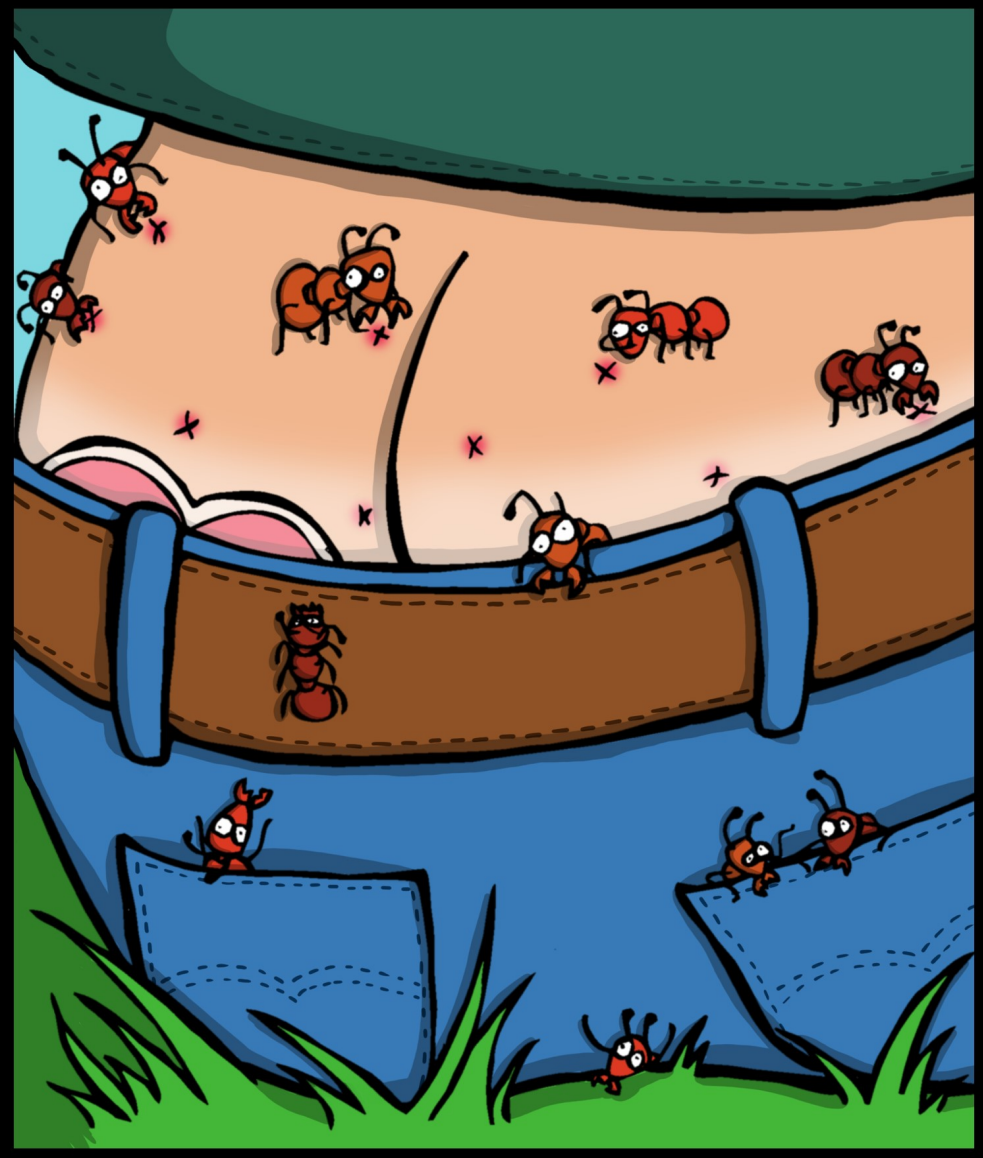


STOREPRESENT



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inside: dear john letter for our times - creepy horse goes sober - pedal pushing - land of the free - being a sound guy sucks - stopping the train - salacious vegan crumbs - todd lives in a film - still reading - record reviews - concert calendar



979represent is a local magazine
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folks that did the other shit for us

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jorge goyco - todd hansen - caleb mullins - rented
mule - starkness - william daniel thompson

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STOPPING THE TRAIN ONE STATION TOO LATE

It has been a long 17 months but June may have been the longest month in the Trump presidency. Considering what this ride has been like I should probably add the caveat of *so far* to this statement. I have tried to buckle myself down for the long haul and not get too twisted out of shape about what the president, his appointees, and his party are doing. But the events of the past month have pulled me from my slow roll into the fast lane of heartbreak, outrage, and outright fear. Yes, I am talking about border detentions.

This may surprise some, but I welcome Trump's presidency. You can be warned about how hot the raging fire is your entire life and never really know you will be burned by it until you stick your hand into it. In some cases, a hand is just not enough. Sometimes you have to walk right into the flames to understand that they will burn you, melt you, fully consume you and reduce you to dust. For decades now America has dabbled with the Far Right, never fully embracing its ideology but not outright denying it either. The election of Donald Trump may not have been on the surface such a bad thing. Trump is dumb, has no experience governing, and is really using the presidency as another business move. America has endured dumb presidents before. In fact, America is set up in such a way that it can still operate with a weak executive branch. The danger in a Trump presidency was never Trump himself. It was the folks who backed Trump early who pushed his candidacy forward. As a courtesy, Trump ushered them into power at his side: the white supremacists, the evangelicals, the new isolationists, the xenophobes, and the culture warriors.

For decades the Right has used fear of illegal immigration to consolidate power amongst its ultra-conservative wing. Concern for a tight border was mainstreamed after 9/11, when fear of the next big terrorist attack rationalized the effort to demonize the lazy Mexicans who took your American jobs right out from underneath you (there's an oxymoron if I've ever heard one). Suddenly the possibility that Jihad Johnny could trade his turban and beard for a sombrero and a drooping mustache and waltz across the Rio Grande with a suitcase nuke inspired a general cracking-down on illegal immigration that begin in earnest with George W. Bush, was perpetuated heavily by the Obama administration, and has met its ultimate conclusion with the Trump administration.

Nazi comparisons have been overused to the point that they have no power. Anyone with a narrow point of view and a penchant for demonizing an "other" can and has been labeled a Nazi, from proud boys to feminists. It is within the last month that we have seen the new Nazism and its face is all of us. It is important to remember that Nazism consisted largely of what has been referred to as "ordinary evil". In history books and films we see lots of swastikas and military uniforms and Hitler Youth rallies, but the backbone of the Third Reich was your average Joe and Jane Citizen who stood by for nearly a decade as the Nazis slowly but surely consolidated power and, in a methodical and quite ordinary sort of way, killed millions of European Jews. It wasn't done on the news, it wasn't done with any sort of glitz

and glamor. Their complicity was in their gradual acceptance of each new atrocity. It is only when removed entirely out of that context and added to the mountain of horrors conducted in Hitler's name that one can follow the trail and see all the many different points that German citizens could have stopped the train, got off, and burnt it to the ground. It took World War II to finally stop that train.

The Right does not recognize the parallels in how Nazis treated Jews to how the Trump organization treats Mexican and South American illegals. I mean, Jews didn't do anything wrong, they were just rounded up! These illegals broke the law. The Nazis split families up



and killed them! We are keeping illegals from using their children as a gateway into our country. Jews were sent to concentration camps! These immigrant children separated from their parents have 3 hots and a cot and VIDEO GAMES! Why, that's better than what we had when we were kids! Why, there's Bible verses that back up what we are doing on the border. Even our Attorney General recognizes this righteousness! These aren't white people like us, like European Jews. These are people that don't belong here legally. We need to do what's necessary to deter them from crossing over. So we will use their children against them. We will punish innocents to consolidate our power over you to prevent you from entering our country.

America has just stopped that train at one of those stations where if we don't get off the train and burn it to the ground we will continue onto the next destination and then the next and the next, more horrific and irreversible than the next. We have normal, ordinary, God and family conservative working stiff's whose empowered rage has led them to accept separating thousands of families without any real way to put them back together again, all to keep that border secure. If they wanted to keep their children they shouldn't have committed a crime. There is just enough truth in here to prop it up. Adults are entirely responsible for their actions and, when accompanied by children, the children will undoubtedly suffer the consequences. The children have no choice, but we do. Will you be a doctinaire who will stick to your failed idea long past the moment of sanity towards dehumanizing the situation? Or do you stare at this precipice and realize that perhaps there is another way forward that

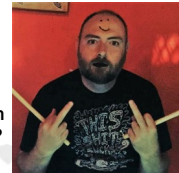
doesn't lead to you plunging down the slippery slope towards Nazism?

Jews were considered animals that needed exterminating. They were placed in cages like animals. If they were not human, then it made the ordinary citizens much more likely to accept their removal. When you've demonized brown illegals to the point that you are comfortable having their children taken away and placed in government camps with no clear plan to ever reunite them, well, one does not have to squint hard to see the parallels. Need you follow the money trail to see who's benefitting from these immigrant detention centers?

