

# STOREREPRESENT



march 2018  
vol. 10 issue 3



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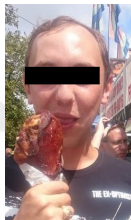
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## THOUGHTS & PRAYERS

When I heard that there was another school shooting, this time in Florida, resulting in 17 killed (last month it was Kentucky), I'm sad to say I wasn't surprised. I expect them now. It seems part of the fabric of our society to accept that children in America should have to anticipate the possibility that their classmate or a deranged stranger will walk

into their school and shoot it up. How can a kid learn with curiosity and enthusiasm when they are on constant lockdown with quarterly shooters drills on top of their fire drills, hurricane drills, tornado drills, etc?

*New York Times: Researchers and gun control advocates say that since 2013, they have logged school shootings at a rate of about one a week. More specifically, according to advocacy group Everytown, there have been 291 school shootings in America since 2013.*

Even more staggering, there have already been 18 school shootings in 2018. According to some pundits this statistic is wrong because Everytown's definition of a school shooting is "any time a firearm discharges a live round inside a school building or on a school campus or grounds." (The fact that they argue that the shooting didn't result in a fatality or that it wasn't actually in the hallways is just plain fucked).

American leaders love to bloat about America's storied traditions of education and freedom, while underdeveloped countries around the world struggle with democracy and education because of dictatorships, religious zealots, and violence. How are we any better when it comes to freedom and education when our lawmakers have a stronger allegiance to the NRA than they do to our children's safety? Their jobs depend on it.

Former Democratic representative Steve Israel wrote eloquently about this after the Las Vegas massacre in October 2017, look it up if you have time, but this sentence alone explains a lot:

*"In the confines of the members-only elevators, where my colleagues could speak honestly, I heard colleagues confide that any vote for gun safety would lower their N.R.A. scores, making them casualties in the next election."*

Look, I don't have kids. Even if somehow I had some spawn come up, there's a good amount of time before they enter school. I wouldn't want them to go to school with the very real risk of being shot. That said—unless our lawmakers make drastic changes to America's gun laws, by the time my children could even enter school—shootings in the classroom will be even more common.

Perhaps our lawmakers should issue new bullets that are painted with the American flag and inscribed with the phrase, "Thoughts & Prayers." Considering all lawmakers seem to be able to do is tweet and voice that tired sentiment after a massacre—at least by issuing these bullets, they will be honest about where they stand. Their thoughts and prayers are as good as the bullets tearing through American children's bodies.

Perhaps it's time for new thoughts and prayers. Think and pray about voluntary buybacks for weapons above market value. Think and pray about inspections and insurance on weapons. Think and pray about ending the gun show and private sale loopholes. Think and pray about how in the hell to change the culture around weapons in our country.

On second thought, fuck your thoughts and prayers. Call your got damn legislators. — STARKNESS

# A SPACE AGE I WILL NEVER KNOW

There are very few things I will consider sacred anymore, but one of those things is space. Outer space is potential, it is our common origin. It is something we can never destroy or control. In a world gone to shit, it is always there. There is so much to know, that I will never know. It is something so beyond us, it is majesty and terror, it holds us in our place. This knowledge is more than many of us want to deal with, so we put it out of our minds and focus on what is here in front of us: the struggle to survive, political upheaval, war, economies, our small lives. I have to face this knowledge every day as an astronomer, and in a way it makes me feel like a mediator. I want you to face this as well, and see yourself for what you are, and see the planet for what it is.

This Falcon Heavy rocket launch gave me mixed feelings. It is always amazing to see this exchange between us and the universe. But this time, space was desecrated. A New Zealand aerospace company recently launched a private satellite into space, which glittered in the sky like a false star, and interfered with the work of many in my field. It is an intrusion of a private company into what should be sky for all of us. And now Elon Musk has claimed space for his. When I saw his car in space, it should have been awesome, but it broke my heart to watch him park his car in our communal sacred space.

Private space agencies are a danger to astronomical (and when it comes down to it, all scientific) research. As space privatizes, NASA and government-funded science is cut. When science is privatized, funding for curiosity-driven research is pushed aside for guaranteed results. Private space agencies and donors do not care about our origins, they do not want to spend money observing objects or developing new technologies that we are not sure will work or provide new information. Companies do not like taking scientific risks in the way they like taking economic risks that we have to pay for. If there is no guaranteed profit, it will not be funded.

However, in the past risk is how we have made our major strides in astronomy, by pointing our telescopes and seeing what happens... the universe is so weird you will never guess what you will find.

NASA and the National Science Foundation have had funding cuts to bare bones, and yes, by all political parties. These organizations provide funding for those of us in the sciences who have no company to answer to, and instead just want to see what is there and why it

is there. They run the telescopes we put in space, and because of budget cuts we cannot repair the Hubble Space Telescope anymore, or build new space telescopes after our current batch (JWST, WFIRST). It is even a risk that our research projects will be cancelled (WFIRST was entirely cut from the President's proposed budget). Many of the best

astronomers I know have had to leave the field or move outside the US, as there is limited funding for new researchers and no funding for academic positions anymore. Instead, they use their knowledge to better learn how to manipulate stocks, develop better advertising algorithms to target you, give your information to the government and advertisers from Google and Facebook, or make sports drinks and Uber more appealing. What a waste, we have lost so many great minds to the hunger for profit.

Space is yours. It belongs to all of us, not wealthy tech-company owners. Your origins are in space, you are formed from the stars themselves, from their magnificent deaths. Go outside soon, to a dark place (just outside town can get really dark, just take a trip to Snook and you will see). See the Milky Way, the backbone of the sky. Remember your cosmic heritage, and our common ancestry with everything you see up there. You were not formed from stardust to buy products, or to waste your life away slaving to the rich and powerful. Remember this. Do not bow to Elon Musk or his billboards in space saying "Buy Tesla". — LEO ALCORN



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# DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

*Waking up in my front yard with the hot sun beating down on my face in the middle of the afternoon in August...* Me: Alright Drunk Detective Starkness, I need you. It looks like we're in our own front yard, so that's kinda a win. Can you help me find a cigarette? Fuck, my mouth is dry, was last night a coke night?

Drunk Detective Starkness: What do I keep telling you? Check your pockets first for clues. What do you have in there? Also, you usually keep an emergency pack of cigarettes in the truck, so if you don't have any on you, check there.

