

STOREREPRESENT



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

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THE WAR ON XMAS NEEDS YOU

I am not a fan of Christmas. It's just not my bag. I suppose I would like it more if it wasn't for the whole goodness and kindness stuff. I never got into Christmas music. Maybe it's being in Texas, where it never snows, but I don't dig it. I never got into peppermint or gingerbread. I think trees are a waste of time. But I think what I hate most is all the pandering.

Gee Zus. I hate the pandering.

Prime time television airs Christmas episodes of all their sitcoms, cable channels rerun Christmas movies, and they all show us the same thing.... It's the spirit of the season that counts right? Sure man whatever helps you sleep at night. While TV is showing you families learning their lessons of life and carolers singing door to door, the reality of life is people are fighting for parking spaces in a mall and kids are asking for expensive tech toys over those hand carved dolls the elves make on TV.

Then there is the "War On Christmas" that seems to come up every year. You know what I'm talking about. The idea that saying "Happy Holidays" will make a conservative Christian implode because people are taking the "Christ out of Christmas".

Put it all together, and I would much rather see a tree burning than anything else.

It sucks too, because disliking the Holiday season paints you in an almost comical light. I can't tell you how many times I have been compared to a Scrooge or a Grinch. How comical Hollywood has made being a hermit during this time of year, and just how much people don't respect an introvert during this season. Now Grinches and Scrooges have been associated with bumbling and idiotic behavior. Something for people to laugh at, to take their kids to movie theaters to poke and teach a lesson (Now Timmy, be good and fall in line, don't have your own ideas or you'll be like the Grinch). The Grinch, for the record had great ideas, but history is written by the winners, so we will never know what could have happened.


So if no one tells you, let me be the first (and probably only) person to tell you it's OK. It is OK to not like the holiday. It doesn't make you suicidal, it doesn't make you a bad person. It just means you don't want to be a part of the bullshit.

It's OK to feel set apart this time of year. It's OK to be mad at things. You don't need inner peace. Sometimes anger can be for your inner peace. Let it run hot. Let it keep you warm those nights you don't want to join a group just for company. Anger is a gift. Fury is a weapon. You can pinpoint it. Harness it. No one would be able to stop you.

The War on Christmas needs you. — **TIM DANGER**

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HUMBQUI CREEPY'S WAR ON XMAS

Let's be honest this world is inherently boring. People openly enslave them selves in to mediocrity. And then comes Christmas. Folks feel the need to be joyous and kind to their fellow man as they put up hundreds of dollars worth of stupid ornaments and lights that don't amount for shit in the grand scheme of things. In Houston we have "Lights in Heights" where people converge to witness the white privilege pissing contest of who made their pretty perfect gentrified home look the brightest and most garishly displayed. Call me the grinch, but keep in mind the grinch didn't have a damn problem with Christmas. His problem was with the people and materialism. He wanted the true meaning of Christmas. Yeah, its true, never liked Christmas. That is true. I thought Santa was quite a motherfucker for giving all the poor kids shit and all the rich assholes anything they wanted. But in all honesty I never had a problem with people being good to one another which is what I thought it was about.

In the last week, I played bingo with a gay man with HIV and a woman confined to a wheelchair living out her days alone in a nursing home. I introduced the two and they were two peas in a pod by the end of our playing. I gave my last three bucks I really needed for my own damn self to a family on the street. Usually I have bottles of water in my car. The homeless don't have access to clean drinking water and it means the world to them when they get it. I even donated \$300 of my services to raise money for someone special to me with a brain tumor. I'm not saying any of this for a pat on the back or to be sanctimonious. You'd never know unless I told you and that's my week to week. I'm sneaky like that.

Me, I'm poor. I'm also not the greatest. But I'm also out there trying to make this hell hole inhabited by ass hats a little livelier and happier. Yeah, my morose, nihilistic ass. Some people seem to need a delusional holiday of make believe to rear their asses into doing good for their fellow man. I don't. And you don't. Fuck good tidings and joy.

You don't need a holiday to dictate that you need to be good to people. Just get out there and be fucking good to people. Make this world beautiful. Make it a little less mediocre and don't dim your fucking shine for no one. Make peace. Right your wrongs. Take a homeless person to lunch with you. If you see someone walking on the side of the road that doesn't inherently look like a serial killer give them a ride somewhere, help a person out. Use the money you would spend on for four Christmas trees and 1800 decorations and maybe donate to a family in need or go out and feed people.

Just please don't wait for Christmas to be a halfway decent human being. Call your family. Tell your friends you love them and mean it tell them you love them. Go out there and make someone's day brighter just because and let's make this world a better place.— CREEPY HORSE

TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

... tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. Christmas is almost upon us, which means a time for celebration as well as another year almost gone and another one about to begin, a time for reflection and for anticipation.

The Christmas season always has been a time of tradition and of change. You go from being a kid so excited about getting presents to watching your own kids get so excited about their presents. There once was a time with family members you loved to see, some less than others, that changes to a holiday season of missing those who have died.

My brother and I have one favorite Christmas memory of when we were probably five and three years of age respectively. It was Christmas Eve, and we were excited about Santa coming, so we were not going to sleep. My dad snuck outside with a jingle bell, climbed a ladder above our bedroom, and gave it a good shake. My mom came in and said Santa's close, and you're not asleep, so he might have to leave. She said she'd never seen any kids' eyes get that big or any kids go to sleep so fast. Ah, I miss them both.

This time of year is supposed to be a time of happiness, of sharing and caring, and of forgiveness. It is challenging to shift into that mindset with all the ugliness that is ongoing in the name of our country. However, it is an effort worth undertaking.

Trying to find the common threads that unite us as Americans rather than dwelling on the differences may be one of the hardest things to do this holiday season, but it may be the most important gift we can give others ... and ourselves.

So, merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all.—
MIKE L. DOWNEY



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HAIR HITLER

"There is no need for the president of the United States to be smart. He can be hovering on the grim cusp of brain death and still be the most powerful man in the world. He can arrest the chief of the Mafia and sell the Washington Monument to Arabs." – Hunter S. Thompson.

Of course, Thompson wasn't referring to the current resident of the White House—Hair Hitler is easily the dumbest man ever elected president. He makes George Bush the younger look like Einstein, and that's saying something.

I just finished Bob Woodward's book *Fear – Trump in the White House*. I already had read Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury – Inside the Trump White House* as well as Katy Tur's book *Unbelievable: My Front-Row Seat to the Craziest Campaign in American History* and even Amy Chozick's *Chasing Hillary: Ten Years, Two Presidential Campaigns, and One Intact Glass Ceiling*. There are three constant themes in all these books concerning Hair Hitler: 1) how astonishingly stupid he is, breath-takingly proudly ignorant on just about every subject, 2) shockingly cruel and bullying to just about everyone, 3) an egotistical selfish liar of dumfounding proportions.

After two years of White House chaos, are any of these revelations a surprise? It just goes to show you – you can give any worthless excuse for a human being a million dollars, and he can grow up to become president . . . after declaring bankruptcy more than a dozen times and sticking others with millions of dollars in debt.

Hair Hitler is becoming more and more of a fascist leader since he's now going after the courts and the military. Of course, he doesn't have to worry about a military coup like Mussolini and the first Hitler had to contend with. Hair Hitler doesn't understand the military anyway – why fight for your country, no profit in it? Why else would he skip honoring American WWI military sacrifices in Europe? The rain would have messed up his hair. What a coward.

