

inside: 35 days - jorge plays the witcher 3 - drunk detective starkness coward of the senate - salacious vegan crumbs - hydrogen jukebox still reading - camper van cracker - pedal pushing - record reviews concert calendar



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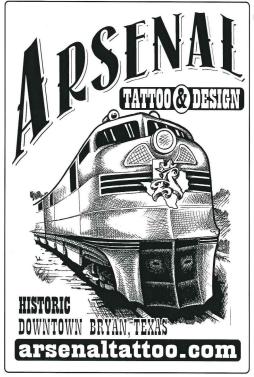
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35 days. President Donald Trump, Senator Mitch McConnell, and the conservative punditry let the latest government shut-

5 DAYS

down continue for 35 days before Pres. Trump agreed to fund the government temporarily while Congress and Trump will meet to negotiate on a more permanent arrangement.

January was not Donald Trump's month. His approval numbers took a beating, he was uninvited to give the traditional State of the Union address, his surrogates continuously looked unsympathetic to government workers who missed an entire month of pay, many furloughed workers did not return to work when summoned by supervisors, airports closed due to not having enough air traffic controllers to safely handle the skies, two high level Trump associates went to jail as part of the Mueller investigation, and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani claimed that Trump and company never said there was "no collusion" amongst Trump campaigners and Russia despite Trump and company saying so at nearly everyone interview since 2017. That is a LOT to unpack, but this is a typical month as far as news cycles go these days.

At the very least I think it's safe to say that Pres. Trump had no idea of how poorly the government shutdown would play for him. His rabid conservative base assured him that only Democrats work for the government so there would be no blowback to Trump, and what blowback there would be would pressure House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats to give in to his demands that Congress provide over \$5 billion in border wall funding as a bargaining chit for reopening the government. Often times Pres. Trump has been able to bully deals through with the weight of his presence. Pelosi and the Democrats were not intimidated. In fact, they knew very well that they had the public on their side. All major polling showed the shutdown to be immensely unpopular. Economists said that first quarter GDP would turn out flat for the first time in decades if the government remained closed. TSA workers went on sick-out, national parks became volunteer-operated or completely unstaffed, thousands of furloughed IRS workers just refused to come back to work when called to return unpaid. Previous shutdowns did not last nearly as long and weren't nearly as impactful.

I also don't think Trump was able to deal with being told flatout "no" the way he was by Nancy Pelosi. Many Democrats did not wish to see her return as House Speaker. If anyone feels that there was a better candidate for Speaker in early January certainly must not feel that way now, taking into consideration the way Pelosi expertly handled Trump during January. Pres. Trump tried to peel members of the Democrat caucus away to sew support for his border wall but no Democrat would budge. In the end, only West Virginia congressman Joe Manchin would fold and many Republicans crossed the aisle to thwart Trump's agenda. Trump also overestimated public support of a border wall. He let the loudest conservative pundits like Limbaugh, Coulter, and Hannity drown out the dismay coming from his base. Yes, they supported a border wall and want one built but no should hold federal jobs ransom to get what they want, not even the president they usually overwhelmingly support. Never had Trump seemed so tone -deaf.

Many feel that Trump's defeat is worth gloating over. Coming after two years of constant defeats the rise of the 2019 House Democrats is something indeed to celebrate. "Trump caved!" Even Ann Coulter has an-nounced her break-up with Trump, stating that he is even bigger wuss than George W. Bush. Many 2020 Democrat hopefuls have announced their candidacy for president. Nancy Pelosi appears to be the Trump Whisperer. Could we have made it to "hump month" in the presidential cycle with a downhill turn towards 2020, the conclusion of the Mueller investigation, and the emergence of a non-Trump Republican Party? Stay tuned - KELLY MENACE.



I kept standing in front of an NPC woman in a village in was a little girl pretending to sword fight the middle of the night and she kept complaining with a with a stick. I thought, "Ah, a young trainyelp. After a while, I stopped bumping into her, but fol- ee. Let's see if I can teach her somelowed her around. She walked over behind a cabin and thing." I took my sword out and she screamed and ran stood there. It seemed like this was her "smoking off. Hmm. That was interesting. I should chase her. break" (sans the smoking) while she waited to be needed

again. She stood at the ready, looking around. There I chased her. Swinging my sword every once in a while

was a dude there already. His loop included picking his nose and spitting. Seriously. They were waiting for a trigger.