Me: Alright man, thanks. Good looking out. *Finds a crushed up pack of Parliaments stuck to my sweaty back, lighter, \$6, ATM receipt, phone, a business card from a guy named (We'll call him Steve for the narrative, because God fuck if I remember his name now).* Alright, so Steve. Mean anything? Parliaments definitely means it was a coke night. I do remember some dude putting quarters on the pool table at the bar.

DDS: Good young padewan, you're learning. What kind of business is he in? Clearly he's some kinda actual person if he had a business card and you kept it rather than just throwing it away.

Me: Oh God, good, it's not someone that I currently work with, and definitely not a customer. Definitely not going on a vendor list if he was around Blacked Out Me. BO Me, you gotta get out here. I don't remember buying blow, this has to be on you.

Blacked Out Me: HAS TO BE ON ME? The fuck you say? I am a kind and gentle soul, and I do not deserve to be treated like this. You had the coke well before I showed up.

DDS: You do have cash on you, and it looks like that \$100 ATM receipt was for 8:47 PM, well before blacked out you typically happens on a Friday. Check your call logs.

Me: Oh fuck, yeah looks like I called my dealer at around 8:45, and I do remember Steve asking me if I was holding after a couple games of pool. Sorry BO Me, looks like you didn't do it this time.

BO Me: Seriously dude, why you gotta do me like that? You know you made that call and went halves with that guy and now you're trying to put the blame on me. You know you were doing rails off the back of some toilet before I came out to play. I'm sure it went something like 'Hey my dude, I live a couple blocks from here and this toilet is kind of gross, and we just spent a shitton on this coke so how about we go back to my place and drink on the cheap while we snort it off a clean surface'

Me: ...Dammit

DDS: Alright. Back to the point at hand, why are you shirtless in the middle of the front yard? Let's get down to brass tacks here. Looks like the window to your room is open.

Me: OK, so I'm pretty sure we went through an 8-ball,

maybe a little more, just hanging out, shooting the shit, coke babbling, like you do. I do remember he was real weird after he went to take a piss in the bathroom in my room. He came back out, did a line and then left again to take a dump and was gone for a real long time.

DDS: OK, so we're getting somewhere. Do you know what he did? Go in the house and see if you're missing anything? *I go inside, walk around the house, crack open a beer, put on a shirt, shut my bedroom window and can't find anything gone.*

Me: Alright guys, I've got nothing. I remember him leaving to take a shit and then just trying to be a polite like coke head and not do any while he's gone, cause I mean, we did go halves. BO Me, you got anything?

BO Me: Alright you've got where I come in to the game. So, the guy is taking forever, even in coke time. And I'm trynna be a polite little coke head and not do any while he's gone, cause you know, we did go halves. But eventually I have to go looking for him, cause jonesing. And he's gone. Vanished. And I'm left with an 8 ball, just going "what the fuck happened to this guy?"

DDS: So you know your pink bed sheets? And that rainbow flag in the back room? I'm pretty sure this guy musta seen all that and figured you was a gay and got freaked out that you wanted to fuck him or something.

BO Me: Yeah, that's what I thought too. I looked through the house, couldn't find him and didn't notice anything gone, but saw the bedroom window open to the front yard and I just started laughing. Cause sure, College Station has a fair number of homophobic assholes, but I'm just impressed with the level of conviction he had with his hatred. Cause, number 1, he just ditched on an eighth of blow. After doing half an eighth. And I don't care who you are, the guy coulda told me, "Oh by the way, I'm a direct descendant of Adolf Hitler and the rightful and true heir to the Third Reich. I'm trynna start it back up." And if we had just gone halves on two 8-balls and already done one, I'd be all like, "Well, you are a douche bag, but we still have an eighth to split, so 'How bout them Aggies', I'm gonna change the subject till we finish this other 8-ball before I bounce on you." Number 2 - We had just split an 8 ball! Even if I was trynna fuck him (I wasn't) I don't care if you were Gal Gadot in 2018 or *Fight Club* Brad Pitt, I just did half an 8-ball after drinking all day. Nothing is fucking happening. Coke dick, you idiot. Number 3 - Why in the hell did he jump out my bedroom door? That damn fool could have just used the door. But anyway, this guy hated queers so much that he straight bounced on an 8 ball because of pink bed sheets and a pride flag. And I laughed about that for the entire rest of the night while I did the rest of this homophobic bastard's blow.

Me: And then rather than close the window and go to bed like a person, you climbed out and passed out in the yard shirtless at 6 AM to wake up in the middle of the afternoon in a Texas summer?

BO Me: Who am I to remember details like that?—  
**STARKNESS**

# GOOD MOVIES FOR BAD GUYS:

## ANNIHILATION

I haven't done a hallucinogenic drug in over 20 years. I did the math walking out of *Annihilation*, which is cool, because I really don't feel the need to. Plus, after leaving the theater, I feel I got most of that out of the way.

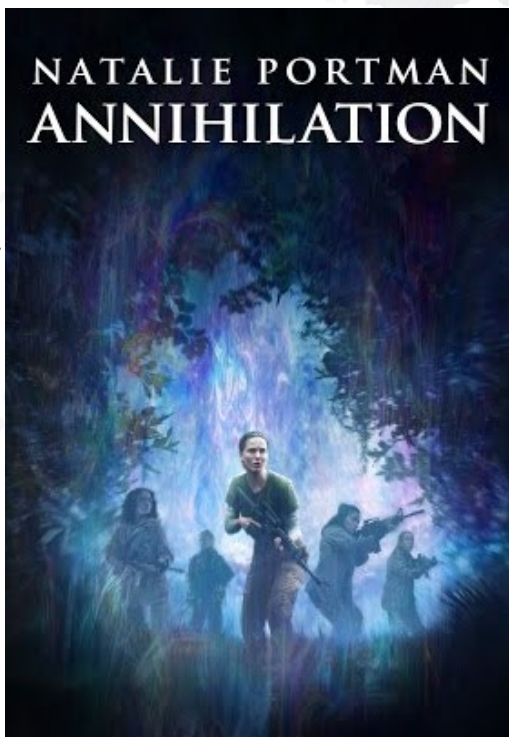
I wasn't really sure if I should review this film. Like a few others I have seen lately (*Cloverfield Paradox* the other day comes to mind) I find that a lot of sci-fi movies I have been watching has been less Antagonist VS Protagonist and more Protagonist VS environment or situation. Makes it kind of hard to review when you are writing about bad guys all the time.

