

979 REPRESENT



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**979represent is a local magazine
for the discerning dirtbag.**

editorial bored

kelly minnis - kevin still

art splendoriness

katie killer - wonko the sane

folks that did the other shit for us

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joshua siegel - starkness

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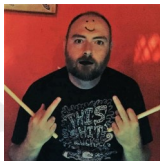
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ABSOLUTES VS NUANCE

It seems these days that nearly everyone in power with a dick has abused that power by sexually harassing colleagues, subordinates, and interns. The headlines break with the news of politicians, actors, news anchors, reporters, talk show hosts all having at some point or another gone full creepoid in order to schmooze their way into attempting to get laid. This, of course, is nothing new. Since the beginning of time men and women in pursuit of a sexual mate have done things questionable. The current trend though finally has these would-be lotharios paying for this abuse of power with their jobs. Well, in the case of the media boys. President Grab 'Em By The Pussy as well as Senators Conyers and Franken as of press time continue to be a "don't be alone with these guys" warning to Capitol Hill staffers. But it seems that every day there is a new revelation that removes someone else from a TV show or another accusation that a certain politician is a lech. It is kind of shellshocking. Charlie Rose does the old open robe routine on co-workers? No way! Garrison Keillor too?! Matt Lauer? Jaysus! Who's gonna be left?

This is precisely the point my missus made to me last night when processing the news of the week together. I paraphrase somewhat, but she lamented that there would be no one left if these men are continually pushed out of office or the broadcast chair. I found that an interesting point of view. My wife considers herself to be an active feminist. She gives to women's causes and works to ensure gender equity in her field. I asked if she means that perhaps some of these folks need to stay in their positions, that maybe the greater good that they can do in their powerful positions outweighs the climate of sexual harassment surrounding them. Maybe, she answered, adding that there was no easy answer here. I think she may be right.

The question of whether a public official pervert should continue to maintain their position after it is discovered that they have misbehaved badly at work is nuanced. The current mood of the country, as witnessed on social media and cable news, does not allow for nuance whatsoever. You are either for Jesus or the Democrats. You either believe the accuser or you perpetuate the atmosphere of abuse. In 2016 Donald Trump beat the rap on his accusers mainly because his supporters could rationalize away his behavior in order to serve a greater good. Most likely former judge Roy Moore, recently accused of decades of pedophilia, will still ascend to the US Senate from his state of Alabama. It is also likely that Minnesota Senator Al Franken maintains his job despite the accusations around him because his ability to represent his constituents' interests can be separated from his predatory behavior.

I do not like my wife's answer. It makes me feel really uneasy. I abhor the behavior these men have shown. Should they lose their jobs for it? Does one very large character flaw completely undermine their ability to do their jobs? In a perfect world we would have perfect men running our country. In a perfect world you or I could stand up to the same kind of scrutiny over our history of interacting with our preferred sex. It is a troubling thing to think about. We live in troubled times so why should this be any different? I wish it were though. — KELLY MINNIS

REAPER

By the way, while we're all talking about these things, and because 2017 has been such a shithole of a year, I might as well tell you guys about the first time I met the Reaper.

I'd been talking through some things with friends and was very much inside my own head. I was single and depressed. I'd been inside my own head for awhile now. We were all talking and cajoling and putting on airs that everything was OK. At that time, I had no girl, I had no dog, my job was going to shit, and I thought that I was going stuck with nowhere else for me to go.

I drove to the liquor store and bought a fifth of whiskey. I drove to Walgreens and bought a bottle of aspirin. I got a hotel room in town. I wrote a note. I ate all the aspirin, then I drank all the whiskey.

That night the Reaper came for me. He walked in the door while I was lying in bed waiting for him to show up. He did not look like the classical grim reaper with the scythe and the hood and all that bullshit. He was ethereal, but still strong, faceless, but definitely not nameless. I'm sure when he comes back for me, he will be different.

That night he came into my room and he said to me, forcefully, "No."

Then I puked. I puked it all up. All over myself. All over the sheets of that king bed with the sheets that are on too tight. All over the floor beside the bed. It wasn't the whiskey that made me puke. I can fucking drink. Even then. A fifth isn't a challenge. I don't even think I was drunk. The Reaper made me puke. He forced it on me.

So I sat up. I thought about things. I took a shower. I cleaned up some of my sick with extra towels. I went back to sleep.

Next morning, I woke up, left the hotel room well before checkout and I went home.

I was afraid of the Reaper that night when he was in the room with me. I probably should still be. I'm not so sure that I am. I won't know until I meet him again.



STILL POETRY

PUSSYFOOT

If you have ever attempted
To walk a pug in the rain,
Then you have met the blunt,
Cold, steely-eyed face of protest.

The pug is a natural protester,
Needing no picket-sign slogan.
No bullhorns to shout their
Snorted rather to the masses.

They need not riot or dismantle
Statues or occupy or invite
A grumble to their movement -
- for they have no movement.

Such is the pug's rainy day protest:
A frozen, impenetrable, Medusa-stone
Stance. Their little pug bones locked
So concretely one wonders:

Did their noses shrink back
Just to stiffen their necks?

— KEVIN STILL

PLACEBO

Oh, damn irony
if these been
sugar pills
all along.

Like that Sandler
skit: tripping on
notebook paper
LSD - poor guy

cried when gig
was up. But so
would I. Me here
thinking I was

thinking better,
hating life less -
- but it's been
same ol' coffee

all along.

— KEVIN STILL

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TODD LIVES IN A FILM: *LADY BIRD*

I have to get out of Sacramento. Anyone who thinks that California is exotic has clearly never been to Sacramento. Not that I know anyone outside of this town, but I'm sure that that's the case. It is certainly too dull for someone like me. Do you know any famous writers, artists, or intellectuals from Sacramento? Didn't think so. And sure, I don't write anything or perform on stage – at the moment – but that's because I'm here in Sacramento, California instead of somewhere on the East Coast, where cities are bursting with life and expression. Or at least that's how they seem in books and movies – I've never actually been. I have one more year of meaningless high school and then I'll be out of place at last. Even San Francisco would be a huge step up for my creativity to grow – actually that's not far enough away, nevermind. But wherever it is I can't end up stuck here in the same place. Otherwise I'll only be working some dull job in a store just like my brother, paying rent to live in my own bedroom and still getting watched like a hawk by mom. No, I need to go somewhere far away to find out who I am, something that's impossible to do in Sacramento. It's clearly holding me back.

All of the schools I'm going to apply to are in the Northeast. Of course my parents can't afford any of them, but I'll just have to figure that out with financial aid and scholarships later. After all the only reason I can go to my Catholic high school is with a scholarship. It's not mom or dad's fault – they work as hard as they can. But I get tired of shifting through thrift stores to find the perfect outfit, or stealing magazines because they're "unnecessary" and "expensive". At least we have school uniforms so I don't have to futilely attempt to keep up with the popular girls everyday, or so they can't tell how often I'm wearing the same clothes. Mostly I can just lie to them and giggle about it with Julie – she's the only person from school who's ever been to my house. Since we both go unnoticed around school together I can pretend to be from a wealthy family like

everyone else.

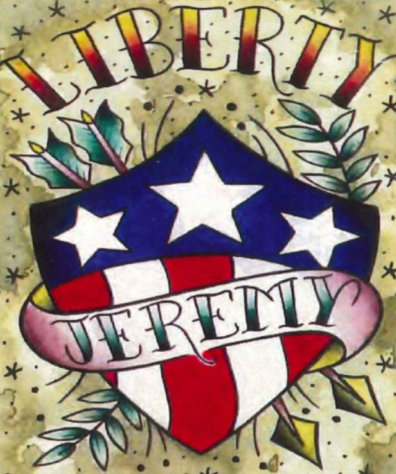
Anyway – College. Out of California. Scholarships. What will I major in? Doesn't matter. How will I get in? I need to make my application look exemplary, to reflect the one of a kind person I truly am, or rather, truly will become once I get there. I suppose that means I need to pull my grades up and get involved with some interesting extracurricular activities. I'm not even sure what kind of clubs and activities we have here, most of them sound as boring as everything else. Yeah, I probably should've looked around school for these things more the first three years I've been here, but it seems now will have to do. Sister Sarah will surely put me in something, she's always been nice to me and calls me by my name. Theater, choir, debate club – I don't care, whatever looks good on paper. Maybe I'll get a boy to notice me while I'm there. It would be easier without having to work after school now at mom's insistence, maybe I can get out of that since I'm doing this for my future.

