

Stereopresent



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inside: high school prisoners - drunk detective starkness - coward in chief - still poetry - reading rocks - steal from the rich - salacious vegan crumbs - in praise of comics - pedal pushing - dream - record reviews - concert calendar

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HIGH SCHOOL PRISONERS

I am very glad that I was never a teenager in the current state of the world. No social media, no cameras everywhere, no school shootings, no hard drugs, etc. You could make every conceivable type of mistake and have there be a good chance that you would not get caught. Your memory would be the only record that you stole glass ketchup bottles from Dennys and drove around later that night shooting them at people's houses with a potato gun. There was always an air of mystery and legend around such activities. Sure, you talked about these things amongst friends but unless you were there one could never entirely separate urban legend from reality.

These days students not only do stupid shit but they film themselves doing it and race to post it to social media. Even those that are a little bit smarter than that cannot entirely escape the threat that someone might whip out their smartphone and turn a prank or even something worse into a YouTube sensation. Parents GPS their children through their phones and data use. Cars have smart keys that can be programmed to limit how far from home a car can be taken, keeping a teen with their parents' car on loan from driving recklessly or leaving town. Parents keep track of their teens' grades online. Key tracking programs store in memory every movement made on the computer. Kids these days are never alone and never not being watched. The College Station School District has decided to take the surveillance up another notch. Starting this fall all students will have to submit to drug/alcohol piss tests if they intend to participate in any school-sanctioned extracurricular activity OR to obtain a parking permit to drive to school.

Piss tests are not uncommon for adults who work in particularly sensitive fields, like law enforcement, air traffic control, etc. Instances in which being drunk or high on the clock could result in people dying. State employees don't get drug tested. Some private companies do random testing, but as an adult you are free to refuse consent. Of course, that may mean you are also free to be escorted from the premises with a box of your desk shit in your arms too. As a student you are still a minor without a choice. You have zero rights and zero ability to refuse. Of course, you could just not participate in school activities but that is a perceived admission of guilt that could follow that child around until graduation or dropout, whichever one chose. The assumption is that a child is guilty and has to be tested to prove innocence. I think this is wrong.

Adults are overwatching children. It is like parents believe that if they are not paying attention constantly that every made for television special on the Lifetime channel will come true and their child will become a teenage dropout meth addict whore parent drug dealing school shooter lone wolf thief. These things do happen, and no offense to those who have suffered from these obstacles and challenges. Most teenagers do not become any combination of these at all. To assume that if one doesn't monitor them that they will is all manner of wrong, regardless of how legal it may be. Testing athletes for performance enhancing drugs, that's a different thing altogether and I do support that. But to piss test the average non-trouble making teen so they can play chess on the Academic Team is bullshit. — KELLY MINNIS

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DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

MOM

Me: unwillingly opens his eyes to the train wreck he knows this morning will be if the otherworldly pain in his head is any indication Urrrrg, oh fuck, Drunk Detective Starkness, I need your services, stat. Quick question, did I fuck **Redacted** last night?

Drunk Detective Starkness: Umm, well buddy, it looks like you woke up naked beside her in her bed and, lemme check real quick...yup. There's a spent rubber in the floor. I'd say it's a pretty safe bet you fucked **Redacted** last night.

Me: Well how the fuck did this happen? Seems a little odd. Not that I care, had sex, whatever, but she is old enough to be my, like legit, not even a teen pregnancy, mom. I mean, why would she be sleeping with my 20 year old alcoholic ass? I'm an idiot, sure, but I tend to believe that the people around me are semi-rational actors.

DDS: Well, as I remember it, you were hanging down at The Woodlands, and the pool crowd kinda filtered out, cause it was getting late, and you kinda just wound up chilling with **Redacted**. And I don't think you meant to be, but you had been drinking for a couple a days and I think you were flirting with her. You said something kinda funny and she came back with, "If you aren't careful, I'ma take you home with me." I think she meant it as a joke. But you, being you, were all like, "Sure, why not? Let's go. What the fuck else are we doing right now?"

Me: Well, it adds up. That is a very me thing to say/do. But don't people know they should never take me seriously?

DDS: You live your life around complete and total drunks, dude. I don't know why you expected them to be any more rational than you. Just a thing that happens. On the plus side, you are up before anyone else, so just go grab your clothes and get the fuck out of here before this gets any more awkward than it is. Look, there's your pants, right there on the floor. Let's just bounce on this shitstorm and head out to a different apartment pool or something and go get so fucked up that we don't have to think about how or why this situation ever occurred.

Me: I like the way you think. Solid plan. Gets out of bed and grabs pants, checks pockets and.... Oh Holy Mother Of Fuck, DDS. I had just cashed a paycheck and there is no money in my pockets. I know I didn't spend a whole two week check last night. Did **Redacted** rip me off? Do I have to wake her up and ask her for my cash back?

DDS: Naw, **Redacted** is solid people. She wouldn't do that. Doesn't she have a kid though? I think I remember meeting him last night. Let's check the trailer and see if he's still here.

So, I get dressed and go looking around the trailer that I



happen to be in (after being at a luxury student living complex pool) for some kid. And sure enough, I find him, asleep in his room, but he's got three other 10-13 year old kids who crashed here on the floor last night.

Me: Fucking are you serious, DDS? Is this a thing that happens? Does this little fucking cum bucket hang out and wait for his mom to take some drunk home and then sneak into the bedroom at night and steal all the cash in their pants once they pass out while he's got his boys over? This can't possibly be a thing. Life has not prepared me for this.

DDS: I hate to say it, but it looks like that's exactly what's happening here. Just chalk it up to a life lesson, I guess. There is Drunk Trash, which is you, but then there is Trailer Trash, which is these people. No fucking sense of community. But whatever, you're young, just chalk it up as a loss, never go back to this trailer park, and move on... Fuck, looks like Blacked Out You wants to say something.

Blacked Out Me: WAIT! I have an idea. Oh wow, you're gonna love this.

Me: Dammit dude. Probably not. Am I gonna get my money back? Cause I could really use that.

BO Me: No. We're fucked on that front, you're not going to fight some twelve year olds over a few hundo. But this is even better. Hahahaha, this is gonna be so great it's worth every cent he stole from you. I need you to look around for a piece of paper, some tape, and something to write with.

Me: after some half drunk fumbling around some strange trailer Ok, got it. Paper. Tape. And a Sharpie. Check.

BO Me: Aiight. Here's what you do. You make a sign that says "I FUCKED YOUR MOM", you tape it on the inside of his door and then we bounce the fuck out of here, run back home where Whale probably has a handle of vodka and a pack of smokes, get drunk as shit and laugh about this for the rest of our lives.

Me: Blacked Out Me, you are a fucking genius. Yes, this is what we are doing.

And I did. Every once in awhile I still get a kick out of sitting around and thinking about this fucking punk playing X-Box, hearing all these randos saying they fucked his mom, and the shiver that runs down his spine, thinking, "OMG, is it true? Is it him? That guy that I stole money from all those years ago who taped that sign to my bedroom door? Did this guy who just 360 no-scoped me really fuck my mom?" I mean, odds are, yes, they did. — STARKNESS

STILL POETRY

OR TREAT

The wife and I just saw
A black and orange snake
Rustling through a creek
Bottom by our house.

It looked like Halloween
Had a bit too much
Candy Corn Schnapps
And couldn't find

Her way home,
Which is funny cause
She threw the party
At her own place.
—KEVIN STILL

WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER

To top perfection one must hold tangible the idea of
chaos in the air; to show motion beyond our own limitations;
to breathe suspense.