But...I felt the need because

- 1) this film is visually gorgeous. Colors, mutations, even ugly horrifying displays of mutated human husks are beautiful in their eerie way...
- 2) Natalie Portman is bae. Sorry, but I mark out on some female actors, and she could make a movie where she blows her nose for two hours and I would still watch it. She nails serious, funny and sensual, this movie gives us a chance to see her play broken, analytical and fierce. And
- 3) This movie is not for everyone...it will resonate with a very small select group of sci-fi fans and movie fanatics and will be rejected by the mainstream no matter how well they market it.

And I love that. In a way, these thinking sci-fi movies are the best troll against the lowest common denominator of people who go to the movies because of special effects, or they think the trailer for "game night" looks funny. While there is a market for a thoughtful confusing science fiction film that leaves things open ended and friends comparing notes, it still alienates the snapchat basic puppy dog filter crowd or people who go to comic cons for the celebs and I love it.

The film opens with an asteroid crashing to earth, then cutting to a present day Lena (Portman) in a room being questioned by nervous people in Haz Mat suits over what happened to her. Lena delivers news that the party she was traveling with is either dead or probably dead, and through a series of past events, we learn the events that led to her mission.



Seems there is an event of some sort, that has existed for a few years and is growing. It is dubbed "The Shimmer" due to its shimmering presence, not unlike looking at a bubble made with a child's toy. Over time, teams of people have entered the shimmer, and none have returned. Save for Lena's husband who returns from mysterious origins who is not able to recount much.

So, Lena finagles her way to joining the next team, this time made of all women to travel inside the Shimmer. The first aspect of this being a thoughtful movie is thinking about why people would want to volunteer for what basically feels like a suicide mission, and we do learn that each one of these strong female characters is flawed in one aspect to another, from self harm, loss of loved ones and death by progressive cancer.

Once inside the shimmer, the environment is changed, everything from time, to plants to animals has been mutated in some way or another. As the party travels further to the lighthouse, which is the source of the phenomenon, things get weirder. This is where we learn a big theory that you could probably guess early on... Things are mutating. The shimmer is like a big crystal, refracting everything from radio signals to DNA. There are animals that seem to be hybrids, there are plants that appear to be several different ones growing from the same vine, and even some that look human in appearance. This leads to the realization that if the shimmer continues to grow, the extinction of man is more than possible.

It's in the second half that things get really weird, and it doesn't let go until after the climax. This will leave many people on edge, frustrated and maybe even pissed off. But the movie doesn't seem to care. It flashes imagery and a great soundtrack that leaves you on edge and discordant. While this means it may not make much money in the theater, I found it refreshing and brave. This will go into a niche for people looking for something thoughtful and a good talking movie to compare notes with. In a time when movies like *Game Night* will go for cheap laughs or another fast and furious knock off will tease the mainstream with explosions and guns, *Annihilation* peeks out and gives us a film that is beautiful to look at, and scenes to think over. — TIM DANGER



# STILL DRINKING

Our Editor-in-Courage-and-Patience, Kelly Minnis, should either be commended or reprimanded for hiring as a Beer Writing such a prude as myself. To illustrate this point, I will confess that I "smoked" Marlboro Red cigarettes in college for nearly one whole year before I actually learned to inhale. Imagine the difference of experience when I finally involved my lungs! I remember my friend Cade passing a pipe full of Paladin my way on a camping trip with our friend Rix. Cade laughed and said, "Just keep it lit for us, Kevin." I didn't know what this meant, until I knew what this meant. I quit smoking promptly and entirely upon receiving its benefits.

The truth can not be hidden that I am a terrible drunk. On the average day, I tend to be about as much fun as a single and soiled abandoned sock on the broken concrete outside a condemned building. Give me two beers and I embody just enough rage and self-reflection to be annoying—ie. I embody Morrisette's *Jagged Little Pill*. My squabbles with drink have been detailed in these pages, to the chagrin of our management, and I shall not delve into them again. The point is to further illustrate the prudishness of my nature. To shine a light on the two roads diverged in Robert Frost's yellow beer woods: one leads to dancing, the other is less traveled—meaning it's the path of self-loathing and melancholy mix-tapes. You know where to find me.

I remember thinking sometime ago that I suffered from social anxiety. The seat pocket of my Levi 501s even toted a paperback collection of poems or whatnot, which I referred to as "my social anxiety text." If things got weird, I whipped it out for distraction. I went on this circle for awhile, confessing my social anxiety like a cancer diagnosis, until the day I realized that I do not suffer from social anxiety. The truth is that I'm just not as nice as I like to think I am. Show me a table with two people, and I'll ask to grab a seat. Once the arrangement exceeds four people, show me the door. I can't fathom approaching a group of four or more people, even in my own family. At Christmas I have to "walk the dogs again" just to find a place where half a dozen people are not engaged in small talk. And, you see, it's moments like this when the drugs would be helpful. And while my flesh is willing, my spirit is—well—a prude.

And, hey, do what you like, but I hate dope. Put it in a pipe, a bong, a gummy, a cookie, a brownie, a contact high at a Lettuce show, and you can keep it! What I've tried is what I've tried, and the stories I've collected in said trials are mine to keep and yours to imagine. But you can imagine. If the beers lead so quickly to my

falling out like a Real Housewife of Miller-Coors, then you know that me and ganja are saloon doors swinging opposite directions. *"Here. This will chill you out."* Thirty minutes later I'm in the fetal position using my forearms to give birth to myself so I'll be "different" on the other side. *"This will help with you anxiety."* Twenty minutes later I'm using a Sharpie on a grocery receipt to write the words "They will talk about me in high school gymnasiums one day" and then adhere that to the refrigerator with an alphabet magnet. I've never even considered anything harder than Ozzy's sweet leaf.