Tear gassing children on the border – it's not enough for him. He'll have blood on the border before he's through. An "ally" like Saudi Arabia murdering its journalists? – we'll overlook murder since it's more money in his pocket. Money trumps human rights any day.

How can you tell when our president is lying? His lips move. The most stunning report in Woodward's book is Hair Hitler's former lawyer – one of many – John Dowd who quit mainly because he didn't want the president to be interviewed by Robert Mueller for the Russia investigation. Why not? Because Dowd knew Trump was such a liar that he'd be found guilty of perjury if nothing else. Of course, Dowd has blustered since that he was misrepresented by Woodward, who has tapes and notes that say otherwise.

The Republicans, led by Hair Hitler, were impotent for the past two years despite controlling the House, Senate, and the presidency. Now, with Democrats in charge of the House, perhaps some of the worst fascist abuses of the president can be curtailed. Also, perhaps the Republicans will grow tired of his constant whining and start passing legislation to benefit all Americans. Whew, 2020 can't get here fast enough. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS



I wake up and check the fridge for maybe some Gatorade or some juice or something that isn't water or booze on a Saturday morning.

Me: Oh Shit! Blacked Out Me, the fuck man?!? Where are you at?!? You bought me breakfast? Does this mean it's real, not just a one night stand? Are we writing a Hallmark Rom Com? Will there be zany hijinks? Is someone going to try and come between us and then there's an inexplicably weird murder plot? Cause I'm in.

"One man. One Blacked Out Version of the same man. Both bonded by the loving grace of microwavable gas station food. Will true love win out above all the booze?" Coming soon to a theatre near you.

But for serious, BO Me, you were so close. You knew we had something kinda important to do today, so whenever it was you went out to the store last night, you made sure you got us a breakfast sandwich, so we could make it through the morning and get shit done. But your one crucial fuck up was also buying a case of beer and placing the beer right on top of that sandwich in the fridge. I mean, come the fuck on, you know exactly what I'm gonna do with that. Ima ignore the sandwich underneath that dirty thirty and just start morning drinking. What did you think was gonna happen here?

Blacked Out Me: Hey man, I can't be held accountable for what your soberish ass does. I bought the food. I made an effort. You're the one responsible for functioning, that ain't me babe. And by the way, you're fucking welcome for the three shitty gas station burritos I ate last night, AKA, the only reason you're even remotely alive right now. You think that shit was easy? Also, I found buying all this crap at about midnight. I'm pretty sure that I'm legally obligated to buy all the booze I can any time anyone ever says 'Last Call'.

Me: Damn it. You've got a point there. You made the right call. Keep doing what you're doing. I suppose the only question left is which one of us is gonna make the long walk to the liquor store today, cause we're out of cheap whiskey, beer certainly isn't gonna sustain us on a full weekend day, and you know what a waste it is for us to drink the good stuff alone.

BO Me: Oh, God damn you. Are you seriously even asking this question after all I've done for you? Dude. DUDE! It's your turn. Get your shit together and go get us some booze.

Me: But I can't (or, if we're being honest don't wanna) BO Me. I'm still drunk from last night and shouldn't be driving. The walk is soooooooooooooo far. I mean we're talking like 8 whole blocks. You're so much better at this kind of thing. Please!? You won't even remember the walk.

BO Me: Ugh. Fine. Fucking. Fine. Keep drinking your morning beer until I arrive. You are so lucky I love you. You understand this thing I'm doing today entitles me to do something really stupid in the future, right?

Me: Yes, I accept these terms, verbal contract with a mental construct signed, sealed, and delivered. You have full license to go do whatever crazy shit you want. After you buy some shitty whiskey. And when the screenplay gets picked up, I'll split the profits with you 50/50. – STARKNESS

OH THE ANIMALS THAT YOU MEET

OWL AND POSSUM LOST AND FOUND

Everyone in the forest loved when Owl and Possum brought their pet Turtle to the clearing where everyone gathered. Turtle was the sweetest little guy, sometimes poking his rear end in the air for long periods of time for no apparent reason, sometimes running around chasing a found object, but mostly he was content to snuggle up in the arms of a willing party and watch the goings on of the forest animals and their peculiar behaviors.

Owl and Possum were favorites, and much loved members of the forest, so when their beloved Turtle went missing, the whole forest frantically took up the task to find him. This was a harrowing several days for everyone in the forest. Where was Turtle? Was he OK? Was he cowering in a dark bramble? Was he swayed by the Alligators and taken to a remote, unfamiliar swamp?

Let me tell you. Within mere days, the fervent efforts of the whole forest found Turtle. He was a little freaked out, a little dirty and a little smelly, sure, but he was fine. Owl, Possum and Turtle still frequent the clearing. Owl, lovely and endearing as ever, Possum, always heartfelt and boisterous, and little turtle, always vigilant.

FLAMINGO AND THE ALLIGATORS

Flamingo is an interesting fellow. Dapper as all get-out, though a bit wobbly on his feet. Everyone in the forest is 100% sure he can fly, but also sure Flamingo would have a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why it would be pointless to expend that much energy just to land again and come back to the same place. He's right, of course.

One especially wobbly day, he was picked up by a singular of boars. They weren't particularly ill-intentioned, but they did in fact throw him into a swamp with a congregation alligators. We will never know why they didn't just leave him be...all he needed was to sit down for a spell.

Anyway, as he stood in the swamp, one of the unremarkable alligators sidled right up to Flamingo and punched him in the head. Flamingo, partly confused and partly offended, flinched in the form of a type of uppercut to the chin of the offending alligator, knocking the alligator dazed and befuddled.

Almost immediately, several of the boars ran over and took Flamingo away from the swamp into a secluded grove. They idiotically asked him if he was "Pink", which he answered with an unapologetically sarcastic, "Well, duh!"

When they realized this was no place for a fancy pink flamingo, they quickly let him go on his way. No one is really sure as to how he made it home, but he did.

RACCOON ESCAPES A DARK CAVE

Once, Raccoon found himself in a dark cave with a

bunch of other dishevelled, mangy raccoons...even more dishevelled and mangy than he found himself at this particular time. He was obviously not meant to be there. Well, not for long anyway. This was a place of rules and stipulations. Of consequences and barriers. The guards required compliance to frivolous, strict behaviors, but in his mind, Raccoon would do the exact opposite of what the guards demanded.

Raccoon did not fit in, and bided his time, scheming an escape.

In the meantime, he took advantage of the disorganization of the guards and the state of disrepair to test the soundness of his predicament. He discovered many openings and lax in surveillance, and had convinced many a guard that his name was in fact "Carlos Rodriguez". It was not.

Escape was easier than thought possible for "Carlos". He basically just left the place.

Once he felt confident in the distance between him and the Dark Cave, he stopped to leisurely pick berries and nuts among a murder of crows that suspiciously kept their eyes fixed on him.

He ate his fill and went on his merry way, thinking of the darkness only when asked to regale it during spooky story times around a campfire.

BUNNY FIGHTS A WAKE OF VULTURES

Bunny is a spry little sort. She is nimble, light on her feet, true and cunning. She will welcome anyone, but kick them out if need be. She has the stones, and has kicked some.