Oh, and when I was messing with that girl by bumping into her,, after her yelp got louder, a dude came out and eveballed the girl as if wanting to see if she needed help...because I was messing with her. Was he protecting her?

After a while of standing in the "smoking/break area", some kids ran by exclaiming that they were catching snails. It distracted me for a second, but when I turned back around, the woman and the guv were still hanging out. But



to keep her running and screaming. l ran her waaaaay away from the village. Seriously...really far away. I thought she would despawn or force run back to the village (If she could find it again). Then, suddenly, she just stopped running. Even stopped screaming. I look at my mini-map and there are several enemies approaching. They were wolves. Oh shit. My heart started racing. What the fuck is about to happen. Did I just run this girl to her death? I freaked out and decided I had to save her. I began to dispatch the angry snarling wolves. One of them lunged right past her toward me. I fight it and kill it. I kill two more.

road. The little girl ran away back to town during the wolf fight (I let her go). In the distance I can see a bunch of grazing deer. I see the wolf that got away from the pack poke his head behind the trees. His pack is gone. He is alone and freaking out. He spooks the deer. The deer run off. The wolf is dejected. Man, this game is so full of stories.

quest I was on when I happened upon the village.

I try to find the NPC woman I was messing with before just to see what she was up to, but I can't find her. I hear some crying, and look to find there's a group of ladies I decide to stand with them next to the fire. They don't really pay attention to me, well, except for the busty, low cleavage one I am standing awkwardly close to. She is not happy I am The woman stuck around. She was shivering a bit, but there. She trades between glancing over at me and hiding her face. She's either embarrassed or uncomfortable. Weird. I'm just a dude hanging out. What's the big

> I accidentally knock into her and all the crying ladies get spooked, stop crying, stand up with a gasp, and turned toward me like I had I interrupted them.

there was a boy now. I guess he staved behind from the realizing that she wasn't going to get attacked by a pack pack of kids catching snails. He was digging in the of wolves (NPC wolves not programmed to kill NPC ground with a stick. Standing there, I had the strange innocent little girls). Whew. Shit. This game! Wtf! realization that I was this dude exploring in this area that was moving along even if I wasn't there. This world existed for me, but it started to feel like these NPCs were I catch my breath by standing in a field next to a dirt sort of "employees" or "slaves" even.

I was trying to be Neutral Good, but was probably more like Chaotic Good, solving mysteries and killing monsters (as I was meant to).

Like this one: A woman got a werewolf to eat her sister (kind of accidentally) because he (the werewolf) loved the sister, but this woman wanted him (the werewolf) to I decide to go back to the village and get back on the love her. She just meant to scare the sister, but not being in control of himself as a werewolf, he tore her apart. There was a cave under his house (through the basement) where he hung out when in werewolf form. That's where I killed him, but only after the sister revealed everything to him, after which he killed her, then sitting around a fire ... crying. asked me to kill him. Super intense side story.

Back to the "smoking area", the boy and the dude left. the sun had risen, so she's warming up.

Once the sun came out, people were stirring and were deal. walking around town. I just heard a merchant open up shop and the Blacksmith started banging on some metal.

I turned away from my stalking victim and noticed there

This game is kinda freaking me out. - JORGE GOYCO



Waking up on the floor with a terrible neck crick and back pain.

Me: What the fucking hell, Blacked Out Me. We live in a house with three bedrooms with a bed in each room and a couch in the living room and a couch on the back porch. You literally can't get more than three steps away from a bed or couch. You couldn't make those three steps, buddy? It's not even that far of a crawl. I can literally reach my arm out and touch the side of the bed from where you left me.



Look, I get it when we wake up behind a bush, or in a mulch bed, or on the side of the road somewhere. When that happens, I just assume there was some zany alcoholic adventure behind it and we were lucky just to wake up at all. In those cases, I don't worry about it. I get it. I really do. But this shit is just amateur hour. We're on the wrong side of 30 for this malarkey and it affects you, too. We're both gonna hurt all day over your silly fuck up.

Blacked Out Me: But...

