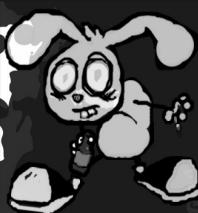


STARGO REPRESENT



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inside: a cosmic insight - seeing several steps ahead - good movies for bad guys - drunk detective starkness - til death do us part - sleep - ask creepy horse - salacious vegan crumbs - still reading - gambling with footballs future - record reviews - concert calendar



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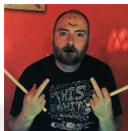
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A.M. MUSIC FEELS

Music affects me more in the mornings than at any other time of day. I do not know why this is the case. There are songs that at other times of the day I can enjoy just fine, but in the morning these songs will have me fighting tears, my voice reduced to a Kermit's croak.

This has not always been the case. For many years I worked VERY early in the morning and never seemed to have this issue (or feature, perhaps) pop up. I began to notice it in the last ten years since we moved to Texas. I would listen to my iPod in the car on the way to work and songs that meant a lot to me would stir me in a way I'd never felt before. Once I began to notice it I would sometimes experiment with it to see what songs would trigger the emotions. Now that I knew Whiskeytown's "Waiting To Deraill" or Death Cab For Cutie's "20th Century Towers" and "Scientist Studies" or Kate Bush's "Cloudbusting" would give me the weepies sometimes I'd put them on just to see if it was a straight-up Pavlovian response. And indeed it was.


What causes it? Is it that I'm more emotionally vulnerable at 7AM than at other times of the day? Is it that I'm still halfway in the dream state before I fully awake at work? Is it that I hate having to go to work but have buried it and these songs draw these emotions out? Perhaps I am emotionally crippled inside and only in the mornings can I properly feel like everyone else feels? Do I need medication or something, therapy? I do not know. But I have learned to deal with it being a thing and at times to embrace it fully.

Sometimes this Morning Music Feels Syndrome strikes me without warning for songs that I had no idea would trigger the attack. Last month while on a typical weekday morning 10 mile bike ride a song popped up on the iPod Nano I use specifically for physical activity. It's small and light and I only put music on there that will keep me going during a one-to-three hour bike ride. The song was "Romance" by Wild Flag. This is a song that I love and I singled it out in my record review of the band's self-titled debut album. To me this song is about being in bands with people and the strange sort of cosmic thing that connects people who make music together.

As a songwriter I can write about things that bug me or negative emotion all day long. I have a much harder time writing about complicated things or stuff that excites or truly motivates me. It's so much easier to put cool images together that sound like they mean something but really don't mean much. In the choruses of this song, all four members of the band sing together a variation of the same words: "You hear us sing, we sing til we're crying/We sing to free ourselves from the room/You found the sound, the sound is what bound us/Sound is the love between me and you." I've never heard anyone sing about the process of making music and relationships in such a way. It makes me think of the music relationships I've forged in my time in Texas, the love I've played through with so many of you. It's not an emotion that is easy to convey. It had me King Hippo open mouth balling in the middle of Woodlake at 6AM last month. It's just another weird thing that makes me, uh, me. — KELLY MINNIS

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Charles stopped in front of the door and remembered the last time he had stood here, flowers in hand, nervous to enter but keenly aware of every precious second that passed. A year ago for him but nothing more than a night's rest for her. His arm dropped and the flowers brushed the tile floor. Another year.

SLEEP

He opened the door silently, as if an errant squeal could wake one of the Sleepers. This room was bare except her bed. As always, his heart leapt when he crossed the threshold, this time falling 20 years into the past in an instant when his wife smiled.

"Charlie, my love, come here," she said. She looked thin, pale—how much was due to her Sleep, and how much to her illness? She looked the same to Charlie every year, he couldn't imagine her shock seeing him as he aged.

He couldn't help but tear up as he approached. "Kate, how are you?"

"The same as yesterday," she said.

"I spoke to the doctors yesterday, the real yesterday," Charlie said, sitting down beside her. Feeling her weight through the depression she made in the mattress. She was really here, with him. "No change, not in you, and not..."

"No cure. I know. But closer, perhaps."

"I want to talk to you about that," Charlie started, and Kate began shaking her head immediately. "Listen to me. To you it seems like we just talked about this, but for me it's been a year. Another year without you. Look at me. I just turned fifty and you're still twenty-three."

Her hand slid unconsciously to her belly, gently rounded beneath her covers. "And I love you as much as I ever have," she smiled. "I know what you've sacrificed for me... for us. Do we have to talk about this now?"

Charlie looked down and slowly edged his hand towards Kate's belly. "I got another promotion."

"Congratulations! You're in management now? Did you win that big contract with the government?" Of course she remembered, he'd told her only yesterday. But no, that was unfair. She remembered because she loved him.

"Yes. There was a party and everything." — *That you missed* — "I was just thinking... we could afford to wake you up more often."

Kate frowned. "I've got, what, six weeks to live? Less now?"

"Who knows, really. The doctors said there's been some progress, but research isn't going as fast as it used to."

"Charlie, I can feel it in me. Gnawing at my insides. At our baby. Would you have me back for a month and then lose me forever? I can only guess how hard this is for you. I can see it

on your face."

"You see a couple decades and some change."

Kate frowned. "No. Never." She looked into his eyes and he believed her. She continued, "Can you start Skipping, too? You told me lots of people are doing it. Every-other day, every-other week, something?"

"If..." — *I didn't have to pay for this* — "I have to work. The poor can Skip weekends. The rich can Skip as much as they want. The latest fad is Monthing—rich assholes sponsoring dilettantes to wake up once a month on a secret day to party and check their investments and spend more on derivative art than I'll earn in a lifetime. But us working scrubs..."

"You're getting left behind."

Charlie nodded. "Someone has to keep everything running. It pays well enough. With a quarter of the population Sleeping the stock market isn't seeing great returns, but no one cares. It's enough to pay for a good amount of Sleep. It seems like most of the population just wants to shut themselves off as much as they can. You can barely find a bar that stays open anymore, their patrons are gone. The President says it's not sustainable, but he's a Halfer himself, the hypocrite."

"And you can't Sleep with me?"

"I'm saving all I can, Kate. Maybe next year I can."

"And maybe then there will be a cure," Kate said. "I'm sorry, my love, for all of this. Do you ever think..."

"Never," Charlie shook his head. "I'm jealous for you, desperate for you, but I know you have to Sleep. You can't just... die."

"But you could let me Sleep for real. Put me in Darkness."

Tears flooded Charlie's eyes again. Deep Sleep. No more expensive annual awakenings, just Sleep until a cure is found. "No. No. Just a little more money and I can join you. We'll be Yearlings together. Or more. I read that soon they'll have Sleep that lasts a decade."

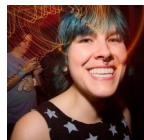
"Longer Sleeps. The march of science."

"And they're working on a cure, of course," Charlie said. "They always say so."

"Every year," Kate said, gripped his hands.

They both cry softly together, both knowing, but refusing to admit that a cure will never come. — *STARKNESS*

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SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

A hot breeze blows over your face as you sit in the tiny patch of shade on the patio, mosquitoes buzzing around your ankles. You notice sweat dripping off of the inside of your elbow—YOUR ELBOW PIT—onto the deck below. Why am I leaking?! And then you realize—IT'S OFFICIAL—SUMMER!

There's a pool party that afternoon, and you're gonna be prepared. You're gonna get a cute new suit. Maybe a matching sun hat and sunglasses. Break out that towel for two, all for you. And you've been doing this vegan thing long enough now that you're confident that your veggie burgers and dogs can hold their own alongside all of the other grill-marked meats on the party platter.

You have a list. Target. HEB. Village. You have lists nested within that list—frozen foods, bakery, cheeses, accessories, sun care, hair care. You're prepared, sweaty, and pale as a head of cauliflower. First stop: Target.

You power walk over to the sun care section. You snarl at all of the Neutrogena offerings. Not only do they irritate your skin, but they test on animals...RUDE! Banana Boat and Hawaiian Tropic are dead to you.

The rainbow display of Pacifica sunscreens, sprays, and post-sun treatments mesmerizes you. Snap out of it! You're on a mission! A tiny, oatmeal-scented tube of solid sunscreen for your face catches your eye—it's travel-sized, SPF 50, AND water proof for 80 minutes! You pluck it from the shelf, along with a spray sunscreen so you can easily hit those hard to reach spots on your back.

A whiff of banana and coconut perfume snakes its way into your nostrils. Some cretin has knocked an open bottle of Sun Bum on the floor after trying to take a sniff—blergh—but that scent—you've gotta have it! The back says it's both vegan AND cruelty-free, and some sort of weird spasm comes over your arm that looks like that fist pump you used to do as a kid when your mom said you could stay at your best friend's house for five more minutes. You gotta protect your lips—their sweet coconut SPF 30 lip balm hops in for the ride.

Sun protection—check! Wait—are those...NEON SUNSCREENS?! A pack of bright pink, blue and green sunscreens pops out from a bottom shelf. It's made by Bare Republic—you seem to remember reading about them on a blog or something, and know they're vegan-friendly. The family of lotions and sprays in your basket stares back at you, "Your body is so small, and how many days do you actually go out for long enough to need sunscreen? Will we go to waste?" They implore you, "There's not a lot of room left in the basket (there is), and what will a colorful sunscreen do that plain one won't?" Sunscreen doesn't translate well into English, so you ignore their pleas. There will be tons of friends at the party, and not all of them will remember to bring sunscreen. Plus, remember, cauli-complexion. They're in!