Once, she found herself smack dab in the middle of a wake of vultures. They whirled around her, mocking and prodding, shoving and spinning, attempting to knock her out. But she had prepared for this.

Her goal had been to get to the other side of the canyon, and this was the only way. She learned how to dodge and weave away from angry peckers, beaks and claws. She learned how to juke and dance around the biggest and baddest of carion munchers.

As she flew past the slashes and taunts of the battle warriors, a crowd gathered. They'd never seen anything like this before. She had managed to turn even the most adamant of gumshoes into swooning fanboys.

She made it through, not unscathed, mind you. She endured weeks of wound licking and restoration, but wore her bumps and bruises as badges of honor and trophies, showing them off to young and old.—*JORGE GOYCO*

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LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

In all of Martin's futures they get married. Love is funny that way.

Today they meet in their first class of grad school and leave together, still arguing. She says Oedipus was doomed because larger forces in the world strip us of our agency. Martin says, *No, Oedipus made the right choices given what he knew. Only coincidence made them seem otherwise.* Cute as he is, even in cargo shorts, she gets a bit fed up, so when Martin starts to cross University Ave, she does not. He turns and blurts, "I'm sorry. I'd rather be wrong and walking with you than right and not." She will take him up on that, she says, then holds out her hand.

In one of Martin's futures they quit grad school, get certified to teach English, spend a couple years in Southeast Asia and another twenty-nine in adjoining classrooms at Columbia High in Maplewood, New Jersey. Their students pretend to gag every time he opens the door to blow her a kiss. Once she asks him whether he still wants to finish his degree. He says, "No, I cast my die," pulls her close, and nine months later they had their third child.

In another future they get their doctorates. While she ends up at Columbia University, Martin has no luck finding a tenure-track position. There is no future in being an adjunct, so he takes a job at a private school in Summit, New Jersey. He hates it. Most of the kids are too rich to need to care about school, let alone literature. They just want A's for their college applications. So Martin becomes that asshole of a teacher and actually grades them. You know the one who makes the kids who actually try learn something, but also attempts to fail the assholes who don't give two shits until the principal overrules him.

A third future finds Martin at Columbia too, an associate professor. His book on how Shakespeare ruined the West by displacing Marlowe's celebration of action with a glorification of anxiety, strikes a cultural nerve and becomes a surprise bestseller. Apparently readers have been waiting for a good kick in the ass, Martin says. She never tells him that departmental jealousy nearly made it so his book never would have been published without

her taking on three shit entry level classes that the dean could never offload onto any decent professors.

They have no time for kids in two of Martin's futures, but still they are happy, just differently happy. They travel a lot. And read a lot more. They can afford a summer home, which they fill with friends and books. There are different types of sacrifice, and can honestly say they were glad to stay childfree.

There are some futures where neither one ended up going to college. Martin was an electrician who came to her house after her first husband left her and she couldn't help but love the way he talked to her son while fixing that god damn light switch that only worked half the time. She invited him to dinner the following week and that, as they say, was that.

My favorite future was the one where they met in Cairo on a cold winter night. I mean, who thinks to bring a jacket to Cairo? Martin was out in the cold smoking a cigarette outside of the expat hotel they were both staying in. She saw him shivering and made some kind of joke about how at least if he freezes to death he won't get lung cancer. They ended up at the hotel bar that night and got to talking way too late giving empty promises to meet back in the States. It never happened. They lived apart and had full, fruitful lives until they ended up living in one of those 'planned senior communities' and both being widowers ended up remarried while never finding out that they had actually first met 35 years ago.

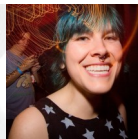
In all of Martin's futures, he loses his hair, but keeps his waist and health. He sings in the shower, tells awful jokes, and farts with pride. He mows hundreds of miles of lawn, vacuums thousands of miles of floor, cooks thousands of pounds of food, and maybe did the laundry a handful of times. He rubs her feet.

Also though, in all his futures, Martin sees the bus speeding toward him on University Ave, and she sees him leap back onto the sidewalk.

Martin pulls her back, and their lives stop flashing before her eyes.—*STARKNESS*



SALACIOUS CRIMBUS CRUMBS



1...2, 3, 4...5, 6...7...8, 9 - TEN! My mom finishes counting on the other end of the phone and I let out an gasp of incredulity. Is this how it normally is? Are there usually that many? Has my mom made TEN types of Christmas cookies every year for the past—since before I can remember? Has she gone mad? TEN?!

Well, yes, TEN, because she her favorite cookies are turtles, so she has to make those, and cut out cookies are classic, so she has to make those, and snickerdoodles are her next favorite, so she has to make those, and Bucky likes pecan pralines, so she has to make those...My holiday bake list of six sounds paltry in comparison.

I work all year long making tweaks to old favorite recipes, making mental notes of the ones that would work well this time of year, and making sure I get my RDA of sugar and Earth Balance. It's my favorite thing in the world to do, and I look forward to each December when I throw a big Christmas bash and make tons of cookies, just like I did with my mom when I was younger. I've been waiting all year to give you guys my favorite vegan baking tips, so snuggle up with some peppermint Oreos and almond milk, and take notes!

Crumb Tip #1

Ditch the butter for Earth Balance, Miyoko's, coconut oil, or Crisco. They're basically interchangeable in standard cakes, cookies, bars, and even pies! Earth Balance comes in sticks, which is super handy and familiar, just keep in mind it's at least as salty as salted butter. Miyoko's is the *creme de la creme*—where EB tastes like margarine, Miyoko's tastes like traditional dairy butter (it's even wrapped in wax paper like butter!). It's spendy, so save it for buttercreams where butter is a key component, or skip it in baking altogether and have a block on your Christmas table to put on your mashed potatoes and rolls (I know you, I know you need a whole block). Room temperature coconut oil is nice and soft and similar to dairy butter, and works well as a one-to-one stand in. You can even pop it in the fridge to solidify to use in pie crusts, pastries, and biscuits! And Crisco—this is something I grew up with. My favorite chocolate chip cookies and birthday cake frostings and Christmas cutout cookies were made with butter flavored Crisco, and I didn't die. In fact, a ratio of half EB and half shortening is pretty perfect flavor—and texture-wise in a buttercream!

Crumb Tip #2

Eggs. You don't need em! For typical cookies and cakes, 1 Tbsp of ground flax mixed into 2.5 Tbsp of hot water is my go-to. It gets all gooey just like an egg does, and when you mix it into a dough or batter, everything comes together and gets nice and glossy. An extra 1/8 tsp of baking powder per egg will help give it some of that extra leavening you're missing from the eggs. If you're making something like a pecan pie or a custard-based pie that calls for a lot of egg yolks, swap out the volume of eggs for the same amount of silken tofu and a Tbsp or 2 of cornstarch. The eggs here are supposed to thicken up and set, and the tofu + starch combo works pretty much the same.

Ok, now I'm going to tell you about the craziest thing

I've read about since becoming vegan—aquafaba. It's literally bean water. The liquid from a can of chickpeas. YEAH. YOU'VE BEEN THROWING AWAY LIQUID GOLD FOR YEARS. This stuff can whip up to big, huge, pillowy clouds JUST LIKE AN EGG WHITE. French macarons? Not a problem. Angel food cake? You got it. Royal icing that ACTUALLY DRIES? Yes!!! It's a one-to-one replacement by volume for egg whites, so toss your leftover chickpea liquid in the freezer for a rainy day! Or maybe a dry day, because, you know, meringues and humidity.