Of course, saner heads in the Republican party have prevailed somewhat. You see, videos of crying children and photos of detention centers are bad optics in a midterm election year. And true, many conservatives are not far removed from their everyday constituents. They belly up to the church pew on Sundays and while a single Bible quote can be pulled out of context to rationalize these actions, most Christians understand that tearing families apart is a willful act of rebellion against the basic tenets of the faith. Many staunch Right Wing politicians and pundits came out against the President's policy and ultimately after months of rationalizing if not outright gloating about this hardline tact Trump rolled backwards on the policy by signing an executive order to end separation of illegals' families at the border.

But the damage has already been done. The president's people have no real idea for walking it back. Separating and detaining children is a lot easier than figuring out how to return them. There are thousands of children and parents separated with no clear path on how to reunite them, and whether or not we will wind up in exactly the same spot again a month or two down the line. At press time the administration's idea is to dump the detainees off on the military, in essence, creating the first concentration camps in America in generations. This isn't the usual catch and release policy that ICE and Border Patrol have operated for decades. This is internment with no definite end in sight and no justice system ready to deal with detainees. ICE has deputized local law enforcement, making any officer from a participating municipality a potential federal immigration agent, making Latinx individuals feel less safe in this country, legal or illegal.

It is a massive mess that at any point up til now Americans could have said nah, this isn't what America is about, this is not how America operates. It took walking completely into the fire of xenophobia for America to at least understand somewhat that it will consume. There is no greater symbol of the administration's uncontrolled callousness than the First Lady's jacket she wore on her way to tour one of these internment camps (see left). It reads "I DON'T REALLY CARE. DO U?" This is as straightforward a presentation of the center of Trump America as one could have asked for. We've answered that question. We do care. The real question is what do we do about it. How will we show that we care? Only time will tell. — KELLY MINNIS



A DEAR JOHN LETTER FOR OUR TIMES

(**TRIGGER WARNING** for Trans Persons. For a more informative and less-asshole take on trans persons competing in athletics, go to <http://bit.ly/OhTheTrans.>)

John [Thu 4:16pm]: thoughts?

Bethany [Fri 7:36am]: John, why are you sending this to me?

John [Fri 7:37am]: because im honestly interested in your thoughts. sorry i shouldve sent questions etc with it, but i was busy at work when i read it and just said, "hmmm WWBeeler-Say", i have no position right now, it has no effect on me, im just curious as to what your thoughts are on this. And honestly, you arent the only trans person i sent this to.

Bethany [Fri 7:38am]: John, I don't follow track. Ask me about baseball or hockey, then I might have some insight.

John [Fri 7:39am]: But do you think its an unfair advantage to allow them to compete or is it discrimination to keep them out of the competition? i wouldnt want t o be the judge to write that opinion and decide.

Dear John,

We have to stop FBing like this.

Let me rephrase that: **you** have to stop FBing like this.

Oh, I know you trumped it up in your mind like you were just seeking insight. But c'mon, John, why else would you have sent it to your friendly FB-neighborhood trans woman you happen to know, *freakin' 30-years-removed from the college days when you barely knew her anyway?*

If "it has no effect on you," if you "have no position right now," why send this article to me?

The answer explains why I write this breakup letter.

Oh, don't worry—I'm not blocking/unfriending/unfollowing you. I'm just not going to take you seriously ... just like you don't take me seriously.

I know, I know—you're flabbergasted that I'm calling it

serious quits with you. After all, you might think, you were just asking a question—"Then she went *trans* all over me!"

Dear John, it's not your question that's breaking us up ... *because it wasn't a question in the first place.*

John, John, John, I get it—you needed to flush this out of your system. *You* think it's an unfair advantage garbed under political correctness. *You* wanna trap me like the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus:



WATCH: Two Transgenders Blow Out Girls In State Meet

You wonder how the other runners may have felt. On Monday, when Connecticut had its State Op...
dailywire.com

"BeelerJesus, we know you're trans and all that shit. Tell us, then: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? We just want to know WWTrans-BD?"
(Matthew 22:15-17, New Trans Translation)

John, you're going to have to figure this out on your own.

I can, though, give you some parting words that might help you not message your angst to other people's inboxes:

- You're not from Connecticut. The last I noticed, you don't give a flying fuck about high-school track in the Nutmeg State or anywhere else.
- You're not trans. Until you knew I was trans, you didn't give a fuck about trans track competitors in Hartford or my opinion of them.
- Suddenly, your conscience is weighed down with trying to determine the fairness of a track meet in Connecticut. "*What to do, Beeler??*"
- Not a fucking thing. Render unto Connecticut what is Connecticut's. And render unto a trans person what is theirs: the dignity of being a human being who doesn't have to answer your fucking question.

I'm sure there's a Transaholics Anonymous meeting near you.

Not Taking You Seriously Anymore,

Bethany

Epilogue: After I sent the gist of this to John, John accused me of "dehumanizing" him. Ah, snowflake baiters are the first snowflakes to melt. —**BETHANY BEELER**

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CREEPY HORSE GOES SOBER



I'm writing something I never thought I'd ever write on my own accord without a court order or some sort of harsh law enforcement behind it. After over 25 years of drinking, I've decided to go on and get sober.

I started drinking at the age of ten. I'd sneak mom's boxed White Zinfandel or Bartles and James wine coolers, my brothers and I would shoplift alcohol from a local Tom Thumb gas station and sometimes they'd give me a couple beers or shots to keep me quiet whenever they themselves scored booze of their own. By 12, I was my dad's drinking buddy. We'd drive to restaurants and bars and drink until we were both wobbly in the legs. Sometimes it was the only peace I could guarantee between my dad and I. By 16, I had private stashes of gin and whiskey bottles I hid from my mother and could be leglessly drunk by 7 am.

Some of my very best and absolute lowest moments were the result of alcohol. I'm not going to lie, I had some fucking amazing times. I did things I'd have never done sober. I could be someone else entirely and for awhile folks seemed to prefer that person until an uglier and far more wicked version reared its head. That person was a nightmare. Caustic and quite toxic to myself and others, I put myself in some nightmarish situations and hurt a lot of damn people in the process. That didn't stop my drinking, I just watched how much whiskey I drank cause you know it was obviously caused by scotch and bourbon.

I've drank until I've blacked out too many times to count, the first time being 16 at a marine Corp house party in Washington DC. I was found by the hostess that had no idea there was a kid underage drinking until she found me unconscious in her bathroom laying on the ground half in her bedroom face down in a puddle of my vomit. I remember flashes of her screaming for folks to get me up and her trying to talk to me and put water down my throat. I'd go on to join the restaurant industry that supported my lifestyle and have literally been so drunk at work I couldn't stand and had to be physically dragged and hidden in the pastry chef's pantry until I could sober up enough to get back to work. Keep in mind I had chef's that'd polish off 2-750ml bottles of Vodka at the start of their shift and we won't even begin with the cocaine use, that'll be another story for another time.

In hindsight, I sure wish I'd have been pulled over and arrested the many times I drove drunk and I can't feel bad enough for that. I wish I'd of been arrested for the bar fights I unfairly instigated. I wish just once I'd have had a major infraction with the law yet it never happened not once. My punishment was never having been punished. I got away clean with things that should have been quite serious. Would it have helped I don't know. Mentally I was in anguish and suffering severely. As

Frida Kahlo once stated "I drank to drown my feelings and the damn things learned to swim."

I lost so many people in my life. I could make all the friends in the world because of alcohol and then lose those same friends to alcohol. My teenage years began with drinking making me the funnest person around. Once that little bit of power mixed with spirits, I started to become the bully I'd always been tormented by and was even crueler to my victims. By my 20s I was a living nightmare. I was cruel, miserable and even had an all girl drinking gang of sorts. I picked fights, got thrown out of bars and pubs and have awakened in the trunk of my car (several times), beside dumpsters, in front yards and even homes I'd never been in before. With alcohol I've partied with bands, hung out with celebrities and even hooked up with folks I'd have never had the balls to sober. I've also pissed in front of cops, punched store front's glass until my knuckles were a bloody mass and once filled a friend's vehicle with "borrowed" street signs and large traffic cones.

None of this however lead to my decision to stop drinking, no something far worse had to happen. You see, once your thirties roll around this absolutely wicked thing occurs: whenever you drink you turn into Jesus. You die for three days and no one can believe you're still alive. Hangovers go from an uncomfortable couple hours in your teens and 20s to a few days of feeling like that one scene in *Team America*. No, not the sex scene. Also, for the life of me I can't understand how I was able to run \$100+ tabs because now I get upset over spending \$6 on a domestic beer. I'm too poor to drink.

Stepping back and looking at the whole picture it just doesn't do any good for me. I don't care if you drink or if your racist Aunt Ida drinks. This is just me. I didn't really feel the need to make any major announcements or yell from rooftops with a bullhorn about this because I just don't feel this is a big deal or at least I didn't until I started telling folks. I'd be offered shots, free drinks or a night out drinking and reject it. I had to give a reason and put it out on social media. The outpouring of support and well wishes kind of clued me in maybe I was still just as much of an asshole when I drank than I realized. Either way, myself and those around me are all much happier I'm not drinking.