Most days I walk home with Julie and we look at all of the homes larger than ours surrounded by beautiful tree cover, daydreaming about living in places like them one day. Other kids can just drive home from school themselves, but we walk because neither of us has a car or parents available to pick us up. It's not that bad, especially since I don't have to pretend about anything there, and the walk is actually very peaceful. You see a lot of the city that way – yeah I know I just complained about it a ton, but it has its moments of being lovely. It's just not a place where I can grow, around the same people and shops and everything else that I've been hanging out with my whole life, while still constantly having to correct people to use my real name and getting yelled at by mom for not appreciating what I have. Sacramento may be just fine, but just fine isn't good enough, and I'll do whatever it takes to leave. — **TODD HANSEN**

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STILL DRINKING



Grub Burger Bar has a non-beer thing happening that should greatly interest beer-nerds. Until December 31, Grub is selling chocolate pecan pies with benefits going to local charities**. Personally, I am not a huge fan of pecan pie as they're usually too sweet for my taste. But that the beauty of the chocolate pecan pie. Upon seeing the advertisement, I imagined combining a sweet milk chocolate with an already syrupy sweet pecan pie filling, and the thought alone nearly left me comatose. However, Grub knows how to sell a product, we tried a single sample, and I was sold on the hands-down, slap-my-granny, groaning cuss words of food-gasmic best pie I believe these buds have ever made sweet Marvin Gaye love to. And it's the chocolate that sends it home! Not sweet milk chocolate, but a bitter dark chocolate mostly nestled against the crust, waiting to counter all that sweetness with the harsh edges of sharp dark chocolate. It's a glorious juxtaposition of rivals. We ordered two pieces, and I was already through mine and my wife's before either of us realized her momentary distraction was just enough to afford me the chance to behave in a surprising manner. Needless to say, that was damn good pie. And all I could think while eating that chocolate pecan pie was, damn, "I could go for a room temp Imperial stout right about now—an **Oskar Blues Ten Fidy** or an **Old Rasputin Russian Imperial**." The thought alone made the pie instantly better.

This whole pie and stout thought train reminded me of the approaching beer season. Winter is a dark beer season. A heavy-malt season. A perfect closure to the lighter, more buttery and caramel-like malt season of fall and Oktoberfest beers. Christmas beers are usually a bit burlier. They're made sturdy to complement the cold weather as well as the winter food palette. And while stouts, porters, and brown ales are available year round, there's something special about pairing the heavy dark beers of winter with the fare of the Christmas feast.

Below are a few traditional flavors of the holidays matched with complimentary beer styles. Of course, nothing works better than good old-fashioned trial and error. If you come across a great food-beer pairing this season don't hesitate to share with our editors.

MEATS: For sweet and salty holiday hams, look to earthy and spicy beers, such as a good brown ale or even an English Strong Ale, such as **Avery's Old Jubilation** or **(512) English Strong**. If you're serving fowl, look to solid American Pale Ale—perhaps a **Southern Star Pine Belt** or a **Deschutes Mirror Pond**—a balanced beer that can dance with the duck and turkey fat. If you're at my table, those pork chops and sausage can go one of two ways depending on your rathens: something gnarly to offset the pork fat, like a big IPA a la **Dogfish Head 90 Minute** or **Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale**, or you can meet the sweet pig juice with something a bit darker, like a good

Belgian Dubbel or a **Bell's Christmas Ale**.

Of course, nothing says "Bah-Humbbug!" quite like a raw hot dog from the crisper and a cold Budweiser in a longneck bottle. Damn. I love snacking that combo like a middle finger to Mariah Carey every year. Dear Lord. No wonder I'm on pills.

CHEESES: The beer and cheese pairing are where things get a bit X-rated and steamy around here. Grab some jazz, light some candles, and get ready to go freaky with the good stuff right here cause, lady, you can keep your fancy wines. Beer and cheese is where it's at! Here's a quick list to print and pocket for your next trip the store. **FUNKY BLUES** (Maytag) AND **SHARP CHEDDARS**—spicy IPAS and Imperial IPAS **SALTY** (Gorgonzola) and **TANGY** (Roquefort) **BLUES**—Porters, Dry Stouts, Imperial Stouts **STANDARD EVERYDAY CHEDDAR**—a standard everyday light Blonde or English Ale **COLBY JACK**—please, just move along **MOZZARELLAS**—sharp Pilsner or grassy Kolsch, even Wheats and Wits **CREAMY BRIES**—something with Farmhouse, Wild, or Saison in the title **FUCKING TALEGGIO** or **BLUE STILTON**—you gonna need a Barleywine, my friend

DESSERTS: Alright, this is you've been looking for. And the truth is that it's just tough to go wrong here. Just match flavor to flavor. You like nutty desserts: get a nutty brown or old school English ale. You like chocolate, pour up some manner of stout. Spicy cookies and cakes like spicy Pale Ales and IPAs, while milder creamy cheesecakes offer solid reasons to break open an expensive Lambic. Heck, you can even bust open a can of Tecate and suck on some strawberries call it a good time. You just can't lose in this round.

But the main question I hear you asking is this: what the hell do I do with all these bottles of **St. Arnold's Pumpkinator** The Ex-Optimists talked me into storing for the winter? Brother, just get you some pretty vegan brownies, maybe a flourless tart, and disconnect the phone. We don't need to know what happens next.

** Grub Burger Bar chocolate pecan pies sell for \$30 a pie. That sounds steep but watch this: \$5 of every pie purchase goes to your choice of charity, while \$10 is immediately returned to you in the form of a gift card. It's an interesting situation they've devised. Just think of it as a \$15 pie with a \$5 tip to folks in need and a new wallet friend to carry around for a rainy day. And with **Southern Star's Buried Hatchet** on tap just waiting to compliment your pie purchase, that all amounts to wins, wins and more wins.—KEVIN STILL

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WHY IS NORTH KOREA SO WEIRD?

Did you ever see that movie *The Last Samurai*? Well, that was based on the fact that Japan, in the 1860s or so, saw themselves in need of not being overtaken by western superpowers (like what had just happened to China), and made an effort to dismantle the Shogun rule. They had until then been isolationists, but could not stay that way...not with all the superpowers breathing down everyone's necks.

With the Emperor in full power, they decided to mimic western industrialism, colonialism and ultimately expansionism, which is what got them into trouble.

Now, let me establish here that I am no historian, just a decent Googler and critical thinker. I'm not going to get all the facts correct, but this is my interpretation of what's gone on in the last 150 or so years.

So, Japan started encroaching on Russia's claims or China's claims or whatever, but Russia was like, "Nope!"

There were a couple Soviet vs. Japanese wars where Japan came out on top, and then Japan took over Korea. It was just one Korea. Russia was pissed, but the Nazis needed to be defeated. Russia agreed to help with them, but then vowed to get at Japan once Germany surrendered. Germany surrendering was pretty important.

In the meantime, Japan was still land-grabbing. In China, even. Maybe the US too but that's debated as to why they bombed Pearl Harbor.

Germany surrendered, Russia invaded Japan between the two American atomic bombs, and Japan surrendered. This led to Korea needing to do something, and there just happened to be two parties vying for control.

So there's the split. Russia was friendly with the North (of course they were) and so was China. Vested interest in having Communist neighbors, I guess.

So, the North gets egged on (and assisted) by China and Russia to take back the southern part of Korea, and the UN gets involved.

That's when the US brings it's hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs and napalm and carpet bombs the whole north. "Saturation bombing" is what it was called. Apparently destroying everything, including dams and power structures and around 20% of the population. This is horrifying. 20% is a fuck load. Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered approximately the same fate...around 23%, but only from those two cities.

So let me pause here for a minute. This is crazy. It's also a part of the story I had never heard. I came across something on Facebook about it the other day, and that's what got me on this research trail.

So at this point, you gotta sort of understand why North Korea has such beef against the US. I mean, short of being forced to believe propaganda and cut off from the rest of the world, I can totally understand why they don't like us.

WTF U.S.? This is NOT fighting for MY freedom.

This is starting to sound like a justification for the rest of the world to see America as a bully. That's intense, and personally, it is not wholly representative of my thoughts and beliefs. But that is a complicated debate between "defense only" or "global humanitarianism". I mean, when people are oppressed and hurting, I can't help but want to help. But carpet bombing? Napalming whole villages?

So, short of saying we should have sympathy for Kim Jong-un, seriously, they're really kinda justified. Especially if the US hasn't apologized...and I'm not sure "we" have.

My parents are visiting Japan for their yearly travels, and my mom was telling me that they've been advised that when they visit Hiroshima, to not mention the war or the bomb because they are still "sensitive". Uh, no shit?

And North Korea's crawling and scratching it's way out of its hole with missile and nuclear capabilities is really just an attempt to seem like they shouldn't be fucked with. Like a skunk shooting off it's stink, or a rattle-snake's rattle. It's a warning, but self-protection at its core.

Like the thin, gangling, keeps-to-himself kid that no one would think could stand his ground, until that one time he got picked on and he snapped and beat the living shit out of like three of the big fuckers.

So, ok, I'll take Tom Cruise off the chopping block (*Last Samurai* reference). He's not to blame...for this anyway. This is a crazy trail of events, and even though I'm it's not 100% accurate in every detail, it's an overview, and a bit overwhelming and complicated.