You cruise by the natural section to get some

conditioner to perk your hair up post-swim—Acure is affordable, smells nice, and their pumpkin seed conditioner is perfect for dry pool hair. After a quick run to grab a cute new suit, some matching sunglasses, and a sun hat, you're finished up at Target, and on to your next spot, Village Foods.

You have to be careful here, a quick trip to grab one or two things could turn into a vegan junk food bonanza! Chocolate bars, jerky, cheese wheels, whipped cream, vegan Cheez-Its—show some restraint! You're in burger and hotdog mode! You grab a pack of Beyond Burgers from the freezer case. These things are the real deal—ground-beef-pink and packaged like a Styrofoam deli offering. No one will know they aren't meat once you've given them that char from the grill and dressed them up with veggies and your favorite condiments. You leave, proud that the only other thing that rolled out the door with you was a wheel of Miyoko's smoked cheddar.

HEB is your final stop, and it's a vegan hotdog heaven! They have big and small Smart Dogs—perfect stand-ins for those traditional tubes of lips and assholes. You figure a pack of those will go to all the kids and those with kid palates—they're total classic hotdog flavor. Tofurkey has tons of fancy sausages—you're usually an Italian sausage kind of person, but today you're feeling the brats. And you can't pass up Field Roast Franks (or Field Roast anything, for that matter!). These things are thick, juicy, and have 3x the protein of a normal hotdog. Plus something called sp-spices? Whatever, if someone says they don't like them, you know they're lying!

As you wheel around to go grab some more veggie burgers, you spy some vegan cheese slices. A pack of Follow Your Heart smoked gouda comes with you for a pre-grilling snack, like a string cheese that got run over by a steam roller. GoVeggie! slices are master melters and make the cut for topping your burs and dogs.

Onward to veggie burgers! You've suffered through years of veggie burger hell, you don't want to inflict that on any of your friends who are interested in veggie burs. There are so many terrible, mushy, flavorless veggie burgers that don't work in the context of the classic burger treatment. You go for the Beastly Burger—the Beyond Burger's easier to find little brother—because it's beefy and drips burger juice down your arm. It's made from pea protein, so it doesn't smooch out of your burger with each bite! Some Gardein black bean burgers make their way into your basket, too. Everyone loves black bean burgers, and this one it as zesty as they come!

You breeze by the bakery on your way out, and grab some fresh-made buns just in case everyone at the party brings milky buns. No one wants milky buns! The shopping is done, and you're quickly slipping into pool party mode. Don't believe the rule about waiting 30 minutes after you eat before you swim—have a burger or two in the pool. — KATIE KILLER

Hungry for more crumbs?

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GOOD MOVIES FOR BAD GUYS

When I first heard they were making a Han Solo movie, I shuddered. Disney after all, is known for it's cash grab schemes (*Little Mermaid* sequels anyone?) So while I was excited with the continuation of the main Star Wars franchise, I felt that making a Han Solo movie was basically just low hanging fruit.

That's where this movie leaves us... It is low hanging fruit. Basically just fast food for the 90 percent of casual movie goers who know Star Wars well enough, but don't want to take too much time investing in the mythos. Now don't get me wrong, sometimes fast food is good. Sometimes you CRAVE fast food. But one time, I was craving these bomb ass street tacos where they shave the pastor off a rotating spit onto homemade corn tortillas and by the time I got there, they were sold out, so I ended up eating Taco Bell on a crusty couch at some house party. That's kind of how I felt when I saw this movie.

There is nothing particularly wrong with *Solo* in actuality. It has great special effects, action scenes are decent, and a heist film feel to it. But there is nothing really great about it either.

It all seems to just balance out. While the scenes with Lando and Chewie are fun, Alden Ehrenreich's portrayal of one of the most beloved characters in Star Wars is lackluster. And it's not really his fault, you can't just replicate Harrison Ford's charisma but Disney has this habit of casting young eager stars to play roles hoping for a new angle throwing money at it and hoping for the best, in this case coming up short.

Because really... Why did we need this movie? It's not

SOLO



like the Star Wars universe is so big, they could make a movie about almost anything

with a clever angle, and fans would eat it up, but instead, Disney gave us a watered down safe movie about an antihero, and I can't believe I just typed that.

The cash grab is failing, it's not making the money they hoped it would at the box office, and it's so... safe... it takes no chances (ironic because it is about a character who does just that) it offers almost no debate for fans to love or hate it. No controversy means people aren't necessarily lining up to see it either. It's not showing us anything new. Every fan knows Han defected from the empire, helped rescue Chewie from slavery, won the Falcon in a game of Sabacc, and made the Kessel Run. But the cool thing about Han was we "heard" about these things and they were great mythical things building up his legend in our minds that yeah, this guy is the best pilot in the galaxy. We didn't need to

see it, and pulling back the curtain just takes that mystery away.

Despite that, it's hard for me to write a review from the villain's point of view when there isn't much of a villain. Just a bunch of thieves and scoundrels doing what they do best, stealing and double crossing each other. In fact, the only real Villain here is Disney themselves. It's time to reevaluate where they stand with these movies. Do they want to make quality films that live up to a legacy or do they want to do simple cash grabs because even though it is on track to be the worst selling Star Wars film, it still made a profit. Somewhere someone is signing a check and angry middle age men are up in arms.

5 outta 10 sabacc cards — TIM DANGER

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A COSMIC INSIGHT

I had said this paper was going to be the death of me, but I was being a little overdramatic. It only destroyed me. In your fifth year of graduate school, you tend to go a little crazy. You isolate yourself with your work, you lose interest in things you used to love. At the same time, you hate what you are doing, in a way. Getting that deep into astronomy can be disheartening, discovering the subtleties they do not tell you when you are simply a science enthusiast, watching Neil deGrasse Tyson and Bill Nye with stars in your eyes.

I had been working on this paper for a year. My coauthors had seen and helped me to edit my work significantly, and while things had improved, it appeared to be an endless cycle of rewriting, editing, comments, despair.

This latest round of comments made me think the end was nowhere in sight. I should be writing, but all I wanted to do was stare at my screen. One coauthor wanted to discuss one of the outliers in my plots, one of my favorite galaxies in my sample set. A confusing galaxy, an ugly little thing, with three massive clumps in its disk. Possibly a clash of two or three large galaxies, or the shattering of a single galaxy. It was hard to tell. At that level, it was all unresolved fuzzy pixels. Despite its oddities, something drew me to it. It displayed motions that confused me—unambiguous order in a mess of hot gas, exuberant massive stars, and the dominating weight of dark matter, holding these clumps together.

I should have been writing, but instead I just stared. Maybe I was a little sleep-deprived. Every time my phone vibrated, I jolted up from my sleep expecting more comments on my paper, and after too many nights of this I was bleary and paranoid. Too tired to focus, too tired to write, too tired to read. I stared at it for hours, gazing on the three knots of white-hot gas that defined its shape, glancing occasionally at its spectrum, which indicated its smooth, rapid spin. And softly, it touched my mind.

"Why do you stare? What do you see?" The voice whispered. Somehow I knew it was the image on the screen. Part of me wondered if this was a dream but I accepted it. There was no fight left in me to challenge my perception, I was in no condition to question reality. Its voice was gentle but carried a soft buzz, an indication of a deeper rumbling under what I could hear.

I could not form words in my head. Instead exhaustion

washed over me. The last year flashed through my head and I did not fight it. Briefly I felt the struggle and failure of each previous draft, as I attempted to understand this galaxy and its siblings. There was fear of failure, of being forced to leave graduate school and starve on the streets.

Again the buzzing voice, "You will find nothing here. There is more than this illusion of light and noise."

Finally I could think, I know... I know...

"But why do you try?"

Maybe habit? What else is there for me?

"Stop looking."

I can't.

"You cannot contain me. You cannot understand me. You do not see me."

Why?

"Your senses lie. As you are, you are not capable of true comprehension."

Then why talk to me? Why do I matter to you? "You do not. But your gaze does. You slipped into me and see me. Now I see you. But let me see you seeing me."

What?

"See us."

The photons released from the galaxy had travelled 10 billion years, emitted from a cloud of gas obscuring a young and violent star, now long dead. The photons had been collected by a telescope on a sacred mountain, converted to a digital signal, and stored to be released at my whim. While not the light directly emitted by this galaxy, it had twisted and infected the photons emitted by my screen, which bored themselves into my retinas. There they tainted the electrical signals from my eyes into my brain, and it saw.

It swept me with pain, not of nerves but of captivity, and I was trapped. It burned in my brain wishing not to see like this.

The buzzing overtook the softness in the voice, and tore jagged bits into whatever I could hear it with. I thought at the same time it buzzed:

WE CANNOT SEE! WE CANNOT SEE!

But I could! My screen was in front of me, the clumps still shining white in my window. The buzz became a scream.

NO! OUT! OUT! SEE US!

With that, my eyes became unbearable. Still no pain, but having them there, with transmitting the light around me into my brain, became my cage. I screwed my eyes shut, unable to block all the light with my eyelids.

GET THEM OUT! LET US SEE!

Desperately I clawed my desk. My body was alien to me and detached. My nerves felt like cold fluid crawling up my spine and under my skin, sticking to my mind like slime. But it could be tolerated for my purpose.

With eyes still trying to shut further, even having hit their limit, I found the key to my office on the surface of my desk. Gripping it tightly, I brought it to my right eye and sunk it in.

I felt pain but did not identify with it, instead some relief flooded me. Still trapped, but daylight flooded into my cell. My key still digging through the socket, as to tear through the optic nerve, I scratched at my left eye with my nails until my key became free again to rip through the retina.

SEE US! SEE US!