Crumb Tip #3

Coconut cream is a perfect stand-in for heavy cream! If you pop a can of coconut milk in the fridge, wait a day, and pull it back out, all of the fatty, creamy, good stuff will float to the top and you can scoop it off and use it just like heavy cream. Heck, it's 2018, they make cans of just the cream if you wanna be lazy! You can whip it up and make booze-infused whipped creams for your holiday pies, use it to make caramel, or my favorite, replace the sour cream in my mom's pecan praline recipe. Coconut milk itself is great instead of half and half, something you might come across when veganizing your favorite cake recipes.

Crumb Tip #4

Chocolate! It's super easy to find vegan-friendly chocolate chips—almost all semisweet and dark chocolate chips are vegan-friendly. HEB beefs up—sorry, Gardein crumbles up—their baking chip section this time of year, and they have all sorts of cool varieties like extra dark, extra semisweet, and big chips just for chocolate chip cookies. I even spied some accidentally vegan Bailey's Irish cream chocolate chips! If you're good at thinking ahead, King David (a Kosher brand) makes white, butter-scotch, caramel, and a variety of other accidentally vegan baking chips that you can order on Amazon. I buy a couple of pounds of white chips (they double as a coating for cake pops and truffles) this time of year while it's cool enough to ship them!

Crumb Tip #5

Veganize your favorite recipes! That's why I spilled out my best tried and true secrets for all five of you reading! I want you to take your version of your grandma's regionally famous peppermint chocolate chip cookie pie bars to the Christmas party just like you do every year and be simultaneously disappointed and pleased that you have none left to take home because no one knew they were vegan. If you don't have any favorite recipes, Gretchen's Vegan Bakery on YouTube is an incredible resource—she's a former bakery owner turned vegan who veganizes her old recipes and has incredible knowledge about how different egg, fat, milk, and even gelatin replacements affect recipes. I want to be her when I grow up.

Crumb Tip #6

Make a cookie, eat a cookie! No raw eggs means that you can scoop a cookie onto the cookie sheet for later, and one into your mouth for now with no worries!

P.S. Mom, tear this page out and put it on the fridge!! —
KATIE KILLER



STILL READING -- ON MEMOIR

Memoirs are a strange art form to me. Most likely that's because so few memoirs reach "artistic" levels, but writing such a statement feels more pretentious than intended. The strangeness of the art form comes in the notion a person (a writer) deciding their life (or portions thereof) are interesting enough to devote their own time to writing about it and other people's time to reading it. Celebrities feel comfortable in this regard. They're well known, so people obviously want more from them. And people certainly want the juiciest bits. But a whole slop of normal people write truckloads of memoirs as well. People no one has ever heard about suddenly decide their trip to China or their parents' divorce or their stint as a porn addict or their Christian testimony is worthy of 200 pages and shelf-space at Barnes & Noble. I would think that right there is pretentious, except that I've entertained the notion myself more times than I care to admit.

Memoirs also appear to be having something of a heyday at the moment. Movie stars. Musicians. Comedians, especially. My guess is that *some* memoirs are easy to write. Simply outline a few life events, hire a good editor to pull a little humor to the surface, and—*voilà*—you've got an easily written book that's also easy to read. And people love that! The masses love a 200 page book that reads like it's 175. Yesterday I received an email from Barnes & Noble that boasted the subject line: "This Season's Top Biographies & Memoirs". "This Season's"? Do memoirs suddenly have fruit status? Or, more accurately, fashion status? Memoirs are so hot right now.

Who was it that started this trend? Was it Steve Martin with *Born Standing Up* back in 2007, or was it Tina Fey's 2013 *Bossypants* that paved the way for every comedian to have a memoir? I'm not sure. I only know that Martin and Fey are actually good writers, and their autobiographical vignettes convey more than anecdotes and punchlines.

A good memoir, a well-written autobiography, like Tina Fey's, can be a beautiful thing when the writer strives for more than self-aggrandizement. Sure, you and your grandmother think you're hot stuff, but what do you have to tell me about the world and the people in it that will make me a better participant in these here Hunger Games of life? Leave the anecdotes for Happy Hour. Where's the raw nerve of your humanity? That's what I want.

BONUS POMPOSITY—I believe the following people should not write memoirs: bloggers, YouTube "stars", people under the age of 45 (the brink of middle-age), anyone who requires the services of a ghost-writer, politicians still in office, zealots who merely wish to convey their path to zealotry (ie. crappy Christian testimonies), folks with a personal vendetta to "set the record straight", artists who think they got it right, artists with zero intentions of honoring other artists, any

member of the Black Eyed Peas (too late!!!), pets (requiring a ghost writer), reality TV "stars" (except maybe the original cast of MTV's *Real World*), Miley Cyrus, White people exploring White privilege and/or guilt, Tucker Max, an adult who has never lost a fist-fight or ended up in the ER due to overindulgence injuries, ie. an O.D. By the way, this paragraph contains thoughts I try to keep inside my head.

All that to say, I've read three memoirs in the past month worth recommending and celebrating and inviting onto your own home shelf space. These were solid reads. Good reads. Difficult to put down. In these pages I met voices I did not want to leave by the end, which is a triumphant sign for any book. And each of these titles meet at least three of my four criteria for a good memoir:

- Must be literary (to some degree).
- Must be funny (to some degree).
- Must be honest enough to be unlikeable (see "Bonus Pomposity above).
- Must offer wisdom I'm angry to now be responsible for embodying.

The first memoir I read in November was Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, which nailed and exceeded all four of my criteria above. I read Bourdain because the book glowed at me in Barnes & Noble. That's not an exaggeration. I office out of the Barnes Cafe where I can work and then walk around to look at pretty things. On one such walk-about, I happened upon Bourdain's book on the corner of a table, and the dadgum thing had a nimbus glowing around the edges. I should mention that I know little about Bourdain, not enough to ever be considered a "fan". But here I felt divinely inspired to make Bourdain's acquaintance. So I bought the book, began reading it immediately, and within the first chapter found why I was called to Bourdain's side.

Anthony Bourdain saw gold in people where others only saw bottom-feeding grunt workers. He saw more value in his loyal dishwashers than in pompous culinary institute graduates. Bourdain writes, "[C]haracter is far more important than skills or employment history . . . That guys who shows up every day on time, never calls in sick and does what he said he was going to do is less likely to fuck you in the end than a guy who has an incredible resume but is less reliable about arrival time. Skills can be taught. Character you either have or don't have". The whole book is about stuff like this: about Bourdain not having character as a young hot-shot, but gaining it in the heat from men and women who were generally at the lowest pay grade.

Bourdain ate oysters fresh from beneath the boat as a boy on a family vacation in France, and his life immediately became one of gourmand adventures and calloused hands and long hours fighting to gain recognition

for people who deserved it. I don't truly love food and don't know how to cook, but I am also not good at loving people well. This is why the Bourdain's memoir glowed at me. I needed his reminders about character. I need a little myself.

Secondly, I hit Thanksgiving hungry for a good read and a dense voice, so I pulled Jonathan Franzen's *The Discomfort Zone: A Personal History* from the shelf. Franzen also nails all four of my criteria, hitting the humor and unlikability even harder than Bourdain. Unfortunately, he's a bit light on wisdom, perhaps even personal character, but—dear me—the fellow can write.