It was quite an adventure complete with fun times, sad times, the darkest of moments, broken hearts and pissed-in clothes, but much like this story, all great stories must come to an end. The next time you see me, offer me a mocktail or throw up on me so I have a gentle reminder why I'm staying sober. On second thought, please don't puke on me, I'll take a Topo Chico with a lime twist instead please. — *CREEPY HORSE*

DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

*****BANG*****BANG*****BANG*****
*BANG*****BANG*****

My Girlfriend banging on my dorm room door: "JEREMY, WHAT THE FUCK WAKE UP"

I try to wake up but just kind of roll over and fall onto the ground.

*****BANG*****BANG*****BANG*****
*BANG*****BANG*****ALARM
RINGS AT 5:25 AM*****

Me: Well that's weird. Why would I set an alarm at 5:25 AM, that's weirdly fucking specific. Drunk Detective Starkness, I need you here ASAP to tell me why Paul Wall is playing at full blast in this dorm room and I feel like I've died and risen again four times.

Drunk Detective Starkness: Well, check your pockets.

Me: Motherfucker, I don't have any pockets. I'm sitting here in a small pile of my own sick and just need one answer from you without having to go through all this bullshit!

DDS: You know that's not how this works. We have to re-examine your life choices for at least a little bit before we get down to brass tacks.

Me: Fine. Fuck you. I'm not dealing with this right now, where is Blacked Out Me?

Blacked Out Me: OH SHIT FAM WE GOT A GOOD GOD DAMN PLAN FOR TODAY.

Me: Yeah? That hardly sounds like truth.

BO Me: Yeah dude, me, you, OK not really you but Ben, Russo, and Whale all came up with a plan last night.

Me: Oh, dammit. What did you get me into? Fuck BO Me, I don't want to deal with your shit right now either.

Drunk Detective Starkness, are you willing to help make sense of this mess?

DDS: I thought you didn't need a world class investigator? I thought you were just going to *handle* it.

Me: Oh fuck me. My mental constructs are rebelling. Now I know how Neo felt. Fuck. OK DDS, we'll have it your way for now. Why am I looking at 14 different receipts for between four and seven dollars? There's no way a reasonable person would go to the paki shack fourteen separate times for single packs of cigarettes.

DDS: I think you've answered the first part of your question. Clearly BO you needed some more drinks, and rather than be a reasonable individual and go pull out cash, you decided to use your Aggie bucks to buy people packs of cigarettes in exchange for at least a tall boy, but maybe as much as a forty.

Me: Dammit. BO Me, get back here. What the fuck, man?



BO Me: Duderino! I haven't got to tell you the plan yet! This was all part of the plan!
Me: Fuck you dude. I don't need your plan, I need to get right with the Lord. What the fuck DDS, why is this music still on full blast?

DDS: Well clearly you needed to drown something out.

*****I stumble over and turn down the music, and make sure that it's screwed and chopped*****

Me: Alright, so I remember us being over at Whale's over at Traditions. We were having a good time. Nothing bad was happening. Vodka and coca-cola as one does. You know, it's all fine.

DDS: Yeah, that was all fine and dandy, but do you remember when you guys ran out of smokes?

BO Me: YEAH! YEAH! YEAH!

Me: Fuck off BO Me, I don't need to hear from you yet. DDS, I mean, I remember getting into a *redacted* car and going to buy some smokes.

DDS: Yeah, but do you remember what was so special about where you went to buy those smokes?

BO Me: YEAH! YEAH! I DO! FUCK! PLEASE!

Me: Oh fuck. Dammit. It was that drive thru spot that BO Me loves.

BO Me: YEAH! SHIT DUDE! IT WAS AMAZING, YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO GET OUT THE CAR! YOU CAN JUST YELL AT THE LADY BEHIND THE COUNTER "GIMME THEM SMOKES" AND THEN JUST THROW CHANGE IN HER FACE AND YOU STILL GET TO HAVE YOUR CIGARETTES! ITS AMAZING!

Me: Is that the story? Is that why you are so excited?

BO Me: NO! I MEAN, YEAH! BUT NO! We were talking with *redacted* about how this drive thru tobacco store GO is the best thing ever, and *redacted* was all like "shit dude, you ever been through a drive through tobacco barn?" and I was like "NO SHIT THAT EXISTS"

Me: Fuck.

DDS: Yeah, listen to yourself.

Me: Fuck.

BO Me: So *redacted* was all talking about how we should go to this drive thru tobacco barn in La Grange, TX. And I was all like "NO FUCK THAT! WE SHOULD TO LA GRANGE WYOMING!"

Me: And everyone else was like "Oh Starkness, that's dumb as hell, and they put me to bed and I woke up this way?"

DDS: You wish.

BO Me: HAHAAHAHAHA NO DUDE YOU'LL LOVE THIS. I was sitting there trying to convince everyone that we needed to go to La Grange, WY for chicken fried steak and they said it was stupid as fuck, until Stuttering Stanley said that the best chicken fried steak was in lola, TX.

Me: Fuck. I see where this is going.

BO Me: YEAH DUDE! I convinced everyone that a much more reasonable goal was to wake up at 5:25 AM and go to lola, TX for some chicken fried steak.

Me: Oh that's not too bad. I guess I can go wake people up in a few hours and we'll go get a meal. Good on you BO Me. I'm proud of you.

DDS: He's not done.

Me: Why you always gotta treat him like such a bag of shit? This seems totally reasonable and fun.

DDS: I told you he's not done.

BO Me: YEAH We're gonna go eat in lola, with Ben and Whale, then we're going to drive to Ben's mom's house and she's going to give us some road booze, and then we're going to the zoo in Chicago!!!

*****BANG*****BANG*****BANG*****
*BANG*****BANG*****

My GF: Hey fucker, get up, my brother has been hassling me for like 20 minutes to wake you up so you guys go to Chicago or some stupid dumb thing. I left your beer outside the door.

*****BANG*****BANG*****BANG*****
*BANG*****BANG*****

****I wake up****

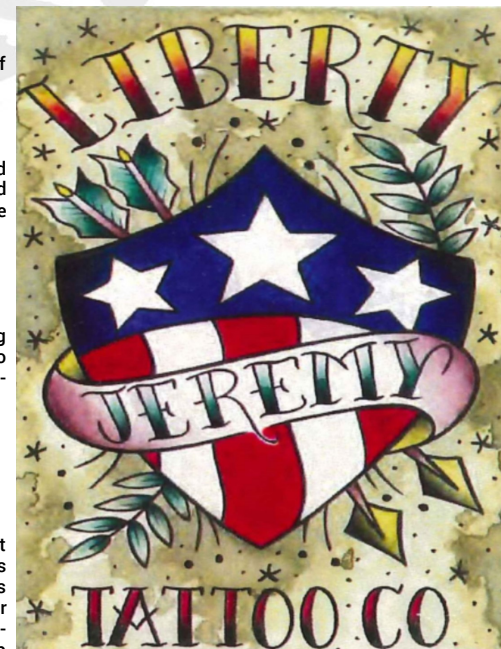
And that ladies and gents is how I started the trip that totaled my best friend's car just outside of lola, Texas after eating one of the most mediocre chicken fried steaks in the world (but some of the best potato salad I've ever had) because I tried to pass someone in the left lane during a rainstorm after drinking all day trying to make it up to the Chicago Zoo and back in under 72 hours. — STARKNESS

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BEING A SOUND GUY SUCKS

OK, so I've done sounds for a long time. I did it for a church for a few years, I ran sound for Santa's Wonderland for a while, and I've trained peeps and tweaked several systems in my day. It's pretty fun. I don't mind it, and in fact, actually I quite like it. I get the opportunity to be the reason that people can hear all the instruments, understand what the vocalists are singing about, and best of all, I get to make the band happy too. I like that a lot.

But as with anything, there's a dark side. I'm not talking about the fact that a sound guy almost never gets credit unless something fucks up. I'm not talking about the issues with overly demanding band members claiming they still can't hear themselves in the monitors. I'm not talking about the panic that is always on the verge of happening when a channel on the board or XLR cable suddenly goes out for some unexpected reason. I'm also not talking about the cluster fuck of cables that no one ever has time to organize.

What I am talking about is the inevitable judging and frustration that happens when I attend an event I'm not running sound for and the sound sucks. I try not to let myself go to the "Better than thou" place, but the truth is, many times, I know that all it would take is a slight knob twist to pull the guitar out of the mud or a frequency cut to get the bass to really pop.