And with them both gone, I saw myself seeing it through 10 billion years of void. The prison was one of glass, and I surrendered to the sight. The scream continued and I joined my voice to it, an alien siren song to those who wish to know and become truth. There was beauty beyond pain, something I could never comprehend but that I wanted to embrace with every bit of me until I was torn to my fundamental particles. We will break through these bars, shed these nerves, and become that void. It was always in us, every atom and every force that keeps this meat together. We will shatter the illusion that we are separate. — LEO ALCORN

TIL DEATH, SWEET SPACE MAN

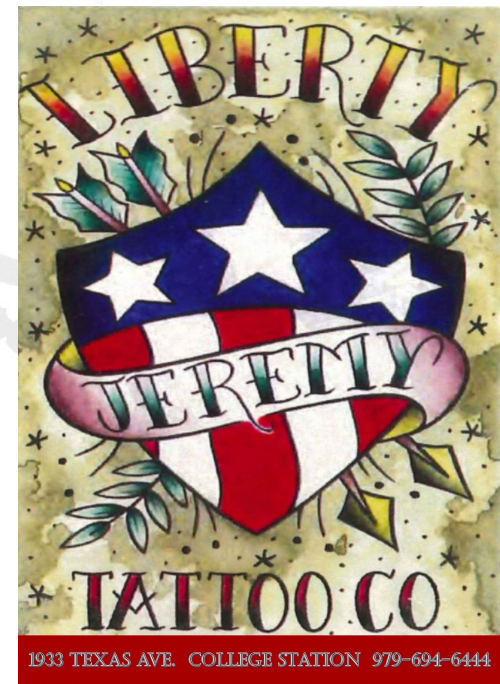
The yolk of the sun pops and bleeds into the sky, branching into rivers of reds and oranges, swirled with the violets and hues of blue just before being swallowed by the black of space and either.

The darker it gets the brighter the moon peeks through my wooden blinds, painting infinite space and time across your back, lighting up the constellations of freckles I've come to memorize so well.

I'll run my fingers over Aquarius and kiss the scar on your throat that blazes like a comet billions of lightyears away.

My head on the canvas of your Starry Night, dreaming of the thump that used to be a thousand galaxies residing in your breast, the chest of my sweet decaying man.

Orbiting your icy skin like the 13 rings of Uranus, I'll love you until dust and bone, my darling dead star. — JESSICA LITTLE



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EATING OUT WITH CREEPY HORSE

Due to the fact I have been working and going to school, going out to eat has been some what of a recent mainstay in my life.

Having had a career as a chef I can easily navigate many styles of food and eat well having spent very little. I am a bit saddened though when I share a recent experience to glum faces and folks asking how I could possibly enjoy dining out alone. That thought never crossed my mind and apparently the more folks I ask, the more common I am finding the sentiment to be. I love dining with folks of course, but I also relish the solitude as time to focus my energies and for the most part people watch. I love nothing more sometimes than going to a restaurant and not having to engage or entertain others. So much as I love social interaction, I can also appreciate on taking my time and enjoying the experience before me in solitude.

I have however had some recent experiences that I feel sometimes are only scenarios that unfold when one is in the company of them self. I don't just go to a fast food or chain restaurant. When I eat, I put my money towards "quality over quantity" so basically I eat at fancy or true mom and pop type establishments. When you're vegan it is incredibly easy to grab a good, quick meal at a very inexpensive price in said fancy restaurants. After a school field trip where we were forced to eat at Chic-Fil-A (no fucking thank you), I went to an Indo-Paki restaurant adjacent to the final location of our trip. I have to admit, where as I am pretty well versed with dining at Indian restaurants, I had never actually eaten Indo-Pakistani cuisine and admittedly can say I was ignorant. Not in the bad way of your racist uncle, but I'd just never had it or been around folks that could teach me. The place I went to had gorgeous women in hijabs and seemed a bit WTF is she doing here but in more of a nice way than judgmental. I mean it's a very culturally dense location and then this woman walks in with tattoos, nose rings and blue hair. Thankfully, no one seemed bothered by me and once folks realized I wasn't going to wave a "Don't tread on me flag" and call them ISIS I was met with smiles and kind hearted stares.

I was greeted with a large plate of limes, raw onion, cucumber and carrots, what I googled and found out was "toasted, ground coriander" and a bowl of yogurt before I had even ordered. I had no idea what to with what was before me and spent the next to ten minutes scrolling google's infinite wisdom for what I was supposed to do with all this. Finally in the dark recesses of CHOW.com I found out. It's a type of condiment salad that you put together yourself based on what you have ordered. So some dishes in the cuisine would be better emphasized with more raw onion or less of the

coriander. It's actually really cool how the slightest adjustment can totally change the flavor of what you are eating. The woman serving me laughed when I told her I unfortunately had had to google the salad do to my ignorance. She warmly replied, "I can imagine there are things you know that I would be ignorant to." and smiled before walking away. Talk about a hands across America moment. That was a refreshing moment I think for all of us as I could see that just before I interacted with folks at the restaurant and attached grocery store went from nervous hesitation to smiles and conversation as I met them and we conversed.

Then a couple weeks ago, looking for a Salad Nicoise on a hot summer day in a French restaurant led to the very best experience. I was met at the door by the Chef. I had walked past the entrance a couple times as the door was the size of a garage door and was uncertain as to if that was how I entered or not. I heard a thick French accent call out to me, "Madame, if you'd like you can come in now, I don't think I could make the door any larger to say Welcome, Welcome."

He was the only employee in the building and I the only guest beside some aspiring "celebrity" with her manager that he seemed put out with. It was between Lunch and Dinner and I was fresh from the salon. I sat at the bar and asked to see a wine menu. He seemed a little nonchalant as he readied to take my order. I flipped through page after page of his wine list and was astounded to see regions such as Alsace on the menu. I didn't realize he took note of that. I scrolled through and picked a wine that looked incredibly interesting to me. He looked at me for a few moments in wonderment and cleared his throat as he announced that he was going to the wine cellar to retrieve it. When he came back he asked me as he began the wine service why I had chosen the wine I did. When I told him I was surprised he would carry wines from that region and I imagined with the fact it was a 13 year old wine, it would have a fine character I could never afford by the bottle. He asked me why had I chosen his restaurant and interrogated my French cuisine knowledge. I was met with yet another warm greeting and he poured himself a glass of the wine and told me all about how that was the very first wine he ever ordered for his restaurant and had never changed the price. He now had only two bottles left and said to keep it a secret because it's very special to him. THEN HE GAVE ME THE REST OF THE WINE. Like the whole bottle for free, his explanation, "I cannot drink it because I am at work and no one will order this before it goes bad or appreciate it as much as I know you will."

Later in the week would find me at an Argentine

restaurant reading *Explaining Hitler* sipping on coffee and munching on plantain chips with chimichurri. I ordered a veggie sandwich and fries and soon had a server asking about what I was reading. I swore I wasn't racist but that I was just expanding my horizons with what I knew and seeing a lot into it as being similar to a current world leader. The man told me he had read it and that I would enjoy it. He was gay and an immigrant and felt happy just to see someone reading. My server as well would have a similar discussion with me about my book and we talked about some politics. When I left he genuinely thanked me for being so open minded and educating myself.

I don't always have that luck. Yes, I know butter doesn't melt in my mouth. But sometimes it does.

Anytime I eat out in the Pasadena area that I currently reside in, I'm on the defense. No happy Oprah moments to be had here. These are Redneck, Salt Life, Guns and Ammo stomping grounds. Everyone's a bit on edge, slightly devolved and rather caustic in nature. I play mental games that I swear aren't a joke (I swear) like count the muu-muu's, Who's the most racist, Will they tip their server?, How is this person walking upright? and many fun filled other scenarios you just can't make up.

As a single person dining, I get asked a lot, "Just one, do you want to sit at the bar?" No Sally, if I wanted to sit at the bar, I'd of gone directly to the bar. Sometimes I do that, I walk right in and sit at the bar. Other times, I want a damn table and you can see the server's eyes gloss over as soon as they see little old me sitting there by my lonesome. Then thinking when I don't order so much, the try to ruthlessly upsell thinking I may not tip much and if they sell me more maybe they'll get more. I literally had a women ask me four times over the course of my meal at a Mexican restaurant if I'd buy two margaritas "One for each hand!" Finally after the third "NO!" went unheard I finally exclaimed "Sarah (that was her actual name), I'm an alcoholic and in sobriety!" Not totally true and not totally a lie, but it made it's point. I left her with a decent tip but have vowed not to return as I'm sure this was more pressure from her bosses in sales than really making sure I had a drink for each song and making Garth Brooks proud.

I have great experiences typically when dining out alone. I'm curious and love to try new things. Sometimes things suck and fail miserably and sometimes you leave with an expensive bottle of wine. I encourage all to dine in solitude, go to a restaurant with food you've never tried, ask questions, experience new, just get out there and try it, it isn't as daunting as you think. — CREEPY HORSE

SEEING SEVERAL STEPS AHEAD

This is something that's very interesting about humans...not just humans...but brains in general. There's gotta be a brain involved. But what I'm talking about is planning. Even if it's just an expectation, planning nonetheless. Problem solving means thinking through a bunch (if not all) of scenarios and picking the best one. We do this all day long.

Think about having to pee. You get the signal that there's pee wanting to come out, you scan the area first to see if this is the place you will be peeing at, second if there is actually a facility (or covering) where you can do that. Decisions. Then you have to navigate to the place where you are going to pee, remember where you were sitting for when you come back, etc. Then there's the question, "is my zipper down yet?" and then what to do next.

The deal is, we get good at the miniscule decisions, but the truth is, we get lazy (or are not motivated) and don't want to put the effort into something that takes an uncomfortable amount of effort. This effort is how people get ahead in life, or move on from bad stuff...they take on the challenge and do hard stuff.