I find myself putting this whole scenario on the elementary school playground with kids. It looks like actions of kids not wanting to get bullied, or have to give up what they play or where they play. Alliances are formed over who gets control over the merry-go-round. Strategies worked out and executed over who will get on the swings first and how long they can stay on. Relationships are formed and destroyed over king-of-the-hill battles for the monkey bars. The tall slide is destroyed and dismantled after a kid is pushed off and breaks his head. Some kids don't go near the playground and lean against the wall in full view of both the playground and the playground monitors.

Maybe we should all just grab a big red ball and play dodgeball. Or kickball at least.

I guess there's always been power grabs and rebellions and revolutions before these big wars.

War is stupid. Carpet bombing the tar out of a whole nation is disgusting and sad and horrifying and inappropriate. Regrettably, I don't see anything short of an Extinction Level Event unifying us as humans rather than clique-y, power-hungry, land-grabbing, opportunistic buttholes. — JORGE GOYCO

OUR LIVES: TALES OF SOUND & FURY

With all due respect to Shakespeare, life's but a tale told by all of us, full of sound and fury, signifying everything.

Not gonna lie y'all, I've changed what I was going to write about for this issue about fifteen times over the past month. Every day, some new item would grab my attention and I'd start developing an outline in my head for how I was going to eviscerate the latest idiot of the day. But then I realized how presumptuous it was of me to assume that I am always the one who knows who the idiots actually are or who needs to be schooling anyone else. Just because I am always so sure of my beliefs, opinions, and convictions, that doesn't mean I am right, and it certainly doesn't mean that I fully understand the beliefs, opinions, or convictions of "the other side." Sometimes I need to step back, get off of my soapbox and remember lessons learned in the past.

When I taught middle-school, friends and acquaintances would often offer their condolences. But I was one of the rare breed of people, apparently, who actually enjoyed working with middle-school-aged youngsters. One of the things that I longed to share with colleagues who seemed unhappy in their work was the fact that, for the most part, middle-schoolers do not act the way that they do in order to make their parents, teachers, or others mad ... they act the way that they do because it is developmentally appropriate for them to do so. That outlook made all the difference to me, because, in my best moments, even though I sometimes found their behavior unacceptable, I never had to take it personally. I could work to help them move on from behavior that wouldn't suit them in adulthood, without having a personal stake in any of it.

The other thing that I quickly learned was that each of my students had a story. Every time that I ran up against a student whom I thought was a problem, I soon found that the problematic behavior stemmed from some current situation or some past event of which I had, up to that point, been unaware. And, even though the story behind it didn't excuse the unacceptable

behavior, understanding where that behavior was coming from made it much easier for me to respond with compassion and, in many instances, to more effectively help the student find ways of coping that resulted in behavior that was more socially acceptable.

My middle-school teaching days are well behind me now. But I have since discovered that it is not just middle-schoolers who have stories behind their behaviors. Everyone has a story to tell. And in almost all cases, a person's behavior, whether we find it pleasant or not, can be tied, at least in part, to that story. When we know someone's story, we are much more willing to make accommodations for behavior that is less than stellar. Think about it, aren't we willing to cut our friends or favored families members a whole lot more slack than those we consider opponents or enemies? When we know what another has been through, it makes us more compassionate in our responses. When we understand what someone else has experienced, we are less likely to take words or deeds as a personal affront, instead recognizing that they often arise from circumstances that have absolutely nothing to do with us.

If we recognize that fact when we know the story ... how much of a stretch would it be to simply assume that everyone has a story to tell, even when we do not actually know the particular details? Can we allow others the benefit of the doubt in our interactions with them ... simply because we know that they must have their own story ... even when their own narrative remains hidden from us? Must we exact the intimate details from others in order to respond with kindness, compassion, and understanding, or can it be enough to know that those details exist for them just as they do for us?

What kind of story might we create by recognizing that every person we meet is the protagonist of their own story: a tale of sound and fury signifying most everything that is important. What stories would we then be invited to be a part of or could we then create? —

PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

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FASCISM IN AMERICA

Alright guys, let's level for a second. We've got a pretty serious problem in our country, and that is the rise of the white nationalist and trend towards fascism within America. The

"mainstream media" spent all of 2016 dismissing the possibility as outlandish. Dismissing it as hyperbole. Pooh-poohing Trump's rise as impossible fantasy. Star pundits like Nate Silver and Ezra Klein misjudged the election to an absurd degree. Now, even after all that, the NYT runs puff pieces about Nazis who bake cupcakes and coin phrases and are just like you and me!

It's gross. It's nasty. But that's where we are. We consistently fail to grapple with fascism, why it rises, how it works, or even what it means within the American construct. At every possible juncture, it is backwards, and everyone is perpetually astonished by their own wrongness, including myself.

Myth: Fascism has nothing to do with the economy. Our news media and intellectuals have consistently said that "economic anxiety" doesn't "cause fascism." What the hell is "economic anxiety"? It's bullshit. The type of anxiety referred to is the type that you get before a crush comes over to watch Netflix. We've got a whole 'nother thing coming. Can you think of an example of a fascist movement arising during good economic times? There isn't one. Fascism is the product of stagnant or declining economies. That's the whole thing with WWII. At a very high level—the Nazis became a thing, because Germany owed so much money to the rest of the world after WWI the German currency became worthless and the average German had no more life savings. Sub in America in 2017. No one has any savings and our country's debts are to an invisible class of ultra-wealthy that may as well be their own sovereignty. There is a burning sense of injustice. People can't earn enough money to pay off their student loans to take out a loan to try and buy a house and one day have enough equity to pay for rising medical bills in their seventies looking at thirty more years of life. We're all fucked in an economic sense.

Myth: Fascism is "populism"/"nationalism"/"insert buzzword". Fascism is a really good way to ration a stagnant economy to in-groups. Fascism exists to ration the dwindling fruits of a stagnant economy. Look—if the harvest fails, crops need to be rationed somehow because markets and prices will leave people hungry. Who gets what and how much is at the core of everything. The best way to do that is to blame a scapegoat and make sure that group is large enough to provide basics to the 'in' crowd. Whether it's Jews in the 1930s or Muslims throughout Europe today or witches in the dark ages, for the rise of a fascist leader you need people to blame for your plight. Then you take

those scapegoats and exclude them from the economy altogether by pushing into ghettos, labor camps, and eventually death camps. The less undesirables, the fewer subhumans, the more of the failed crop is around for those that are left. So, then you either have to find more subhumans to exclude until you're at a sustainable level, or find someone else's stuff to take. Either way—fascism allows for rationing of stagnation.

Myth: Our existing institutions will save us from fascism. Nope. Fascism can only rise when those institutions have already failed. Our traditional news media is failing. It is not independent. It is owned by the Koch brothers and Rupert Murdoch. After WWII the rest of the world wrote hate speech laws, made being a Nazi illegal, all kinds of things that are just plain common sense. American didn't. Our legal system failed then. There then is the democratic failure. No one votes. It's ridiculous. About 55% of the voting population showed up last year. Earlier this year, I voted in a local special election that had a little over 1% of the City of Bryan vote. People who want healthcare and education and reasonable things just aren't showing up. The people for whom inequality is better, do show up. Then we have the failure of our economy itself. Economic institutions do not exist to allocate real value. Does a school teacher deserve to be paid a quarter of what an oilfield services engineer earns in a year? Failure after failure—of economic, political, and social institutions cause people to look for something to change the system. Hitler never won a majority vote. The central bank gave up on managing their currency. Chamberlain gave Germany vast tracts of land even when it knew they were evil to avoid conflict. Institutional failures sow the seeds for fascism, and those institutions aren't what will save societies from the situations they've created. After WWII German and Italy both had to build entire new governments. We're getting there.

It takes a vacuum. If strong institutions work, fascism is suffocated. If the economy is even a little bit balanced, fascism is suffocated. If people believe they are truly free, fascism is suffocated. Without order, prosperity, or growth, fascism rises. We currently have an institutional vacuum. Shit just doesn't work. Pedophiles in Congress get a slap on the wrist. The news media writes about how the Nazis are just like you and me, getting married and having kids and being good damn people! The median retirement fund for working-age people is \$5,000. Placing our faith in the broken institutions of our current government to make change is the truest kind of folly.

Get out there and make a change. Do a good for your neighbor. Show people that we really do care at a local level. The only way for things to get better is to fix them at home first. Go talk to your neighbor. Fix the bar's toilet. Don't talk about it, be about it. — STARKNESS

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TALES OF EXCESS & OUTRAGE

EPISODE 5: POSSUMS & JACK RUSSELL TERRORISTS

Nigh on 8 years ago or so, I was just drifting off to that last bit of sleep I could eke out of the morning, when Killian opened the bedroom door.

"Dad, um, JJ got a possum."

I lived in a small subdivision in Bryan. Possum live there, too. They look suspiciously like our current Oval Office Holder.

I had heard JJ barking to be let out of his crate. I heard our other two dogs gently drifting into canine apoplexy, too. I just wanted to sleep the sleep of the just while someone else did all that letting out.