Here's the deal: Franzen is most interesting as a nerdy, unsure, science-obsessed child who despises his parents than he is as an overly pretentious and horny grown man. For this reason, the first three chapters of *T.D.Z.* are beautiful and essential. Also, Franzen has the rare skill of centering his chapters around a single theme, and he uses that theme like a maypole to wrap the threads of several seemingly disconnected narratives. For instance, Chapter Two: Two Ponies seems to be "about" the writer falling in love with Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* cartoons as a child, but the chapter also explores Franzen's early reading habits, early academic fascinations that led to becoming a writer, the plight of his brother Tom to fit into the family, the intellectual climate of St. Louis during the 1970s, the evils of commercialism (with hinted digs at Oprah's Book Club), the emotional awkwardness of puberty, the requisite "suffering" of artists, his father's tyrannical hold on the family and eventual death, the purpose of comic strips, how everyone bearing the Franzen name were essentially dicks. All this wrapped around young Franzen reading *Peanuts*.

Franzen's comedy roots deeply in sadness, leaving the reader with images so despairing—ie. the distraught Franzen family on a deflated merry-go-round at Disney World exhausted from pretending any of this was fun—that laughter precedes the need to set the book down for a reprieve. Franzen's definitely something of a wet blanket, but a funny wet blanket. He and I would do well at Happy Hour together. Cause I'm pretty sure we'd both just shut down and stare at each other's feet.

Lastly, I burned through Lacy M. Johnson's *The Other Side* in two swift sittings, and I dare anyone not to do the same. Long story short, Johnson was once kidnapped, raped and threatened to be murdered by a man she'd been in a sometimes loving, sometimes abusive relationship with for more than a year.

Opening paragraph: "I crash through the screen door, arms flailing like two loose propellers, stumbling like a woman on fire: hair and clothes ablaze. Or I do not stumble. I make no noise at all as I open the door with one hand, holding a two-by-four above my head with the other. My feet and legs carry me forward, the rest of my

body still, like a statue. Like a ninja. Like a cartoon."

That opening reveals the precision of Johnson's recollection as well as her own reckoning with the absurdity of her situation. How does a thing like this happen? How does a woman find herself in a position like this, at the mercy of man she once trusted, then feared, and then fled? In *The Other Side*, Johnson explores such questions, and she appears far more interested with the *How's* than the *Whys*. The story remains, from beginning to end, Johnson's story. This is not a cautionary tale. This is not a rhetorical situation about what one should do in exotic romances or how one should behave in dire relationships. Johnson is beyond regret. There is the thing. There is This Thing that happened. And her life now and forever contains This Thing. That alone is worth the writing of this book: the setting free of This Thing.

As Johnson's reader (I've since read her new essay collection *The Reckonings*, which is aptly titled for its questions regarding various forms of justice), I was often at a loss for what to do with her story. With Bourdain, I read to gain his appraisal of character over skill, his bawdy appetite for the fullness of living. With Franzen, I recognized my own pretentiousness and practiced finding the funny in my own sads. But with Johnson, I often did not know what to do. Here's this woman I do not know. Here's this story that is bigger than even the storyteller. How do we two share the page? And then I realized something about memoir I had never considered before, something I learned from Lacy M. Johnson while taking her story into myself, and it is this—

Sometimes the great gift of a memoir is that which the reader gives the author: the willingness to bear witness, the promise to help the storyteller carry their story. Not all stories need to be so carried. But some do. And simply being there to burn through the pages, to set them down and to welcome them into one's own existence, may actually supernaturally lift something from the writer they only recognize when the next morning is suddenly lighter. Maybe this also explains the sudden surge in memoirs. Maybe more of us need help carrying our own stories.

BONUS VULNERABILITY—The reasons I've considered writing any number of memoirs include the following: to remember, to impress ____, to "set the record straight", to gloat, to shock, to expertly tell the stories I am never able to adequately convey at tables and in parking lots and on road trips, to explore *How's* and *Whys*, to reverse time, to get a do-over in words, to apologize, to win sympathy, to give my zealous Christian testimony, to both honor and scandalize my parents, to make more jokes about my cancer and broken bowels, to be alone in a room and yet with so many people, to make money, to win this round, to confess I've never been in a fist fight, to live forever. — KEVIN STILL

JOE BIDEN IS NOT THE RIGHT GUY TO BE PRESIDENT

Don't get me wrong, as a human being, Diamond Joe is probably a real sweet dude. He's a real down-to-earth man. I respect all that and would happily hang out with him any day. But in terms of policy, he's not the right choice to lead the country.

PATRIOT ACT AND TECHNOLOGY

Biden was one of the key figures in drafting parts of the Patriot Act, through the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995 introduced prior to 9/11. This bill was controversial even at the time—a New York Time article revealed that the ACLU, for instance, was opposed to the bill. Despite what we now know were the negative consequences of the bill, Biden has even repeatedly taken credit for writing the Patriot Act itself. The bill allowed secret evidence to be used in prosecutions, expanded the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and wiretap laws, permitted the U.S. military to be used in civilian law enforcement, and allowed permanent detection of non-U.S. citizens without judicial review, among other "war-on-terror" policies. On other technology issues, Biden has been disappointing. A previous war on terror bill he introduced in 1991 was so serious in eroding civil liberties that it spurred Phil Zimmerman to create the encryption program PGP, in fear that encryption as a whole was about to be outlawed by the bill. He's been opposed to net neutrality legislation and has advocated for taxing violent video game manufacturers.

BANKRUPTCY REFORM AND TIES TO SHADY FIGURES

Joe Biden helped pass a "bankruptcy reform" law in 2005 that was harmful to working class families, while benefitting the same financial institutions that Donald Trump has decided to embrace in his time as President. At the time, many unions, consumer advocacy groups, and women's organizations opposed the bill, yet Biden supported the bill for years, right through its signing. The bill was also criticized by prominent figures such as Elizabeth Warren. In terms of effects? A Fed study found that the bill increased rates of insolvency and foreclosure. It concluded that the greatest effects were felt by those with lower incomes, and that the bill took away a key form of financial relief for those in debt by making it harder to file bankruptcy. Biden also voted down a proposal to restrict corporate judge-shopping (going directly to a court of their choice instead of having to pursue the case in their local area). With these effects having been predicted by many advocacy groups, it is inexplicable that Biden championed it.

We do have some clues as to why he supported it; it was a major boon to his funders. An especially significant backer was located in his home state of Delaware: the credit-card conglomerate MBNA. MBNA has donated over \$214,000 to Biden over the course of his career.

AID PROGRAMS FOR THE POOR

Joe Biden played a major role in 1990s "welfare reform", an effort to gut New Deal social programs and replace them with the fragile layer we currently have today. He voted Yes on replacing FDR's AFDC program, which granted cash to poor families, with a block-grant welfare system, meaning the federal government would give states money to administer welfare systems. This was



similar to the modern-day GOP proposal to change Medicaid into a block-grant system that many Democrats oppose. This change was also paired with a more restrictive basis for receiving grants, a system currently known as TANF. Research shows that replacing aid programs with block grants results in large funding decreases over time, and indeed, the current state of welfare is poor.