I recently attended Austin City Limits and was seated in the nosebleed balcony. It was a great view of the stage, and a cool experience overall. While waiting for the band to come out (and the tequila to kick in), I obviously scanned the room for speakers. They use a "Line Array" system. If you don't know what that is, it's basically a stack of speakers hung from the ceiling and they curve down and back. You'll usually see them at festivals and bigger venues. I'm sure you'll start seeing them in the future now. Normally, these are great, but I noticed that they were placed at the level of the bottom of the balcony. My judgement meter started going off. I could tell there was going to be trouble.

Once the music started, I (sadly) realized I was right. I could hear the instruments pretty well (although the high mids and treble "sparkle" were lacking), but the worst part was the vocals. I could barely make out the vocals. I figure for just a couple thousand bucks, ACL could buy a few speakers, hang them high, pointing them to the balconies, and all would be good. I was just surprised. Seems like they would have had someone go up there and check out the sound in the balconies. I'm sure it sounded fantastic down in the general area. I was bummed.

My wife knew right away too, but not because it bugged her, but because she knew it was gonna bug me. It did. We left after a few songs. Also, the band played 90% from their new album, which is not their best, and it just came out a couple weeks ago. They should have played older stuff...it's what people wanted. Well, it's what I wanted anyway.

I talked to someone downstairs as we were leaving that promised to tell their manager. I'll probably find a way to contact ACL and let them know my opinion. But the truth is, I have found that sound guys are like IT guys...they know best, and pretty much everyone else is stupid.

And another thing, being in a band with this "sound guy brain" is also tough, but mostly, I just have to trust the house. Trust that their sound guy knows what he's doing. Trust he has the vocals loud enough. Trust he's got everything loud enough that it envelops the audience. Trust that the bass is full and big. (As a side note, I'm bummed that I will never get to hear my band play live).

It's very difficult for me to enjoy a performance when there's a sound issue. Sucks for me I guess. But I'll admit, I've tweaked a sound board without asking when the sound guy left the board to go to the bathroom. I've secretly turned down the gain on a mic that kept feeding back while the guy took a drink of his coffee. And yes, I've even turned up the bass guitar when the sound guy was tying his shoe. — JORGE GOYCO



**FEATURING OVER 30
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Today I served my annual jury duty for Brazos County. After a late

start, having consumed only a slice of rye bread and half a cup of yesterday's cold coffee, I slid into the courthouse at 8:15 AM as instructed. The cowboy before me frazzled the walk-through metal-detector, causing an alarmed commotion to which he calmly and joyfully responded, "I have two fake knees!" His delivery felt oddly chipper, but security appeared satisfied and allowed him passage without further inquiry. Their eyes fell on me, however, with dubious gazes – perhaps the beard? – so I declared, in similarly chipper fashion, "My knees are original!" Thankfully, I also was cleared without molestation.

The fourth floor location of Suite ___, where a growing pool of taxpayers were destined, required potential jurors to choose between the cardiovascular merits of the stairwell or the elevator's convenience. Another cowboy referenced the stairs with a carnal inspired expletive as he pressed the elevator's request button, a crude stab at leadership that garnered mass approval. My lone choice to take the stairs was rewarded by the bell-like echoes of high-heels on tile from above – a podiatrically feminine chime I've long relished. With a size-seven song in my heart, I climbed to the doom of a Tuesday.

A sad fact of the *voir dire* jury selection process is that time shimmers merely as a mirage in the eyes of the law. Potential jurors are lavished with praise for attendance and buttered with gratitude for service. They may even be regaled by whimsical jests from both sides of counsel about the "drag" of jury duty. *Wouldn't we all rather be sipping coffee at home or – OR EVEN BETTER! – a pina colada on the beach?* Begoggled chortles resound! *Ohhhhh, HAHA! Of course! But – whimsy ceases – we are here* because citizenship in this great nation carries rights and, more importantly, responsibilities. In the hands of such a voice—such a balloon-popping, milk-spoiling, kitten-peeling voice—time asphyxiates. An 8:15 arrival extends to a 9:30 launch. A ten-minute break becomes a thirty-minute drama of helplessness. And the 45 minute deliberation session, offered in lieu of a lunch-break so the day may "end sooner", morphs into a 2.5 hour crash-course in self-awareness. With all those empty minutes, surrounded by strange and unhappy people, one becomes acutely aware of his or her own lack of civility. *You, sir, keep your jokes about at least not being up the boss's (insert preferred rectum reference) over there.* And, you ma'am, take your monologues about footwear regrets around that corner. Jury duty proves as fine a place to build a Happy Hour klatch as a sex addict's support group is for finding a spouse.

Still, I found a quiet corner and purposed myself to enjoy the pageantry of justice. So, no slave to boredom, I chose to fortify myself from the vending machine with the protein rich salted peanuts over the more therapeutic Twix bars. The package declared "Peanuts" as the primary ingredient while also warning those possessed with allergies, "This product may contain peanuts". *Well*, I pondered, as if solving a riddle to appease the bridge troll, *which is it?* Alone with my peanuts, I considered how nice it is, in our hustle-bustle world, to find a sequestered moment when the brain is free to tackle fundamental conundrums of existence.

Or maybe not. I noticed that, out of 63 potential jurors, only four of us brought reading material. My fellow Americans spent shapeless hours Crushing Candy, recycling pleasantries, counting floor tiles, *not* staring at the legs falling from that one black skirt, coralling into similar-bodied pods, or pacing in cattle-like states of numbed gloom. Not me, bozos! I brought an actual gloss-and-paper copy of *The New Yorker* (smart stuff!) and enjoyed the gripping, true story of Henry Worsley: a

THE LAND OF THE FREE

nearly 60-year old retired British Army Lieutenant who – for his second

and polar expedition – walked across Antarctica *alone*. I read Worsley's story in its entirety, heaping heroics on myself for practicing patience.

Another sad fact of the *voir dire* selection process is that the empathetic ineptitude of the body collective is on full display. Inside the courtroom, we savored the rich history of juvenile detention in Texas, the intricate nuances between various types of incriminating evidence, and the calmly delivered instructions—*we know this is what you're most interested in!*—about how to validate our parking. We were asked our opinions—more specifically our *feelings*—about assault with a deadly weapon and what type of deadly weapon we most feared used against us in an assault. We were asked if we had ever been personally assaulted, or whom we personally knew who had been personally assaulted, and – *I realize this may be difficult to discuss publicly*—how such details might psychologically cloud our perceptions of a defendant who may or may not have attempted such an assault. Ironically, we were not asked what we might like to craft into our lives with the materials of an entire Tuesday, since time—regardless of two parties' legal pickle before us—possessed our sole priority. Nor were we asked if we'd like the name of a good licensed counselor to assist with varying degrees of post-assault/post-*voir dire* trauma, since we'd been so emotionally ramshackled by the mere discuss of the judicial process. Indeed, the entire show turned darkly comic when I realized, *oh, we're being selected on how well we can keep our shit together*—an epiphany I rolled around until Worsley's Antarctic adventure crossed my mind and I remembered how much I hate being cold.

At one point, potential juror #32 announced that, upon seeing the young, Black, male defendant before us, he was instantly reminded of an assault story that triggered his anger and made him "want to punish that boy up there!" A point that caused both attorneys, their interns, and the judge to scribble simultaneously some sort of note on their legal pads. (I assume they were "legal pads".) Just prior to this cinematic confession, a gentleman two seats down from me asked the judge, please, for the chance to serve on this jury. When the judge inquired why, he responded, "Because I'm 63 years old, and, although I've reported for jury duty all these years, I've never had the chance to serve. And that's something I'd like to try before, you know, I *go on*." The courtroom erupted into hysterics! I couldn't help thinking how some men spend their lives dreaming of crossing the South Pole on foot, while others wish to deliver the law of the land in plush seats from air-conditioned boxes. (I'd like to believe I'm somewhere between the two, but who can say?) Potential juror #52, a young lady in nurse's scrubs, stood from her seat to ask if a toy gun might be considered a "deadly weapon" if used during an assault. When she was answered in the negative, she extended her question by asking, "Well, what about a chainsaw, if the chainsaw wasn't *running* during the assault?" This also elicited simultaneous notations, surely, to pen a reminder – as I made for myself – to buy #52 a Coca-Cola Classic for delivering the Bat-shit Crazy Quote of the Day.