The girl before was the sun. She brought the rays and
all blue skies with fluffy white clouds that gave no sorrow. She was pure, and all the world loved her for her purity.

I stand in the rain against the sun bringing the hurricanes of disaster and opportunity of rebirth. To be or not to be; I am. What am I?

Possibly, a series of continuous gestures with an appetite for poetry, science, and philosophy; all things beautiful and dreary?

Perhaps, I am the consciousness of a run-on sentence to a literature major who minored in art. Irony, if it turns out I was the chicken scratch of the professor who longed for chaos in their world of word counted essays on rhetoric. And what are you, dear reader?

Perhaps you are the same as me in this world where uniqueness begs for loose change around every corner of Houston, Texas. Perhaps you are the flooded streets near the bayou; raging and carrying a flu through the homes you made your own. Maybe, you aren't raging. Maybe, you're the sun, too; consistent, round, bright, and blinding with all your perfections.

Can I be your moon? Waxing, new, full; crescent in Cancer when I bring the rains in the earliest of mornings. What, is and isn't rhetorical. What, is the broad question of existence in an unconscious world of uncertainty.

We're all chicken scratch from the ink of a heavy pen
dying to be some mystical moon or storm in the poem of
the next Keats.

— JESSICA LITTLE

THE HERMIT, THE ISLAND

26 years underwater
Away from your island
has it been so long now?

Skip me through the sea like a stone
Under the surface of water, I've been waiting
I could taste your February mouth

I gave you my gold in hopes to rest my warm sands
upon your beaches
The lanterns kept your mind.
How cold are your bones on your island alone?

You were looking across the sky
All the years you've miss my warmth
I could never hold you.

— JESSICA LITTLE

ROLLER COASTER

The first time I was decapitated was in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I was a child. My head fit in my father's pocket.

The second time I was in Branson, Missouri. I was old enough to remember the first time. That didn't stop me from raising up to look back to see if my friend was screaming, too.

The third time I was on a white cyclone overlooking a pond with a dog-park in Denver, Colorado. I also lost my Dell Brewing Co. baseball cap. Everyone in Denver seemed to have a dog, I thought right before.

— KEVIN STILL



MONDAY, July 2

"Tell me your secret," I said.

Mara smiled. "I don't sleep anymore," she said. Sun streamed through the windows of the library, highlighting her fiery hair.

"We're in God Damn college!" I pointed out, slamming my book shut. "None of us sleep. But you're the one that it doesn't seem to bother."

Mara regarded me for a moment, then reached into her purse and drew out a small unmarked bottle. "Sleep pills. I bought them on the Internet. They're not legal and have no FDA review date. So, keep it to yourself."

"Sleeping pills help you study?"

"Not sleeping pills, listen to the words that I speak.

Sleep pills." She enunciated with wide-stretched cheeks. "One pill contains eight hours of rest. All the benefits of a refreshing night with none of the time commitment."

"So, crack."

"No, not like that. It's synthesized in Germany, so you know it's good. It's literally sleep in a bottle."

"That can't be healthy," I said.

She shrugged, letting out a small cackle. "I haven't been to bed in six weeks, and I feel great. I'm so far ahead on my classes, I've been writing again, and I did a speed run on Chrono Trigger last night."

I stared at her. Her eyes looked a little sunken, her cheeks a bit drawn, but that could just have been the late afternoon shadows, I'd never paid attention before. "If you're so far ahead, you can quiz me," I said finally.

WEDNESDAY, July 11

I caught up with Mara after Physics. She was walking quickly, her messenger bag whacking against the backs of her legs rather violently.

"Hey," I said, a bit out of breath. "Are you still not sleeping?"

She flinched, half turned, and laughed. "Who needs sleep?" she said. "I'm the most productive I've ever been. I don't need to worry about prioritizing because I have eight extra hours in the day and now I'm working on grad school applications. Do you think I should learn Chinese?"

I lengthened my steps as she continued to hurry along. "Don't you miss... you know, being asleep?" I asked. "Just the fundamental experience of it?"

DREAM

"No," she said. Then, after a pause, "I miss dreaming. May be a little bit."

FRIDAY, July 20

"You look terrible," I said frankly.

ly.

We sat with our backs against the stairwell in the student commons, sharing almonds out of a bag. Mara's eyes were bloodshot in a way that was much more striking than her hair. She glanced constantly from side to side like a jittery forest creature, huddling close against me as she scratched around in the bag.

"I think I'm going to quit the pills," she said. "Or at least cut back. Save them for all-nighters. Just when I need them."

"I thought not sleeping was the greatest thing ever," I said.

"The thing is," said Mara, "since I haven't been able to dream unconsciously, I think I am consciously."

I thought about this for a minute. "Like, daydreams?" I asked.

"All kinds," she said. "Nightmares, mostly. They don't stay in my head anymore. They follow me around, on paw feet and full of hate."

"You're hallucinating," I said.

"No shit Sherlock," she agreed. She fumbled in her purse and came up with a single white capsule. She broke it in half, popped one piece in her mouth, and held out the rest to me. "Catnap?"

MONDAY, July 30

Mara didn't show up to lecture today, or last Friday. She didn't answer her phone, and none of her roommates had seen her in at least a couple of days. Whatever, we all go missing occasionally. Maybe she did get off the pills and was sleeping it off for real.

THURSDAY, August 2

They found her at the bottom of the creek a few blocks away from campus. Dew had soaked her hoodie and washed the dark stains from her head. The police say she jumped, and that given the amount of unknown chemical in her bloodstream, they said she probably never felt a thing.

At the top of the ravine, in the soft dirt, there were tracks – made by paws, not feet. No known animal would have made those paw prints, anyways they were too big for anything native to urban New Jersey. The police said they didn't know what she thought she was running from. Neither do I.

But I know I will dream about it. — STARKNESS

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PEDAL PUSHING

Recently, when asked to name one piece of gear I owned that completely revolutionized my playing, I named the Line 6 Pod as that one device. The first time I played through one nearly 20 years ago I was astounded that a device had finally arrived that you could plug your headphones into that sounded like a real amplifier. I bought mine in 2000 and have used it ever since on countless recordings. Two years ago I started looking around at maybe doing something different. I knew that emulation technology had leapt forward enormously and figured I might could possibly do better than the olde Pod. I bought an Amplitube rig for my iPad and I was quite underwhelmed. I had

read a lot about the Kemper and Fractal stuff but that was all WELL out of my price range. Recently our erstwhile graphic designer Wonko bought a Fractal AX-8 for amp and effects emulation. It inspired me to go back to looking for a possible Pod upgrade that would not break my little piggy bank. Online research and YouTube videos led me to the **Atomic Ampli-Firebox**.

For starters, this is a full-on DSP-powered nine preset amp and effects simulator in a 2-in-1 pedal enclosure. It sets up amplifier and effects chains with the ability to add a boost, EQ, compression, delay, and reverb to the chain. It has a LOT under the hood and does require a bit of work with it connected to your computer to edit the presets and get started, but once you get those going you can use it standalone. You cannot edit the effects on the device itself other than the reverb level. The 14 available amp models emulate a good portion of Fender and Marshall amps as well as Mesa, Friedman, Dumble, Kornfeld, and Peavey. Big gain, edge of breakup, big cleans, British kerrang, etc. It's all in this box. The presets are selectable atop the pedal, as well as the preferred output (1/4" or XLR). It is powered on a standard Boss style 9v at 200mA so it can pretty easily be pedalboarded. Many players use these as backup rigs to their real guitar amps or their more expensive emulator setups.