Me: Nope, don't even start with an excuse. I'm not even gonna wake Drunk Detective Starkness over this lame shit. It's violently obvious what happened here. His skills would be wasted on this stupid case. We're timed out of Dragon Age on the TV and the phone still has Facebook up. So, you were just playing some video games, looking at stupid pictures on the phone, passed out, and fell into floor.

What kinda shit is that, my dude? Why would you want to be on the floor? A well placed spin woulda landed you in couch. No, I don't care about the rare bow you found! You play this game more than me anyway. There isn't even a story behind this. This is the most boring thing I can think of. All we get is more weird aches than normal for a whole day. You're letting me down here, buddy. This here is some rookie shit. Act like you've drank liquor before. Jesus Fuck. I expect no less than a fifth of whiskey and a pizza to be in the kitchen when I wake up tomorrow to make up for it, or so help me God, I'll...

BO Me: You'll what? Not black out anymore? Pfffft.

Me: Touché. That is a bit of an empty threat. Hmmmmm, but what if I changed all the passwords on Netflix and the game accounts then logged out before going to the bar? You'd never figure that shit out.

BO Me: Alright. You've got me there. But I want you to think long and hard about what used to happen before I chilled out and just ruined your vidya saves. In case you don't recall, there was a lot of cocaine and some occasional homelessness. You sure you wanna get that ball rolling again?

Me: Damn. So there really isn't much of anything I can do to you that doesn't result in punishing me as well. Fuck. Well, can you just please try not to do this. My back is really sore.

BO Me: Yaya, I know. I'm not happy about it either. I'm gonna be dealing with that same sore back later. I just got drunk and fucked up. Act like you haven't done that. I'll try not to let it happen in the future. We cool here?

Me: Yeah. Sorry, just woke up cranky. Probably from sleeping on the floor, you cock-wipe. But yeah, we cool.

BO Me: Good. Here, have a tall boy. I bought a few cause I figured after you've been going for a few days on whiskey while barely eating, you'd want a change of pace.

Me: Awwww, that sounds lovely. Dammit, Blacked Out Me, even when you're fucking me, you fuck me good.-STARKNESS





COWARD OF THE SENATE

Mitch McConnell is the so-called Majority Leader of the Senate, but he has shown himself to be as spineless as the president during the government shutdown as well as

for the past two years.

Whatever the outcome of the longest shutdown in American history, McConnell could have nipped it in the bud at any point merely by doing his job of legislating, but he has become so craven – and heartless – during his decades of "public" service that he just doesn't care. The suffering of nearly a million federal workers and millions of others affected is his fault as much as anyone's.

McConnell has gorged himself at the trough of American swamp politics for more than a quarter of a century. He is a millionaire 20 times over, at the beck and call of several corporations. While he once held principles that matched the majority of Americans, he long ago abandoned those for the path of doing anything to get reelected and cling to his precious power.

During President Obama's two terms of office, McConnell proclaimed on more than one occasion his cowardly intention to undercut any and every proposal that might be credited to President Obama. Obstruction replaced legislation. This included obstructing a vote on Obama's Supreme Court Justice nominee for the longest period of time in history. McConnell wasn't about to allow a black man to appoint anyone else to the Supreme Court.

McConnell's obstructionism has continued despite his party controlling all three branches of government for two years. He's forgotten how to pass bills as evidenced by the fact Congress was unable to gut the Affordable Care Act despite railing against it for nearly a decade and only passing one piece of legislation in two years ... and it just benefited the wealthiest one percent of America.

As gutless and evil as the current president has been during the government shutdown (as well as his entire reign), McConnell has been supportive of his fascist leader merely by his absence from doing his job. He has refused to allow the Senate to vote on any bills to reopen the government merely because the "Grand Wizard" of the White House says he will veto them. What a yellow streak McConnell must have to lick the boots of such a moral weakling.

However, McConnell shares much with the current ignorant and arrogant occupant of the White House. The president made McConnell's wife the Secretary of Transportation, so he owes him for that. Plus, McConnell relied on his father too to help him with the Vietnam draft in 1967, not with spurious "bone spurs," but with getting him out of the military reserves in just five weeks.