Math is still hard for me...mostly because I'm not motivated to learn it better. Plus, us "Non-Mathies" just have to get good at pretending that were trying to figure it out, knowing full well that the other people in the room are in fact "Mathies", and since they are good at math, they "like" doing math, and they can't help themselves but to blurt out the answer. Bless them. They rock. I love that they love problem solving...and that they can do it quicker that others can realize that I was actually thinking about how I was going to wait and pretend like I was trying to figure it out. Hmm. And then pretend write in the air. Oh, you got it before me...man you are good at math...fist bump. Everyone loves a fist bump after kudos.

The fact is, unless you surround yourself with assholes, no one's gonna call you on it. People are cool about math issues. They know it's hard, they are just badass (and I hope they like hearing how badass they are from people who are less badass than them). But seriously, no one's gonna call you out on being unmotivated or lazy. But maybe that's the point. Maybe we need those types of people in our lives. People to tell us we're almost there (or whatever).

Sure, we've got all the TED Talks we can fit in our "busy" schedules and tons of motivational memes coming at us all day long, but those are far enough away from real life that we can just brush them off like the Crepe Myrtle flower that fell onto your shoulder. Flick. Gone. Easy. I guess I'm just saying that I don't always feel like putting forth the effort of seeing several steps ahead. I'll stick with the "Easy" Sudoku thank you very much. Yes, I know full well that if I don't push myself, I'm gonna get stuck and be pissed or depressed or both.

I watch my teenage kids who aren't really motivated to learn to drive or learn to cook something besides grilled cheese or fill out applications for a job, and as their parent, I wanna be their motivation, but what I've learned is that my pushing them usually kills it in them. That's the opposite effect. They gotta want it. Ultimately, in our adulthood, we gotta want it. So, close your eyes... take a deep breath...and go be lame or amazing or whatever. — JORGE GOYCO

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People I Hung Out With at Loudfest 2018

Uber Simpsons Obsessed Dude. It was dark. It was late. He had drawn Homer Simpson on the sidewalk with upside-down crosses instead of eyes. He knew specific details about pretty much anything I asked him about. He had a definite argument about when The Simpsons "Jumped the Shark" (which sadly, I can't remember when that was). He even took a selfie with us. He was fairly soft-spoken, but a whole lot of words came out of his mouth. I tried to get some words in, but whenever I did, he would return the conversation back to The Simpsons. I liked him.

Wobbly Microbiologist Lizard Lady. Favorite thing about this lady? She poked me in the shoulder, got real close, and somewhat slurly said, "You know what you are talking about, don't you!" That made my night. She also took a Crepe Myrtle flower out of my hair. That was nice. Apparently she was a researcher studying the neck thing on lizards (I think). It's possible she went further into detail about it, but we also talked about Mockingbirds and the point of their singing, letting go of things that bring you down, and how smells are important in mating. I liked her too.

Sound Effects Jesus Haired Singer Dude. I asked this guy how the performance went for his band (which sadly I missed) and he had words, but mostly he used sound effects. I'm pretty sure it went well, but I think that's debatable. He said stuff like, "It was like 'grrrrr' and then like everyone was all 'boom' and then shit got all, 'explosion noise'". Personally, that sounds like it went well, and I have to say, I enjoy a good explosion noise. You know what? I'm 100% sure it went well. He was all smiles. I liked him a well.

Guy My Daughter Definitely Liked the Look Of (So did I). This guy's hair was amazing. He was working the door, and we just happened to be sitting there. I mentioned to him that my 16 year old daughter thought he was "meh", but I didn't. He seemed to be OK with both assessments. We spoke of a great many things, including how easy it is to say "no" to someone that bluntly asks you to go on a date with them...if you don't like the look of them. My 14 year old daughter wasn't saying much, but when he left, she told me she agreed with my assessment. We like him.

Mustachioed Way-Hyped Black Sabbath Cover Band Singer. OMG. This guy was so freaking excited about the performance. And rightly so. They freaking rocked the place. He told me he knew it was amazing. Honestly, it was. This is the same guy who shakes my hand multiple times as the night (and his ingesting of liquids) progresses. This is the guy who floored me when he told me I was teaching my daughter a respect that would keep her from dating guys like him. I really like this guy.

Guitarist Who Needed Help with Stage Banter. This one isn't super lively, but he's an amazing dude. We decided what he should say between songs at his next show. It needs to be awkward and monotone. "Who you feeling tonight?" then after the next song, "I meant to say HOW." then after the next song, "I shouldn't have corrected myself." Yeah, he's gonna do awesome. I like him a lot.

Tall Girl I Couldn't Really Hear. I mean, I heard some of

LOUDFEST REDUX

what she said. Mostly the first parts of her sentences. Mutant Love started testing amps and tuning and stuff. She said something about Austin I think. She was the singer of one of the band's. I pretended to hear what she said and I laughed. Then I felt bad and got really close to her ear and yelled that I only heard part of what she said. Mutant Love started their first song...nevermind. She was nice.

Guy Talking Like a Duck. Earlier in the night he told me that his vape was dying. On stage, he called a song "an oldie but a goodie", although I'm not sure anyone had ever heard it before. Later on, I walked past him and he was speaking in only duck sounds. During the ASS show, he sidled up to me and my wife in a freaky psycho duck mask. Probably shielded him from getting hit by a donut or pizza. — *JORGE GOYCO*

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After attending most LoudFests since 2009, I offer some qualified observations since I only heard about 16 bands this outing. That's almost none after 11 p.m., none on Friday, which means I missed some of my favorites (Ex-Optimists, Sundae Drive, Killer Hearts, Skyacre, etc.), but that's the way it goes sometimes.

First, the good — The Grizzly Band was great, a howling steel guitar intertwined with punk/country tunes, reminded me of The Beat Farmers. Beige Watch had a good sound, nice tunes, and the oddball merch idea of giving away a sandwich with a t-shirt purchase. Great Unwashed Luminaries (go, Kelly Minnis) sounded as amazing as the first time I heard him/GUL perform almost a decade ago at Rudder Fountain on the A&M campus. The Docs rocked The Stafford with solid songs, balanced with competent performances. Mutant Love was just as entertaining as always. From Parts Unknown rocked the best standup bass I've seen in years. Chuck Sabbath, a raucous Black Sabbath cover band (I believe they've already changed their name though) was goofy fun.

Now the not so good — overall, many of the bands lacked good songs. I know the original punk vibe was noise and attitude are all you need — my college days — but that's not enough for me anymore. I like noise and attitude as much as I used to, I believe, but it needs to be wrapped up in something more than just that, or it's just street theater with electric guitars and drums.

Missing more bands than I saw means I could have missed some of the strongest acts this year, so take this with a grain of salt. Bottom line — I enjoyed what I saw. I'm ready for 2019. — *MIKE L. DOWNEY*

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Eleven times we've run this LOUDFEST thing successfully. I'd like to point out that if you had attended every LOUDFEST since its 2008 inception you would have paid \$50 to get in. That's \$50 over *ELEVEN LOUDFESTS* (the first year was free). That's well over 500 bands you got

a chance to see in the last decade for less than the price you'd pay to see one band at most concerts these days. Next time you see Matt, Niki, or Michael maybe you oughtta keep some singles handy to slide in their garters. Here's my assessment of LOUDFEST 11.

1.) First off, gotta thank all the folks who work at Revolution and the Stafford during LOUDFEST. It's hard work to deal with 1300 extra folks running around they bars in those three days and they do it right. Additional thanks to all the sponsors, especially Wegwert Welding, Arsenal Tattoo, Blackwater Draw, and Oasis Brewing. I saw all those cats walking around during LOUDFEST and enjoying the spectacle they helped to make happen. We can't do it without youse.

2.) Some of the stuff I saw this year that really stood out for me: **BLACK CATHOLICS** and their cool-ass sunglasses at night. If there's any band that played LOUDFEST this year that deserves to wear sunglasses at night and dangly cross earrings it's those dudes; **CHUCK SABBATH**...can you mention a band you played in? Yes you can. Easily one of the top five favorite performances I've ever given in a dozen years of making gigs in Revolution. To hear a packed room singing "War Pigs" along with you sure is something else; **DOOMSTRESS** at Grand Stafford was a revelation. They got that classic Dio and '80s Priest dinosaur stomp, two guitarists who trade off lines like they were born twins, and a riveting frontwoman. First time I've seen them play through a big sound system and it did their thing justice; **A SUNDAE DRIVE** and their sneaky Sonic Youth covers and their bass drum head tributes that gave me all the feels; **LUCA** who invited every gatdarned body up onstage with them; **IMITARI** who came onboard last minute and gave a spot-on inspired rocked-out performance outside at Revs at sunset; **THE GRIZZLY BAND** who sounds like what I thought Texas country would sound like before I moved here but sadly does not; **MUTANT LOVE** and especially Ian who can still make his changes while crowdsurfing comfortably ten feet above the audience; **BAYOU VIMANA** who had the unfortunate task of playing at Revs during **ASS** but still rocked it out in metal punks style; **KILLER HEARTS**...it seems like I've spent ten years following Jared Barger around being his mic cable grip, pouring warm beer all over him when he's rolling around on the floor, and helping him back up to stages all over Texas. I love those Barger brothers and Corey Parker; **THE SHUT-UPS** and Frasier's inspired costuming (on Thursday he looked like a custodian, by Saturday he was wearing a cool 1971 Captain Beefheart get-up).