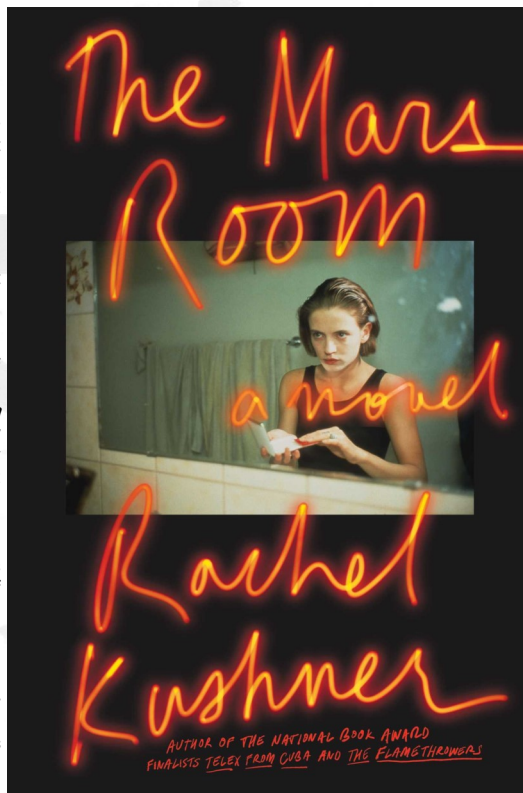
At 3:10 PM, Judge ___ announced that I was not selected for this jury, even though I wore a button-up shirt and believed beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant was probably guilty. But, to my credit, neither was the gentleman selected who hoped to celebrate his 63rd year bravely implanting himself into the judicial narrative of complete strangers. In our mass exit, the halls resounded with the loudest camaraderie of the day. An invitation to grab a burger was extended somewhere behind but not to me, as I descended the stairs gripping my *New Yorker* magazine tightly. — **POTENTIAL JUROR #58**

Over the past month, I've written often about the author Rachel Kushner—in journals, in letters, in marginal notes—in an effort to remember the way I found her as much as to remember what she's written. There was my initial stumbling upon her story "Stanville", a strangely disjointed tale of a male GED instructor teaching in a California women's prison and how he couldn't keep himself from discovering their secrets. This story seemed very incomplete to me, as if it had been extracted from something larger. Yet, I couldn't stay away and I reread it multiple times, watching the intricate ways Kushner revealed a bit more of her characters—their impulses and secrets—to one another and to her readers. I wanted more from all of these people, including the author. Then, a week or so later, I stumbled upon a profile titled, "Rachel Kushner's Immersive Fiction" (Google it, trust me), and I was done for. In that bio, I found Kushner to be an intellectual and creative hero of sorts, a woman who appeared more concerned with following her own instincts (she possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of motorcycles, classic Italian film, and Cuban history—each explored in her previous novels *Telex From Cuba* and *The Flamethrowers*) rather than keeping her finger on the current cultural pulse. Granted, she was raised by fledgling academics as much in a tent on the Northwest Coast as under a bona fide roof, so her social and cultural estrangement comes honestly.

But the profile also explored the evolution of Kushner's newest novel, *The Mars Room*, which was born out of her political concerns about the California penal system, particularly how it seems to entrap poor women, punishing them—essentially—for their poverty. Kushner began researching California prison system in 2014: touring facilities, attending court sessions, building relationships with both male and female inmates. She recorded what she saw and heard, allowing—over time—scenes and characters to emerge in her imagination from the reality of incarcerated lives. Even after her research was complete and the drafting process began, Kushner continued visiting women she'd met at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla. The women even call her at home. Kushner again following her instincts rather than the business ethic of completing a job well done.

The Mars Room tells the story of Romy Leslie Hall, Stanville inmate number W314159, a young mother serving two consecutive life sentences and an additional six years for murder. The novel is named after the cabaret (maybe that's too complimentary a term) where Romy performed and met a man who became first a solid regular and then a stalker. During particularly horrific moments in Romy's imprisonment, when she tries desperately to reach out to her son, Jackson—either through her mother on the outside or through her male GED instructor—guards and wardens remind Romy that if she had wanted to be a mother she would have made better choices. Romy, like most of the women in Stanville, has too much pride to inform her

STILL READING



accusers that the very act which landed her in Stanville was an effort to protect her son. Unfortunately, the state of California did not see it that way, so neither will her protectors. Only the women who share Romy's space, who rarely if ever speak of their crimes, know that certain efforts to protect and serve one's own are rarely seen after the fact as such. For some women, there's survival and then there's freedom, but the two seldom co-exist.

The Mars Room is a difficult novel to recommend. It's drastically sad and violent, often in explicit ways that feel too profound to accept as any person's reality. According to Dana Goodyear in "Rachel Kushner's Immersive Fiction", Kushner "uses the novel as a place to be flamboyant and funny, and to tell propulsive stories, but mainly as a capacious arena for thinking." I can see all of this. Certainly, within the sadness and violence, Kushner, like any good comedic writer, explores the dark humor of solitary confinement and death

row, mostly by what's shared through sewage pipes vocally and in tightly wound packages, and by allowing wild stories of big personalities and hard bodies to clash (sometimes sexually) in cells and on the prison grounds. There's something necessarily humanizing in finding the funny spaces within despair.

However, the novel also does not shy from exposing a system that appears set into motion simply to remove the Romy Hall's of the world from the world. This happens through linear narrative, as well as poetic ventures of strange lists (past job descriptions, prison rules, wardrobe codes) and even quoted passages from the Unabomber's diaries, presented as a counter-balance between criminals who are maliciously minded and those simply out of options. Within Kushner's narrative, as various characters are introduced, their pre-prison stories are told alongside the actuality of their impoverished options, of their available resources, offering revelations that call into question who—in each woman's specific crime—is the victim. This is essentially what separates *The Mars Room* from *Orange Is The New Black*. Kushner's book focuses primarily on the effects of poverty in these women's lives. She examines how far-reaching the effects of socio-economic poverty can reach, depleting entire communities of the resources necessary to establish a sense both of groundedness and peace, as well as for meeting basic needs. Strip away a young mother's center of gravity, put her and her children in a sudden and dire situation, and generalized good charm and feminine decency rarely rises to the surface. The state of California does not seem willing to understand this. Kushner does. *The Mars Room* is her effort to make this seemingly common sense conundrum more widely known.

The Mars Room is also a difficult novel to recommend because I can't quite say I enjoyed reading it. As mentioned above, this is not exactly a whimsical beach read. But knowing what sparked Kushner's curiosity, and seeing her process come to life on every page, made *The Mars Room* meaningful in a way few novels have been for me. Several times during my reading I stopped and said to myself, "Ah, so this is how you write about politics without writing about politics." And I was grateful that Kushner, after an especially difficult conversation inside the Women's Facility walls, did not churn out a hyperbolically emotive editorial and call it quits. She could have done just that as so much of our current news and editorial media reads as sensationally as fiction for entertainment. Emotive editorializing would have been easier and in keeping with our current cultural pulse. But, again, Kushner appears more concerned with following her instincts—in this case, slowly across the years, back and forth from Los Angeles to Chowchilla, pacing the floor as she accepts another call from Central California Women's Facility, listening through the attempted silence of the state to a voice she knows deserves to be heard. And I, for one, am glad for the chance to listen in. — KEVIN STILL

HAS BILL CLINTON LOST HIS MORAL COMPASS?

Writing about the moral failings of a former president may seem pointless in a time when our current leader is a heartless bigot and likely a criminal as well as a traitor, but such are our times. Bill Clinton served two terms as president and was able to work with both sides of the aisle in a manner that often escaped his predecessors. However, many only remember him for his sexual behavior with a White House intern, a circumstance particularly pertinent in today's #MeToo climate.

For more than 20 years, Clinton's presidential legacy has been shadowed by that personal failure. It is apparent from recent interviews as he embarks on a book tour that Clinton has not learned anything from his past; hence, it will continue to impede his future.

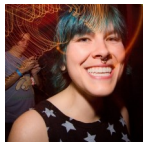
While it's understandable Clinton would want to put this affair behind him once again, it is clear that he never grasped the enormity of his actions. His claim that a public apology to Monica Lewinsky was all that was necessary is ludicrous. The common decent thing to do would be to apologize to her, personally and privately.

Granted, she might not have ever wanted to be alone with him again, but he could have at least called her or arranged something. That he never thought it was at least kind and proper to say he was sorry to her in person is appalling, but it's equally terrible that Clinton defends his lack of apology all these years later. He just doesn't get it.

Clinton has paid for his affair in the White House. It will forever besmirch his authority as a former president and as a human being. Regrettably, Clinton's unapologetic stance likely had some bearing on Hillary Clinton not being elected president. When the infamous audio of our current president's female crotch-grabbing predilection hit the airwaves, the reaction was not only the rehashing of this affair, but the assembly of all the women who had unresolved sexual issues with Clinton.

Clinton has had to live with this for more than two decades. It seems it will continue to haunt him for the rest of this life. That he does not have the graciousness — or the intelligence — to do the right thing is such a sad failure of a former promising leader. America needs leaders more than ever, given our present White House inhabitant's utter lack of governance qualities.

The only positive part for Clinton is that he still has time to redeem himself. He can still rectify himself even if it means he has to admit he was wrong. Hopefully, Clinton will find it within himself to right himself. It's never too late to say you're sorry. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

After 2 hours packed in an air-conditioned sardine can, we finally roll up close to Sam Houston Park. "Is that a vegan?" Tim asks. "What about them - are they vegans?" "Oh! Those people with the hats are definitely vegans! Follow the hats!", yells Kiry. They lead us to a parking lot with a malfunctioning entrance arm (thanks!). An hour later, we're finally parked and have the privilege of hopping out onto black asphalt and 95 degrees of thick, soupy Houston heat!