It's terrible. Whatever drugs are meant to accomplish, in me they inevitably do the opposite. I tend to believe this is God almighty protecting me on some level because, again, I've detailed my squabbles here before. But I share all this because I've been on regular doses of Hydrocodone the past few weeks because of an emergency abdominal surgery I had at the beginning of February. Hydrocodone is a strange drug. I don't feel it half the time, but then I go to bed and that's when the games begin. One night I dreamed I was in a canoe with Senator John Lewis. My punchline to this dream being: "He had hair and I had the paddles." I'm not sure where we were going, but the dream lasted hours, long enough for me to wake certain that I was sunburned and not a fan of Senator John Lewis on a personal scale.

The weirdest Hydrocodone experience I've had was when I woke in the middle of the night utterly, 100%, without a shadow of a doubt convinced that I was the embodiment of Joan Didion. I had been reading her memoirs, specifically the ones about the death of her husband and daughter. And I had also just watched an excellent documentary about her on Netflix. Anyway, I woke in the dark just knowing that I was Joan Didion, to the point that my little bird arms swam out in the air before me as Joan Didion tends to do when she's talking. I knew I needed to call my literary agent in the morning. The only problem was that I did not know who my literary agent was, and I grieved for quite some time in the night that my husband was no longer around to help me know who my agent was. This episode continued for a good five minutes or so—me weeping and swimming my arms around, literally saying, "Oh John!" over and over again—until lucidity began to return to me. Somehow in all of this I did not wake my actual wife.

All this to say, in our future dealings, expect little and keep the good stuff for yourself. I'm going to stick with caffeine for the time being, and I promise to keep my squabbles with its profoundly detrimental effects to myself. — KEVIN STILL

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# PEDAL PUSHING: BEHRINGER MODEL D

The Moog MiniMoog is perhaps the most iconic synthesizer ever created. It was the first prepatched portable keyboard analog synthesizer to be marketed towards working musicians and has become the benchmark for the sound of subtractive analog synthesis. Artists as diverse as Stevie Wonder, P-Funk, Yes, Rush, Gary Numan, Depeche Mode, and Nine Inch Nails owe their careers to its robust, obese bass and cutting highs. In the '80s, as all synthesizers went digital, Minis went out of style.

When analog synthesis came on strong again in the '90s Dr. Bob Moog began making Minis again, but as the Voyager, a new millennium Mini with memory, MIDI, an X-Y expression pad, etc. It was not exactly the old school MiniMoog. Moog later in the '10s created a new MiniMoog but last year discontinued it. Interestingly, the patent for the MiniMoog design lapsed last year as well. And that's where Behringer comes in.

Behringer is a European musical instrument company that has built its career on cloning other companies' designs and selling them for a cut rate. Their pedals model Boss, MXR, EH, Line 6, and many other pedal makers; their very successful line of audio mixers nearly destroyed Mackie; their audio interfaces clone MOTU and Tascam; their multi-FX units rip off Alesis and Lexicon. You get the picture. Recently, Behringer turned its attention towards synthesizers. At first, the company claimed to be building an ARP Odyssey clone, but Korg beat them to the punch with their reissues of the Odyssey as well as their own MS-20. Behringer then turned to the Deep Mind, a synthesizer that, once you study the architecture closely, begins to more than just resemble the Roland Juno series. But the company's first big outright clone was finally shipped in December: **The Behringer Model D**, otherwise known as "the \$300 MiniMoog".

Last summer I watched a well-produced A-B comparison video between a Model D prototype and a 1972 Moog MiniMoog Model D that convinced me to place a preorder for the Behringer version. A long seven months later I was unboxing my very own Model D. The name, btw, comes from the internal reference number for the MiniMoog. The Model D was the fourth attempt by Moog to design the MiniMoog. For starters, this synthesizer is a shrunken version of the very familiar MiniMoog. It is about 17" wide. The knobs and rocker switches are quite small, but even my sausage fingers can navigate around its controls without difficulty. It is less a complete clone and more like 99% clone with a bunch of bonus features. The Model D has MIDI over USB as well as the traditional MIDI in/thru outlets. The original did not have a dedicated low frequency oscillator for modulation purposes. Behringer has one onboard. Behringer also nods to the Eurorack modular market by including over a dozen patch points for making the Model D for



control voltage interface. While the original also had input and output for CV control, the Behringer adds just a little more flexibility. The Model D has a couple of 1/8" patch cables included to encourage experimentation as well as a serial ribbon for connecting the Model D to modular power so one could insert the Model D into a Eurorack case. A popular MiniMoog trick was to route the headphone out into the external audio input to add some audio feedback. Behringer prepatches this popular technique without the need for an extra cable.

I have only ever goofed off on a MiniMoog before, and that was a Voyager. I've never played a vintage Mini. I have owned a Moog Source (Moog's first foray into preset programmability) and it certainly could be programmed to make the sounds I associate with the MiniMoog. Alas, it broke and I sold it more than ten years ago. I used to regret that sale. Upon plugging in the Model D I no longer lament the late Source. This is a true MiniMoog. Three analog voltage controlled oscillators and a switchable pink/white noise generator provide the sound. A 24dB 4-pole low pass analog controlled filter colors the tone, and two ASDR analog controlled amplifiers provide the envelopes for tone/volume contour. There's an onboard A-440 tone to tune the synth to. No oscillator sync, but the original doesn't have it either.

If you have never played a Mini before you will have a steep learning curve. I've played many a different knob-by-analog synthesizer over the years and even I have had to adjust to the MiniMoog architecture. The "release" portion of the ASDR envelopes is not adjustable. A rocker turns it on or off. The way that modulation works on this synthesizer is kind of batty to me. On an original, the third oscillator was switched to "lo" function and keyboard CV to the oscillator was switched off. Then you could apply the 3rd oscillator as an LFO to pitch or filter cutoff. The Model D features oscillator cross modification, allowing the oscillators to modulate each other or the filter. The noise circuit can also be applied to the filter cutoff or oscillator pitch, allowing for some interesting effects. Figuring out the modulation buss is somewhat tricky to me and half the time I can't recall how to get the mod wheel to route the dedicated LFO to pitch or some of the other interesting routings it can do. It's not complicated, it's just that the

MiniMoog had a unique way of accomplishing this task.

The addition of patch points is a nice stroke. Sadly, I can't figure out a way to bypass the VCA entirely and get the synth to drone. This is a function that I personally value as someone who uses drones and access to the filter for external instruments. My Vermona Mono Lancet has VCA bypass and so did some later Moogs. It is a small bummer. Also, I have been unable to figure out how to patch a simple slow LFO sweep of filter

cutoff that zeros out. It is like the Model D applies 50% of LFO intensity to the task but does not go 100% wet. This is likely user error on my part, but again, it is something that I can do on my other analogs without difficulty.