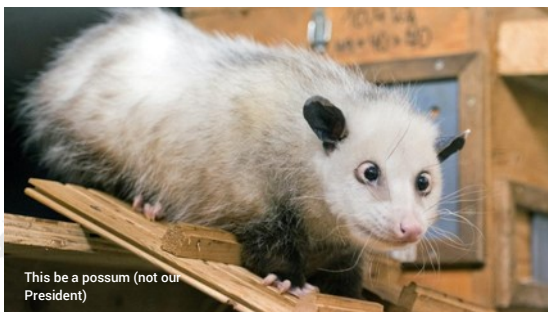
So, fruit number one of my indulging in sleep was that JJ, our full-bred Jack Russell Terrorist, had finally struck the motherlode of Jack Russell-dom—that possum he had been barking at since the Mesozoic era.

Killian is up, I reasoned. He's a high-school senior, manly and all that; thus his heroics would enable me to purchase some extra Zs. "Get a shovel," I told him.

And I turned over the turning over of the just.

Meanwhile, my amazingly talented wife, Pam, and the aforementioned high-school senior were left to combine their resources in the retrieval of a possum carcass that they weren't too sure had officially attained carcass-hood. One thing was for sure: JJ was quite alive and enjoying his new plaything.

Now, mind you, I wasn't there, but I hear tell that my intrepid heterosexual life-mate walloped the aforementioned possum over the head (using the aforementioned



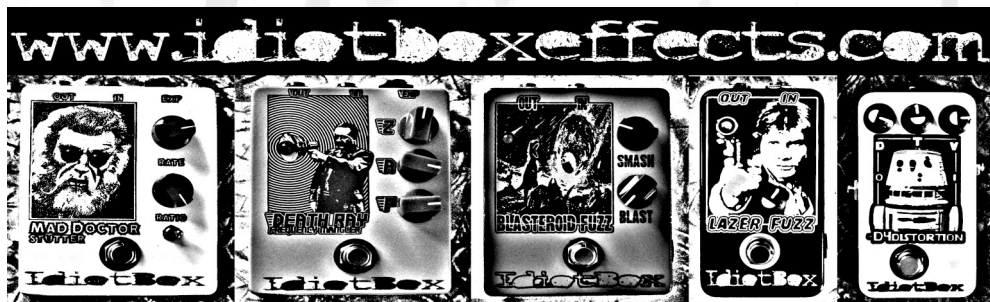
shovel that the avowed manly high-school senior was chary to employ), in order to confirm that the possum had indeed enjoyed its eternal reward.

JJ had faced off with the critter underneath the tool shed. (Jack Russells were originally bred in WWII to chew on land mines and dismantle Nazi Panzer Tanks.) It is reported to me that JJ went under the shed. A hiss then a growl emitted from said shed. SNAP went a neck joint or two, and JJ trotted out, fairly proud of his prowess, all the while clutching in his rapacious jaws the possum (its life status at that juncture yet undetermined).

Having thereafter ascertained the departed state of the creature by assiduous scientific method and experimentation, my beautiful wife then attempted, I have heard mentioned, to transfer the offending marsupial carcass via the previously-cited shovel into a welcoming double trash bag configuration the high-school senior had prepared.

Problem was that JJ (who had the vertical leap ability of Spud Webb) reportedly jumped to any and all heights that the gorgeous (but, sadly, hobbit-sized) Pam could hold the shovel and reunited himself with his unanimated playmate. Eventually, however, the possum was raptured to the awaiting trash, JJ corralled (I did *not* even ken the thought of letting him lick me for the next fortnight, at least), and I caught a few more winks.

The moral of the story is: *Don't overestimate the employment of your average male high-school senior in helping you gain extra shut-eye. Rely on an intrepid bride. #imanasshole #yepiknowit* — RANDY BEELER



ST. VINCENT VS. THE GEAR PAGE DUDES

"This is St. Vincent's new look. Still TGP approved?" posted a forum member of The Gear Page, a "discussion forum for musicians passionate about music, gear and life," accompanied by this photo (right) of St. Vincent live in concert earlier this fall in support of her new album, *MASSEDUCTION*. What followed was a 16 page discussion that sadly tells the sordid affair of where the battle against sexism in music and pop culture finds itself these days.

For those of you who don't follow these things, St. Vincent is the nom de rock for Dallas native Annie Clark, a Berkeley School of Music dropout, former Polyphonic Spree and Sufjan Stevens associate, and torch carrier, along with Screaming Female's Marissa Paternoster, Ex Hex's Mary Timony, Marnie Stern, and a host of other axe slingers, for the female guitar god. There are men who resent a woman who is sexually assure and as concerned with presenting an overall visual and sound experience as well as shredding the fretboard. Comments on the board range from early man to Kennewick man with a few thoughtful responses in between, but overall, the point is that it's not consistent for a woman to want to have her music be taken seriously when she dresses like this and performs how she performs. Don't look at her as a sex object. Well then don't dress like a sex object. You are asking for it. Etc. Ad. Inf. This is of course all wrong.

Let's start with St. Vincent. Her recording career began in 2007 but Annie really found her stride with her second through fourth albums. 2009's *Actor* showed off Annie's particular knack for creating pop music with a lot of interesting left turns and influences blended together with a sardonic point of view. It took until 2011's *Strange Mercy* for her singular voice to emerge. This album brought Annie to the forefront and at this point she began to rub elbows with people outside of her given milieu. She began to run in the same circles as other legendary musicians, filmmakers, actors, and authors. In particular, Talking Heads' David Byrne saw something in Annie that inspired him to collaborate with her in 2012 on the *Love This Giant* album and tour. Annie began dating models and participating in the trappings of the legit pop star world. She decided to take up the pop star mantle on her self-titled album from 2014. She began to take interest in not only how the music was performed (she has always had a unique approach to presenting her music live with a blending of traditional rock guitar with synthesizer bass, violin, acoustic and electronic drumming, and sequencing) but also how she presented the music onstage. Annie began to choreograph movement to her shows and dress more dramatically. She became a fixture in the arts scene and began a long-term romantic relationship with indie film star Cara Delevingne and became a gossip column item, followed by paparazzi and the lack of privacy that comes with the territory. Earlier this year, Annie wrote all about immersing herself and then losing herself in the typical glitzy trappings of superstardom on *MASSEDUCTION*.

Her live performances on this tour are presented pretty much as the photo shows. Annie Clark dresses in a number of fetish-styled outfits that combine 50's June



Cleaver with vinyl, latex, fishnets, and very strong colors. She plays all by herself in front of scrims and with a half dozen choreographed dancers. She sings and plays guitar live, but the rest of the music is Memorex. The presentation is disarming. There is no room in this approach for ducking behind the amps for a break or to shine a spotlight on the stuff a bandmate is playing. This approach is ALL about St. Vincent. How better a way to present the emptiness of the gossip column lifestyle she found herself in than to send it up and lampoon it with sarcasm and bon amie.

The photo itself is a screengrab from St. Vincent's performance on *The Gordon Ramsey Show*. After performing, St. Vincent stepped over to the seating area for an interview. Already seated on couches were members of the cast for the remake of *Murder On The Orient Express*. Famed actors Johnny Depp, Dame Judy Dench, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Josh Gad were all interviewed prior to St. Vincent's performance and were still seated with the host. Annie sat down on the couch right beside them looking like she just climbed up Alice's rabbit hole, with these actors in their dark grays and blacks, and answered all of Ramsey's fairly straight questions. You can see the discomfort on the faces of the actors, who really want to laugh at Annie Clark, or at least smile. But everyone played it cool, with just a slight edge of farce and archness. Including St. Vincent. It was a throwback of sorts

to watching glam rockers like Bowie and Roxy Music and KISS being interviewed on the daytime television talk shows in costume in the 1970's. The clash of avant and pop, something that may not be new but certainly doesn't happen all that often these days. I thought it was incredibly brave of Annie Clark to do this.

St. Vincent is not the first indie rock star to play with glamour trappings. After releasing two brutally minimalist rock masterpieces, British singer-guitarist PJ Harvey opted to dial back the confrontation and anti-image of her earlier work for adopting overlarge false eyelashes, 50s mob wife cocktail dresses, and drag queening her look to an extreme. Eurythmics vocalist Annie Lennox has been known to dress up in an almost comic representation of high camp femininity. It plays with an audience's conception of what being female is, what makes something glamorous, what makes something sexy or vapid. It can be empowering to take something meant to cage women out of that context and make something powerfully personal out of it. Yet there are some that only see the sexy outfit, the lack of a band, the impression that St. Vincent is all flash and no talent, the guitar is a prop, etc. St. Vincent has unwittingly become a sexism detector for men who cannot take what a woman creates at face value. It always has to have at least a little bit of sex to it. She's hot. She can't be about the music because she wears thigh high hooker boots while playing guitar.