How did this country end up with such lily-livered individuals in positions of power? What is it going to take to restore moral fiber and backbones to our elected representatives? The 2020 election can't get here fast enough. Perhaps then, not only will our wretched excuse of a leader been voted out of office, but hopefully enough new blood will infuse the Senate that McConnell will be removed from his position of obstruction. One can only hope and work toward such goals. – *MIKE L. DOWNEY*



GUT ROT On my back: Spine straight Legs stacked In femured stalks And ribboned ankles

- Wanting sleep.

This new posture after resection surgery last February (pissing in water bottles beneath the stairs to avoid the stairs) removed part of me from inside me, reing, by broken translation, by stuttering currents, my every accent and connotation.

My hand splayed: Thumb on sternum Pinky to navel Charting pillar Popper engines As they burrow -

Morphine, codeine, hydrocodone (for pain). BusPIRone and diffused Bergamot (for anxiety). Hydrocortisone, lidocaine, Magnesium sulfate, Acetaminophen, and NSAID (for hemorrhoids). Ondansetron (for nausea). Simethicone (for bloating). Solitude (also for bloating). Loperamide, Lactobacillus rhamnosus, electrolytes (for diarrhea). Methylcobalamin (for vitamin absorption). Vitamin D (for sunshine). Iron (for anemia). Lactase enzyme (for the glory of cheese). Bismuth Subsalicylate, peppermint tea, ginger root (for everything). Windhand's sophomore, Soma (for morbid ruminations). Melatonin, valerian root, Rachel Kushner novels, and Diphenhydramine HCI (for sleep). Darkly brewed ethyl alcohol (in abstinence). Loads of monosaccharides (for ethyl alcohol abstinence). French roasted trimethylxanthine (for vigor). Delicate balance of theobromine, phenylethylamine, and anandamide (for pleasure).

- me awake. Flickering slithers Of want and resistance Conspire to invert Me, a machine Washed offal sock.

God, grant me... shall not want... through the valley of the shadow of... the poor in spirit, for theirs... rejoice in all... give thanks in all... for by Him all things were. .. and in Him all things hold... for Thine is... Amen.

In these dark hours: Names (loved, Hated) pepper The ceiling - the fruits Of waking towards Wholeness. - KEVIN STILL

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I've been listening to metal music all my life. Quite literally. My earliest childhood memories involve my nascent love for KISS. For Christmas of 1979 I got a Gene Simmons

doll AND the Gene Simmons solo album under the tree. The music made me so berserk that I laid waste with badminton racket guitar to the bedroom I shared with my older brother. This got both of our KISS records taken away from us permanently. But by then it really was too late. My brother (being six years older than me) hit puberty and it was all about METAL for him, so he listened to lots of stuff in our bedroom that made an indelible mark on me. Van Halen, Ozzy Osbourne, Rush, KISS, Night Ranger, Iron Maiden, etc. But Ozzy ... those first two Ozzy albums are probably the ones that loom largest in my metal legend. Many of my hours were filled under lights at neighborhood basketball courts, in late night piece-of-shit cars, on polyurethane skateboard wheels, and in someone's trailer park bedroom jamming out to these albums.

A few years back whilst watching a special on the 1980-1982 era Ozzy on VH1 Classics my wife casually destroyed the Ozzy myth for me when "Crazy Train" popped up. "You know, that just sounds like pretty much all the other radio rock from that period, like Boston or something." Pheweeeeeeewwwwwwww goes the sound of the air out the balloon. Because she's right. "Crazy Train" is classic rock. But there's so much more to those first two albums that Ozzy made with Randy Rhoads, Lee Kerslake and Bob Daisley, especially once you get away from the songs that have been somewhat overplayed and get to the meat of those records.

By 1981 heavy metal had gone underground. We'd been through punk and new wave and were just getting the first taste of MTV, the New Romantics, and synth pop. The next wave of metal was a tape traders' circuit. It was faster and leaner. Ozzy was considered a hasbeen, having been kicked to the curb from Black Sabbath, pretty much the ultimate heavy metal band, and replaced by former Rainbow vocalist Ronnie James Dio who helped to reinvent Black Sabbath for the metal '80s. If you've watched The Osbournes you pretty much know the story of how Ozzy's former manager Don Arden tried to drop Ozzy, only for his strident daughter Sharon to take over Ozzy's contract. Ozzy hooked up with former Quiet Riot guitarist Randy Rhoads and the rest is pretty much history. The template for Ozzy's success was set with these two albums.