As I said, each preset is set up with a chain. The editing software shows a large version of the pedal on the screen with pull down menus for each editable feature. You can choose what type of boost (clean, overdrive, distortion, fuzz), echo (lots of style to choose from plus many parameters to tweak), gate, compressor, reverb, and EQ. The cabinet impulse responses are built-in to each amplifier type. While you can change which amp simulation is set to each preset, you cannot choose from the available IR's. However, the Ampli-Firebox WILL allow you to upload your own IR files. In most cases the amp presets have really good IR's but in the case of the Vox AC30 emulator it is assigned to a Fender Deluxe Jensen style 1x12 and it REALLY does not sound like what it is supposed to. Using an aftermarket



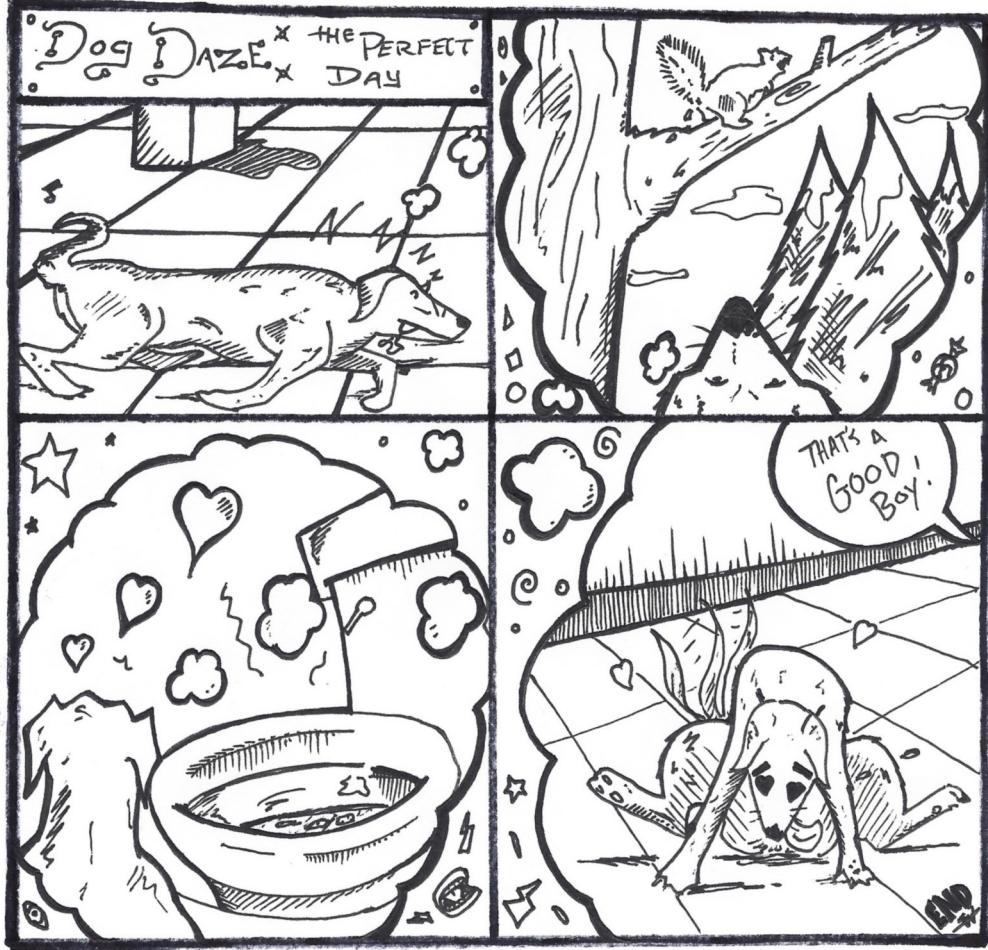
Greenback or Blue style IR will help to make the Top Boost sound like an AC30. There are plenty of IR's available for free and for pay online and it is definitely worth experimenting with them. The cabs themselves have some parameters that allow for some EQ'ing and volume adjustment. You can also defeat the IR's entirely and use the pedal with an amplifier. Once you set up each preset you can use one of the two footswitches to boost the preset. In essence this is like having a clean and dirty channel footswitchable. The enable switch can be used also to toggle between two presets. From the factory it is set as a clean to gainy amp but that is

easy to alter if desired.

There are certainly drawbacks to this machine. It is small. Atomic makes larger versions of the Amplifire that have 6 and 12 footswitches atop it, storing hundreds of presets and allowing for extended modulation effects emulation. I have used an Amplifire 3 but preferred the smaller Firebox as it was more inline with my use of the Pod. I do not use the Pod's programmed presets, only the rotary dial that chooses the type of amp. This is also how I use the AFB. It is useful to remember that the AFB is a little computer in a pedal and has its glitches. Powering on the pedal and playing with it before hooking it up to a booted computer caused the AFB to lose all my presets. The AFB is also very susceptible to picking up 60 cycle hum. Using the box through an isolated transformer seems to help with the power pickiness.

In use it is easy to be fooled that you are hearing a tube amp. It behaves a lot like a tube amp. Its basic tones improve on my old Pod immensely. It takes pedals like a real amplifier. That said, it does not respond well to rolling down the guitar's volume. It muffles with lower volume. It is also important to remember that the presets do not always relate to the pot positions on top of the enclosure. So you will certainly need to be handy with turning levels up and down. I could see using one or two presets as a giggle alternative to an amp, plugged straight into the PA. I find this to be an invaluable recording tool. If I want to record an amp sound at 1AM without turning on the amps and pissing everyone within a three house radius then this is a fantastic box to reach for instead. The Atomic team runs a web forum and Facebook group so people can share presets and programming tips. The company is active with firmware updates to keep your gear running strong.

For \$299 this is a lot of pedal. Unfortunately Atomic doesn't have a lot of distribution. To purchase you need to buy direct from Atomic's website or their storefront at Reverb. — *KELLY MINNIS*



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IN PRAISE OF COMICS

Throughout the 1980s, Brookshire Brothers Food & Pharmacy in El Dorado, Arkansas kept a double-rack of comic books near the magazines and paperbacks, just to the right of the store's front entrance. For this reason, I never protested a trip to the grocery store, which was frequent in our family. My mom did not believe in big shopping trips. She liked the ritual of dropping by Brookshires every other day: grabbing two potatoes and a chicken today, only to return for spaghetti noodles and pasta sauce two days later. Secretly, I think she fancied the *Cheers* like greeting—"Hi, Ms. Still! How are you today?"—she received entering Brookshires. I inherited this need to be recognized (ie. validated) in public, which is why I frequent the same eateries and Happy Hour spots, even though I've never quite landed her celebrity level of recognition status.

But to my mom's credit, she was chatty at Brookshires. She knew the cashiers and baggers and deli workers as well as they knew her. Every trip to the grocery store offered her a chance to ask and be asked about, to check in as well as to be checked on. For my single-parent mom, there had to be a comfort in knowing "these people look out for me." I, however, did not inherit her need to engage, as was evidenced by my hiding beneath the comic racks to the right of the store's front entrance, engrossed so deeply in the shenanigans of *Heathcliff* the cat I could have been stolen and never known until I was unloaded and the really nasty stuff began.