Guitar manufacturer Ernie Ball heard something inspiring in St. Vincent's fractured art-pop guitar playing and asked Annie to design a St. Vincent signature model guitar. The guitar has a unique bowtie body that is light, ergonomic for a woman's body (I have been told by female bandmates that their breasts often get in the way of the upper bout on some guitars), has a smaller neck for smaller hands, and it is easy to play all night. The guitar is not priced for a beginner. It is aimed at professionals wanting a more comfortable axe. I hope that Ernie Ball figures out an import version of the guitar lower priced and marketed towards beginning players. I have been told by my industry friends that young women are the fastest growing demographic in the instrument sales business. Women have been inspired by Taylor Swift, among others, to pick up guitars. The Girls Rock Camp movement has helped to inspire female players to demystify the rock band process and give budding players the confidence to not only play in a band but also the tools to deal with the sexist bullshit that is rampant in the music world. I have been in mixed gender bands for 20 years now and I have seen it first hand. My female bandmates get ignored at best, at worst patronized and mansplained to. Rock and roll is still very much a boys club, but the cracks have formed and finding oneself on an all male bill isn't always the norm anymore. Instrument manufacturers are slowly focusing on the changing demographic but it is still easy to find women used in demeaning and token ways to promote instrument sales. St. Vincent is already several steps ahead of the game. It is pleasing to note that the typical gear dude mentality is slowly being displaced but it is a problem not only pervasive online but on stages around us. It is something we need to pay attention to as performers and bandmates. — KELLY MINNIS

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GOODBYE KEVIN

This is how it ends. This is how it ends. This is how it ends. Not with an South-eastern Conference championship, but with a whimper.

Kevin Sumlin's six-season tenure as the head coach at Texas A&M started with a bang and ended with his dismissal after a fifth-straight loss to LSU and another season that lacked the magic of A&M's SEC debut.

The Aggies stormed the SEC in 2012. Led by eventual Heisman-winner Johnny Manziel's electric play, the Aggies upset No. 1 Alabama in Tuscaloosa and walloped former Big-12 rival Oklahoma in the Cotton Bowl to punctuate an 11-2 season and a No. 5 finish in the polls.

That sensational 2012 season made A&M nationally relevant and a hip, buzzy program on the rise. That buzz combined with upcoming renovations to Kyle Field, a Top-10 recruiting class and tons of money being poured into facilities and staff created expectations from fans and the administration that Sumlin's squads were never able to fulfill over an entire slate in subsequent seasons.

There were moments when the Aggies appeared to recapture that magic of their first SEC season, but each eventually faded. A&M began the 2014 and 2015 seasons 5-0 before disappointing finishes. A 6-0 start in 2016 secured by a 45-38 double-overtime victory against No. 9 Tennessee earned A&M a spot in the first College Football Playoff rankings of the season. The Aggies would respond by losing the rest of their conference schedule and finish 8-5 for a third-straight year.

The people in charge had given Sumlin the resources to build A&M into a program that is in the CFP discussion annually. Sumlin has recruited the caliber of player who on-paper should have helped reach that goal.



He did not meet their expectations. While firing him is justifiable, I am still unsure it was the right move. I might be proved wrong. I might be proved right. We won't know until the results are in.

A&M brought back Sumlin for 2017 to coach a green, rebuilding roster with uncertainty at key positions.

The Aggies rallied from a deflating 45-44 choker to UCLA in the season-opener to sneak back into the Week 10 rankings before conference losses ate up any real optimism. Still, Sumlin kept the Aggies above water to stand at 7-5 overall and 4-4 in the SEC. Not anything to celebrate, but not a dumpster fire and definitely not something unexpected based on the depth chart and schedule.

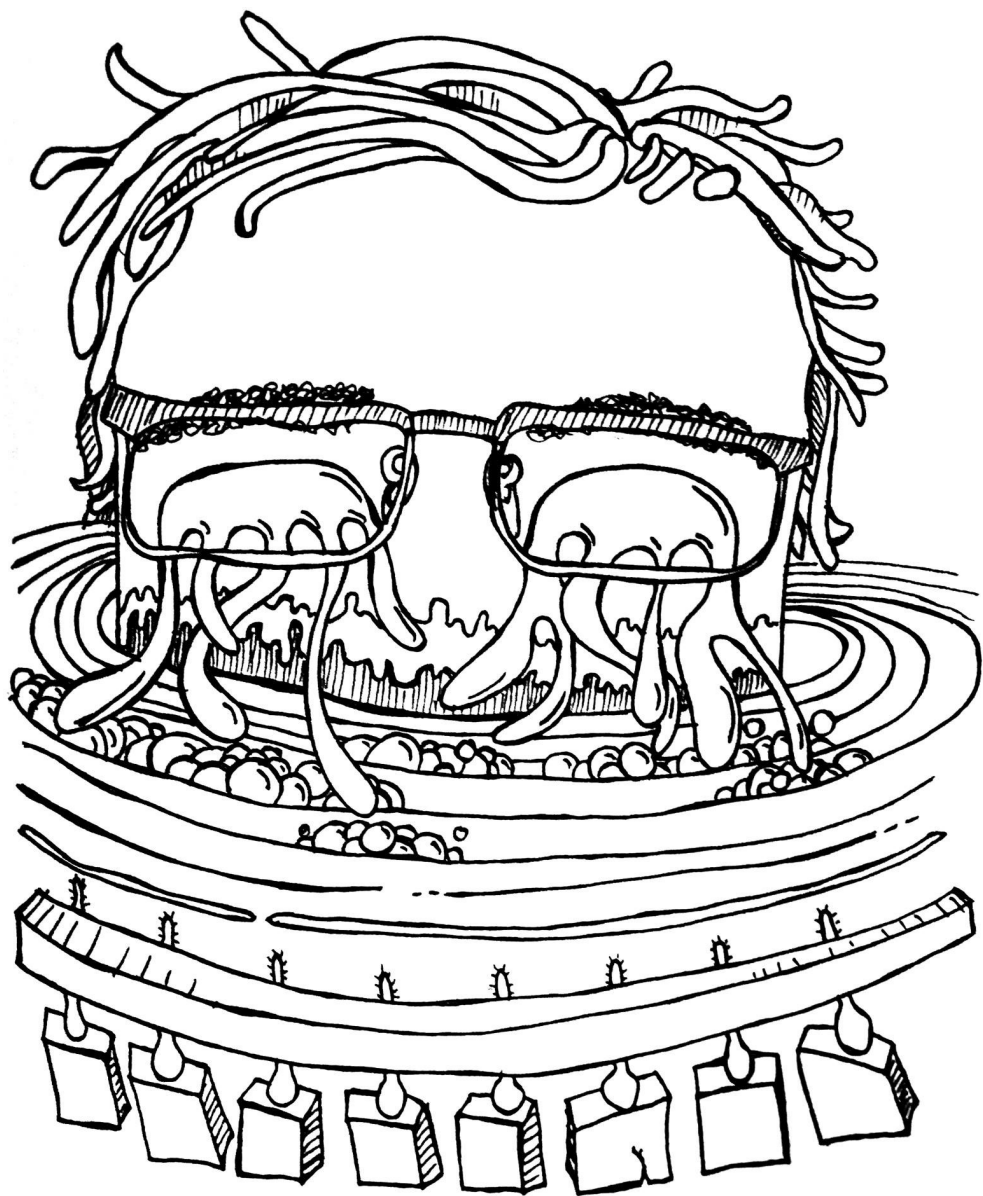
My question to those who called for Sumlin's head and have a thirst for immediate results is, "Who are you going to replace him with?"

Unless you sleep with a Jimbo Fisher photo next to your pillow every night, could you tell me with a straight-face that he's the answer? How about Chad Morris? Frank Wilson? Well, at least there seems to be some upside to be tapped there. None of these feel like home runs out of the box on paper.

Despite his firing and loss of favor with some, Sumlin leaves A&M in a better spot than when he came on and he'll surely catch on quickly somewhere if he chooses to. Sumlin led the Aggies into the nation's best conference, gave A&M three straight bowl wins for the first time since 1939-41, brought buzz and swagger to the Aggie brand, he produced a Heisman-winner and NFL No. 1 pick and finished with a 51-26 overall record and 25-23 in the SEC.

That's not a bad run by any means. It's only frustrating because there could have been more. — JOSHUA SIEGEL

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TAKE IT FROM THE TOP

Good Morning, Mr. Johnson."

I glanced down at my morning script. "Good morning, Mr...." I turned the page, "...Smith. Looks like rain this afternoon."

He chuckled and adjusted his reading glasses a little so he could get a better look at his next line. "We sure need 'em, hadn't seen it this dry since my ex wife."

I waved at the passing taxi and it pulled to the curb. The driver looked at the clipboard hanging from his dashboard. "Where are you headed?" he read.

"Over to Charlie's place."

He nodded and stared at his script. "That's on Lexington, right?"

"Right."

=====

I finished my burger and made sure that I left the last bite on my plate that the script called for. Charlie came over and set a glass in front of me. "Scotch, right?"

My eyes glanced at the script. "It's a Tuesday, right?"

He smiled and swept up the tip I'd left him. I waited a couple of beats and tossed an extra five on the bar.

"Feeling generous today?" he read out.

"Easier than carrying it around." I told him, I almost lost it..." I took a quick glance at the script, "twice today, better with you than me."