In fact, the effects may be worse than that, because money given to states for welfare can be used for other purposes, thanks to nonexistent oversight measures. Only a quarter of welfare money is paid as cash assistance to the poor, with less than a quarter being spent on "help finding jobs", and the rest being diverted to far-flung things like scholarships for the wealthy and marriage counseling. The state-centric approach, along with overleniency in terms of what can be cut, resulted in disastrous outcomes. In Arizona, for example, just 6% of poor families with children receive assistance, compared to the 42% who received aid before the Biden/GOP welfare reform. As with bankruptcy reform, these effects were predicted beforehand, so it is concerning that Biden pushed so hard to pass them.

FOREIGN POLICY

Biden is known as a person with lots of foreign policy expertise; while he has experience, this time is also filled with missteps, most of which are confusing even in context. The most well-known position is his votes for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which brought forth plenty of criticism in 2008 when he was chosen as VP. This vote left people disappointed even at the time: while 26 Senate Dems voted for the war, a significant portion of this vote was composed of Blue Dogs with conservative foreign policy, while the 23 Senate Dems who voted against the war were composed of liberals such as Ted Kennedy. There was lots of criticism, even at the time, for this vote.

More concerning are his lesser known positions. He supported the US government taking an official position on the separation of Kosovo from Serbia, risking the country into an unnecessary war. He was one of those sounding the alarm of WMDs as justification for the

Iraq war, claims that were repeated by the Bush administration and later proven to be fabricated, based on unreliable evidence. Biden helped quash a push by Russ Feingold to stop taxpayer dollars from being used to train Indonesian death squads. Biden, confusingly, voted no on an amendment to ensure that US-sold cluster bombs would not be used on civilians.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

Joe Biden, an avid supporter of the War on Drugs, was a key figure behind crafting the legislation that caused the increase in incarceration, and prosecution of drugs such as marijuana. One of his first moves was to support legalization of civil forfeiture, allowing "policing for profit" with officers able to prosecute anything suspected of being associated with drug money (in practice, this has meant absolutely anything). He helped author an act that created a 100:1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. Under this bill, 5 grams of crack carried the same sentence as 500 grams of powder. The bill was intended to target minorities, who used crack more due to its lower cost. In 2003, he supported an anti-ecstasy bill which backfired, causing businesses to stop offering safety measures as doing so would risk prosecution. Even today, activist organizations continue to try repealing the bill as it has caused a few deaths.

His most-well known anti-drug measure, creating the basis for strict policing of drugs like marijuana, was the Crime Bill which he supported heartily. While others who backed the law, like Bill Clinton, have apologized for its negative consequences, Biden has continued to defend himself and stand by its passage. The crime bill included funding to build many more prisons and foster an aggressive policing strategy, which was then expanded by local governments. Today, there are about twice as many people behind bars as there were before the crime bill, giving the US one of the highest incarceration rates in the developed world. Lots of these inmates are there for drug-related crimes that wouldn't be prosecuted in many other countries. It is disappointing that Biden played a role in one of the worst policies of our generation.

Based on all this, it's reasonable to say that Joe Biden's policy positions on some issues are quite lackluster, and pale in comparison to those of other prospective Democratic nominees for 2020. I haven't even talked about Anita Hill or his slobbering over war criminals and segregationists like Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms. Or even going as far back as the 70s when he was a fierce anti-busing advocate. Despite this, I am willing to say I will vote for him if he ends up being the person facing Donald Trump. His policies are indisputably better than those of a Republican. However, we should not actively seek to put him in that position. In the Democratic primary, there will be many other candidates who have experience, better policy, and the capability to defeat Donald Trump. Instead of allowing Biden a free run to become nominee, we should support these other candidates, as they remain popular with the American public. — STARKNESS

BORDERLINE MADNESS



There's a fairly large and willful misunderstanding amongst the ideological right in this country about the concept of political asylum and separating it from other forms of immigration, both legal and illegal. This is of course in reference to the caravan of South and Central Americans making their way to America. By definition a person seeking political asylum is doing so because they have to flee the instability in their country. Not because it's just uncomfortable and because the individual can't find a job or wants to visit family somewhere or freeloader off of someone else's tax dollars. It is because the individual wants to live without fear that their government or law enforcement won't someday just line him/her up somewhere and shoot them. Said individual wants their children to grow up outside of such a regime with the chance of a future. *Any future.*

So what exactly is causing these individuals to band together and head north? And where are they from? United Nations reports say the largest concentration is from Honduras and El Salvador, two of the five most violent countries in the world. Some are fleeing government corruption in Guatemala and Venezuela. The UN describes such corruption as the political class colluding with the private armies of drug trafficking cartels who rape, steal, and murder at will without any interference from law enforcement. The choice is flee, die, or become a part of the international drug trade, which often only delays the choice of death. The U.S. government is partially for this instability, thanks to its failed meddlings in Latin American politics in the '80s and '90s. Both Honduras and Guatemala have been hit with massive drought that has left the ready supply of food decimated. Over half of the migrants are women and children fleeing the highest percentages of domestic violence against women and children in the world. These are not lazy Messcans sitting around wanting to come to America to take your jobs. These are individuals fleeing destruction.

Fox News and other conservative news outlets have many Americans convinced that these migrant caravans are full of violent gang members, ISIS plants, and lazy people wanting to birth anchor babies to freeloader off hard working American tax dollars. Seeking asylum is a process, not a free-for-all where migrants pour across the border. The asylum process will help to weed out any such "bad eggs" that might be using the migrant caravan as a screen. The current U.S. administration does not see a difference between an illegal immigrant and a petitioner for political asylum. It is that willful ignorance that allows for an impending humanitarian crisis now finding its way to the American border. Will Trump ultimately back down? Will Trump continue to use American military to lob tear gas canisters at the asylum seekers? I find it most likely that Trump will appear to back down but continue his current policy, just like his administration did with separating illegal immigrant children from their parents. Although courts found this policy illegal the Trump administration has done very little to reunite the families separated. It will take the strong-arming of the moderate Christian right who will see the human atrocity in this action to attempt to steer the rest of the right wing towards doing what Jesus would have done. The question is whether or not the skirmish along the border will escalate and whether or not troops will take migrant lives, by order or by accident. I fear that we have not yet seen the worst of this action along the border. — KELLY MENACE

**I
Just
had
the
Answer
FOR
Everything**



PEDAL PUSHING -- WEBER MASS

I have had a constant battle with Mrs. Dr. Menace for many years over the volume of electric guitar amplifiers. She's totally cool with how loud guitars are on albums or in a rock club or a stadium or whatever. But she AB-HORS the volume of a guitar amplifier in her house. Especially if Mr. Mrs. Dr. Menace has a guiftiddle plugged into said guitar amplifier and is playing teenage anthems to the sun. So usually I will just wait until the missus is out of the house on an errand or such and then kick out the jams. Unfortunately, my recording schedule does not always coincide with my wife's errand schedule. So I would often times make do with a **Line 6 Pod** or an **Atomic Amli-Firebox** (as reviewed in the most recent *Pedal Pushing* column). While I like the simplicity of using digital amp simulators, I'd really like to use the superior sounding real thing. And, you know, I've got all this money and expertise tied up in these big iron tube amps. It would be nice to actually use them darned things on a record. So...I procured the **Weber Mass 100** as a possible solution to my problem.