You cannot take them separately. Both albums were released in America in 1981 and feature the same lineup of players. The songs were written in a group collaborative effort (no matter what Sharon Osborne and her team of lawyers may say), and what songs these were! Blizzard of Ozz fired the first shot, introducing the world to a more animate, less doom-laden Ozzy sound and to the singular guitar work of Randy Rhoads. These albums set the cast for what the 1980's version of the fret-burning guitarsmith would sound like, as much so as Eddie Van Halen. The classical guitar flourishes, the ungodly finger speed, the one-handed hammer-on runs, the pinched harmonics, etc. It was all right there from the beginning. I look at Blizzard as more of a pop record. It has "Crazy Train", which is pretty much the biggest hit Ozzy had, plus the romantic ballad "Goodbye To Romance". I don't know if I've just heard "Crazy Train"

HYDROGEN JUKEBOX

beautiful

gothic

punch

classical solo piece

for Randy; the rock-

stood "Suicide Solu-

tion" and "Mr. Crow-

ley"; the somewhat

"Revelation/Mother

Earth"; and the good

times rocking on

both "No Bone Mov-

neo-

one-two

of

too many times, but I just really can't handle that song anymore. And it is for that reason that I might possibly not rate Blizzard as highly as I should, or it could be that the pure excellence of Diary of a Madman overshadows it for me. Because once I'm passed that song, I love this album. "Dee". the



ies" and "Steal Away (The Night)". But man, when I reach for one of these it almost always for Diary of a Madman. Many have talked about the impact of Randy Rhoads, but this album really feels more like a band thing than Blizzard. and you get

it from the very first

blast of drums in the intro to "Over the Mountain". That song still just floors me. It has much of the cosmic hooey in the lyrics that I love so much from Ronnie James Dio, but perhaps not so fantastical. The guitar solo just slays and even has a little tongue-in-cheek quote of "Black Sabbath". This was back when guitar solos were orchestrated, melodic and every bit as important to the song as the chorus. "Flying High Again" is perhaps not the hit that "Crazy Train" was, but I can handle this one better (though I usually skip it) because from there on out the record just steamrolls. "You Can't Kill Rock & Roll" is probably my second favorite Ozzy solo song of all time and is most certainly my favorite rock & roll song about rock & roll. Talk about a rebel song, kinda wrapped into a ballad, but then it starts to rock, and Randy just burns all over the coda. And then into "Believer" with one of the most bad-ass bass guitar intros of all time (usually attributed to journeyman Rudy Sarzo who toured this album with Ozzy but that one is all Bob Daisley). Dark, gothic but in a neoclassical way, not unlike the latter '70s Black Sabbath albums (which I find are unfortunately maligned by most fans but I farking LOVE Never Say Die). "Little Dolls" is a great lighter hearted rock song with another awesome Lee Kerslake drum intro. Listen to that one on headphones and you will notice that Kerslake double tracks that drum intro. No wonder it sounds so mighty! "Tonight" is the "Goodbye To Romance" of this album, but I don't think it's as potent, but the guitar solo smokes. "S.A.T.O." right after just burns a blues shuffle with that gothic

darkness and operatic largess that leads you up to the title track, which is pretty much the point of having this album. It is

easily the best song Ozzy has ever recorded, and is perhaps one of the top 10 Metal Songs of All Time.

Instead of having the classical guitar thing kinda be out on its own like "Dee" or the occasional mind-boggling Bach-esque solo run, "Diary of a Madman" gets started with a rubato classical guitar intro that turns into a waltzing 6/8 dark, droning riff that drops the 6th note at the end of each run. Then the band kicks in. and this song turns into a mini-orchestral gothic prog metal masterpiece, complete with violins, orchestral bells, and a choir. The bridge gives me goosebumps "a simple minded spirit/the mirror tells me lies/could I mistake myself for someone/who lives behind my eyes?" This is pretty deep for Ozzy lyrics. Most of Sabbath's lyrics were written by bassist Geezer Butler and it has long been rumored that most of the lyrics for these two albums were written by Daisley rather than Ozzy. Then it kicks into that last little 8-bar run where Randy reminds you why his genius has never been replicated and then it stomps into the last bit with the strings and the choir slamming it at you full bore until the song just cuts off.