=====

When I climbed aboard the subway train on the way back to the office, I pushed my way forward until I hit my marks and stopped. I waited until the train lurched to a start, then glanced around for the woman with the red scarf and nudged her carefully. "Sorry about that." I read.

"That's all right," she said, without looking up from her script. "Just the train starting up." she added, her index finger following the words on the paper.

I grabbed a strap and read through the next few pages, trying to memorize them before I got to my stop. It

always feels better to have it memorized.

=====

A secretary handed me my afternoon script as I walked through the door. I looked through it as I hurried down the long corridor to J. J. Edwards' office. "Anything new in your department, Joe?" he asked as I stepped through the door.

"Not much." I said with a shrug.

"Good." he said. He smiled and added, his script folded up in his back pocket (he is so good, no wonder he's the boss) "Anytime there's something new in Accounting, it means trouble."

I nodded and held out a sheaf of papers. "At any rate, there's the latest report."

"Thanks." he studied me for a moment as I settled into my usual seat. "Nothing wrong, is there? You look a little out of sorts."

I shook my head. "Nothing major."

"Something on your mind?"

"Oh, I don't know." I looked out his window, at the neat, orderly color-coordinated rows of cars flowing through the streets. "Do you ever worry that maybe we just aren't free anymore?"

"That's the price of civilization, isn't it?" Edwards waved at the window behind him. "We couldn't have had all this without a little order in our lives. No poverty, no crime, tremendous medical advances, real prosperity; why, all that is worth a few sacrifices, isn't it?"

"Maybe." I told him. "But maybe a little disorder here and there wouldn't hurt us much."

"I suppose." he replied, "But you'd be risking everything we have--"

His secretary knocked and stuck her head into the room. "Mr. Edwards? Mr. Cohen is here to see you."

"Oh, right." he read out from his script, "I forgot. I'll be back in a moment."

I relaxed and settled back in my chair. I paged through my script and looked over my next few scenes.—
STARKNESS

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NEIL YOUNG, AL FRANKEN & THAT LIAR IN THE WHITE HOUSE

"Let's impeach the President for lying" – Neil Young

This first line from Neil Young's song of 11 years ago seems extremely prophetic, but then you hear most of the other lines in the song, and they are even more true today than ever before.

The reason it's true is because lying is a cornerstone of the conservative Republican political formula, and it's something U.S. Senator Al Franken has fought against for nearly two decades (before and after being elected to Congress), but who is going to listen to him now, right?

I was about 300 pages into Franken's book *Al Franken Giant of the Senate* when the news broke about his dumb stunt on a USO tour. A quarter of a century career in comedy, a decade in the U.S. Senate – all that crippled by a few stupid seconds making a sexual joke with someone who wouldn't find it funny, particularly if someone else took a picture of her being embarrassed that way. Dumb, dumb, dumb.

One of the biggest ironies here is that Franken has made it a point for the past twenty years to exposing lies by the conservative right – *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* (marvelously funny) and *Lies: And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*, as well as on the Senate floor (the DeVos confirmation, for one), and then he gets slammed by a truth from the right.

Another big irony is all this shame and humiliation coming this way now (his wife of 40 years is not happy, I'm sure, and facing his sons, daughter and grandkids was equally horrible, I'm sure) is that there is this other guy who bragged about kissing women without their permission and grabbing them by their crotches ... he got elected President.

"Abusing all the power that we gave him" – Neil Young.

I am not apologizing for Franken's behavior, but what does Mr. Trump go after Franken, but ignore a man who was well-known as an attorney in his 30s for cruising the malls hitting on teenagers, legal age or otherwise. And Mr. Trump wants Moore to be a senator?

"There's lots of people looking at big trouble/But of

course our President is clean."

The White House press secretary says the difference between Franken's circumstance and those who've accused Mr. Trump of sexual impropriety is that Franken admitted his wrongdoing. Anyone else see how asinine that is?

"Who's the man who hired all the criminals? ... They bend the facts to fit with their new story."

It seems like every day, every hour, something more takes place that is predicated on lies, lies that have been told so many times that they get repeated until many believe them to be true. I mean a Washington Post factcheck found that Mr. Trump lies nearly six times a day – that's an average. He lies all the time, just more on some days than others (1628 lies in 298 days).

If his press secretary says the 11 women (so far) who have said Trump sexually abused them are lying, then that must be the truth, right? Now if Trump were to admit any of these are true, well then, where would she be?

You think Mrs. Sanders is ever alone in a room with Mr. Trump? I don't think so.

The longtime pedophile that Mr. Trump is not condemning is strongly backed by the evangelical right, a group – that beyond all reason – still backs Mr. Trump despite the fact he represents everything a Christian is not. So we know why he can't bad-mouth the pedophile.

"Let's impeach the President for hijacking/Our religion and using it to get elected/Dividing our country into colors."

So what do we do now? Here are three pieces of advice from Senator Franken, who, despite being a lout once (and being dumb enough to let someone take a picture) on one of his half-dozen USO tours to entertain our troops, may be one of the good guys. Keep showing up and speaking out. Keep being a pain in the butt to Congress. Become an advocate on an issue.

We can't let the liars win. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

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HUSKERS VS. 'MATS

Husker Du and the Replacements are two of the most name checked bands of the 1980's; and rightly so.

Both bands took punk rock from the dead end it had reached with hardcore punk and added hooks, melody, musicianship to make memorable songs your grand kids will be talking about/ attempting to cover. The Replacements out "punked" punk rockers of the day with a devil may care attitude (and sense of humor) that hid razor sharp lyrics and songs too clever both for punk rock and bands getting radio play at the time. Husker Du meticulously built upon their initial hardcore punk sound (sort of...more on that later), adding hooks and gradually slowing down their songs until they had established a hard edged pop sound. Their musical contributions influenced by "alternative" bands that went on to make millions copying the musical templates developed by Husker Du and the Replacements. As the saying goes: The pioneers get scalped.

The Replacements *Live at Maxwells*, captures The Replacements at the height of their powers. Recorded during their tour for their album *Tim*, The Replacements play a fevered set from all of the albums they had put out to date as if their lives depended on it. I can see where the "drunken genius" yarn for The Replacements got it legs after hearing their versions of "Color Me Impressed", "I Will Dare", "Unsatisfied", "Bastards", "Hayday", and "Kiss Me on the Bus" on this record. Their set recorded here is rough around the edges and yet very tight. Lest anyone take them too seriously, The Replacements bluff their way through a cover of the Sweet's "Fox on the Run" before either getting bored with it or deciding it wasn't a good idea. If you want musical perfection, listen to a Rush album. If you want rock and roll the way it should be played buy *Live at Maxwells* (and if the notion of the Replacements playing cover tunes badly strikes your fancy find the semi legitimate cassette only live release *The Shit Hits the Fans*).

Husker Du's *Savage Young Du* is a 3 cd or 4 album (I bought both) compilation of unreleased live/studio recordings, early singles and their first studio album. The 100+ page booklet that comes with *Savage Young Du* is packed with archival photos of the band, detailed information on where and when each song was

recorded, a chronological history of live dates played and history of the band. With due (Du?) respect to the

author of the only Husker Du biography out there ("Husker Du: The Story of the Noise Pop Pioneers who Launched Modern Rock"; still worth a read), the history Husker Du in this booklet is more engagingly written than anything I've read on Husker Du to date. The booklet in *Savage Young Du* is worth the price of the admission alone. CD 1 of this is set is mostly unreleased recordings some live recordings and their first single 'Statues/Amusement'. At this point in their career Husker Du sound like a faster, sloppier, non-preppie power pop band minus skinny ties. The seeds of Husker Du's coming greatness is evident in songs like "Sore Eyes", "The Truth Hurts" and 'Industrial Grocery Store'. By the time of their first single "Statues/Amusement"

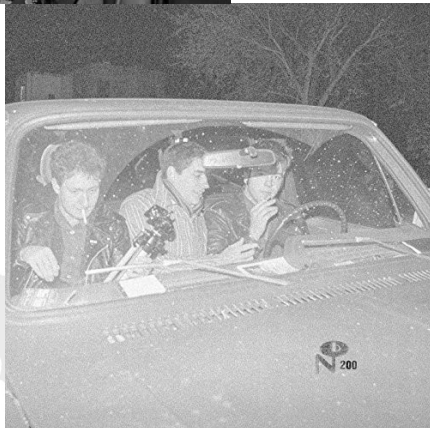
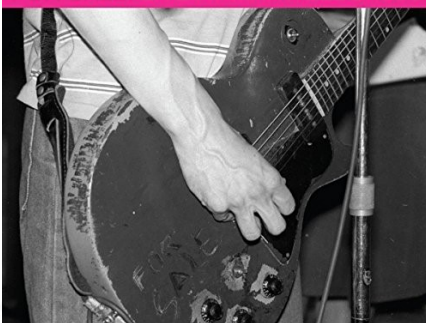
Husker Du were incorporating post-punk into their sound.