The Mass is an attenuator. It takes a guitar amplifier and in essence turns it down. Uh, isn't that what the amp's volume knob is for, yo? Well yes, yes it is. However, many guitar amplifiers do not perform optimally unless they are turned up to god awful decibel levels. An attenuator allows the guitar god to turn that amplifier up to the level that the amp sounds the best...then turn it down to a more acceptable level, meaning, the amp itself is still turned up but what is sent to the speakers is quieter. Now ain't that what the master volume is for, fam? Well, not every amplifier has a master volume. In fact, many vintage amplifiers or smaller amps do not have master volumes. In some cases, amplifiers with master volumes perform better if the master is turned all the way up, pulling the master volume entirely out of the audio signal path. An attenuator can be used to pull the volume down to a more useful level.

Now that I've explained to you what an attenuator does, let's now talk about what *this* particular attenuator does. The Weber Mass series is an affordable solution for those with many different types of amplifiers. The Mass has a selector for 2/4/8/16 ohm inputs. Many other attenuators either are fixed for one ohm rating or allow for choice between 8/16 or 4/8/16 ohms. The Weber series is the only attenuator that allows for the full range of 2 to 16, allowing users of Super Reverbs and tweed Bassmans to enjoy the same amount of attenuation as Fender Twin, Deluxe, Vox AC30, and vintage non-master volume Marshall users.

The Mass uses an active speaker motor inside the unit to accept and smother the amplifier signal load (Weber is a well regarded speaker manufacturer). Having the speaker motor inside to sop up the signal really helps the Mass to allow amplifiers to *feel* like they normally do cranked up and not lose much fidelity and finesse in the attenuation process. The box works best when it is

used in the first 75% of its range. At 10 on the dial the Mass is not attenuating signal at all. As the pot is turned counter clockwise the signal is attenuated more and more. Below 2 on the dial with the wrong amplifier the signal becomes kind of fizzy. Some amplifiers respond better to extreme attenuation than others and it's a trial and error process to determine what amps perform well and which ones don't.

A common side effect of attenuation is that there's not only the lessening of volume but also of high end. The Mass allows for 3-6dB of attenuation which helps to bring back the high end that is lost in the attenuation process. The Mass also has a direct out from the back of the unit. One still has to connect a speaker cabinet to the Mass but it will allow an amp to be 100% attenuated to silence so one can use the direct out straight to a PA, direct box, or recording interface. Weber includes a second tone stack for use with the direct out. It can be bypassed. While this sounds like an excellent solution to mic'ing a loud speaker cabinet it really isn't. The line out sounds thin and tinny even with the tone stack engaged. It sounds A LOT better if one has speaker impulse responses in the signal after the Weber. One thing to note about 100% attenuation: The Mass is rated at half the capacity for pulling an amp all the way down. Meaning that the 100 will only safely take 60w amps at 100% attenuation.

I have five amps and two of the three non-master volume amps respond pretty well to the Mass. My Bassman 5F6A head responds *VERY* well to attenuation. My Bassman 20 (essentially a non-reverb Princeton) also responds very well to the attenuation process. Oddly enough, my 5E3 tweed Deluxe does not and neither does my Mark I reissue Mesa Boogie. In the case of the Boogie, it has a rather nice master volume and can put out acceptable distorted amp tones without the use of the attenuator. My little Vox MV50AC also has a master volume and does not like being attenuated. When I say it doesn't like it, I mean that at acceptable volume levels the amps sound congested and overly compressed with a fizzy top end.

Most importantly, does it allow me to turn up my amps when my wife is home? Sort of. I have to do some smart speaker cabinet placement in my recording room and cover the speaker cab with blankets to help. But I've been fairly impressed with the tones I've been able to coax from my amps with the Weber Mass. I'm hoping to experiment more with using the direct out with an IR host. At \$250 the Mass comes in WELL below comparable units from Suhr, Fryette, and Rivera. I'd love for it to be DSP-powered with the ability to load IR's like the Universal Audio Ox the Mass is nearly 1/5 of the price of the Ox. This coming winter Boss will debut a box that combines the Fryette Power Station with an IR host like the Ox. No price on that yet, but until then those looking to tame their tube amps but maintain their tone would do well to give the Weber Mass series a shot. — **KELLY MENACE**

RECORD REVIEWS



Undead Prophecies *False Prophecies*

Do you ever find a band and then ask yourself, "How in the hell did I miss these guys?!" Well, that has happened to me more than once, but, considering my taste in music, how I missed this band should be a grievous sin worthy of dreadful punishment! The band I speak of here is a group that goes by the name Undead Prophecies. Formerly known as "Undead", the band altered their name in order to distinguish themselves from another band with the same name.

The band's sound is very similar to early Death records. According to Undead Prophecies, this is purposeful as it is meant to pay a certain amount of tribute to the godfather of death metal. Some may think, "Old news! Gruesome is already doing that!", but hold your horses. Whereas Gruesome is a purposeful tribute band who models their image and style completely after Death, Undead Prophecies is no such thing. Their idea is not to imitate Death, as Gruesome is doing, but to celebrate the sound that Death and Chuck Schuldiner created.

As of now, no one knows a thing about the members of the Undead Prophecies. Boasting names like Necros, King Oscuro, Angelus, Drauh, and Noctidurnal, the band has chosen to keep their identities hidden, claiming that only their music is important, not themselves. When playing live shows, the members dress like grim reapers complete with black robes, glowing eyes, and a scythe microphone stand—my guess is that their image is that of the ghoul on Death's original logo. Unlike Gruesome, Undead Prophecies draws heavily upon the sound of Death's first three records, allowing for less imitation and more adapting.

Their debut release in 2015 is titled *False Prophecies*. What I love most about this record is that it sounds old; I mean primitive death metal old! Undead Prophecies has produced an album that boasts

amazing artwork with music to match. In short, *False Prophecies* is everything one loves about *Scream Bloody Gore*, *Leprosy*, and *Spiritual Healing*, wrapped into one package. King Oscuro's vocals are full of that tormented sound Chuck was famous for, but this is not an impression; the frontman has accomplished the same style with his own unique voice. The same can be said for the music. There are the fast-paced, crushing moments, and then there are those progressive moments where it is changed up quite nicely. Rather than the prog elements being the main course, they are more like the complimentary wine which is paired with an altogether deliciously brutal meal.

If you are looking for a masterpiece of old school death metal, then look no further than *False Prophecies*. Undead Prophecies has proven, along with other resurgent bands, that old school is the best school. This debut is a well-done release with a great minimalist production. The band has shown that they have mastered Death's early sound, but with a second record already in the works, we shall have to wait and see what new flavors they will bring to the table. *False Prophecies* gets a 4.5.- CALEB MULLINS



Jamie Lin Wilson *Jumping Over Rocks*

One of the times I saw Jamie Wilson play years ago was an outdoor dirt patio on Northgate at a place that no longer exists. It was after 1 AM and I was wondering why someone with this marvelous voice wasn't a star. *Jumping Over Rocks* is proof she's getting there now, but on her own terms.

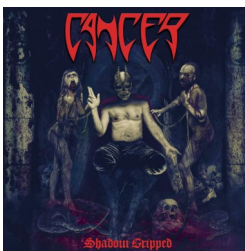
The ten songs on this record look at life and love from an adult perspective, not the sticky-sweet view of an adolescent, but an intelligent examination of Wilson's world and the world. The singer drew on co-writers on four tunes and chose a stunning Guy Clark song to cover. To present this world, producer Scott Davis wisely puts the emphasis on Wilson's voice, using his top-notch

musicians (including Austin guitar wizard Charles Sexton) to subtly back Wilson. Cody Angel's pedal steel plays a prominent role on many tunes.