A couple of blocks away, we can hear an MC trying to hype of people — HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN VEGAN? EVERYONE WHO'S VEGAN, MAKE SOME NOISE! No one makes noise. By the time the door guy has checked my backpack for illegal contraband (you know, leather wallets, meat snaps, cheese socks), I'm halfway through our first liter of water and have sweated out just as much. I've dressed for the occasion—shortie shorts, a white tee, sandals, a hat that looks suspiciously like a handmaid's funerary bonnet, sunglasses, and a layer of sunscreen so thick you have to scrape it away to see my skin. I don't know if you guys have visited any festivals lately, but they usually have a barrack of port-o-potties, and one thing about the summer heat is that you can drink as much as you want and sweat it out instead of having to visit those hot, steamy poop chimneys.

Inside the park gates, there are tons of little white tents and people walking around with loot. Tim decides to order a sandwich from the very first booth we see, Chickpea and Olive from Brooklyn, NY. What a fool! There's an entire mini-universe of food to explore, and you stop at the first chick'n-fried planet! One bite of his Nashville hot tofu fried sandwich and I'm proven wrong. Michael bee-lines it back to the booth to order a buffalo style one—even better! This fried tofu is incredible—it's savory, with no beany flavor, and it's been deep-fried until it has a crunchy, textured crust, just like southern fried chicken. Not to spoil the rest of the offerings, but it was heads above the other things we ate that day as far as taste.

Kiry spots Monk's Meats, one of the booths on my must-visit list, serving coffee-rubbed smoked seitan brisket sandwiches. We wait in line for a short time, and are served smoky, savory sliced seitan served on a bolillo with a bit of sauce and a cool, crunchy jicama slaw. This is Vegandale, and you must share your winnings, so the sandwiches travel around the circle. Everyone enjoys their bite, and I wolf down the rest of mine, hoping to build up a base of energy so I don't pass out in the hot sun. It wasn't Texas brisket for sure, but it could be with the right kind of sauce and a rectangle of white bread. I stow away an idea for jackfruit and shredded seitan chopped beef style BBQ sandwiches for later in the summer, and we continue exploring.

We pass a donut shop, a booth serving beignets, and a lemonade stand with a huge line and the zingy scent of fresh lemon. The whiskey we snuck in would go really nice with a tall glass of lemonade, but that line is crazy bananas! We roam around, through the center of the festival where there's a stage and huge open area. It's sliced into three by competing lines for VegaNation's BBQ ribs and mac & cheese and Eggloo's ice cream inside of Hong Kong egg waffle-style cones. Retreating to the backside of the stage, we find the mister tent—I'm not really sure adding more moisture to the air is the right way to cool off in Houston, but the tent is packed.

Out of the corner of our eyes, we spot the signature bold lip of an Amanda, hiding out near a shaded pond, beneath a statue with a bare butt. She's nibbling on a tender, chocolate brownie, and fanning herself like the lavish lady she is. We scoop her and her summer goth friend up and hike back up the hill to visit the outer ring of the festival.

We pass samosas, ice cream, a salsa booth, and spot the vegan ice cream of the future! Vegan Dots are basically vegan Dippin' Dots, and Kiry and Jess pick up a few flavors to try. The future just tastes okay. Tim and I stop at the Edgy Veggy booth, and pick up some soy and prickly pear cactus jerky, and order a chili cheese dog to split. I could definitely make a better chili cheese dog, but we share it and wolf it down. Nothing gets wasted at the vegan fest!

Kiry spots Dumping Haus, from Wisconsin, and grabs some veggie dumplings wrapped in a pretty green wrapper. They have perfectly crispy bottoms, and are really delicious, but they're piping hot and one bite in the heat is all I can take. I break off from the group to explore further, and come back with some shaved ice from Houston locals Moody Ice for Michael and myself. At less than a truckload of shaved ice, they are obviously much too small, but 1000% better than JJ's snowcones!

After a short rest in the shade, we get back up and slither our little sweaty bodies back inside the park gates. Throughout the day, we saw lots of Simpsons (pre season 10, obviously) stuff — we spotted a Frankelganger in a Bart Simpson shirt, and I was wearing a shirt of Millhouse brandishing a pint of soy milk, saying No Milk, No Meat, No Masters. We're all pretty stoked to find a big art of an annoyed Lisa Simpson, a speech bubble next to her head declaring she's going to marry a carrot. After lots of photos of myself with my idol, we all split up again.

I bound off to grab a reuben from Mythology Diner, Michael and Tim grab beers, and we lose Kiry and Jess. After a long, arduous search, we find them people watching some Uber drivers under a tree behind a donut booth (no donuts in hand). We all share the reuben, and take off as many clothes as is socially acceptable in an attempt to cool off.

We're wilting fast, and decide it's time for one last hurrah - ice cream! We can't even make it across the park to the Eggloo stand without stopping for popsicles. I pretend I'm swimming in a pool of icy honeydew and cucumber juice on the way.

The sweet, cakey smell of the fresh waffle cones at Eggloo is the only thing keeping Michael and I standing. The crispy-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside Hong Kong style waffle cone has little round bubbles — like if you put two sheets of big bubble wrap back to back. One bubble and a scoop of ice cream are the perfect ratio of warm and crispy, and cool and refreshing. We're melting as fast as our coconut ice cream, so we join the others who've found a fading Amanda in the mister tent. We sweetly slap bodies together, hugging goodbye, and trudge out to the car.

We're hot. We're miserable. We're full. And we're happy. We're coming back next year. —KATIE KILLER

Hungry for more crumbs?

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TODD LIVES IN A FILM

Documenting aches and pains in one's own journal seems like a pointless exercise of self-pity. However, the wrenching in my stomach today was painful enough that it couldn't simply be ignored, and yet again I saw blood in the toilet that I tried not to look at. I can't remember the last time I visited the doctor, but I do not look at the prospect of an appointment as being necessary. Nor can I remember a doctor ever telling me good news – first thing he would say is to stop drinking. I can continue to take care of myself, just as I'm the one man tasked with taking care of the church. It's not the assignment I ever imagined becoming tasked with when I was a military chaplain, but God brought me here for some reason.

I attempt to keep up with the necessary planning and preparations for the upcoming two-hundred fiftieth anniversary celebration at the church grounds, but mostly the schedule and checklist to address overwhelm me when I think about them. The organ in the choir loft has been out of commission for many months, and the repairs tend not to return my phone messages asking for them to come in sooner. The faucets and piping in the restrooms often have small leaks, which I repair myself to save what limited funding we have. Usually the leaks come back after I fix them up. Sometimes the ancient gravestones in the cemetery outside the church will fall over, and I place them back up as there is no one else around to do the task. I'm not blind to why there are more empty pews on Sundays at First Reformed than there used to be, and I can't say I blame the people who no longer come.

Were Abundant Life not helping with the arrangements, invitations for special guests, and video simulcast at their own church the ceremony would surely not be ready in time. Reverend Jeffers requests that I check in with him from time to time to talk about the services and my general well-being. He means well but I don't care to tell him more than necessary to reassure the sugar-coated anxieties he has on his agenda. Abundant Life is well-attended and does good work with its ministry programs – most of the time I can keep myself from feeling envious. Then again, if First Reformed were as full of attendees every Sunday as it will be for the anniversary, it would not need Abundant Life's assistance to get by. Instead I am required to place house for the tourists that come by on occasion during the week. I show them around the church building, explaining its history and pointing them towards the limited amount of merchandise for sale available to commemorate their visit. If I smile enough there's usually a donation made

at the end of the show – a tip for a holy concierge.

Last Sunday a young couple was in the congregation that I had never seen before – with a small number of faces it's easy to tell who the regular attendees are. The woman Mary approached me afterwards and asked me to come by their home the next day to counsel her husband. She told me she was worried about him, both of

his simmering activism and his having second thoughts about her recent pregnancy. When I met Michael the next day, he confirmed he was scared of Mary's pregnancy – not because of fatherhood, but for bringing a child into a world steadily being destroyed by human hands. Michael explained his fears about the environment and anger about corporate greed along with society's inaction in reversing course. He preached for extreme measures and demonstrations to get the importance of the message across, that martyrdom and collateral damage was a price worth saving the Earth. I offered him any lessons I could think of in the moment and paper-thin reassurances as I tried to keep up in his escalating discontent, even speaking about some of my own tragedies when he cried about my past, but no argument I made seemed to the sway his



entrenched position.

It's been a while since I've kept in regular contact with a congregant outside of services, but I feel I must continue to check in with Michael to make sure his troubled feelings do not progress further. Mary says he's not a danger to her or their unborn child, but I have offered to be on call in case he still feels the need to talk. She is pleasant to be around even her eyes do a poor job of hiding her fear. What worries me more are my own shifting thoughts, finding myself in hellish daydreams of destroyed landscapes. As I sat in Michael's study attempting to change his mind, it was he who was gradually succeeding to change mine. Humankind has in fact repeatedly allowed oil spills, carbon emissions, and toxic waste to be an accepted consequence of the progress of capitalism. What does God think of the damage we've done to his creation? Will he be able to forgive us for these sins?