Writing this today, I now realize that, ever since my childhood, I have always kept some form of text on me—a book, a magazine, a printed article—in order to avoid engagement. Heck, three years ago when the crowd ramped into a full-blown thrash metal blitzkrieg during an ASS show at Revs, it was the Arthur Miller paperback in my rear pocket that shattered the window behind where I sat, my body slammed backwards by a sweaty slick dude moving like a cartoonish blur through the crowd and against my knees. Even then I referred to Arthur Miller as my "social anxiety text", pocketed to comfort my attention away from the pressure of being fully present. Sure, I want to be recognized, but I don't want to be bothered. My poor sweet single-mom never knew she was raising an asshole.

For this, among other reasons, comic books had a special place in my childhood. That's an odd statement to make because, looking back, I remember very little about the comic books I read and collected. (By the same token, I was a dedicated baseball card collector, but, to this day, I couldn't tell you a single fact about baseball in the 80s. There was something about a Darryl Strawberry, but I've lost the particulars.) I remember that superheroes were not my thing. *Thor* had a big name at my elementary school, probably more because of the Elizabeth Shue movie *Adventures in Babysitting* than any actual *Thor* title, and this because Elizabeth Shue was solely responsible for settling questions regarding the sexuality of most of my fifth grade compatriots. So *Thor* was a big deal, and I read every *Thor* title between 1987-1991 because my friend Chris Hammond, who we called "Hams"

for multiple reasons, got everything he asked for, and Hams asked for comic books. Every month his parents gave him fresh copies of *Thor*, *X-Men*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Daredevil*, even a few female characters he kept on his nightstand. To this day, I don't think Chris read a single comic book he ever owned—he didn't even *read* the female hero titles on his nightstand. But I did. When I spent the night at Chris's house, he played Nintendo and I sat in his closet reading the comic books he filed in plastic sleeves and long cardboard storage boxes. Occasionally he would yell, "Don't fuck those up! They're already worth money!" What twelve year old boy is already obsessed with appreciating assets? Well, besides a filthy rich one?

Like Chris, I also collected comic books, but, unlike him, I never collected the right ones. Marvel and DC only mattered to me during the hours my mother shopped at Brookshires or my friend played Nintendo. The titles I truly loved were forgettable, even as they were being placed on the rack: *Heathcliff* and *Richie Rich and Ducktales* and *The Real Ghostbusters* and *Transformers* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. My absolute favorite comic book of all time was *Alf*, of which I owned every issue ever released. The juvenile comics were my comics. I loved them. I loved everything about them. I loved the bold colors and bulbous penciling and gawdy punchlines. I loved the interwoven advertisements for breakfast cereals and Kool-Aid Koolers and Saturday Morning Cartoons. I loved the contest announcements in the back-pages, many of which I entered but never won. And I loved the letters from readers. I wrote loads of letters to my favorite comic books and kids magazines (*Boys Life*, anyone?) that were never published. That didn't stop me from writing fan mail. I was a comic book fan, even though I didn't have one of those long cardboard storage boxes in my closet to prove it.

At some point in my late 20s, I noticed the lack of comic book racks in grocery stores. This was also around the time that I noticed kids were glued to their parents, and any kid not glued to a parent was automatically deemed "delinquent". Back in the late 80s, my mother dropped me off at the Brookshire Brothers comic book rack—sometimes she even left me in the car with the windows down flipping through an issue of *Fright Night*—until she finished her businesses. I relished those lonely moments with a comic book draped over my knees—sometimes reading, sometimes eyeball tracing the artwork—allowing the adult world to clamor along without me. But those days are gone—for me and for other kids. The world has changed. And access to kid stuff, like comic books and lonely time to enjoy them, has changed as well.

So I was not surprised, though definitely bummed, to read a *New York Times* piece by Gregory Schmidt, published on July 22, titled "Comic Book Publishers, Faced With Flagging Sales, Look To Streaming." The title here says it all. Sales of physical comic books are down, but, naturally, comic companies want to stay afloat. Tanking companies reach towards those shooting to and past the surface. That would be Netflix and Hulu and probably half a

dozen other streaming services I don't know (I still do not consume the "right things"). As Schmidt claims, "The goal is to reach readers who may not live near a comic book shop but want to keep up with *The Avengers* and *The Justice League*." Schmidts' claim speaks volumes about these declines.

First of all, the medium that woos an audience is the medium they will seek. And, most likely, those new fans of *The Avengers* and *The Justice League* that need to be kept are cinematic fans, not comic book nerds. Committed nerds are already convinced. They keep the presses rolling. So the real question might be what do we do with all these new fans—not necessarily of *The Avengers* and *The Justice League* but—of Chris Hemsworth and Gal Galdot: how can more revenue be made from those cinematic fans who attended Summer Blockbusters multiple times and even bought their Target t-shirts? Asking such a question might make sense, again, because Netflix and Hulu are killing it. Which brings me to a larger question.

Secondly, what are Marvel and DC doing to win their new found cinematic friends over to print comics? Is there a massive Red Sea divide between Marvel Studios and Marvel Comics? According to Schmidt, DC is the company pushing for more digital and televisual content, opening streaming services that will feature classic DC based films, such as the Christopher Reeves *Superman* franchise, and television, which obviously means Lynda Carter's *Wonder Woman* series. But have you watched those films or shows recently? They don't hold up, at least not for a new generation. They feel slow and dated, and—fine, I'll say it—downright silly. An angst teen frantically mowing lawns to pay for her first Heath Ledger Joker tattoo is not going to binge watch Cesar Romero in a lavender dinner jacket. So how about winning them to the actual pages and frames that gave birth to the Joker? Some publishers, including Marvel, have hired actual literary writers to pen story arcs—ie. Ta Nehisi Coates, Roxane Gay, Margaret Atwood, Chuck Palahniuk, Jonathan Lethem, and Stephen King, who need not even be named here. This is a good move, but it's primarily a move to win readers from one print format to another, which is its own struggle, for sure. But, the question remains, how does a publisher win cinematic fans over to print comics?

Lastly, the most significant problem here, concerning comic book sales and the plight of the publishing industry in general, is also clearly stated in Schmidt's claim: "... to reach readers who *may not live near a comic book shop* . . ." It was that statement that took my mind back to the hours I spent reading comic books in Brookshire Brothers Food & Pharmacy in El Dorado, Arkansas. Schmidt's claim also reminded me of a strange fact I've noticed over the past fifteen years: those comic book racks are becoming harder and harder to find. My small hometown never had an actual comic book store. But that didn't stop my friend Hams from collecting half a dozen titles a month or me from finding every issue of *Alf* comics ever printed. These were pre-internet days. These were find-it-or-don't kinda days. So why should I

now have to live near a comic book store to appease my inner nerd? I don't need more digital or televisual access as a substitute either. That option is grossly mind-numbing and insulting.

Not to mention, there is zero chance my mother would have driven out of her way, especially to a comic book store, so I could score another issue of *Madballs*. It wasn't gonna happen. My comic book collecting consisted of what I could wave feverishly enough at my mother while in the grocery store check-out line.

With this in mind, one day last week I drove the greater Bryan-College Station area in search of comic books. I wanted to know what titles were available outside of online orders. My quest was rather depressing. At the major grocery stores and big-box chains, I found zero titles except various iterations from the Archie Comics Double or Jumbo Digest Library. Barnes-n-Noble had one periodically published comic book title—*Simpsons Comics*—but, of course, they have a fairly solid smattering of graphic novels, especially if you like Marvel or DC Comics. Half Price Books, as you may know, is a hit or miss situation. At HPB, you need more time than money on your hands to dig, and then re-dig, the comic book bins and graphic novel shelves. As for our actual comic book stores, Lytle's Comics and Games (on Brothers Blvd in College Station) and BCS Books & Comics (on Inwood in Bryan), have very similar display options, featuring loads of Star Wars, Image Comics, IDW Comics, as well as big hitters Marvel and DC. I was hoping to find something a bit more juvenile, but to no avail. BCS Books & Comics did have several *Adventuretime* and *Archie Meets Kiss* titles, but I walked out with *Black Panther and the Crew #1*, for my buddy who (for some reason I can't fathom) loves Ta Nehisi Coates. We all make choices.