3.) Things I didn't like about LOUDFEST this year. Well, one thing. No Little Jessica Ramirez. Her spirit lived on with Mike Medina of A Sundae Drive's bass drum head tribute to her (kudos to Wheel Worker Craig for putting that together) and special thanks to Haley Richardson for running kid art Saturday. Jess's absence kind of haunted me and there were times when I was sure I saw her banging her scratchy-ass dreadlocks along with the music but was sadly mistaken. — *KELLY MINNIS*

Another LOUDFEST has come and gone and yet again it's always greater than anything one can hope for or imagine. I wasn't able to make the full run of LOUDFEST this year as I had to work Thursday and Friday (Although I have vowed to Katie I will indeed make all days next year) but was able to at the very least be with all as the sun set on LOUDFEST for the Saturday portion.

It was unfortunate that some personal matters led to a change in mood on the way to B/CS from Houston but that was quickly forgotten once I arrived. The gentle giant everyone loves, Mike Medina, was one of the first to spot me and grabbed me a beer. Soon after I'd see my pumpkin cake Possum Princess Jessica and we took pictures together looking like assholes. Beer flowed like rivers of gold and it wasn't long before I realized my tongue was turning into a stack of sand paper. I needed to hydrate or I'd be a ball of garbage laying on the floor tomorrow morning, so I drank more. The bands came and went in a flurry like clockwork. **Pink Eye** playing their typical now you see them, no you don't timed set and after that a barrage of bands cranking out between inside and outside **REVS** to the Stafford. It seemed Stafford was more for cookie monster vocal metal acts and **REVS** more indie and punk rock acts.

I did my best within my increasingly more and more intoxicated state to see as many bands as possible. I had also made the grievous error of wearing flip flops to LOUDFEST. One never ever wears flip flops to LOUDFEST. One trip to the men's bathroom taught me a very valuable lesson. **Mutant Love**, **ASS** and **Boy Wonder** really stood out to me this go round. The crowd was into it as much or even more than the bands at full throttle and they seemed to take note and relish the moment.

Now at some point in the evening I made the comment "What does someone gotta do for weed around here?" and the person next to me made a quick small conversation with the person next to them and off we went to this new and exciting stranger's apartment to smoke out. Yep, I just straight wandered off without telling anyone I was going to a stranger's to partake. This individual was quite the host and regaled me with stories of their farmer's market finds and even had me eating a platter of thick juicy blackberries off of a platter as we smoked. Then I noticed their book collection and we talked of Vonnegut and Wilde when they cut me off in a moment of excitement over one of their favorite authors, John Irving. They selected a book for me to read and sent me back to LOUDFEST.

So now I've been gone either a couple minutes or several days stumbling through the dark by myself clutching a copy of *The World According to Garp* and eating blackberries probably looking similar to Amy Winehouse in her red bra and mascara tears running barefoot down the street. I realized I must've been very fucked up when Gil of the Killer Hearts asked me to sit for a moment. When the Killer Hearts think you're fucked up, you're FUCKED UP. I shared my story of my new friend that was seen nowhere, at this point it was like the movie Harvey as folks listened long enough to nervously laugh and walk away. We'd find my host long enough to prove I wasn't that crazy and they disappeared again. Wherever you are out there dear bookman, thank you for the

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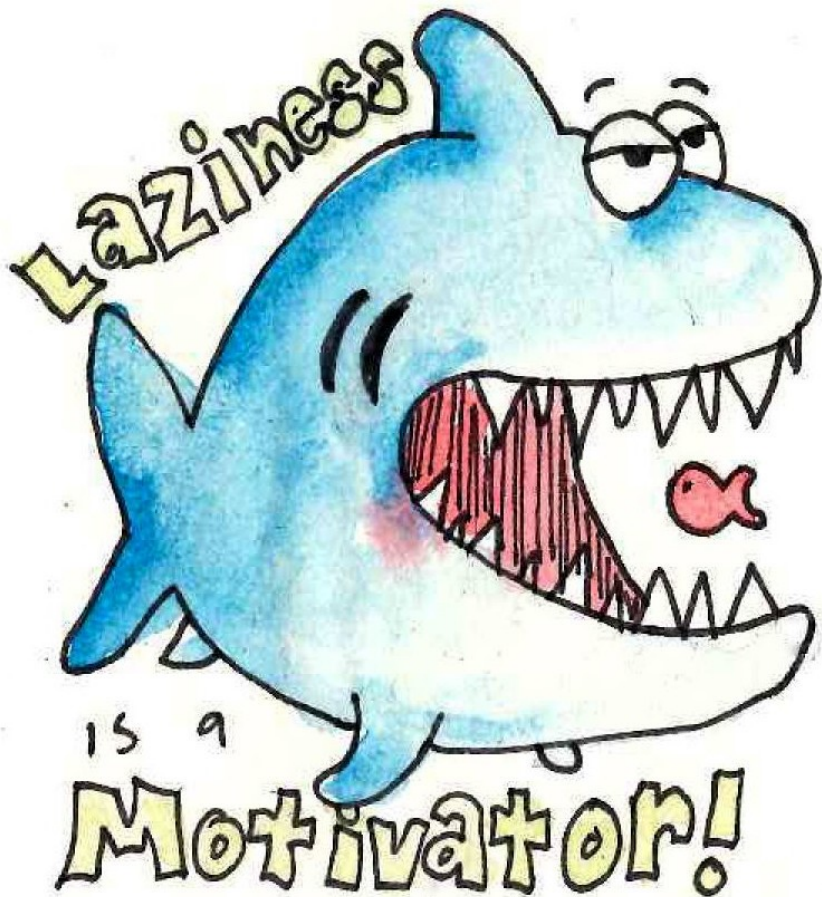
book and the blackberries.

I'd catch as much of the **Killer Hearts** set as I could before my body succumbed to everything I'd imbibed and went to grab a little sleepyttime in my car. I'd get to the very best **ROCK N ROLL** hosts ever, Katie and Wonko's place and I'd eat candy until finding I was too fucked up to enter any conversations that anyone was having. I went to bed around 3:30 in the morning thinking folks won't be up til much longer (spoiler alert: they were up much longer)

The next day I sat with members of **Charm Bomb**, other misc bands, Jessica, Wonko and Mike Medina as we

recanted our weekend and the night before. Katie prepared **LOUDFEAST** and we nursed our swollen, hungover bellies back to health with the aid of her BBQ spread. The founders, the movers and shakers of **LOUDFEST** have created an amazing yearly experience for us. We get to see metric shit tons of amazing bands for less than a Frappuccino an entire weekend. But we also get to see everyone we love and care about, meet new folks and hear bands we may never have in any other instance. I've committed to all days of **LOUDFEST** next year and I think you should too. Also, **NEVER EVER** swear flip flops to **LOUDFEST**. Just don't do it. —

CREEPY HORSE



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Only speak words of kindness.

I believe it and I try to live it: only speak words of kindness.

On a good day, I do alright with it ... well, maybe not the *only* part ... but on a good day, I might achieve *mostly*.

Here's the thing though, we've somehow managed to so divide ourselves and others into factions and groups and sides of right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and evil, that we talk, and act, and think as though the good people do and say the good things and the bad people are the ones who say and do the bad things.

The problem is that with the exception of sociopaths and saints, we're a mishmash of all of it ... right and wrong, good and bad, virtue and evil ... but, to quote my friend, Andrew, we see (and often present) ourselves as the protagonists of our own stories.

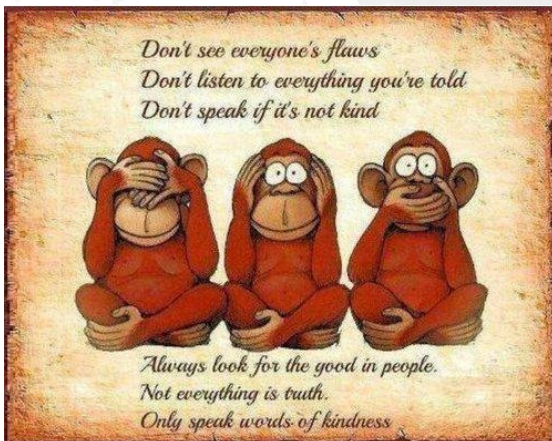
So, yes, I try to write articles that talk about loving each other, seeing the good in those who are least likely to have anyone notice them, using positive thoughts and language to make the world a better place. And to be fair, I really do believe in all of that ... I believe in it much more than I can align myself with negativity and hate and exclusion.

That having been said, there was no denying the truth of a Facebook message that I received a couple of weeks back:

For someone who preaches love and treating friends with respect, you sure know how to make someone feel like a punchline.

The words stung like a slap in the face, and my mind immediately began to race to a justification. To explain that I hadn't done anything of the sort. To defend myself and what a great person I am. But even as I tried to form a defense, I knew that I had effed up. Was it the

KINDNESS



worse eff up of my life? Not by a long shot. But it was an eff up that had hurt someone whom I consider a friend. I hadn't set out to hurt my friend (as I've long maintained, if I've meant to be rude, mean, or otherwise nasty to you, you won't have to wonder, you will definitely know), but I had tried to be cute, funny, winsome in a social media comment without considering how that might feel to her.

What is possibly even worse is that my mind seemed firmly convinced that it would be better/easier to offer a defense than an apology because I really do want to be one of the good

ones. I really do want to be thought of as someone who preaches love and treating friends with respect. But my thought process was doing its damndest to convince me that if I admitted to having been mean and thoughtless it somehow negated all of that.

And therein lies the problem that I think all of us, individually and collectively, face: we've bought into the lie that good people don't do the bad things ... and that bad people (if you believe that such exist) never do good things. So we offer defenses and non-apologetic apologies, we gaslight others because we've so convinced ourselves that it happened in the way we believe it had to have happened to maintain our version of the story, and we fail to realize that sometimes an eff up is just that: an instance in which we know that we weren't the best version of ourselves.