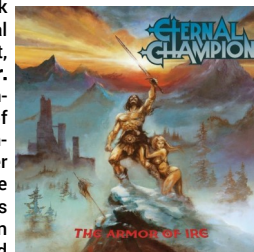
We wouldn't be here though if you or I weren't curious about "the sound". It has that Moog sound and behaves like one too. There is a twangy acoustic bass style patch that I had on The Source (patch 5) that I've been unable to satisfactorily dial up on any other synthesizer I've owned. It took all of 20 seconds to nail that patch on the Model D. The soaring "Tom Sawyer" lead, the detuned "Roundabout" lead, the roaring pitch dropped square wave lead on "Magic Man", the tight, thunderous low end of "Billie Jean"...pretty much every famous MiniMoog patch you can dial up to your heart's content on the Model D. Many synth manufacturers use the same Moog filter ladder, the same oscillator design, but somehow just aren't able to get beyond "Moog-esque" to "Moog clone". Behringer figured it out. The Model D retails at an astounding \$299. Moog's recent MiniMoog reissue retails at \$3499. That is an amazing difference in price for little, if any, difference in sound. I must point out that there is a very large difference in manufacturing style. Behringer's synthesizer is made of metal and the pots are surface mounted so the unit is robust, but the wood panels on the side are obviously fake. The Model D is mass produced in Asia on circuit boards. Moog products are handmade in the United States, paying American workers American wages, using quality circuits and hard woods. Moog synthesizers FEEL like a musical instrument. The Model D, while it is an amazing little box, does not have the feel that Moog products have. You have to decide for yourself whether having that craftsman's touch is worth the extra \$2200 to you.

Many people will not be able to get past the ethical considerations here. Behringer has in essence taken advantage of copyright laws to take someone else's design and undercut sales of their product. You could also say that Behringer has placed a sound long out of reach of average musicians' means right at their fingertips. It's no contest for me. Value wins out. I cannot recommend the Model D enough. — KELLY MINNIS

## ETERNAL CHAMPION

Normally, I'd be putting out an album review this month, but unfortunately, some bands do not do me the convenience of making monthly, consecutive releases that fit my agenda. Even though there isn't a new release I wish to review this month, there are still many lesser known bands that deserve recognition. In fact, I thought I'd throw the spotlight on a well-known band who will be retiring soon, and another band who is making headway in the Texas metal scene.

If someone were to ask me who my favorite metal band is, without a doubt, it would be **Manowar**. That's right, I'm a manowarrior with a heart of steel! In late 2016, Manowar announced that after 36 years of flying the banner for metal warriors everywhere, they will soon lay down their arms and retire from the battlefield after their final world tour. Despite the heartache of this news, a ray of hope has peaked over the horizon. The call to defend true metal from the poser heretics who'd corrupt it has gone out, and the New Wave of Traditional Heavy Metal has answered, but one band stands above the rest; enter, **Eternal Champion**.



One thing that is certain about metal is that it's the nerdiest music genre. That being said, is not surprising that many metal fans tend to be fans of fantasy. Second to horror, fantasy is probably the second most common lyrical theme in the genre. One look at the cover of Eternal Champion's debut album, *The Armor of Me*, represents this idea perfectly. I mean, a muscle-bound bruiser wielding a sword with a half-naked lady clinging to his leg in true Conan the Barbarian fashion should tip us off, right?

Upon spinning Eternal Champion's music, the listener is transported back to a time when metal was novel and primal. The best I can describe Eternal Champion's sound is that it boasts a credible balance of traditional heavy metal with the speed and melodies of power metal peppering various songs. Mix Manowar's machismo with the galloping riffs of **Iron Maiden**, and there you have it. To be clear, though Eternal Champion gives nods to the greats, they are not cheap imitators. They truly fit the genre they seek to play, and make it their own. Swords, sorcery, and barbarism may be a gimmick to some, but Eternal Champion revels in the aesthetics of it, and does so in a way that reminds us metalheads that our roots are firmly planted in nerdism, and that's nothing to be ashamed of.

The sound of the traditional heavy metal's warriors of yore is being immortalized. A sound like Eternal Champion's is not very common in Texas, which I think makes them a unique gem. I have high expectations for Eternal Champion, and hope that they continue to do what they do without compromise. So, don your armor, sharpen your blades, and chug back your horn of ale. True metal (as Manowar aptly calls it) is not dead! — CALEB MULLINS

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# ASHES TO ASHES

A-minor was the last chord ever played on Earth.

It rung out slowly, but no one was listening. Tom—the man who had strummed it—was far too focused on his mournful reminiscing.

"Why'd you play so much with that stupid wooden toy?" The memory of his father's voice was as clear in Tom's head as it had been the day he'd confronted him. "Why don't you just play on the Net with all the other kids?"

"I do use the Net Dad, I just like to play my guitar sometimes."

"Sometimes? You call three hours a day sometimes?"

"I like it"

"It's a useless waste of time, you never hear about 'the famous geeta player Mick Ronson' over the Net, no one makes any money on music"

"It's guitar Dad, and yeah... Well, you used to!"

Shaking the conversation from his head, he placed the guitar back in its case. Its final resting place.

He couldn't explain his love for music. Back then, anyway. Now he'd say that he enjoyed the routine, that it was nice to spend a bit of time away from the busy Network. And that, most importantly, he enjoyed the sense of achievement he felt after nailing a riff he'd been hammering away at for weeks. But that experience had been lost to mankind. Brain augmentation allowed for skills to be uploaded directly to the mind. The easy thing to say is that people became lazy, there was no need to *learn* anymore, you could be proficient at anything at any time. The real answer probably has more to do with the human condition than Tom ever wanted to think about. They were all junkies, not him.

His boots clapped against the smooth floor, the sound echoing through the hall.

How had it come to this? When he was younger it was a dirty thing to talk about, plugging in. Back then it was known by a more sinister name—the Death Code. It was taboo. Tom could still remember reports across the Network—"so and so found dead in house, suspected death code". He'd done a lot of research on the phenomenon, especially since his wife left him three years ago. He was fascinated by the speed at which it had become mainstream.