My point here should be obvious: I am hindered in participating in an industry that is not readily available to me. Likewise, I am further hindered from discovering the goods of an industry I do not have direct access to. Kids may not be buying comic books, or waving them in their parents' faces, because they simply do not see comic books in their daily, already limited environments. Would I have fallen in love with comic books had Brookshire Brothers not had a double-rack of juvenile titles directly beside the front entrance where those colorful covers could catch my attention? Probably not. I certainly was not in love with the Marvel and DC titles my friend collected.

I also can't help wondering if the modern-day misguided paranoia concerning childhood literacy wrongly inspires parents to bypass comic books for something more "educational". Unless a child is blessed to be born of nerds, they may have few opportunities to achieve grand nerd-dom themselves, especially in an internet driven marketplace where the pleasures of serendipity and discovery are out of reach. Think about it: video stores, record stores, bookstores, illustrious toy departments—those

CONT.->

places we once pedaled bicycles to and milled around for hours, scanning covers and imagining the glories of the contents—are disappearing. They're not just out of reach: they're out of business, giving up the ghost to the virtual marketplace. Kids today might as well be glued to their parents. Streaming provides the new grounds of discovery, where kids are free to roam as far as their thumbs can take them. Such kids are assured all the tools they need to become *normal*. And nothing kills nerd industries quicker than a generation suckled at the teat of normalcy.

God forbid and break the rainbow: it's time for a fresh flood.

My goal in writing this essay was to revisit my own love for print comic books, and perhaps to reignite someone else's as well. I'm saddened by the decline and potential death of any form of print media, especially when, as a substitute, we're given something as cheap and vapid as more digital and televisual content. I want other people to share my concern, even to a financial degree at the newsstand, but I know better than to nurture such hope to fruition. Marshall McLuhan was right. Neil Postman was right. They saw the writing on the wall move to a scroll along the bottom of a screen: we are a televised society. And the internet is merely a new manifestation of television that we can more easily control. I love it. You love it. And it takes sitting down to write something like this to remind myself that I once cherished something—yes, something juvenile, but something that mattered deeply to me—even more than I now love television and the internet. I want to remember that when the thing I once loved so much is replaced by this new thing I mostly consume for its digestive ease.

That being said, Alyssa Milano was also keenly responsible for settling the question of my own sexuality. And, last I checked, *Who's The Boss* never made a narrative appearance in print. So . . .

Also, the truly great irony here is that streaming television—that damned sugar-tooth induced mental cavity of the masses—is precisely what won me back to print comic books about a year ago. It was a little show that should not have survived half a season, and it sure as shucks should not have romanced me so profoundly, but, alas, it did. And now, because of the CW's *Riverdale*, I'm obsessed with *Archie Comics*—even worse, with the *Afterlife With Archie* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* horror arcs. Inasmuch, and to my often cheerful chagrin, the nerd pulse of gratuitous comic collecting has been revived within me. But that, as they say, is a story for another time.—KEVIN STILL

READING ROCKS

Rocket 88 is a book publishing house specializing in mostly coffee table books for legacy bands (i.e., OLD BANDS) with niche audiences. Bands that Rocket 88 has published books on include Dinosaur Jr., Opeth, Dream Theater, and Talk Talk. Devo's *The Brand* and *Unmasked* are Rocket 88's latest signature offering.



At over 300 dollars, Devo's *The Brand* and *Unmasked* signature edition book set is not for a casual fan or for someone looking for an introduction to Devo. For a DEVOTed fan, however, the signature edition provides a lot of bang for the buck. This signature edition comes with two coffee table books, an original art print signed by Gerald Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh (Devo's primary songwriters) and a signed "certificate of authenticity". Why a certificate of authenticity is necessary is uncertain. It isn't as if I am going to make a bootleg copy of this book. All this comes in a sturdy hard shell container.

Devo The Brand is a blow by blow history of the band from their beginning to present with plenty of unpublished photos and commentary by the band members. Several early Devo reviews/interviews of Devo from the likes of Sounds, New Musical Express, and Trouser Press are printed in their entirety. Of particular interest is the Trouser Press magazine review which had three different Devo Reviews in the same issue: one author liking them, another one lukewarm to them and a third reviewer disliking them. Also reprinted in the book is William Burroughs interviewing Devo; which is worth the price of the book). *The Brand* wisely breezes over the less than stellar Devo records of their later career rather quickly.

As an added "bonus" Yours Truly is pictured in crowd shot on page 146-147 of Devo playing SXSW in 2009 (one of the 50 or so bald guys in the audience; you can't miss me). *Devo Unmasked* is a more informal volume with numerous shots of Devo in the recording studio and live shots of the band playing places like CBGB's. It is basically a Devo scrapbook; essential for the fans; of significantly less interest if you aren't a fan.

I'd recommend the Devo's Signature books *The Brand* and *Unmasked* to any Devo fan. For those who do not have quite that level of commitment, Rocket 88 does sell a "classic" bargain basement version of *Unmasked* and *The Brand* for significantly cheaper. Info at: <https://us.rocket88books.com/collections/books/products/devo-by-devo-signature-edition>

— RENTED MULE

G-TONE
SPEAKER CABINETS

SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS



It's a zillion degrees. You're beginning to think that all along we've been misspelling pores, because yours just seem to be pouring sweat all the time. You've ditched any semblance of a "makeup" routine for tinted sunscreen and let your hair color fade from all the pool parties you've been to this summer. Your poor body is just screaming for you to replenish everything the sun sucked out of your skin, condition that pool hair, and make everything stop sweating. Just your luck, the bathroom cabinets are barren as a bible woman!

You take a trip to Targét—it's cool inside, and it's the time of year when you can practically smell the fall time stuff coming in on Back to School's heels (velvet, burgundy, HALLOWEEN!)—and saunter over to the beauty department. You grab your holy grail CeraVe cleanser, but wait! It actually contains some weird animal cholesterol!! Even if you're not vegan, that's pretty gross. You've been brushing up on vegan beauty products, and you've learned that loads of brands use beeswax instead of the vegan-friendly candelilla wax. You've also learned that lots of stuff that's listed as cruelty-free isn't vegan-friendly—tinted lip balms with carmine (crushed up bug shells), face masks with honey, and hair masks with eggs (throw some Just Mayo up in those locks!). You're up to the task of veganizing your vanity!

The next row over, you see an entire section of natural products. Jackpot!! You make a bee-line for Pacifica—everything they make is vegan and cruelty-free, and they have a wide range of cleansers, lotions, masks, and sun protection. You grab some after-sun body spray to cool you down after a hot 30 seconds from the driveway to the front door, and an oil slaying pineapple cleanser for your cheeseless pizza face.

Underneath the Pacifica, you see some sleek, white minimalist packages—Acure. You remember hearing Lisa on the VietVegan talk about Acure helping her sensitive eczema-prone skin! Cleansers, serums, creams, hair junk! A moisturizing shampoo and conditioner combo with argan oil and pumpkin (HALLOWEEN!) sounds like the perfect thing to rejuvenate your straw pool hair. The under-eye mask that you pop in the fridge first probably does something nice for your skin, but fuck it, it's something cold you can slap on your body!