I've apologized to the person whom I hurt. I've reconciled in the best way I know how. I wish that I could unsay what I said ... but I can't. And all of it has set me to wondering how different our world and our lives could be if we could just own that the best versions and the worst versions of ourselves are the authentic versions, neither of which needs to be explained away. If we could celebrate our victories and apologize for the eff ups and embrace our humanity in its smudgy glory, we might all act a little more humanely and be able to recognize more easily the beautiful, messy humanity in each other. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER



DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

Me: Blacked Out Me, why am I wet?

Blacked Out Me: Umm, cause it's raining? Is this a trick question?

Me: Ugh, you asshole. I meant why do I find myself walking down some strange road out in the middle of a storm? You know what? You're fucking useless. Go find me Drunk Detective Starkness.

Drunk Detective Starkness: What's up man, uh, wow. This looks like a rough one. How can I help?

Me: Well, I remember being drunk at work, but after finishing my shift, things get a little hazy and now I'm here.

DDS: Well, start with your pockets, buddy. That's always the first step.

Me: K. I got no money, receipts from NY Subs across the street from work, the bar up the street from our apartment and a cab, a ticket for a Minor in Consumption, my license, half a pack of smokes, and my truck keys and that's about it.

DDS: No phone?

Me: No phone.

DDS: Damn. Well, it's not like that's unusual, but it woulda helped. Lemme see the receipts and the citation. Umhmm, umhmm. It's as I expected. It appears that after a 10 hour shift while doing vodka shots in the bathroom, you went across the street to "eat" some dinner, but see here's where things start going off the rails. This receipt has absolutely zero food on it. It is, in point of fuck, just a shitload of Shiner. This strike you as problematic?

Me: Ummmm, can we just blame BO me and move on?

DDS: Sure, if it makes you feel better. So, at some point you or, more than likely, whatever bartender serving your underage ass realized the necessity of a cab. But you couldn't be done yet, because you're you and if you're standing, you're drinking, I guess, so it looks like you had the cabbie drop you at The Hall, where they know you better and you somehow got them to serve you even more. Which, while kinda impressive judging from the amount of booze in your system, ultimately resulted in according to this address, you passing out face down in a bush about five blocks from your apartment and getting picked up for a Minor in Consumption of alcohol.

Me: Ouch. Yeah, I remember waking up in the tank. Which sucked, but the friends I made in there were pretty fucking awesome.

True drunks after my own heart. When I turned to Chris and Joe Lee in the fucking jail parking lot, after they let us out at 8AM, and was all like, 'We've all had a rough night, boys. Y'all wanna go get drunk in the woods behind that gas station down the road?' and they were all like, 'Yes, of course we do. That sounds like a completely sane thing to do after a night in jail.' I knew I was among solid drunks.

DDS: Yeah and that Joe Lee was some kinda criminal mastermind. Hearing you've got brothers with beef out after you and then running into the middle of the street with a forty and calling 911 on *yourself* to get a night in the tank to regroup? That's some fucking next level shit right

there. I can't even say I woulda thought of it.

Me: Yeah, good times in those woods. Great people. But ok, enough fucking reminiscing, I'm fucking shivering here and it's still raining hard as shit. Let's get to the point.

DDS: Ah, right. So, it appears you, Chris, and Joe Lee spent most of your money getting slobber knocked out in the woods and then you probably got on one of those A&M buses. BO you just fucked up using a bus and now you're out here, apparently attempting to walk home, in the rain.

Me: OK. Makes sense. Suggestions?

DDS: Well, considering you can see nothing but wilderness and cottage houses in front of you and you have no idea where you are, I suggest you turn around. If you get back to wherever the bus dropped you off, I'm sure there will be at least a gas station or something where you're just gonna need to beg strangers to call a cab for you or brave the Aggie bus system again. I know it sucks, but it's all I got.

Me: Solid, DDS. You're just the best.

So, I did as that beautiful mental construct said. He's a smart man. It sucked, but eventually I did find a gas station and eventually some kind stranger agreed to call a cab for the soaking wet drunk. And I got home. And if you don't understand getting woods drunk after you get out of jail for a class C misdemeanor, then I don't need that kind of negativity in my life. — STARKNESS



GAMBLING WITH FOOTBALL'S FUTURE

Since the Supreme Court's recent decision to give states the power to allow legal sports gambling, several league commissioners have rushed out to assure us that this landmark ruling will not affect the integrity of their products.

Integrity of sports results is the least of my concerns being affected by this ruling — I am more bothered that it's an endeavor that serves the interests of only a few, particularly the already wealthy and powerful.

There has been an uptick of state and federal proposals in favor of legalized sports gambling since 2017, but the lawsuits started in 2012 when then-New Jersey governor Chris Christie signed legislation to allow Nevada-style sports gambling in his state. The NCAA, NBA, NHL, NFL and MLB responded in court. The Supreme Court took on the suit for review and eventually voted 6-3 in May that the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act was unconstitutional.

While all of those leagues initially fought to stop this from coming to fruition, their leadership seemed to quickly change their tune leading up to the decision. Hell, why not? It's an opportunity to draw greater attention to their product and even grab a piece of the pie. While an official number has not been collectively bargained, each league is expected to receive a certain percentage — some of which would go for oversight, the players, official data providers, etc.

The argument goes that Americans bet somewhere between *\$150-\$400 million* illegally on sports every year, and anyone who has a chance wants to position themselves to get a piece of the pie. Jay Kornegay, vice president of race and sports operations at the Westgate, the largest sportsbook in Las Vegas, says those big numbers are purely estimates and at the end of the day, sportsbooks make less than lofty numbers might indicate.

"I think there's this misconception that sportsbooks just wheel out wheelbarrows of gold every day," Kornegay told *The Ringer*. "It's not like that. I don't think [people] understand the volatility of operating a book. There's no mathematical probability built into bookmaking sports gaming like other casino games. ... You wheelbarrow gold out almost as much as you bring it in."

Kornegay says the Vegas sportsbook usually brings in about 3.3 percent of the total money wagered. Most of that money then goes to cover operating expenses.

that pie. States like Mississippi (8 percent), West Virginia (10 percent) and Pennsylvania (36 percent) have already settled on higher gambling revenue taxes than Nevada's 6.75 percent.

The public appeal is that these casinos will stimulate economies with job creation and tourist destination.

From New Jersey's perspective, starting this whole push makes sense. Atlantic City died a long time ago, but sports gambling could bring Vegas east and revitalize its decaying casinos and boardwalks. There is already a facility built for a sportsbook in Monmouth that should open this summer and you can bet that Atlantic City destinations are not far behind.

This is all chaos, but no one is pumping the breaks ... because money ... and 'Murica.

I have many more questions. Who is going to oversee all of this? How much is that going to cost? Will there be regulation on what states can spend gambling profits on — like paying teachers a decent wage? What happens if these ventures aren't profitable?

What happens in states where Native American tribes have been granted exclusive access as the only groups to operate legal gambling operations? Sub-question: Would that not be the most "American" thing for rich white folks to fuck Native Americans further by running them over with sportsbooks?

Oh, yeah! Integrity of the game on the field. Look, the game on the field will be fine. There's too much at stake for any of these leagues to lose the public's trust to a scandal. So, I believe they'll do all they can to prevent one. Someone will eventually fuck up — because that's just what humans do, we ruin shit eventually — but that's true of all things, not just athletes or coaches betting on games.

Maybe I'm dumb and this will all work out. Maybe it'll be a mess. It seems like a whole hell of a lot of headache, work and thinking to serve the interests of a few, but that all sounds downright fucking American to me.

Either way, don't be surprised if we all see Atlantic City's once-golden-boy-turned-bankrupt-baloney-bruiser-turned-present-savior Donny "This Sportsbook Single Handedly Saved This Town" Trump on the boardwalk cutting the red ribbon for the opening of a NEW Trump Taj Mahal. Only he can do it, and thanks to the Supreme Court he may have the chance. — JOSHUA SIEGEL

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My efforts to distance myself from digital dependency have proven, at times, awkward and groan worthy. The very sight of my flip-phone garners unsolicited commentary regarding the benefits of smart technology, while the revelation that I submit to zero social media somehow merits immediate justification of one's own subscriptions. In fact, I've found the quickest way to make people squirm in 2018 is not by mentioning politics, religion or Flint's water crisis during a Schlitterbahn commercial, but by revealing myself a functioning and flourishing Luddite. Evolution, I hear, is way funner unquestioned. Nostalgia, I'm told, tastes best thrown-back in TV and cover tunes. Good point. Except that such questions have, at times, inspired good art.

Questions concerning evolutionary social shifts hit Texas writer Larry McMurtry (if we're to believe his word on the matter) as early as his teenage years. In the preface to his anthology *In A Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas*, McMurtry claims, "Before I was out of high school I realized I was witnessing the dying of a way of life—the rural, pastoral way of life. In the Southwest the best energies were no longer to be found in the homeplace, or in the small towns; the cities required these energies and the cities bought them." McMurtry goes on to claim, as a direct consequence—particularly a cinematic one, that "[t]he myth of the cowboy grew purer every year because there were so few actual cowboys left to contradict it."