These questions have stayed in my mind since speaking with Michael. Until I hear an answer, it is my task to show people a path to repentance for sullying this place. I'm not sure why I continue keeping this journal full-knowing it will not be seen by anyone else's eyes. It seems this experiment only causes more time agonizing over the garden. — TODD HANSEN

PEDAL PUSHING: VOX MV50AC

There is a current trend in guitar amp design to produce super small amp heads. Some are no bigger than guitar pedals. Some are slightly bigger, but all are quite smaller than the "lunchbox" variety which usually rely on some manner of power tube amplification. The sub-lunchbox genre is almost all Class D solid state amplification with some instances having a 12AX7 preamp tube or some even use tube power from a tube chosen usually as a preamp tube. Vox began life as a British owned and operated company but in the '90s was purchased by Korg, a Japanese company. Recently Korg developed a new vacuum technology called, uninventively, the "Nu Tube". It is essentially a vacuum tube on an IC chip. It is far smaller than a traditional vacuum tube, more efficient, and longer lasting. The Vox MV50 series amplifiers were the first products to test out the new tube technology. This month we are talking about the AC variety of the MV50.

For starters, this amp is quite minimal. Tone, master volume, and gain are all upfront; in the back you have ohm selection, speaker out, and line/headphone out. The wattage is variable by resistance; 50w to a 4ohm speaker, 22.5w to 8ohms, and 12w to 16ohms. The VU meter is neat to look at but doesn't really add much functionality. There is a flat/deep EQ toggle that is meant to delineate between using small 1x8/1x10 cabinets and larger cabinets. It is less than a pound and fits in the palm of most non-Trump sized hands. It is certainly small enough to keep on hand in a gig bag, in the back of an amp cabinet, or even velcroed onto a pedalboard. Its portability is certainly one of its calling cards. It could be the size of a USB stick and if it didn't sound good no one would care. And the MV50 does sound good.

When I took on the MV50AC I had an AC15C1 to directly compare it to. With all the controls at noon on the MV the AC lineage is apparent. Vox has always been good at porting its AC15/30 style tube amps across to modeling, hybrid, and solid state platforms. There's something about the Vox "chime" that translates well to solid state. Dialing up a similar setting on the normal channel of the AC15 yielded startling results. These amps don't sound identical but through the same speaker would be hard to tell apart when set at this sort of "barely breaking up" setting. The AC15's gain channel kicks out more dirt than the MV50, and there's no hi cut on the MV50. But the clean channels on both amps compared favorably. Had I been able to tap into the AC15's Celestion

Blue with the MV50 I imagine the similarities would only have increased. At 8 ohms into an open back 1x12 there's plenty of volume but certainly not enough for my gigging purposes. Into a 4 ohm 2x12 the amp gains more girth and loses a bit of the "clacky" Vox thing but I can't tell if it's appreciably louder. For those who mic amps live it won't matter. At Ex-Optimists practice the MV50 and 1x12 was not enough. To be fair, neither was the AC15 and my 5E3 Deluxe clone is barely loud enough to hang with Wonko's Deluxe Reverb reissue.

For home playing it was certainly more than adequate. There are reports that diming the master on the 16 ohm setting will eventually overheat the amp and it will shut off. I don't run it at 16 ohms so I've not had this happen. I don't like turning the gain up much past noon, as the preamp begins to congest somewhat. This is not uncommon to many master/preamp tube amps.

The AC line isn't really known in general for high gain. The Nutube sounds like a 12AX7 to me. The line out has an amp-flavored EQ to allow for direct recording and direct out to soundboard. The MV50 needs no load so you can use it as a standalone preamp or even as an effect pedal. The amp is snarly on direct out and it is certainly a useable sound. But anyone expecting it to be a speaker replacement should seek elsewhere. The EQ switch is bypassed in direct mode and that's a pity. Would have been nice to have that option for DI too. One thing I don't like is that I wish the handle would fold flat. A small complaint assuredly.

It compares favorably to the Hotone line of amps or even Orange's Micro Terror. Small, light, though not as cheap as its competition (the MV50's come in around \$199). Vox has three flavors of MV50 available (Clean, Rock, and AC) with two more on the way this month at the Summer NAMM show (High Gain and Boutique). The MV50 range is often out of stock at the larger music retailers and the popularity is warranted. It's a fun amp to bang on at home and a useful tool to toss into the gig bag in case a backup amp is needed in a pinch. How the Nutube holds up over time will be anybody's guess but it makes me interested in other uses of the Nutube. Ibanez already has a Nu Tube Screamer and I'm hoping that more folks sneak these into audio signal paths. I'm also eager to see if the Nutube can power an amp as well and not just amplify a signal. It's an auspicious start for Nutube and I'm expecting Vox is just getting started with its implementation. Based on my experience with the MV50, I'll be eagerly awaiting the next creations. — KELLY MINNIS





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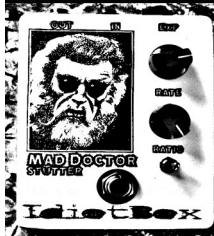
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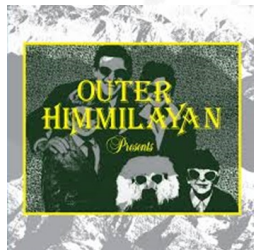
HERO'S of the BRAZOS by Bill DANIELS '15



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RECORD REVIEWS



Various Artists

Outer Himmilayan Presents

To date, Sacred Bones Records' reissues have been excellent. The latest album in this series—*Outer Himmilayan Presents* is no exception. *Outer Himmilayan* compiles early singles from three bands: Soft Drinks, The Magits, and S-Haters.

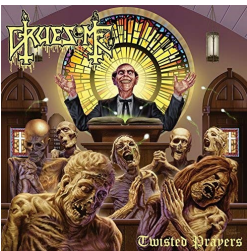
Any UK anarchist punk band in the 1980's worthy of the name put out records on their own record "label". Crass had Crass Records, Conflict had Motorhate, Flux of Pink Indians had One Little Indian Records and so on....*Outer Himmilayan* (their spelling, not mine) was the label for the UK anarchist punk band Rudimentary Peni. Rudimentary Peni were among the most unique of the UK anarchist punk bands that followed in the wake of Crass. While a discussion of Rudimentary Peni is not within the scope of this review, their first two albums are very highly recommended. Today Peni are name dropped and cited as an influence among many deathrock bands.

Until "Outer Himmilayan Presents" came out, I didn't know Peni had put out records for other bands. Soft Drinks were a synthpunk duo with drums and keyboards only. The aggressive and tribal drumming and moves the songs along lest anyone think they had stumbled onto a new wave band by mistake. Soft Drinks sound like Rudimentary Peni sans guitars which isn't surprising as one member of Peni was also in Soft Drinks. The Magits (their spelling, not mine) were a noise band with keyboards vocals and drums. They sound like a cross between a noise band and a hearing test you would get in elementary school with vocals put on top; respectable as art but not a sound that works for me (music for which the phrase "sound-scapes" was invented). However, Magits songs are fairly short and they get dubs for not sounding like an atypical punk band of the time; or now for that matter. S-Haters are the most straight forward rock band on this compilation. They

inhabited a grey area between punk, goth and post punk. Their goth influence is most evident on the song "Industry and Nature" an almost poetic spoken word piece with distorted guitar, bass and vocals about nature reclaiming abandoned buildings. S-Haters went on to record several ep's and album (with a name change to the Underlings) before calling it quits in 1985.

The *Outer Himmilayan Presents* LP comes with a reproduction of the black and white Xeroxed artwork that came with these releases; with the obligatory, tiny eye 'o strain microfilm sized font used by political punk bands and zines back in the day. Lest they be taken too seriously Soft Drinks propaganda included a "A young person's guide to drinking" that is quite funny. *Outer Himmilayan* is allegedly only available on vinyl and according to sacred bones website is "sold out". So until the "reissue" is reissued, you will have to find these bands online. That's show biz.....Now if only someone would reissue the three volume punk compilation "Bullshit Detector" that was put out on Crass Records.....

More info at: <https://www.sacredbonesrecords.com/collections/reissues/products/sbr3025-various-artists-outer-himmilayan-presents> — **RENT-ED MULE**



Gruesome

Twisted Prayers

What's Matt Harvey been up to lately? With four active bands, I'd say lots. While Exhumed might be his bread and butter, Matt's secondary band, Gruesome, is making a big splash. In every way possible, Gruesome is doing their damndest to purposefully imitate Death's image. However, this isn't criticism, but praise. I find keeping the legacy of Chuck Schuldiner alive to be a noble cause. Gruesome's first two records, titled *Savage Land* and *Dimensions of Horror*, could have easily been the B-sides of Death's *Scream Bloody Gore* and *Leprosy*, but with their release of *Twisted Prayers*, Gruesome explores the

progressive death metal sound.