The centerpiece of this album is "Death and Life," an achingly beautiful rumination about mortality. Wilson manages to pair growing old and being young in a way that defies explanation. Angel's pedal steel truly cries on this song. Equally powerful in looking at time, "In A Wink" reflects on how fast children grow up. Wilson, the mother of four, laments "Nothing I can do to stop the clock from turning." Also pointed at family, "The Being Gone" is a catchy mid-tempo look at weighing the worth of being on the road. Relationships come under scrutiny in several tunes, especially "If I Told You" (which boasts a Roy Orbison ending) and "Faithful & True," about how complicated and complex love really is. Even the Clark cover—"Instant Coffee Blues"—etches the sadness of a one-night stand as Texas country star Jack Ingram joins Wilson in a duet.

Despite the seriousness and thoughtfulness of many tunes, this is not a gloomy album. "Eyes for You" is a loping love song, and "Run" could be a rock country staple. There is pleasure in the intricacy, things to enjoy, whether the quirky instrumentation in the slow two-step of "Everybody's Moving Slow" or the breezy Americana in "Oklahoma Stars." Of course, there's always Wilson's astonishing voice.

Wilson did her time in the Sidehill Gougers, sang in the Trishas, released a quirky EP (*Dirty Blonde Hair*) and her first full-length 2015's *Holidays and Wedding Rings*, and now she's continuing her music and life balancing act. We're lucky to be here for it all.—MIKE L. DOWNEY



Cancer *Shadow Gripp'd*

When it comes to death metal, fans are accustomed to hearing about bands from the United States and Sweden. However,

one country that tends to get left out is England, which is unfortunate. England has produced heavy hitting death metal acts like Napalm Death, Carcass, and Bolt Thrower (RIP). A band who should be among England's best is an underground legend who has lay dormant for the last thirteen years, a band simply known as Cancer.

Kicking off their career at in the late 80's, Cancer released three consecutive records titled *To the Gory End*, *Death Shall Rise*, and *The Sins of Mankind*, which are considered rare gems by fans of underground death metal. However, after three well-received releases, the band fell from grace in the eyes of their fans with the next two releases which largely abandoned the band's original thrash-infused death metal sound. After taking a much-needed hiatus, and successfully touring and promoting their first three albums, the band has had an aggressive recurrence (see what I did there?) and returned to their roots with the release of *Shadow Gripp'd*.

In the place of Cancer's discography (ex the last two albums), *Shadow Gripp'd* fits in quite well. While not much can be said for the mediocre artwork, the band's talk of returning to their roots was no empty gesture to garner attention. This record harkens back to the band's early days and is reminiscent of *To the Gory End*, but what is more is that each song is unique and distinct. "Garrotte" and "Ballcutter" are fast-paced, thrashy songs, "Organ Snatcher" and "Half Man Half Beast" are rhythmic, groovy, brooding, and reminiscent of a Bolt Thrower's song structure, and "Thou Shalt Kill" is brutal and nasty. John Walker's vocals have definitely aged; of course, that is to be expected. Nonetheless, the guttural, yet very articulate, projection he produces is something to be feared; it's not a soul suffering eternal torment, nor a wild boar's mating call, type of sound, but something akin to a wolf's snarl. To say the least, I like it, as it gives this album an altogether sinister mood.

For the most part, the fans' fears were laid to rest with *Shadow Gripp'd*, but there are still some drawbacks. These drawbacks are mostly because Cancer has done nothing new here. I was hoping that Cancer would have gotten far heavier as the years passed, building on the sound of *Death Shall Rise*, but, alas, they stuck to what they knew how to do best, which is not

CONCERT CALENDAR

12/1—Hand Me Down Adventure, DUNK, Charm Bomb, Rickshaw Billy's Burger Patrol @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/7—Doc Mojoe, Grifters & Shills, Desdimona @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/8—Punk Rock Flea Market @ Revolution, Bryan. 3pm

12/8—Black Catholics, Black Mercy, Black Jackals, Super Cobras @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/13—Andrew James, Michael Witt @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/14—Misotheist, Iron Slut, Shoobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/15—Legacy Fails, BONNIEblue, LUCA, Charm Bomb, Billy King & The Bad Bad Bad @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

12/15—The Shoobiedoobies, Ride On Panda, Dale & Waylon, Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 8pm

12/20—Keith Michael Kallina @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/21—Dezorah, Unicordog, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

altogether a bad thing, but it is a little disappointing.

Cancer's reentry to the scene is a notable moment in death metal history. *Shadow Gripp'd* is an album which sharpened the blades that had been in the armory for far too long and shown that they are still as deadly as the day they were forged. Despite some boring artwork and lack of sound growth, this record grows on the listener with every play and, overall, is a solid death metal release. All things considered, I give this record a 4.2.5. Welcome back, Cancer! — **CALEB MULLINS**



Sneaky Pete
Buzzard Junction

The latest recording from the prolific Pete Rizzo finds him with his usual mix of playful tunes, a parody cover, an instrumental, but he tosses in a little more philosophy and gravity this time.

While "Rip Van Tinkle" and

12/22—Tongue Punch, Khan, Arsis Thesis, Carter @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

12/27—The Prof. Fuzz 63, The Vintage Ramekins @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

12/28—Odd Folks @ Revolution, Bryan.

1/17—The Ugly Architect @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/18—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/19—STEPHSTEPHSTEPHFEST feat. Boy Wonder, The Thief & The Architect @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

1/24—Sissy Brown @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/25—From Parts Unknown, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

1/26—Graham Jones, The Wild Tinderbox, GOODGIRL, Darwin's Finches @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/1—Mutant Love, The S chisms, Hammer Party, The Shutups @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

"Blue Balls Boogie" are what you'd expect from the long-time Dr. Demento novelty song darling, "Lo-Fi Guy" and "Auditory Therapy" lay out a bit of the method behind the madness, so to speak. "I'll never be mainstream/Living my dream" and "playing my tunes/with down-home pride" sum up the message of the ukulele/harmonica-driven "Low-Fi Guy." The perky "Auditory Therapy" is all about listening to your favorite music when you're feeling down as well as when you want to celebrate: "makes me feel alive/helps me to survive." Who can't relate to that? Likewise, a bit of a departure are two serious tunes: "Stuck in the Shadows" about a homeless man's struggle and "Forever Friends," a sweet paean to friendship and changes.

More typical of the Sneak are

the talking blues of "Cotton Ball Diet" and "Blind Spider Boogie." Also, "Buzzard Stomp" features a nice guitar solo while "Mescaline Tea" is essentially a drinking song. "Slim Sharp and the Sharp Tones" and "Once Upon a Dream" reflect on a fictional forgotten band and a bad dream with a happy ending.

The cd closes with the nice instrumental "Calm Before the Storm," something of a Sneaky Pete tradition (he has a collection of 14 of his instrumentals called "All Cappella"). However, a hidden bonus track is a slowed-down parody of Of Montreal's "Lysergic Bliss" done as one who loves vinyl records, complete with pops and cracks.

The year 2018 has seen a plethora of releases from the DIY performer. Who knows what the next year holds in store?—**MIKE L. DOWNEY**

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