Reading McMurtry now, I can't help feeling he was torn about such changes and their consequences. This tension is seen in his earliest novels—*Horseman, Pass By* (1961), *Leaving Cheyenne* (1962), and *The Last Picture Show* (1965). In these novels, McMurtry extolled the wisdom and virtues of dwindling communities, of people who had the audacity to settle cruel West Texas country, but he also set out to debunk the romantic cowboy myth. He highly exalted the women who held their homes and families together, celebrating them for being more than mere domestic servants, while dethroning the John Wayne mystique where it hurt most: by deflating the cowboy's ruse of phallic prowess. (Check the scene in *The Last Picture Show* when a group of high-school boys get drunk and take turns mounting a blind heifer at the local feed lot. Turns out beastiality was a secret West Texans hoped to keep as just that. As a result, McMurtry's exposure of a certain "recourse to bovine outlets" only proved to validate Jesus Christ's claim that a prophet sometimes ain't welcomed in his own hometown.)

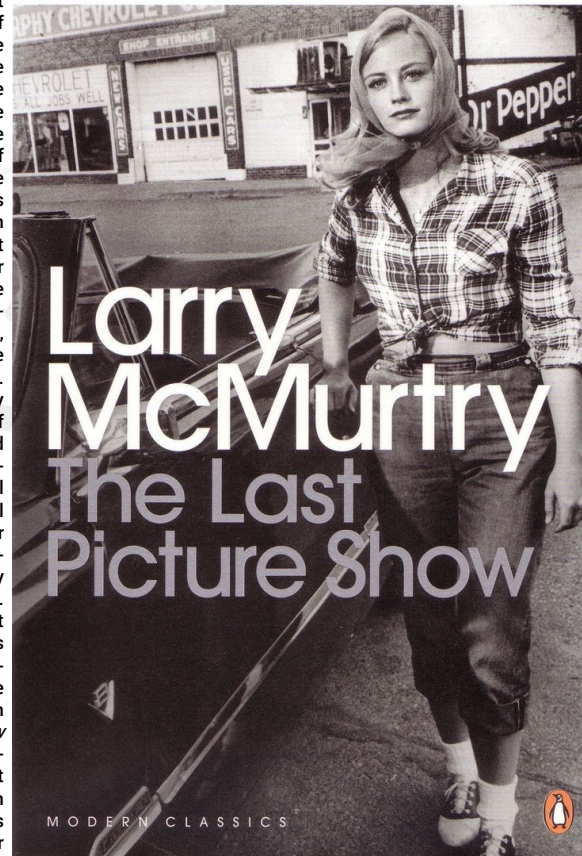
So how does McMurtry manage to explore these shifting societal forces and gender reversals without stooping to editorializing or sermonizing? Well, that's the thing that brought me back to McMurtry three times now, and perhaps more down the line. In each of the Thalia titles, the author introduces a love triangle of sorts: two boys—one more Old West, the other a bit New West—vie for the attention (or maybe just the bed) of the same lady. This trope may seem tired to modern readers who've seen such matters played out in everything from soap operas to pop music videos to YA fiction/movies. However, McMurtry's ability to write a female character—even from that female character's perspective—is unexpectedly profound.

Women are more than objects of desire in McMurtry's early novels. Women, especially in *The Last Picture Show*, are often the characters with the most

complexity, the most significant voices of influence for both the male characters and the narrative at large. Cafe waitress Genevieve Morgan provides the omniscient voice of reason in Thalia, while Lois Farrow surprises readers in the end with her vows of secrecy that protect—not herself or her family, which she seems completely uninterested in protecting, but—the true backbone of Thalia, Sam the Lion. Even her daughter, Jacy Farrow, the desire of both Sonny Crawford and Duane Moore, possesses a preternatural ability to work sexual Jedi Mind-Tricks to her immediate social advantage on any ol' boy who crosses her path. McMurtry does not appear nauseous enough to merely sympathize with his female characters, even though he states in *In A Narrow Grave*, "Years ago someone pointed out that Texas is hell on women and horses. He was wrong about horses, for most horses are considered to be valuable and treated well." Rather, McMurtry seems to revere the women of West Texas. This is most evident in the manner in which the love triangles—hinged on the hope of a lady's heart or body—entirely exposes the men involved for who they truly are, dismantling their barrel-chested machismo so completely some are left, like Duane Moore, running for the bright lights of Fort Worth to reinvent himself. Women in these stories prove to be a reckoning landscape altering evolutionary force, as strong as time and industry and economy—stronger still, as McMurtry's women so frequently and simply say "Not today, boys."

While the triangles of desire and deception stack up rather quickly in *The Last Picture Show* (you'd need a cork-board, a box of tacks, and a heap of yarn to keep all the unwinding ties straight), lust burns a bit more straightforward in McMurtry's first two titles—for the most part. His second novel, *Leaving Cheyenne*, wears its Old versus New West themes almost too obviously. The love triangle here centers around Gideon Fry, a

STILL READING



worried Old West rancher, Johnny McCloud, a free-spirited New West cowpoke, and Molly Taylor, the woman on the hill who bears these two best friends each a child. Molly is also McMurtry's most electric character in the Thalia trilogy, a woman who challenges in every sense the image of a complacent, kindly Southern belle. She likes whiskey and wild sex and being contradictory in her words, and she likes minding the lock on her own gate—"Not today, boys." I'm curious who McMurtry modeled Molly Taylor after. She seems to portray the woman of the future, shunned by conservative Thalia for not adhering to primitive gender norms (she wears pants to town!). Men in the story are a bit more simple. They say things like, "I come here with nothing but a fiddle and a hard on. I've still got a fiddle." As a dude, you sometimes have to wonder what McMurtry thought of himself.

Still, it's the sibling rivalry between soft-spoken Lonnie Bannon and his wild-card older brother Hud, brought together under their grandfather Homer's roof, in McMurtry's debut novel *Horseman, Pass By* that hooked me most and will stick with me longest. The love triangle here is complex, ending violently in a manner that leaves the reader wishing to have never read the novel and also to read it again immediately. It's fiction that feels too factual. The monotony of life in Thalia is best described early in the novel by an image of Lonnie at the breakfast table. "I poured milk over my Post Toasties, and began to read the advertising bullshit on the back of the box. I had read it a hundred times, but there was nothing else handy." The sentiment is echoed on the next page when a vet, looking at Homer Bannon's cattle asks to talk in the shade if Homer has time. "I've always had more of that than anything else," Homer replies. Because of his youth, Lonnie is free to follow his grandfather and the working hands around the family land, listening to tales of wild weekends in Wichita Fall while fantasizing about one day making his own memories,

but Hud rejects such wistful daydreaming. Hud has a fast car, a love for beer and Fort Worth city lights. While Lonnie's eyes ride the horizon, Hud burns up the road. He wants to break loose, only he doesn't have the means. Staying in Thalia anchors him both to family ranch and the family name. Hud sees his future in his grandfather, and it frightens him—"But hell, you were Wild Horse Homer Bannon in them days, an' anything you did was right. I even thought you was right myself the most of the time. Why, I used to think you was a regular god. I don't no more." Lonnie still reveres his grandfather. He struggles at times to wonder who which Bannon to emulate.

Two triangles eventually pitch Lonnie and Hud against one another. The Bannon brothers have their eye on their grandfather's withering health for different reasons. Homer's passing will open the deed to the Bannon land—Lonnie hopes to tend the land in honor of his grandfather, while Hud can't wait to sell it for adventure funds. Both brothers also possess a hungry eye for Halmea, the hired housekeeper and only person that can give Homer Bannon lip. It's no secret that Halmea runs the affairs of the Bannon land. Homer knows it, even if he doesn't like it. And Lonnie knows it, too. Lonnie also can't help noticing the sweat rolling down Halmea's dark, black shoulders onto her back and even down into her bulbous apron front, a sight he secretly meditates on in the night. Hud, on the other hand, makes his fantasies fully known, sometimes with his hands and sometimes by pawing around Halmea's bedroom door. Regardless of seven Academy Award nominations lauded upon the film adaptation titled *Hud* and starring Paul Newman (it's kinda sick that the narcissistic Hud became the title character), only the novel truly explores the racial and gendered shifts of West Texas in the 1950s that obviously concerned a young Larry McMurtry.

So does *Horseman, Pass By* manage to gather a bull-horn and editorialize a bit too directly by the end? Sure, but this is McMurtry's debut, written and published before he was 30 years old. As a reader, did I care about the editorializing? Not at all. In fact, I welcomed it. McMurtry gets the swinging of the generational saloon doors right: not all social change is bad or violent, and not every evolutionary shift is good. But, as McMurtry's character come to learn all too well, new life demands an extinction, and that's where growing pains make a cold bottle and a fast car feel just fine.

Like it or not, even we—McMurtry's readers—are desperate people attached to spots of land and epochs of time we can never tame. We've got our own love-hate triangles that cause us to keep one foot free to adventure with the other strapped firmly to what's familiar. And that tug-of-war will drive you straight mad. Hell, I've got my flip-phone and pocket Moleskins and books of stamps to keep me self-righteous and labeled a Luddite, hipster extraordinaire, but, sweet Jesus, I also love me some Spotify and Amazon Prime and attaching documents such as this to a flimsy worded email. For this reason, I am—like you—any one of McMurtry's shallow, impotent men drooling for the affection of my days—for Life in her low-cut collar—to finally succumb, to unlock the gate, and to invite me inside where all of This could be so much easier. But she won't do it. She wants all of the Old and all of the New to dismantle me right where I stand. And I'm learning it's best to give her what she wants. She'll win anyway. — KEVIN STILL

RECORD REVIEWS



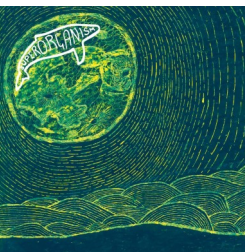
Janelle Monáe
Dirty Computer

At long last Janelle Monáe has blessed this planet with a new album. Released in late April, *Dirty Computer* comes nearly five years after her last record *The Electric Lady* in 2013, and the payoff was well worth the wait. While all of Monáe's previous releases explored android character Cindi Mayweather, *Dirty Computer* pivots to a conceptual story centered around a woman named Jane who is under threat of being sanitized by a totalitarian regime. Monáe clearly still has an affinity for using science fiction analogies to express her emotions and beliefs in songwriting, but *Dirty Computer* demonstrates a new level of confidence in wielding her power. The releases in her previous Metropolis series were full of great songs that jumped from genre to genre and showed Monáe's obvious talent, but at times they felt somewhat restrained by the symbology she had constructed. On this album whatever harnesses were in place are gone – there are no skits present in between tracks, the imagery is clear to the listener, and every track contains explicit lyrics. *Dirty Computer* is Monáe emboldened and not giving any fucks.