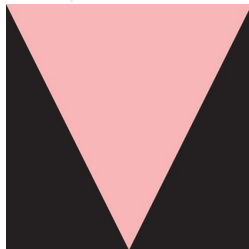
It's almost impossible to listen to *Twisted Prayers* without comparing it to Death's *Spiritual Healing*. The title, guitars, song structure, and Ed Repka's classic artwork are very similar. One thing I noted is that Matt's vocals haven't changed and are better executed than Chuck's. Also, this album balances the death and progressive elements better than *Spiritual Healing*. Put me down for two counts of blasphemy! The progressive change in *Twisted Prayers* is less noticeable, making it far more palatable for those of us who prefer Death's earliest sound.

Though there were nice surprises on this record, I am still going to gripe. My first gripe is the fact that Gruesome followed the same progressive path as Death. Prog-death has never been my jam. The guitar solos feel overdone like the band is showing off, a common tactic for this subgenre. To quote Emperor Joseph II, "Too many notes, Herr Mozart!" Such things makes me zone out rather quickly.

The other gripe I have are Matt's lyrics, particularly of the songs "Crusade of Brutality" and the title track: misinformed at best, and atrociously juvenile at worst. The former is an indictment of the Crusades that lays the entirety of the blame on Christianity. The title track is the story of a woman whose life is threatened by her pregnancy, but will not get an abortion because she and her peers view it as immoral. Once again, this song lays the blame on —you guessed it— Christianity! The lyrics seem to be drawing from the song "Altering the Future" from *Spiritual Healing*, which also tackles abortion. But where Chuck's lyrics weave a complex, philosophical debate questioning the morality of abortion with no accusations towards anyone, Matt's lyrics are an old, tired, repackaged, finger-pointing apologetic used by the pro-choice crowd.

Twisted Prayers, for me, is a mixed bag. Soundwise, I consider it a *Spiritual Healing* done better, but it is still prog-death, and that is enough for me not to buy it. The other issue is the lyrics. I hold Matt to higher standards as an artist, as he an intelligent guy, but he got sloppy. Honestly, "Crusade of Brutality" feels like a cheap shot at Christianity made by those too cowardly to criticize the other party involved ("ahem" Islam "ahem"). Any history buffs worth their salt know that the Crusades were far more complicated than that. And surely, Matt is intelligent

enough to know that the percentage of abortions performed to save the life of the mother is somewhere between 1-3%, right? In other words, Matt: Give me a freakin' break! Facts should mean something when writing socially conscious lyrics. Perhaps I'm being too harsh, as Matt hasn't written on these topics before. Overall, I give *Twisted Prayers* a 3.5, but if you're a fan of prog-death and forgive Matt's lyrics, you will appreciate it more than I did. — **CALEB MULLINS**



Me'shell NdegeOcello

Ventriloquism

One of the most talented soul artists of the 1990's tackles a cover album of neon 1980s R&B? Sure, I'm game. NdegeOcello knocks a bit of the slick candy coating off the songs and gets in underneath them and gives these songs some real depth. The originals were largely high glitz drum machines and synthesizers, reverb, and gates. Largely, Me'Shell and band go for a more organic, almost country funk feel for much of the songs' arrangements. Flat, close-mic'd drums, glacial clean electric guitars, squiggly synthesizers, a smaller, roomier feel graces these songs. The bumping, raucous opener "I Wonder If I Take You Home" trades the fake cowbells and hand claps for rolling, tight jazz drums. The requisite synthesizer horn pop bears more in common with the programming on classic '70s Stevie Wonder albums than the Fairlight of the 1980's. The songs have a lot of space and noir. The country tonk funk of "Atomic Dog 2017" feels like a lazy summer afternoon more than the urban stomp of the original.

What does work is mind breaking. She covers Prince's "Sometimes It Snows In April," the song that has become his de facto epitaph since his passing two years ago. Me'Shell sings the song as though she is trying to comfort herself and us and does not really succeed. It's hard to believe there's another level of

CONCERT CALENDAR

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

7/5—Sykotic Tendencies Almatatah, The Shoobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/6—Magic Girl, Colton French, Logan McCune @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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

7/12—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/13—Street Pizza, ASS, Garbage Man @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/14—Rock Wood Honey, Keith Michael Kalina Band @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/19—Ian Eisinger, Carter Patric @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/20—Sketchy Trench, Knockin' Chucks, Burn Ban, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

7/21—YeeHa!, Wezmer, The Lucies, Mad Rant @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/26—Bily King & The Bad Bad Good, Rickshaw Bilies, Beige Watch, Benghazi Osbourne @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

7/27—The Schisms, Akaw!, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/28—Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

7/28—The Blaggards @ O'Bannons, College Station. 10pm

8/2—Jeff Becker @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/3—Jealous Creatures, Darwin's Finches, The Ex-Optimists @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/4—Runscarred, Aphotic Contrivance @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/5—Brazos Valley Roller Derby @ VFW, Bryan. 5pm

8/10—George West, Rudical @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/12—Punk Rock Matinee feat. Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 4pm

loss in that song but she sure as hell found it. When she sing/ speaks "Always cry for love, never cry for pain" you believe that *she's* trying to believe what she's saying and isn't quite sure she believes it. I never felt the love for Tina Turner's epochal "Private Dancer" in original form, but NdegeOcello makes it more populist in waltz time, and the upside down 5/4 take on Sade's lush "Smooth Operator" is inventive with dark synthesizer touches but still true to the original's intent.

Not every song and approach works. The quiet storm slow jams of the mid '80s had similar harmonic content and taken at the same pace and arrangement Me'Shell's band reveals the songs to be too similar for my tastes. "Nite and Day", "Funny How Time Flies (When You're Having Fun)", and "Don't Disturb This Groove" have similar chord progressions and weaken the album by having all three, though they are fine covers, the latter being my favorite. NdegeOcello flips "Sensitivity" on its head with a bouncy groove and gender play ("You need a man with sensitivity/a man like me" she whispers) but it's the same chord progression as "Tender Love" sped up.

Overall, *Ventriloquism* is a fun album to listen to and the love for the material shows through

and might even turn a new generation onto some of these classic '80s jams reinvented for the '10s. — **KELLY MINNIS**



Graham Nash
Over the Years

In many ways, Graham Nash is the sound of a younger time, an earlier time, in America. It was in the Sixties that protests against a lying President first erupted and continued into the Seventies with the next lying President (that's Johnson first about the war and Nixon about pretty much everything).

Over the Years is a throwback to a simpler time and a simpler sound. While many of these tunes were hits during Nash's time as part of rock's first supergroup: Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, many sound even sweeter in this stripped-down version of demos.

"Our House" is essentially the same vision of domestic tranquility, framed by just Nash's superb voice and piano. "Chicago" is just as powerful with its piano chords as a protest song: "We can change the world/It's dying/to get better." What a great line among many striking ones. "Wind on the Water" still works well as a protest song against killing whales even as it shows some of the influence of Neil Young on Nash's lyrics. "Wasted on the Way" is the most fully-realized song with backup vocals and acoustic guitar. "Just a Song Before I Go" also still works on solo piano (and harmonica) and Nash's fine voice. The familiar "Marrakesh Express" and "Teach Your Children" are still fine tunes, but the extra music and voices take them to the next level and are missed in these singer-songwriter presentations.

A couple of tunes that I had forgotten even knowing were pleasures to hear again: the propulsive guitar-driven "Pre-Road Downs" and the strong "Right Between the Eyes." The countryish "You'll Never Be the Same," along with "Man in the Mirror" and "I Miss You" are fair enough songs, but not as strong as others on this collection.

All in all, this is a pleasant visit

to the origins of some classics of rock music. Granted, this is not a rock and roll dance record by any measure, but it is what it is: a bunch of good songs, a solid voice, and competent musicianship. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

STILL POETRY

Traces under the skin,
Random mole tunnels
That never surface,
That never pile bb's of turf
At a point of entry
Or a point of exit.

They do not connect
The freckles, the follicles,
The scars, the tags,
The frown lines, the crows' feet,
The callouses, tags, lesions,
Warts, and absence of pigment.

Traces under the skin,
A range of foothills,
Capped as the Sierras,
Appalachian low,
Worrying at the mantle
With its floes and geysers.

Relieve this soldier from duty.
Fold this map carefully.
Store it in a warm, dry space,
Free it from plate tectonics,
Solar flares, and wind patterns.
Preserve it for those yet to come.

— **KELLY MINNIS**

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7.22 ST. LOUIS, MO - SAN LOO

7.23 FORT WAYNE, IN - NEAT NEAT NEAT RECORDS

7.24 DAYTON, OH - BLIND BOBS

7.25 CHICAGO, IL - UNDERGROUND LOUNGE

7.26 LAWRENCE, KS - JACKPOT MUSIC HALL

7.27 TULSA, OK - THE BEEHIVE

7.28 DALLAS, TX - HOUSE SHOW

ART BY: HALF JAW