On CD 2 Husker Du begins their climb to break-neck speed hardcore punk; though they hadn't completely abandoned pop songs. The highlight of this cd is an "alternate version" of Husker Du's live record *Land Speed Record* (SST

records wouldn't give them the rights to re-release "Land Speed Record"). As is the case with *Land Speed Record* - this version has Husker Du playing hardcore punk tunes at warp 11 recorded low fi. Although the accompanying booklet claims this is better recorded version of *Land Speed Record* era Husker Du it is still pretty low fi. Anyone doubting Husker Du's hardcore punk bona fides punk bona fides should give the version of "All Tensed Up" here a listen. CD 3 has Husker Du's next single "In a Free Land", their first album *Everything Falls Apart* and some unreleased live tracks (including the second unreleased set of slow songs from the *Land Speed Record* set). By then the elements of Husker Du's sound that they would pursue to perfection were in place; Punk rock intensity and great hooks. Not many bands could successfully pull off the straight up hardcore punk of "Bricklayer" and the pop of "Gravity" and "Everything Falls Apart". *Savage Young Du* is primarily for the long-time fans but the quality of unreleased songs and live recordings make it worth a spin even if you have never heard of the band.—RENTED MULE

THE REPLACEMENTS

FOR SALE: LIVE AT MAXWELL'S 1986



TOMMY KEENE

Almost. Tommy Keene spent an entire 30+ year career almost getting over the top. Tommy was spoken of in hushed tones in the early 1980s as an amazing young songwriter, ushering the '70s power pop formula of ringing guitars and earnest harmonies forward into a decade that never quite knew what to do with him. He recorded in small studios and self-released albums and EP's that were broadcast over college radio, building a buzz that the major labels couldn't ignore for long. Geffen Records pickup him up and he recorded his most well-known album, *Songs From the Film*. Tommy's songs sounded like three minute soundtracks to the best John Hughes teen movie you'd never seen. He sang earnestly of heartache, sadness, broken dreams. His songs were slathered up with massive reverb, chorus, noise gates, and oceans of echo and often it was hard to hear the heart of the music for all the production clichés of the times.

How did you market a Tommy Keene in the heyday of the video age? He didn't look like a New Romantic. He didn't look like a metalhead. He looked like a college letterman who wandered onto stage and picked up a guitar. His songs were solid pop radio smashes that somehow never found their way onto pop radio. Critical respect could only go so far. Someone needed to buy the records, someone needed to play them on the radio.

Eventually Tommy's major label deal ran its course and critical respect actually paid off somewhat. Tommy found himself a sideman to Paul Westerberg on his first post-Replacements tour. Hip indie record label Matador Records released records for Tommy in the '90s. Another decade's college radio nerds made up a new audience for Tommy's power pop paeans. Tommy was able to do late night TV, tour the world. But again, Tommy kept knocking on a door that just would not open for him. Tommy spent the last two decades continuing to plug along, releasing a handful of well-reviewed albums and tours. Tommy's songs were no longer overproduced. The guitars were loud and proud, the drums no longer sounded like they were in a lift shaft. The songs were true. In the '00s Guided By Voices frontman Robert Pollard asked Tommy to go out on the road with GBV on their final tour and play with him in his first post-GBV solo band. The two enjoyed each other's company and

admired each other's songwriting skills so much that they recorded an album together as Keene Brothers. It remains one of the finest albums of either man's career.



In the '10s Tommy toured the world, sharing his songs with the old hipsters who had remained faithful to him. In 2017 he toured opening for Matthew Sweet. My son and I caught the Heights Theater show in Houston. It was at this time that I finally had my chance to see Tommy play live. He played completely solo, alternating between his old faithful blonde Telecaster and an acoustic guitar. He played some newer songs, he played some of my favorite from his catalog. "Highwire Days", "Listen To Me", "Places That Are Gone". He covered Big Star. Tommy had become an elder statesman of power pop. Before his set I saw him wandering around the audience and I decided to do something I'd not really done much before. I decided to go up to him and talk to him.

I lived in Seattle during a bit of the '90s and '00s. As a musician I wound up rubbing

elbows with a lot of folks who were either stars from the '90s or who were on their way to becoming future indie rock stars. I learned very quickly that one thing you did not do was talk to any of them about music. They were so tired of talking to people about that stuff and in most cases they were very suspicious of people's intentions. Sure, you could see Kris Novoselic at a show or you could card Eddie Vedder coming into the bar you worked at but by God you did not talk to them about their bands, about "grunge", about Seattle, about Nirvana. You nodded, maybe you said hi but that was it. So that's what I did. To get up the gumption to look Tommy Keene in the eye, shake his hand, tell him how much I loved his music, I'd never seen him play before and I was very excited to see him play, and THANK YOU very much for doing what you do was soooo not cool. But Tommy was gracious and spent a few minutes talking about his plans to make another album later this year and some time in 2018 come back out on tour again with a band. Maybe he'd make it back down to Houston.

Tommy passed away last month at the age of 59. I'm very glad that I didn't "Seattle" Tommy. It may not have been cool, but my admiration was heartfelt and real, much like the music Tommy made. Not even almost.—

KELLY MINNIS

RECORD REVIEWS

HOW DID I FIND MYSELF HERE?

The Dream Syndicate
How Did I Find Myself Here?

It has been nearly 30 years since The Dream Syndicate name has been tied to any new recordings. The Los Angeles quartet is considered a member of the "Paisley Underground", a loose collective of '80s neopsychedelic bands that harkened back to the post British Invasion *Nuggets* era of sub-Yardbirds rave-ups combined with the studied cool and darkness of Velvet Underground. Others, such as The Bangles and The Three O'Clock may have had more commercial success, but The Dream Syndicate seems to be the band whose influence is felt the most.

That said, the first version of the band crashed and burned in 1984 with the second iteration limping along to 1989 before giving up the ghost. Bad record deals, revolving lineups, and a general fatigue sent singer/guitarist Steve Wynn towards a solo career and eventually a revival of sorts in the '00s with his Miracle 3 backing band. Earlier in the '10s the post-1984 iteration began to play the reunion circuit to rave reviews and now *How Did I Find Myself Here* is the fruit of that labor, the first new Dream Syndicate record since 1988's *Ghost Stories*.

What would three decades do to the band's sound? Apparently, from the moment the needle drops on lead off track "Filter Me Through You", very little. It meanders, it drones, it has a vaguely Eastern feel to the electric organ, and Steve Wynn's voice is well lived-in. "Glide" feels like a song that would've been a hit in The Wallflowers' hands in 1999. I don't fault the song, but I don't really feel the approach the band took with this recording. There is more shoegaze than shards of twang in the band's overall sound on this album. "Out of My Head" feels like vintage Dream Syndicate with a simple charging drone vamp with the guitar onslaught of Jason Victor, a well-known asset of Wynn's Miracle 3 who is onboard for this version of the band. "80 West" begins with a pile-driven bluesy bass

riff from Dennis Dunn and those glorious braying guitars. "Hands clutched rigid on the steering wheel/whiskey underneath the seat carefully concealed/Odometer has turned over three times/But I've only gotta make it past the county line" like a trippy Hunter S. Thompson ballad exhaled through sheets of Deluxe Reverb. "As soon as the pills starting kicking in she decided to go for a drive" Wynn sings on the twinkling, country-ish "Like Mary" and you begin to feel there's a motif at play. The title track is really different for the band at first listen. It bounces to a '70s blaxploitation movie soundtrack groove. Victor and Wynn make Voyager One noise to compete with the wah-wah'd Fender Rhodes. It's a different look for the band and it fits the stretched-out psychedelia with a new strut. Original bassist and sometimes vocalist Kendra Smith lends her smoky timbre to album closer "Kendra's Dream".

Overall, it is a very strong effort, updating the band's sound without straying that far from the band's strengths.—**KELLY MINNIS**



The Escatones
The Escatones

The world is a better place with The Escatones playing music in it, so a new album is always welcome.

Unlike their sprawling 2013 epic *Slow Down Jackson* that was literally crammed with pop gems and oddball wanderings, the latest album is a sparse eight tunes. This one is closer in theme to *So Long Norman* and *The Replacement* in that the tunes take a bit longer to sink their hooks into you.

As always, Conner Pursell's guitar playing is prominent, whether the squalling workout in "Another Interstate Truck Love Song" or the ringing tones in "Gun." Ken Dannelley on drums is as inventive and solid as ever while JP Popiel keeps that bass rocking throughout.

The stellar track is "Look Away" that is something like a punk Cheiftains on steroids, complete with pennywhistle (Note:

when they played this at LoudFest it was easily the highlight for me and my wife). The longest track on the album at just over seven minutes, it's normal—well, Escatones normal—for about three minutes before shifting into a demented jam until returning to the tune at the end. No radio play for these guys. The tunes rock along like the sprightly "Lasso" and the upbeat "Wrasslin'" as well as the rocking "Fears." Only the over-long balladic "For You" and maybe the slow "Pondering" mar the record. I did miss not having a surf tune which is surprising since the cover is set at Surf Motel.