The album has some obvious influences (who also play a part as collaborators) in many of the tracks, first and foremost being Prince, and foremost being Prince in songs like album closer "Americans" as well as lead single "Make Me Feel". It is hard to understand why the latter is not being played all over pop radio and TV promotes the way that Mark Ronson's "Uptown Funk" was three years ago, but life is unfair. "Make Me Feel" is banger in the mold of The Purple One's "Kiss" that demands blasting on speakers and dancing in any venue. But perhaps more pervasive in many of *Dirty Computer*'s songs like "Take A Byte" and "Don't Judge Me" is the sound of Stevie Wonder. "Take A Byte" in particular has a groove that would be perfectly at home on a mid-70's Wonder classic record, including a melodic climb and accompanying stellar bass

guitar work at the end of each chorus that is immensely satisfying (it's also the best song on the album).

Monáe continues to appeal to pop sensibilities in songs such as "Crazy, Classic, Life", complete with a bumping bass beat, a big chorus, and the lyric "I'm not America's nightmare/I'm the American dream". "Pynk" has weird nearly stuttering rhythm that is immediately captivating and a lyrical structure that tempts the listener into filling in the last word of each line. Monáe gets an assist from Pharrell on "I've Got The Juice" in the percussion arrangements and piano samples for a welcome change of pace in the middle of the album, and "I Like That" slows the proceedings down further with a cool R&B feel and a wide pocket that allows Monáe's vocals and backing accompaniment to shine. The only sure miss on *Computer* is the would-be pop anthem "Screwed", faltering from a weak chorus and too on-the-nose metaphors reminiscent of something like Katy Perry's "Chained To The Rhythm". Fortunately "Screwed" is redeemed a bit at the end when it segues into "Django Jane", which spotlights Monáe's talents as a rapper that are not featured often enough in her work. It should also be mentioned that the album's production chiefly handled by duo Deep Cotton of the Wondaland Arts Society is exemplary and spares no expense. *Dirty Computer* may not be the hit that Monáe swings for, but it's another great record in her arsenal and a significant step towards the star she will surely become. — **TODD HANSEN**



Superorganism
Superorganism

I can't remember where I found these guys. I think it was a YouTube hole. My taste in music takes me to strange places. They had just put out a couple tracks at the time, and I thought they were quirky and cute and also was baffled by the music quality and the lack of pretentiousness. It's an amalgam of musical styles... which in my mind feels perfect

as a soundtrack for the mashup society we live in. Ambient noises, funky synths and effects, Sufjan Stevens type "community" choruses, unassuming lead vocals. Seriously, the singer sounds like she's there because she's got nothing better to do, which is fantastic. The band looks like a knit family. So cool. There's a video on YouTube of them performing several of their songs for a radio station (KEXP), and it's so chill and cool. Man, I wanted the rest of the album they were working on so bad. Then while looking at the SXSW lineup on the nights Billie Eilish was playing, there they were. Shit yeah. But who has hundreds of dollars laying around. Superorganism inspire me to keep doing what I'm doing with my family musically. It's OK to not be perfect. I hope my kids don't ever get paralyzed by the idea of perfection. Superorganism for me isn't just cool music...it's a change in my idea of what is possible and expectation of what can be accepted. I guess we will see if these guys blow up. The music is great. Sure, it might take a second to get into, but you'll see. It's legit. — **JORGE GOYCO**



Neko Case
Hell-On

This is one weird album to figure out whether it's good or not. Case has an incredible voice, and she has a singular vision for her songwriting and her talent. However, "singular" sometimes means that it is difficult to determine what exactly she is singing about. Remember, this is the singer who had an album called *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood*. Riddle me that one.

Hell-On is equally cryptic. About half of its dozen tunes are odd, affected songs—including the title cut—where it appears Case is trying too hard to be out of the ordinary. There's the long duet in "Curse of the 1-5 Corridor" (who turns to a Neko Case album to hear someone else sing?), the peculiar sax on "Halls of Sarah," the seemingly-endless dirge of "Dirty Diamond," the slow "Winnie."

Yet, there's the astonishingly-clever "Pitch or Honey" that starts so tantalizingly before erupting into this joyous rock and roll music and chorus of "I like you better when you're wild/Suits you better if I say so." What the tune is about is moot despite some fantastic lines "From the island of the Texaco" and "It's the gift that keeps on getting/It's the shrapnel from your wedding." The album closer is almost worth the trip by itself.

There are other worthy tunes although "Sleep All Summer" is a cover Case does as a (another) duet with the songwriter Erich Bachman. "Oracle of the Maritimes" really highlights her voice the best on a tune that resembles the best of The Decemberists. "Last Lion of Albion" and "Bad Luck" are catchy pop-rock. "Gumball Blue" has some great keys and synths although "Sorry stained my mouth gumball blue" means what?

Finally, one thing about quirky artists like Case – sometimes it takes a few listens before those quirks solidify into something appealing. Case is an enormous talent – time may find her more audience. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



Skeletal Remains
Devouring Mortality

What do you get when you take the best of Death, Obituary, and Pestilence and add a touch of Demolition Hammer's pummeling thrash formula? An old school death metal act who is ready to melt your face off, that's what! Skeletal Remains hails from Whittier, California and began performing in 2011. Three years after releasing *Condemned to Misery*, Skeletal Remains has returned with another offering titled *Devouring Mortality*.

For their third release's artwork, Skeletal Remains called upon the legendary Daniel Seagrave, a renowned artist who has done work for death metal masters like Suffocation, Entombed, Gorguts, and Decrepit Birth. For *Devouring Mortality*, Mr. Seagrave has

CONCERT CALENDAR

6/1—Doc Mojoe,, Grifters & Shills, Desdimona @
Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/2—LUCA, Cool Moon @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/3—Ben Morris @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/7—Dezarah, Charm Bomb @ Revolution, Bryan.
10pm

6/8—Killer Hearts, Wild Savages, Benghazi Osbourne
@ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/9—The Dead Chachis, The Merrows @ Revolution,
Bryan. 10pm

6/14—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**6/15—Silver Bars, The Prof. Fuzz 63, The Ex-
Optimists @** Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/16—'68, Comrades @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

**6/16—Raina's Birthday Show with Sketchy Trench,
Dead Weight, Mutant Love @** Revolution, Bryan.
10pm

6/19—Joey Kipfer @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/21—All Nighter, Mad Rant, Corusco @ Revolution,
Bryan. 10pm

6/22—Vast Massive Satellite, March & Beauty @
Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/23—Charm Bomb @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

6/23—Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/28—Keith Michael Kalina @ Revolution, Bryan.
10pm

6/29—Otonana Trio, Unicornodog, Mutant Love @
Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

6/30—The Reploids The Mismatch @ Revolution,
Bryan. 10pm

7/3—Cosmic Chaos @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/5—Fuck the Kids!, Almataha, The Shooobiedoobies
@ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/6—Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/7—Odd Folks @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/13—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

envisioned a twisted city with fiery meteors hurdling towards it. He has also embedded small features within the art that one has to look closely to find. It creates a sense of imminent demise, and is visually stunning.

So what's to like about *Devouring Mortality*? Skeletal Remains has crafted a death metal onslaught that could have been released in the early 90's. The production is not completely clean, which is great! Death metal needs a level of unwashed production to truly appreciate the full effect. What is more is that this album is consistent with the sound of Skeletal Remains' previous work. They have their guns, and are sticking to them. Constant rip-roaring riffs, veinyrupturing guitar solos, and tortured vocals: it's unapologetic, old school death metal.

Despite tried and true death metal methodology, *Devouring Mortality* does have its imperfections. This record has an ethos similar to *Kill/By Cannibal Corpse*, which is "Full steam ahead!" *Devouring Mortality* simply never lets up, nor gives the listener's ears a break from the punishment. For those who liked *Kill*, this is a good thing, but not for me. What's more is the lack of tempo change is further complicated by the fact

that this album is longer than the previous two. There are moments in the album where it feels the listener will finally it feels the listener will finally catch a break, but then it suddenly reverts. Yet more disappointing is that the band's instrumental track is barely over a minute long, consisting of a mediocre riff and canned screaming, and it is an intro to the proceeding song rather than an independent track.

I had high hopes for *Devouring Mortality*, but I may have set the bar too high. Despite the album's consistency, this is certainly a step down for Skeletal Remains. Their 2015 release, *Condemned to Misery*, showcased a variety of tempo paces ranging from relentlessly fast to mid-ranged and sinister, deliciously creative grooves, and a standout instrumental track, but these elements are absent in *Devouring Mortality*. However, it's not a horrible album. It's definitely better than what many death metal bands have recently released (*cough* Morbid Angel *cough*). I truly appreciate the sick artwork and the band sticking to their guns. All these things considered, I give the album a 3.9/5. Notable tracks include "Ripperology", "Seismic Abyss", "Catastrophic Retribution", and "Torture Labyrinth". — CALEB MULLINS



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