The authorities quickly censored an ad for a 'Sustained Functions Machine'; but not before a few hundred orders had been placed and fulfilled. Automatic censoring on anything concerning either the Death Code or the machines meant that the network was quiet on the matter for a few weeks. Until the shock broadcast of Steven Vaughn—the fifth highest connected person on the Net. His transmission informed the world that he was choosing the code over life. That he was plugging in.

The Death Code became the Happiness Code. And, after the authorities lifted the ban, the Net went wild with the idea. It didn't take long before government mandated storage facilities were constructed to house the ever-growing number of plugged-in humans.

Tom turned a corner, stopped, and inhaled deeply. There she was. Plugged in, with a look of complete ecstasy on her face.

Is this how humanity goes out? With a smile?

He found the look sinister, unpleasant. It wasn't for him. It had never been for him. But he'd lost hope someone else would have felt the same way. He almost laughed thinking back to his defiance all those years ago. He'd vowed more than once—"Don't ever say you're ready. Don't ever say you're better. It's just not right."

That was before he'd been left by himself. Before he had experienced cold, suffocating loneliness. Three years he'd hung on, his head getting more and more jumbled as the days dragged on. This was it. He couldn't bear it anymore. He couldn't find that hippie commune or plucky gang of adventurers trying to save the world from itself. The world was too connected, and you just couldn't find people off Net. It was impossible now.

He stroked the plastic casing of his wife's pod and looked deep into her eyes. The image was more than he could bear, and he felt himself ready to burst with sadness. Her eyes stared past him. They were cloudy and unfocused. And the smile. It was unlike anything he'd ever seen on her face in all their years together. She looked crazy and deranged. Lifeless.

He tried to choke back tears, but it was all too much. He bent over and cried, the sounds echoing down the vast chambers of the storage facility.

It was hard to tell how long he spent lying there on that floor, hours probably. He lifted himself up and walked towards the only empty pod remaining in the facility.

This was it, he thought as he slowly lowered himself in. He'd seen it happen countless times before. He fiddled around with the yellow cable, scrambling to get it into the hole.

He felt it immediately. His body being taken over by the regulator. His breathing slowed down to a terrifying level, his body cold. Slowly, he started to feel comfort. Like stepping into a hot shower on a cold day, or lying between freshly dried sheets. The pleasure grew in intensity, as his face cracked into a smile. His mind was in turmoil. Slowly the negative thoughts disappeared, replaced by this new feeling. The feeling of crisp sand between the toes, the smell of a warm summer evening, the joy of a child's first Christmas.

Ground control to Major Tom, your circuit's dead, there's something wrong. — *STARKNESS*

# LAVON LANGLEY

Hey y'all in a band?

He's leaning against the bed of a pickup truck, the back loaded with a whole bunch of junk, random stuff, dog hanging out the passenger side window.

We sure are, is the answer I give over my shoulder as we carry amps and guitars up the switchback staircase to our second floor motel room. I go back down the stairs and pass the fella again, looking a little closer this time. Denim jacket, long gray hair in a pony tail, some trucking supply company's logo on his battered ball cap. Y'all playing somewhere tonight? No, I give my answer over the shoulder again as I head back to the van, we already played downtown earlier tonight. I close up the van and drive it to the other side of the parking lot and lock it up.

The sounds of an acoustic guitar greet me when I walk into our hotel room. Michael hands me a Yuengling while the guy from the pickup sings us a country gospel rendition of "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain". He pauses to take a beer as well, and to introduce himself to me. Name's Lavon, Lavon Langley, he says between swigs. I'm on my way up to Jackson. My friend up there got me a gig up at Morgan Freeman's place up there, I'm gonna just play with a pickup band up there. What do y'all play? Y'all believe in the Lord?

Naw, we are into some of that Eastern shit, that's my reply.

Well I believe and I sing Him my songs, write some of them to play up in church.

There's not much to say that, so he sings another one. "Make the World Go Away." That's Ray Price, ain't it, I ask. Yah, he's a good ole Kentucky boy, comes the reply, but y'all are from down in Texas. I spent time in prison down that way, but I got my life turned around, the Lord has me now, I'm a make my way up to Oxford now and play at a place up there a friend's got me set up at. Y'all don't mind if I sing one I wrote now?

Of course not! Y'all play your own songs too, he asks. Yeah, we're not good enough to play anybody else's songs we gotta figure ones of our own to do. Hahaha-haha, well I wrote this one for my Savior and I'm gonna play it at church over in Greenville this Sunday, I got a friend that has me set up to play with their church band.

The last chords ring out, he turns up the green bottle to the ceiling, sets it down, and thanks us for the suds and for listening to his songs, shuffling out the door a few minutes ahead of the other half of the band returning from a fast food run.

Y'all just missed a private concert from the Jesco White of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Like the hint of a passing freight train out in the county, feeling the faint rumble, the distant whine of steel on steel, passing in the night, five miles down the line before the afterimage of its whistle catches up to the Super 8. — KELLY MINNIS

# NO CROWN, NO COKE: PIKESVILLE STRAIGHT RYE

Who? MIKE JONES! (Heaven Hill)

What? Straight Rye (51% Rye, 39% Corn, 10% Malted Barley)

When? Now

Where? Any big box store

Why? Because Thomas H. Handy and A Midwinter

Night's Dram are nearly unattainable and this is the next best thing.

How much? \$50

Do you remember those few months in 2013 when you couldn't buy Twinkies? Then Hostess got bailed out by some other corporation and they were back on the shelves by the end of the summer?

No? What? We were a concerned nation! It was on the news and shit. People were selling them on Craigslist.

*In singles.*

Anyway, Pikesville is pretty much the same thing but with whiskey and it spent closer to three decades off the shelves as opposed to three months.

Long story short: the distillery and the recipe itself have changed hands a few times since 1895, but was most recently purchased in 1982 by Heaven Hill—maker of Evan Williams, Old Fitzgerald, Henry McKenna, et al.—and was finally released again in 2015. I'm not sure what took them so long as this is only six years old, but I'm sure happy it's back. I've had the opportunity to try some of the early 80s juice and I can honestly say this is just as good (although a little lighter in color and body,) and that's saying something. The, "they don't make 'em like they used to," adage holds true for a lot of whiskeys.