Check this out on Bandcamp as well as the rest of the band's catalog. And make an effort to see them live.—**MIKE L. DOWNEY**



Bell Witch
Mirror Reaper

Let's get technicalities out of the way. *Mirror Reaper* marks the third full-length album from Seattle doom metal duo Bell Witch. Released October 20 from Profound Lore Records, Bell Witch delivers the entire 83 minutes of *Mirror Reaper*'s duration through a single track. (For fans of Sleep, that's 20 minutes longer and one track less than 2003's *Dopesmoker*—not that anyone's suggesting a measuring contest here. I'm just offering context. Not to mention, veteran Sleep and Neurosis producer Billy Anderson captains the *Mirror Reaper* helm, putting this album into the realm of modern classics even at its inception.) The technicalities here are worth getting aside as they comprise the least interesting details about this record.

Mirror Reaper's backstory as eulogy is key. Recorded in response to the passing of founding member and drummer Adrian Guerra, *Mirror Reaper* works as a single track split over two distinct movements: the agonized "As Above" and the resurgent "So Below." Bell Witch's current line-up, Dylan Desmond (bass, vocals) and Jesse Shreibman (drums, organ, vocals), confessed unique intentions for *Mirror Reaper* on their Bandcamp

page: "In love and respect to [Guerra's] memory, we reserved an important yet brief section in the song for him that features unused vocal tracks from our last album. This specific movement serves as a conceptual turn in the piece, or point of reflection." From a band who traditionally focuses their narratives on ghosts—look to 2015's beautifully epic *Four Phantoms*—in order to explore perplexing and uncomfortable boundary lines between life and death, Guerra's posthumous vocals offer a turn—right at the 51 minute mark—that feel far more tangible than merely *conceptual*.

Those who commit to *Mirror Reaper* will find its uniqueness not bound to format. After repeated listens, *Mirror Reaper*, for me, becomes more compelling, more complex, even beautiful. Spending time here is not difficult. The album holds and demands attention, moving in places both unexpected but grossly familiar to anyone who's experienced grief. Bell Witch musically recalls a painful truth: grief takes time. It requires process. It brings our entire spirit to a grinding halt and then kneads us into something new that we never imagined. Perhaps something stronger. Perhaps enlightened. We can't know until we endure and emerge. In that context, *Mirror Reaper*—this 83 minute doom symphony—offers a snapshot of such endurance. Nothing on this record is rushed. No one is hurried. Music builds and falls. Vocals rise and fade. Single notes simmer, drifting slowly into larger, darker expanses of chasm deep echoes, and this beyond our awareness. We find ourselves suddenly in new territory—"a new shore" as Guerra sings. Meanwhile, cymbals crash like broken water while bass lines swim twisted through currents of, initially, anger and despair, until eventually giving way—prompted by hymn-like layered organ swells—to something lighter, something akin to peace, perhaps hope. How ironic that *Mirror Reaper*, a record about an actual death, ends at the opposite of doom.

Grief's full portrait is here. A sun setting. A darkness ruling. But then a sun reappearing. Bell Witch reminds listeners—by closing and pulling back these curtains—that, sure, we can keep our eyes closed, but the sun will reappear. In that sense, *Mirror Reaper* is an 83 minute exercise in emerging.—**KEVIN STILL**



Cannibal Corpse
Red Before Black

With 2017 coming to close, we are treated to another dose of death metal. This time, the offering is something from one of the "greats" of the genre, a band whose name and album art strike fear into the hearts of concerned parents everywhere. That's right, it's the freaking Cannibal Corpse ("CC" from here on out)! Their last album, *A Skeletal Domain*, was released in 2014, and it was killer! Full of grooves, creative story arcs, and old school album artwork. After three years, CC has returned with another viscera splattered record titled *Red Before Black*. Unlike other albums, this title is subtle, but it doesn't take much imagination to conclude that the red in the title is referring to blood and gore...lots of it!

As per usual, let's talk artwork first. CC has a reputation for putting out nasty album covers, which has gotten them banned from playing in several countries and all Disney venues (Does that really surprise anyone?). My propensity for wanting artwork to match the music is generally no obstacle for CC. The artwork for *Red Before Black*, however, is not the most iconic. We get a knife-wielding psychopath flinging blood everywhere. It definitely has the CC spirit, but it's not reminiscent of anything we've seen before. It's just kinda...there. Considering the creative artwork from their previous release, *Red Before Black* doesn't try to top it. It's as if someone were asked to define "violence" or "gore" with a picture, and this is what comes out. It meets the dictionary definition, but that's it.

Now to the sound. Is the album art outshined by the music? Yes! At first listen to the album, I was not all that impressed, but not disappointed either. At second listen, I found things I had missed before. By my third listen, I wanted to listen again. Unlike many bands who have evolved to the ever-changing metal scene, CC refuses to follow suit. Honestly, if you are the t-rax of metal music, why would you evolve when you are already the apex predator? There is nothing new on this record, it's simply CC doing what they do best: punishing blast beats, chainsaw riffs, and monstrously guttural vocals which are showcased

perfectly in tracks like "Shedding My Human Skin" and "Heads Shoveled Off". One thing I was especially pleased with were the lyrics. The story arcs have certainly gotten much more creative. Less gore, more horror. *Red Before Black* is CC's 14th album. Fourteen records and no sign of deviation from their death metal methods. I'll be honest, I'm primarily a fan of the *Corpsegrinder* years of CC. For me, CC's 5/5 record is tied between *The Wretched Spawn* and *Evisceration Plague*.

Overall, I give *Red Before Black* a 4.5/5. Is it their best album? No. It could certainly be a disappointment for those who were hoping to hear something new, and the album art leaves something to be desired. Is it a good album? Yup! If you're a fan of bands that keep their sound consistent, this album is a superb example of such dedication; *Red Before Black* gives those of us living in 2017 a brutal reminder of what death metal is all about.—CALEB J. MULLINS



Sneaky Pete
Illusions, Delusions, & Brain Contusions

This is the 22nd album by the former Aggie biology professor turned Dr. Demento favorite, and he has three in the hopper ready for 2018. Like all the rest of his albums since 2000, this is another DIY product from Sneaky Pete Studios.

Illusions, Delusions, and Brain Contusions is more of what's expected of the comic/novelty song musician with titles like "Sextoy Salesman," "Marty Mofrig and Freddy Frigmo," and "Bad Booty." One stylistic switch is the three instrumentals, a taste of an all-instrumental album to come.

If Sneaky Pete released singles, it would probably be the wry "An Experienced Man." It proposes that older men are better lovers as the singer calls for a "honeymoon at Viagra Falls!" can tell you about all the cool bands I saw. "If It Works" is an upbeat tune while "Bad Booty" hits a solid groove. "Gotta Get a Grip" boasts a nice bass line while the instrumental "Dance of the Butterflies" features what sounds like a flute. Another instrumental is a spry mashup of guitar whiz Duane Eddy and the late great Bo Diddley beat appropriately

CONCERT CALENDAR

12/1—Leaving Leavenworth, LUCA, YeeHa!, The Fox In the Ground @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

12/1—Prof. Fuzz 63, Cornish Game Hen, The Ex-Optimists @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/2—HYAH!, Wartime Afternoon, Spirals, King & Nation @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/7—Raging Peppers @ Revolution, Bryan. 8pm

12/8—Jay Satellite, Economy Island, Cult Leaders, Magic Girl & Skullbone @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/9—Punk Rock Flea Market @ Revolution, Bryan. 3pm

12/9—Austin Disaster Relief w/Magic Girl, Mutant Love, John Scott, Charm Bomb, Khan, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

12/14—HYAH!, Beige Watch, Cosmic Chaos, North By North @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/15—Acoustic Showcase with Justin Honeykut, Colton French, William Latham @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/16—Billy Law @ New Republic Brewing Company, College Station. 7pm
12/16—Minuano, LU-CA, Corusco @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/22—King & Nation, Electric Astronaut, First Thought Worst Thought @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/28—Odd Folks, The Ex-Optimists, Cosmic Chaos @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/29—Tenino, Psionnasaur, The Shooobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/30—Atarimatt, great unwashed luminaries, Dead Horse & The Rabbit Holes, Gateslinger @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/31—DJ Skullbone @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

titled "Duane Diddle."

music in any fashion.

The official album closes with an accolade to the female stars of movie pop culture aptly titled "Heroine Addiction" that manages to work in everyone from Wonder Woman to Princess Leia to Ripley to Hermione Granger to Ariel. A bonus track is a medley of Dave Van Ronk's "Green Green Rocky Road" and Jack White's "We are Going to Be Friends." Somehow I think the late Van Ronk would have enjoyed being matched with the eccentric White as well as having Sneaky Pete revive his

It's appropriate that the last words of this review are from Sneaky Pete's liner notes: "No shrinks were harmed in the making of this album."—MIKE L. DOWNEY



atarimatt

great unwashed
luminaries

gateslinger

dead horse &
the rabbit holes

saturday, december 30
9pm. 5 bucks

revolution
downtown bryan