Next to that, you see the Yes To! Collection—skin care that uses things like charcoal, tomatoes, carrots, and other natural ingredients to tackle different problems. You're immediately drawn to all the cucumber products—so cooling, so moisturizing, so soothing! A couple of single-use masks make their way into your basket—so cheap! The Yes To! stuff is cruelty-free, but the entire line isn't vegan, so keep those eyes peeled for honey and beeswax!

After slinking to the back of the store to see if any fall time stuff has made its way into the seasonal section, you check out of Target, leaving with full bags and a cherry icee.

Wanting to spoil yourself a little more, you run to Ulta to replenish some of your more high end stock. You lavish

in the Pureology section—the shampoos, conditioners, and other hair care is expensive, but high quality and sure to be a jump start to getting your hair back in tip top shape. Summer is still here to stay for another two months, despite how badly you want to be watching *Hocus Pocus* and eating pumpkin treats, so you grab your favorite tinted sunscreen from Australian Gold to keep your manic stress over that one weird mole on your face at bay. The entire Ulta brand line is vegan and cruelty-free, so you throw in some shower gels and bath bombs—they're always on sale!

Replenishing your dwindling bathroom cabinets is tiring, so you stop by HEB to pick up a little snack and grab your favorite toothpaste, from Hello—you started buying it a while ago because the packaging was cute, and it accidentally turned out to be vegan-friendly! The natural skincare and beauty section is surprisingly well-stocked—lots of vegan deodorants like Schmidt's, Tom's, Jason, even Primal Pit Paste! You pick just one, and note hair care and body wash from Jason and Nature's Gate—next time! You've already spent a fortune on this bathroom stock that happened to all strangely run out at the same time!

Your final stop of the day is Village Foods—they have vegan and cruelty-free everything, and it's a little overwhelming! A friend recommended LaVanila deodorant as the best deo ever, so you pick up a travel-sized tube for your upcoming vacation. They also have wee little vegan and cruelty-free travel toothpastes, and a HUGE selection of Acure—some body wash and a moisturizer topper into your basket. After grabbing some Dr Bronner's shave gel and a wheel of smoked vegan mozz (not to be used together), you head home, eager to test out some of your haul!

At home, the shower steams, and your body is clean, your pits smell nice, and your hair finally feels like hair again. The couch invites you plop down to play around on your phone. Someone's Instagram video of a Lush bath bomb catches your eye—look away before it's...too...late! Noo! Lush is the original skin care company fighting animal testing. None of their products are tested on animals, and 85-90% of their line is vegan, and clearly marked. When you first went vegan, you thought you had to say goodbye to all your precious dollars because Lush was the only company that cares about animals, but you're wiser now. Obviously not wise enough, though—in your excitement, your order your favorite scrubby Cup O' Coffee mask, a pumice soap for your feeties, some dusting powder for that underboob/undermooboob sweat, solid perfume, solid deodorant, shampoo and conditioner bars (c'mon, solids are perfect for your upcoming travels!), and an armory of bath bombs. An audible whimper comes from your wallet.

Taking cover under your warm down-alternative blanketie (it's summer, but it's always a cool 68 degrees inside), you fear the next morning when you check your credit card statement. You slowly drift off to a lavender-induced sleep, grumbling about your stupid skin care stash that all ran out at the same damn time.—KATIE KILLER



STEAL FROM THE RICH

Alright, look you dirtbags reading this weird underground zine, it's time you realized something: It is time to stop respecting the rich, and start stealing from them. Immediately.

Inequality is eating America alive. It has been growing for decades. To say that "the American dream is dead" is no longer a poetic exaggeration — It is an accurate description of 40 years wage stagnation and loss of economic mobility that has given a new generation nothing but the very real satisfaction that since they can't afford things it puts casual dining establishments and golf courses out of business. Not because of devastating war or plague, but because of a very specific set of rules governing a very specific economic system that encourages the accumulation of great wealth among a tiny portion of the population. Our political and business leaders have chosen to embrace a system that favors capital over labor. A system in which the more you already have, the more you make, and the less you have, the harder it is to build wealth. It is a system designed to increase inequality. It is functioning exactly as designed. And now, it is about to get worse.

How long are us normal people supposed to tolerate being stepped on by people who already have more than enough? It is not as though the fact that inequality is a crisis is a fact that snuck up on anyone. Economists have seen the trend for decades, and the general public has been well aware of it since at least the financial crisis of 2008. Obama called it "the defining challenge of our time." Thomas Piketty became a rock star by writing a very dry book about it. It's not an underground thing. It is well known and understood by the people in control of the institutions with the power to change it. The response to this dire situation by the Republican Party, the wholly owned subsidiary of the American capital-holding class, has been to pass a tax bill that will only make things worse in this country. It is a considered decision to make a bad situation worse. It is a deliberate choice — during a time when the rich already have too much — to take from you and me to give the rich (including members of Congress and the President) more. That is not a metaphor. That is the reality. That is what the Republican party is about to accomplish on behalf of the donor class, calling it "middle class tax relief" in the face of mathematical proof to the contrary. Even to my cynical ass, the sheer fuck you-ness of this

action towards the majority of the country is breathtaking. This is not just a failure to solve a severe problem; it was the expenditure of vast amounts of political capital to make the severe problem worse so that a tiny handful of people will get wealthier than anyone needs to be.

Ideally, in a democracy (or democratic-republic if you want to be that kind of an asshole), elected leaders reflecting the interests of the people would pass taxes and regulations to reverse the growing inequality here. For that to happen, we would need to end gerrymandering and reform campaign finance and probably abolish the senate and the Electoral College, and that's just for starters. In short, it's just not going to fucking happen. Our broken political system, which is designed to reward money with political power, is moving in the opposite direction of a solution. Who is suffering because of this? We are. The bottom 50% are acutely suffering — money that would have been in their paychecks has been instead funneled upwards into the pockets of the rich. Every desperate family that has found themselves coming up short for rent or food or medicine, every American who has downgraded her dreams and aspirations because they became financially implausible, has been directly harmed by the political and economic class war perpetuated by the rich, even if they cannot see the perpetrators with their own eyes. I think that people have been more than patient in the face of this slow-moving crisis. In 2009, when the markets crashed and millions were laid off, nobody rioted and kidnapped the financiers and burned their homes. That was bad praxis. It's why they were able to keep fleecing us.

Violence against people is morally wrong and a bad way to solve problems. But capital is different. One thing that would help to create the political environment conducive to solving the inequality problem would be to make the cost of accumulating all that capital too high to be worth it. In other words, to create a downside to being too rich. I have personally stood in rooms full of old rich assholes warning one another explicitly that inequality must be addressed, or the U.S. will become a place like Latin America, where rich people are forced to live behind walls, surrounded by armed guards, because of the very real risks from the rage of the poor. Rich people in this country do not want to live like that. If they see that they must stop being so greedy to enjoy their own freedom, they will stop being so greedy. Those conditions must be created by people who want justice.