Nose: Spice, wood, apples, and an undertone of dark fruit. Very reminiscent of wassail, actually. But sweeter and the ethanol is definitely there, but it isn't distractingly present.

Taste: It's *very* dry, *very* spicy, and *very* bold. Obviously, those are characteristics you'd associate with rye, but the juxtaposition still surprises me at times even if I come to this straight from a high-rye bourbon. The spice and the ethanol tend to back each other up, I think. It's 110 proof, but at times I think the dryness compounds the ethanol burn, but it's not at all unpleasant. 3-5 drops of water do this dram a huge service and allow an otherwise straightforward whiskey to express more complex characteristics. The sweetness, dark fruit, and vanilla really shine if you give them a chance.

Finish: Long and dry with a touch of allspice, cinnamon, and cloves mixed with vanilla. Wonderful.

I often come to this dram if I'm just going to enjoy one drink as I wind down for the evening. It's so easy to savor and opens up the longer it sits. 91/100—TUCKER

# **PLAN B CIGARETTES**



**MAKE BABIES FIRST SMOKE  
A MEMORABLE ONE.**

**WARNING: SMOKING IS FUCKING AWESOME.  
DON'T BE SUCH A WIMP.**





When you put on  
other people's glasses  
you realize how  
different you actually  
are from everyone  
else.

# RECORD REVIEWS



**Deer Tick**  
*Vol. 1 & Vol. 2*

It's easy to slag any artistic endeavor because it doesn't conform with one's preconceived expectations. Sure, many Deer Tick fans likely were hoping for something along the lines of "Let's All Go to the Bar Volume Two," but that's not what we got, so let's just look at the art itself.

*Vol. 1* is the Americana acoustic side of Deer Tick—the ten tunes range from bleak to depressing with little light (except for "Me and My Man" from the perspective of a dog). Just check out some of the titles: "Doomed from the Start," "Rejection," "Limp Right Back," "Card House." Even a song like "Hope is Big" acknowledges that "they're always going to win" and "we're always going to lose."

These desolate observations don't mean the tunes are bad however. The melancholy "Sea of Clouds" about a love affair that ended holds a nice groove despite the pain: "It feels like a movie/Long before the end/Someone turns on all the lights." The warmth of "I can't count the ways we've come untethered" in "Limp Right Back" is wrapped with nice sax. The warm sax also is featured on "Rejection."

All this darkness in *Vol. 1* is offset by the energizing verve of *Vol. 2* that features the electric guitar/rock and roll side of Deer Tick. This is the reward for the despondency of *Vol. 1*.

Frankly, the better tunes are on this disc including the roaringly-infectious rocker "Mr. Nothing Gets Worse" that may be the

best thing Deer Tick has ever done. Written by 3/4ths of the band, the tune evokes every great bar band with its Thorogood/Springsteenian saxophone, honky-tonk piano, guitars, drums, and organ that ups the ante with every chord. There's also the rollicking "Tiny Fortunes," the raw guitar tune "Jumpstarting," the piano/guitar interplay on "Don't Hurt," and the hilarious "S.M.F." Even the surprising instrumental "Pulse" is solid (should have been on "Vol.1," guys). Also, the lyrics that edge out are overall more upbeat: "I'll be there for you," "Saying time to have some fun," "To be liked by someone is pretty nice."

So, what does it all mean? Deer Tick wants to be seen (going out on a limb here) as more than just a good-time rock band. They may want to be seen as serious musicians, or at least, musicians who know their craft as both discs are filled with their instrumental expertise. Or maybe Deer Tick just had all these tunes they couldn't wait to play on tour.

Whatever the reason, pick your poison and enjoy: wallow in *Vol. 1* or bop with *Vol. 2*. —  
**MIKE L. DOWNEY**



**LUCA**  
*You'll Never Be At Peace With This*

LUCA has knocked around Bryan/College Station for five years or so now. This is LUCA's second full length album and third overall release. If you thought you knew what LUCA could offer you on 1's and 0's you would be mistaken. You have never heard this LUCA before.

For starters, this album is well recorded and sounds like every other album you've ever bought in a big box store. It has that polished, major record label sound. The performances sound labored over. Every instrument is in its perfect place, you can set a clock to the beat, every sound is pitch perfect. It's like someone scooped the band up and, as the Army slogan goes, made LUCA "be all that they could

be". The story is not all about the production. The band's approach to its basic sound has changed as well. Initially what drew me to LUCA was that they reminded me a lot of the music that I enjoyed so much in the early '00s, living in Seattle. Death Cab For Cutie, The Shins, Pedro The Lion, Modest Mouse, Built To Spill. LUCA still wears some of those influences, but they have made room beside their Pacific Northwest sound for influence from the '00s basement emo-pop scene. *You'll Never Be At Peace With This* is filled with large motion picture commercial emo moves, much like their brethren local bands Corusco and Odd Folks. What separates LUCA from being like these other bands is that singer/guitarist Josh Willis crafts well-written, catchy pop songs. And one cannot also escape the religious overtones in LUCA's songwriting as well.

"Breathe" is the standout song on the album. Were there such a thing as rock bands on the radio anymore this song would surely have placed LUCA on the airwaves with a bullet. It will have you singing "I've been this way just as long as I've been alive/And I've been alive as long as I remember" for days afterward. In "Saw Your Ghost" Willis sings "You never told me about all the ways/You loved me enough to stop singing God's praise/What the hell am I supposed to do with that information?/You expect me to change for your divine revelation? I won't!" in "Your Ghost". In "Family Dog" Willis likens the end of a long, drawn out relationship to the family pet. "I know that this might be hard to hear but I think it's finally time to put down the family dog" he sings, and while it may not mean to be funny it's humorous nonetheless. That is certainly a new high point in the sad sack metaphor Olympics. "Do you ever think about me and weep/Do you feel like my life is ever gonna be more than a blank sheet?" Willis asks in "Wildlife", capping what seems like to me a sort of coming of age for LUCA. I do think the band made a mistake in pacing for the album. "Better Not To Know" is the natural closer to the album emotionally with the lines "This church pew is starting to feel more like a bar stool" with the title of the album and it just naturally feels like an album closer to me.

