all these pedals by yours truly.—KELLY MINNIS



concert calendar

1/4—Shortbus Superheroes @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/16—Granger Smith @ Hurricane Harrys, College Station. 9pm

1/17—The Eastern Sea, Kopecky Family Band @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

1/18—Roger Creager @ Hurricane Harrys, College Station. 9pm

1/18—Quiet Company, Driver F, The Docs @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

1/19—Golden Sombrero, Bounce House, Fistful of Dollars @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/19—Wellborn Road, Broken Teeth, Saint Carmen @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

1/20—Aaron Watson @ Hurricane Harrys, College Station. 9pm

1/20—Chris King @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

1/26—The Bad Drugs, The Feeble Contenders, The Ex-Optimists, Strange Weapons @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/5—Stone Sour, Papa Roach, Otherwise @ Hurricane Harrys, College Station. 9pm

2/16—Punk Rock Valentines with **The Hangouts** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

Record Reviews



The Killers
Battle Born

The latest from The Killers is surprisingly melancholy for a band that should be hitting their stride with this their fourth album. *Battle Born* has its moments, but they rarely are all contained in one song except for "From Here On Out," a tune that fully works due to its simplicity.

Battle Born isn't a bad album, but it's not quite the comeback after the odd *Day and Age*. It starts off pretty well with the Killeresque "Flesh and Bone," followed by the fairly sprightly "Runaways." However, by the time you've listened to the sameness of the third song, the disc is brought to a screeching halt by the monstrously-overwrought ballad "Here With Me." Things stay flat with the next two tunes — the earnest "A Matter of Time" and the slight "Deadlines and Commitments" (is this what rock fans want from their bands?)

However, "Miss Atomic Bomb" signals real promise as it builds and builds, but it never really delivers the satisfying moment that the best of the Killers' songs have done. After that, none of the rest of the album rises above competence, with the exception of the aforementioned "From Here On Out" featuring unaffected vocals by Brandon Flowers and some tasty slide guitar by Dave Keuning.

With more than a half-dozen producers (including the band), the album likely suffers from too much tinkering in the studio — almost all the songs are too long as well. That said, the Jacques Lu Cont remix of "Flesh and Bone" sounds really fine. One wonders what the unadorned beginnings of

these songs might have been like.

As a Killers fan (I took my teenage daughter and two of her friends to see The Killers in Houston in 2007; it was great), I continue to hold out hope the band will stop at some point in making all their critics right. —**MIKE L. DOWNEY**



The Well
Seven

Austin stoner rock trio The Well never really steps into typical stoner metal archetypes, forging a sound that owes as much to late '60s psychedelia as it does to proto-grunge and early metal. The familiar ingredients are certainly here on *Seven*, the band's debut recordings. On side A "Act II" gets it started with a great Sabbath style riff with a super-murky muddy guitar tone, with the rhythm section ignoring the normal monolithic dinosaur stomp for something a bit more slippery, lithe and polyrhythmic, and, well, groove-based. Ian Graham and Lisa Alley's voices entwine in unison with each other and at times it hard to tell which voice is which. This is a straight-up riff-based rocker but it has a certain air of panic to it, and it is refreshing to hear a band like this not just go for the loomii riffs and iron man stomp, but also for that jazzy light-stepping quality that Bill Ward and Geezer Butler had together, and with the Ozzy melody too. Not to say that The Well is a Black Sabbath cover band, but the resemblance is remarkable without the band ever really exactly copying Black Sabbath. Let's just say the spirit is definitely there.

On the flip side "Trespass" has one of those early Sabbath/Blue Cheer wah-wah bass guitar riffs (Graham takes it on guitar though)

and you get a more swinging version of what the band is going for on the A-side, with lyrics about priests and temples, etc but not in a Dungeons and Dragons sort of way.

All in all, The Well reminds me most of Portland's Danava, a band that definitely bears its influences proudly but manage to do something unique with a tried and true sound. The Well's songs sound like something you've heard before, except you haven't really, it's just that they get into the spirit of the music's foundations so much that they are able to come up with largely the same results. And that is definitely a good thing. —**KELLY MINNIS**



Ke\$ha
Warrior

My wife surprised me with a copy of Ke\$ha's newest record *Warrior*, slipping it in the car stereo before a grocery trip. When I revved the engine, the opening notes to Ke\$ha's new single, "Die Young," chimed through our factory system. This was a surprise for two reasons: a) although I wanted Ke\$ha's new record, budgeting it a post-Christmas allowance expenditure, I had not requested *Warrior* to celebrate Christ's birth, and (b) I remain constantly and pleasantly surprised my wife encourages my love of princess pop music. She surprised me with a copy of *Teenage Dream* and Katy Perry. She put all my Robyn tracks on her iPod. She memorized the lyrics of three Kelly Clarkson records before our concert. And now she's supporting my fanfare for a blonde beer-guzzling horny-toad with a dollar sign in her name. At this point, I'm not sure if this is a glowing review of Ke\$ha's newest record or my wife's coolness. Either way, I'm

giving both a giant glittery gold star.

But let's chat about a record that is ridiculously better than I should have expected. At best, I was hoping for the urgency of "Blow" combined with the authenticity of "The Harold Song" garnished with the recklessness of "Take It Off". What I found instead makes Ke\$ha's earlier albums feel like early demos of "Tik Tok". Everything Ke\$ha did well previously — debauchery laden lyrics, throbbing dance beats, autotune out the wazoo, oddly catchy "white girl rap" — has only progressed exponentially in complexity and blatant talent on *Warrior*, proving that Ke\$ha is truly an underrated song-writer and performer.

Honestly, I feel it's easier to talk about the fails on this album rather than the hits. The one track that should have been the biggest hit — "Dirty Love", a duo with Iggy Pop — is easily *Warrior*'s weakest track both lyrically and musically. Iggy comes off sounding amateurish when, I'm sure, Ke\$ha hoped he'd bring legitimate brass knuckle rock to the mix. And Ke\$ha's fake growls sound like Glee bloopers rather than animalistic upper-cuts. But this might be the only track on *Warrior* that does not work. Sorry, Iggy. Otherwise, *Warrior* offers consistent "cock-rock" hit-rature. However, the stand out track for me is "C'mon", which features an autotuned choral intro, preceding the album's strongest synch-bounced dance track and most fun rhyme schemes — "Feeling like a saber toothed tiger / Slipping on a warm Budweiser / Touch me, give me that rush / Better pack a toothbrush / Gonna pull an all-nighter". She's darn nearly the poet laureate of white trash club music.

Warrior's strongest tracks may be easily overlooked. "The Last Goodbye", the first bonus track on the Deluxe Edition. Just go YouTube the sonuvabitch. It's all the futuristic possibilities of pop music comprised in a single song track. This song makes me want to feed poor children and give money to sick puppies. Did I mention the picture of her holding a PBR in the liner notes? Yeah, this girl's classy in all the right ways. —**KEVIN STILL**

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979.696.3430