Our situation is absurd. Not since the Gilded Age has it been clearer that a few people own everything. Furthermore, the people with too much are investing in political clout to give themselves more. It's just wrong. If the government won't help, all we have is direct action. Sticking up a billionaire on the street for a cool hundo is not going to do it. But angry Americans might express their dissatisfaction with our current division of wealth in a much more correct way: A large-scale attack against the holdings of the very rich; yachts sunk in harbors; unoccupied vacation homes in the Hamptons mysteriously burned to the ground. Sotheby's auctions swarmed by vandals, Art Basel attacked by spray paint-wielding mobs, protests on the doorsteps of right-wing think tanks, venomous words directed at millionaires as they eat in fancy restaurants. People have a right to life and safety, but property does not. A life spent screwing the little people so that you can acquire lots of stuff loses its allure when you know that all that stuff will be smashed to pieces by really fucking angry people. It is not hard to put together a list of those who should be targeted — Forbes tells us who to get every year. Likewise, public campaign finance records from opensecrets.org give us a pretty good idea of exactly who is funding the politicians who are perpetuating this economic war on behalf of the rich.

It is nice to imagine a grand, well-targeted computer hack that would neatly transfer billions of dollars out of the accounts of, say, the Walton Family and into a charity account that would disburse the money to the poor in untraceable ways. That seems far-fetched. Realistically, what people can do now is to start thinking about ways to make it uncomfortable to be too rich. Socially uncomfortable and otherwise. When the accumulation of great wealth ceases to be a praiseworthy endeavor and instead becomes viewed as a sick, greedy pastime whose only reward is the hatred of your fellow citizens and the inability to live comfortably without fear of your excessive property being destroyed, rich people will rethink their goals. Until then, inequality will keep rising, and everything, for most people, will continue to slowly, slowly get worse.

So, in short, good on you random vandal for fucking up Betsy DeVos' yacht in Ohio. Let's see some solidarity and burn down Bezos' lake house in Medina, WA. Come with me to Bel-Air and let's smash Elon Musk's 1,000+ bottle wine cellar, steal his James Bond submarine car and drive it into the God's damned ocean. Fuck these people and fuck their property. — STARKNESS



www.idiotboxeffects.com

COWARD IN CHIEF

That Mr. Trump's lack of moral fiber has been evident all his adult life, but his lack of a backbone didn't become completely apparent until his shameful boot-licking of Russian dictator Putin live on international television recently.

Why a long-time bully like Mr. Trump would debase himself before Putin only adds to the evidence that the Russians have something particularly nasty on the current president, which is why the criminals worked so hard to ensure he became the leader of the free world.

As one commentator put it, Mr. Trump is now "Putin's poodle," at his beck and call. Why else would the president of the United States grovel and defend a murderous foreign dictator's word while disputing what loyal Americans have proven by their hard work? One only has to remember what Mr. Trump has valued his entire life — money and power — and what he has viewed with disgust: anyone who isn't rich and powerful.

Mr. Trump despises those in Washington because many value service to the country over material wealth, a concept he can't comprehend. His mistreatment of immigrant families is no surprise since he can't stand anyone who is poor. How could they allow themselves to not be rich like him? That he loathes all working Americans who aren't millionaires is readily apparent.

The president is a coward. It's not really that surprising since most bullies are cowards, and Mr. Trump has always prided himself on bullying everyone. Except Putin. The Russian president worked hard to get Mr. Trump into the White House, and now that he's there, Putin is going to enrich himself as much as possible. It's entirely probable that Mr. Trump believes being Putin's toady will allow him to benefit financially. After all, all Trump cares about is himself and money.

It's appalling that the country is being led by a craven weakling, but that's where we stand at this point. The good news is the executive branch is only one part of America's government. While Mr. Trump will have some input into the composition of the judicial branch, history has shown that individuals rise to serve their country in times of need, and I believe that will be true of the Supreme Court, no matter who he chooses.

The legislative branch needs to find its own backbone since the leader of the free world is a spineless barely-literate bigot. It will have to find the courage to combat the chaotic pettiness that Mr. Trump continues to loose upon America and the world.

Congress will need to find the gumption to do the right thing to combat the lack of presidential guts. Just because Mr. Trump lacks courage doesn't mean Congress has to be as cowered as him. Indeed, the time is ripe for all Americans to find the mettle to reclaim America from the cowardly traitor in the White House. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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RECORD REVIEWS



Hoth
Astral Necromancy

For those of you who haven't heard, Hoth is black metal band from Seattle, Washington. In true black metal fashion, they are a two-man project. What's more is that their name is nerdy as hell (yes, their logo is shaped like Darth Vader's TIE fighter). In regards to genre, Hoth is a bit of a paradox. They produce black metal that is kvl't yet fresh; serious, yet not-so-serious. With their recent release of *Astral Necromancy*, the band delves darker than their previous 2014 release.

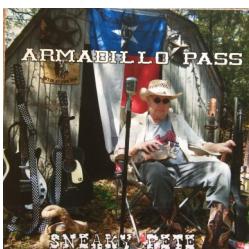
Astral Necromancy is melodic black metal. The vocals are hoarse croaks similar to that of Abbath's, which allows the vocalist to enunciate clearly and effectively, and it pairs well with the guitars. Unlike many black metal artists, Hoth has taken exception to the minimalist production and produced some of the most polished black metal around. The guitar distortion and the raw atmosphere are still present, but the sound is completely clarion. This is part of genius that is Hoth's creativity.

If the production is surprising, just wait; there's more! The songs have a wide variation, from fast n' furious like "Vengeance" to slow and epic like "Citadel of the Necromancer". When the listeners reach the sixth track, "Ad Inane Pacatio", they are graced with a choral song entirely in Latin! By the ninth track, appropriately titled "Journey Into the Eternal Winter", the listener gets an old school, slow-galloping, black metal song with a clean sing-along chorus! The best thing about these surprises is that they are totally unexpected from an album like this, and they are done extremely well.

The downsides to this album are few, but they exist nonetheless. The first downside is the song, "Passage into Entropy". It's a beautiful song, and I genuinely like it, however, if not for the vocals, it would totally be a melodic death metal song. Because of the sound, the song deviates from the black metal

mold a little too much, and this nearly breaks the spell that the band is attempting to weave. The last downside is the concept of the album itself. In early interviews, the band stated that their previous release, *Oath-breaker*, was a linear descent down a dark path with each song in the story getting darker; whereas, *Astral Necromancy* was to be "journey in infinite directions" with "no paths." For me, the music didn't communicate this idea very well. The arrangement of songs felt like a linear path rather than the journey of twists and turns that the band was hoping to create.

Overall, *Astral Necromancy* is a fine piece of black metal. Hoth has proven again that they are great storytellers, and the themes and atmosphere of this record creates a story that the listener can feel, as well as hear. The songs are well-ordered and poetically crafted. Hoth is one of the most creative forces in black metal because they are unafraid to implement new methods to the genre, and *Astral Necromancy* is a testament to that creativity. Because of that, I give this offering a 4.6:5. — CALEB MULLINS



Sneaky Pete
Armadillo Pass

Armadillo Pass, Population 14 is the last of Sneaky Pete Rizzo's Texas trilogy in honor of his return to the Lone Star State. As with his previous albums this year from his novelty-song DIY studio, Sneaky Pete has fun as well as getting in a few pokes at the things that are bothering him at the moment.

He chides humorless machines making telephone calls in "Robophone" while hilariously lamenting underwear issues in the harmonica-driven "Walkin' Talkin' Wedgie Blues." "The Hungry Man" is a bemused look at the morning ritual of having to eat: "Burned the toast again." "Slave to the Grape" is what you'd expect, but with a nice dynamic shift.

Four tunes fall into the "woman done me wrong" relationship

category like the melancholy "A Masochist's Dilemma" with keyboard touches, the instructive "Just to Please You" about change going both ways, the fabulously-titled "Me, You, and Doggie Doo," and the top of the lot: "Overstating the Obvious." In the tune, a great harmonica lights up the list of observations — "no worms in wormholes," "no water in car pools" — that concludes with the obvious "no way we could get along."