The main takeaway from the new LUCA album is that the band has matured and reached an artistic stride, having created an album that swings for the bleachers. It will be interesting to see where the band goes from here. — **KELLY MINNIS**



**Superchunk**  
*What a Time To Be Alive*

This longtime indie-pop band has said this album is a reaction to the demoralizing 2016 election of Mr. Trump, but like all good protest music, it has potential to be timeless due to its ferocious passionate power. To be sure, there are plenty of lyrics that easily tie to the former reality TV host and his elitist white privilege, but what dominates *What a Time To Be Alive* is the punk drive of practically every tune. Only the album closer, the mid-tempo yet searing "Black Thread," lets up a bit on the pounding beat.

Finding a favorite among the 11 cuts depends on the listener (Personal note: this is better than 1994's *Foolish*, my intro to the band, usually seen as its best). The hooky "Break the Glass" with its catchy chorus might draw in many at first — "This is what the hammer's for." The rocking title cut may lament "we can't pretend to be surprised" and "darkness was all you wanted," but the guitar/drums interplay never slackens. The sardonic "All for You" is more great punk rock aimed at the self-centered and vain: "You think this is all for you/Fight me/I'm not a violent person/But fight me." While the raucous "I Got Cut" name-checks Chelsea Manning, it also wails: "Oh, these old men won't die too soon."

Despite the dire observations, Superchunk leavens the honest bile with communal hope, so that even an obvious title like "Bad Choices" includes a line urging "meet your weird neighbors once in a while." And the rocketing "Lost my Brain" clamors for us to "grab ahold/ And let's make a chain."

That hope infuses even a tune like "Black Thread" with its obvious target ("No one to tell you/How low is low") who has blackness "stitched into your heart," but as the chorus calls "Cut the black thread" — that is meant for us all. Go for the music, stay for the words. —

**MIKE L. DOWNEY**

# CONCERT CALENDAR

**3/1—Zynius, The Tron Sack, The Shooobiedoobies**  
@ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/2—Dollie Barnes, The Cover Letter, Wiretree** @  
Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

**3/2—Magic Girl, The Docs, Desdimona, Beige Watch** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**3/3—LUCA** (CD release), **Charm Bomb, Vodi, Magic Girl & Skullbone** @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm  
**3/3—The Mammoths, Citizen Banned Radio** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/4—The 12 Jam** feat. **Vacationer, Coast Modern, LUCA, Odd Folks, Wartime Afternoon, JC Juice, HYAH!** @ TAMU Rudder Plaza, College Station. 2pm

**3/8—Gnar World Order, Blast Dad, Unicornog** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**3/9—From Parts Unknown, Breaklights, Mutant Love, Electric Astronaut** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**3/10—TGTC, Cheap Haircuts, The Fox In the Ground, Michael Echterling** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**3/15—A Deer A Horse, The Ex-Optimists** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/16—1476, Volur, Aphotic Contrivance** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/17—A Deathbed Promise, Second Runner Up, Forming the Void, The Doze Brothers** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**3/18—Altercation Hangover** feat. **ASS, Heels, The Grizzly Band, Dr. Beardface & The Spaceman, Sabbath Crow, Gashgasm, Despero, Mutant Love** @ Revolution, Bryan. 2pm

**3/20—Couch Jackets, LUCA** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/22—Shivery Shakes** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/23—Roxy Roca** @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

**3/24—The Lonely Wheel** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/27—Hassan Minaj** @ TAMU Rudder Theater, College Station. 7pm

**3/29—Colton French, Desdimona** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/30—Beige Watch, Billy King & The Bad Bad Good, G Class** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/31—The Escatoners** (CD release), **Economy Island, March & Beauty, The Ex-Optimists** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**4/6—Mad Rant, Beige Watch, HYAH!, Cosmic Chaos** @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

**4/7—Thunderosa** @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**4/8—Cindy's Birthday Party** with **Mutant Love** @ Revolution, Bryan. 5pm

**4/12—Band of Heathens** @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm



**Bat Fangs**  
*Bat Fangs*

For years now I've been waiting for the follow-up to Ex Hex's fantastic debut album *Rips*, my favorite record of 2014 that I must've listened to at least thirty times while driving

around in my car. While we haven't heard from Mary Timony since then, bassist Betsy Wright has joined forces with Laura King (previously from Flesh Wounds) for the new self-titled *Bat Fangs* album. Betsy pulls double duty with guitar and bass in this band, and while *Bat Fangs* is in some ways a spiritual sequel to *Rips* it goes into some territories that Ex Hex never fully explored. For one, it's obviously heavier in the tones of the guitars and riffs wielded in many of the tracks. "Turn It Up" (different from the equally awesome Sheer Mag track with the same name) leads off and sets the pace with a major-key Ratt energy, and "Rock The Reaper" continues with an opening riff reminiscent of early Def Leppard. More 80s hard rock/metal vibes come out

on "Bad Astronomy" featuring guitars and lyrics that would make Dio proud. And "Wolfbite" could've been a song by The Sword about eight years ago off of something like *Warp Riders*, which is a full complement to it.

But like *Rips* this debut has great poppy hooks within its songs, the structures are nonsense (okay, maybe a little non-sense) and straightforward, and — most importantly — it fucking rocks. "Boy of Summer" is probably the most Ex Hex-ish tune out of the bunch, immediately foot-tapping and fantastic to sing-along-to. "Heartbeat" focuses *Bat Rips'* energy into an Eagles of Death Metal-style twist-dancing mood of a track complete with *sh-lal-las* in the chorus. A couple other tracks change the pace

up from the rest of the record, such as the low-key energy of "Mercury" in the vein of Mazzy Star heard in its verses and psychedelic-reverby guitar, while "Static" has a dark, paranoid-surfy vibe to it along with a fantastic bass line during the chorus. Finally, if "Fangs Out" is meant to be the band's mission statement it is absolutely perfect in accomplishing that goal. It roars along like a classic Ju das Priest track, and the subtle shift of the drums and guitar rhythms in the prechorus is a fist-pumping delight every time. This album now makes the third link in the *Wild Flag-Rips-Bat Fangs* chain, another excellent set great for repeated plays until the next entry from this nebulous group. — **TODD HANSEN**



**THE ESCATONES  
THE EX OPTIMISTS  
ECONOMY ISLAND  
MARCH AND BEAUTY**



**SATURDAY MARCH XXXI NINE THIRTY PM FIVE DOLLARS  
REVOLUTION CAFÉ DOWNTOWN BRYAN**