One of the most fun songs is the album opener — "Road Trip" — that rocks a Beach Boys/surf music vibe from start to finish. Also fun is the off-beat "What's This Song About, Anyway?" featuring odd percussion and Robyn Hitchcock lyrics about Goldilocks turning into a nurse . . . or something like that.

Oh, yes, there's the requisite instrumental "Mmmmm!" that he actually debuted on his all-instrumental album "All Cappella" earlier this year.

All in all, it's another solid offering for the retired Aggie biology professor. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



Immortal
Northern Chaos Gods

This year has been strange for me. I was stoked for 2018's death metal offerings, but so far, the genre has let me down. Even some of my favorites have put out mediocre work. But like a cold blade in the blackest of nights, my death metal disappointment is suddenly swallowed by the mystical, unforgiving, void of black metal. After nearly a decade in silence, the tyrants of Blasphyrkha have awoken from their icy hibernation, calling their legion of fans to arms. Immortal has returned!

Northern Chaos Gods is the first Immortal album without Abbath. When Abbath left, I thought Immortal had finally died (obvious irony); but when I heard they were continuing without their charismatic frontman, I was worried. I mean, how do you replace a guy like Abbath? After hearing that Demonaz would fill the roll rather than remaining the

ghostwriter lyricist, I held my breath. I liked the idea of someone who was originally in Immortal becoming the frontman. A completely new singer can change the essence of a band far too much. I hoped that Demonaz on vox would help Immortal preserve their original sound. Thankfully, my hopes were realized.

Northern Chaos Gods harkens back to the original, raw, and viscous old school Norwegian black metal sound. Immortal has definitely drawn on *Sons of the Northern Darkness* for this record. This album is truly a return to the band's roots. Aggressively chilling riffs and pommeling drums make the

listeners feel like they are in a nightmarish blizzard. What's more is Demonaz' vocals; I knew he could pull off some folk-influenced singing as he did for his self-titled project, but I never knew he could belt out such monstrously shrill vocals. He could easily be one of the Nazgul from *The Lord of the Rings*! He is definitely not Abbath who croaks like a demonic toad, but this is certainly not a bad thing at all. Demonaz' vocals pair perfectly well with Immortal's sound; he truly captures the spirit of the band. Two things I appreciated most about *Northern Chaos Gods* is how most songs average around the five minute mark, making it easily digestible for the listener, and I also love how the record ended with "The Mighty Ravendark." The song is great by itself, but the melodic and slower pace makes it the perfect closer. It's nine minutes of beauty, and not boring in the least.

As far as drawbacks go, I cannot find any to complain about, so I will carry on. This album from start to finish is amazing! It's nothing new, and that's what I love about it. What I truly admire about Immortal is that after losing what seemed to be like an irreplaceable frontman, the band pushed on and proved that Immortal is still Immortal without Abbath, and I mean that with the utmost respect to Abbath. *Northern Chaos Gods* is, without doubt, a contender for best album of the year, and it gets an easy 5:5. — CALEB MULLINS

CONCERT CALENDAR

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

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

8/4—LUCA, Charm Bomb, Stranger Her, The Hallers @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

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

8/9—The Shoobiedoobies, Benghazi Osbourne, Distance/Here @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/10—Silent Disco @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 7pm

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

8/11—Ian's Birthday Show with Aphotic Contrivance, Sykotic Tendencies, Comfy Muffin @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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

Wednesday the 11th:
Jason Swims

STILL BULLSHITTING

Jason Voorhees
learned to swim after

he had drowned. And he drowned because his counselors, who should have had eyes on him, could not keep their hands off of one another. Why would such a boy learn to swim after he had already drowned? That's the question nobody dares to ask. But he did. The drowned Jason Voorhees was a fast swimmer. Those who knew (only himself) said he could swim faster than a shot harpoon! Faster than a catfish in heat! They said he swam faster than sequels could flop! Of course, these were the days before *The Mask*. Few people know that Jason took *The Mask* as a sign—to himself and to others—that his swimming days were over, at least for the moment. The Mask slowed him down. But the glistening grooves of Jason's warped and bloated head cut the water like a blade through digestive linings. Jason took pride in his time. Dressed only in his mother's satin garments, Jason could feign a whistle, launching himself into a full dive from the boat dock, and then rise at Crazy Ralph's pine oak, the one with the noose over the cattails, before the whistle's vibrations stilled on his lips. He was fast! He favored no particular stroke. Jason Voorhees swam like jazz, whipping his arms in impromptu windmill fashions, listening to the currents above and beneath him, wrapped in algae and expired minnows like the winds between a tenor sax and wailing trombone. Perhaps, in this ensemble, he was the upright bass, those long legs and tree-trunk feet slamming the surface of the water like Mingus after a third gin. Or maybe he was the voice, his moaning slice of tomahawk hands—raised out and chopping in, raised out and chopping in—sang like Sarah Vaughn through Crystal Lake's pine-needled arms, stretched out to welcome Jason ashore, lonely Jason, dropping their needles like tears to build a bed for his weary, whale-like body. Climbing ashore, the go-whistle still trembling between his

8/16—Music & Art Showcase feat. LUCA, Vodi, Fox In the Ground, Michael Witt @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

8/17—Telesomniac, Origami Ghosts, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/18—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/23—Jay Satellite (solo), Don't Call Me Shirley @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/24—Patric Johnston, Andrew James @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/25—Shelter the Orphan, Brooks Roman, Little Outfit @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/30—Jeff Becker @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/31—The Ex-Optimists, A Sundae Drive, Brand New Hearts, LUCA @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

9/1—Jody Seabody & The Whirls, Mockingbird Brother @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/7—Charm Bomb @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

teeth, he wipes his eyes and squints to see the boat dock far across Crystal Lake. Yes, he had done that.

He had done it again. He had made Crystal Lake—the place that once seemed so massive and so magnificent to his tiny childishly dented eyes—smaller, even smaller than his fear of living alone, smaller than the grief that swallowed him in those quiet, hollow nights. And so he swam. He swam to feel the lake caress his body, to nurture his deceased skin. And Jason trained—alone, unguided—pushing himself to achieve more than his mating counselors, too busy to notice, ever expected of him. Now that Jason had made Crystal Lake small to himself, it was time to move on to phase two of his training: to swim faster than he missed her, to swim faster than Beth's blade taking his mother. Yes, it was time. And he would begin the day after tomorrow. He would rest on Thursday. Then he'd wake early the day after, slip on his mother's garments, and stretch on the boat dock. He would run his decayed tongue over his dusty lips and feign a whistle. But what Jason doesn't know is that—before the whistle whips pierces the air—he will hear a sound. A sound behind him in the distance growing closer. A line of cars will pull through the gates, onto the camp grounds. Music will rattle through the windows, scattering birds from their nests, sending the fish upstream. They are coming to counsel. To set up camp. To open his home to others. Who told them they could do this? Who told them they could unlock the cabins and fire up the ovens in the mess hall and fill the archery range with the stink of their sex? Jason doesn't know it yet, but he has swum his last lap for the season. The day after tomorrow, after a full Thursday of rest, he will turn from the dock, head back home, and prepare to drive them away. *Mother, he'll whisper in the quiet of his mind, I'll swim to you soon. After I make them leave. I'll swim to you.* He reaches in the closet for his boots. The blade he uses for fresh kindling is already by the door.—KEVIN STILL

THE EX-OPTIMISTS
JEALOUS CREATURES
DARWIN'S FINCHES

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