Less than four months after the release of this album Randy Rhoads would die in a freak airplane accident, silencing an incredibly gifted musician and pretty much wounding Ozzy's music to the core. It wouldn't destroy Ozz, his career would go on and he would make good albums. I happen to like The Ultimate Sin guite a bit and bits and pieces of stuff from the Zakk Wylde era. But no more would Ozzy make the sort of masterpieces that he made effortlessly in 1981.

For nearly ten years vinyl was pretty much the only way to hear the albums as originally recorded. In the mid '80s both Kerslake and Daisley sued manager Sharon Osbourne for the songwriting royalties due to them, as all 16 songs recorded on these two albums were written by the band, not just Ozzy. To keep from paying them royalties, Sharon had touring bassist Robert Trujillo (now in Metallica) and drummer Mike Bordin (formerly of Faith No More) overdub over Kerslake and Daisley's parts, supposedly at Ozzy's behest. Pretty much every fan pitched a fit and refused to buy those reissues. The bass isn't quite as obvious to tell apart but the drumming is quite different. Bordin's hi-hat technique is different and he doesn't have the groove the way Lee Kerslake did. Earlier in the decade 30th anniversary editions of the albums were issued restoring the original masters.

I think often of how an artist or group of musicians sometimes have those periods of time when it seems like they can conjure lightning at will, that the music comes magically, then often times wanes as time goes on. Some musicians have multiple acts and can call upon that lightning many times over in their careers. In Ozzy's case he would ride the coattails of the initial spark lit from 1981. He may have sold more albums and had more successful tours later but artistically Ozzy has never been able to come within miles of the work he was a part of on Blizzard of Ozz and Diary of a Madman. -KELLY MENACE



Ultimately, it was the unicorn-blood soup that did it.

The fairy food industry drowned beneath a deluge of hate mail. Animal rights groups were up in arms, even though unicorns technically don't exist. The fair folk were baffled. Humans had gone wild for dragon-on-rye. What was the problem?

The fairies had set up in a food truck last Midsummer Day. Within a week it was a hotspot. You wouldn't have pegged a bowl of fresh cream as the next big food fad, but that fairy favorite took the culinary scene by storm, flooding the feeds of Instagram, bewitching with photo-filter glamor.

Emboldened, the fair folk expanded to a fey cafe. They spun the finest floss of starlight, filled tarts with curdled mermaid-song, and fried up spicy phoenix-egg omelets. People kept coming back for more - humans just couldn't get enough.

The influence and rise of fey fame was uncanny. Once they were fully licensed-everyone knows fairies are sticklers for rules-their sunshine-sauvignonblanc prompted thoughtful discussion among commentators about the sustainability of "eating light," and bloggers warred over whether banshee-tear-salted brownies could be vegan.

Competitors whispered it was all down to enchantment, that less-than-fresh Cornish piskie pasties were glossedover with glamor, that it's easy to maintain profit margins when you give fairy gold in change. The fair folk just laughed, with a sound like the tinkling of silver bells, and lay quiet curses upon their rivals' harvests.

As the business expanded, fairy kitchens were staffed with the most skillful, and comely, of human apprentices. Possibly there's truth to the rumor they'd been spirited away from competitor kitchens in whose place were left shiftless changelings. But the food scene is cutthroat, and fairies had thousands of years' worth of tricks up their silken sleeves.

Book deals and the curious alchemy of gastronomigue beckoned. The star of fairy fame shone brighter than moonbeam panna cotta.

On the opening night of their fine-dining establishment -Sith - critics and connoisseurs buzzed in anticipation of an otherworldly eating experience. Tonight, the fairies vowed, mankind would be permitted to sample the most rare and sought-after flavor in all of fay-cuisine. A dish you could lose yourself in-for a hundred years or more.

But excitement turned to horror as human gazes fell upon that fateful first course: a delicate consommé of freshlysqueezed unicorn.

The spell was broken.

Public outcry, vitriol, and boycotts followed. Cold iron through cafe windows was the death knell of the fairy food fad.

By Samhain the fair folk had left forever.

When it comes to fairy food, some tastes just don't translate.-STARKNESS

It's that last sentence in Denis Johnson's story "Triumph Over The Grave" that'll make you feel the earth has opened beneath you—or the sky above. Even as you near the end of your second collection of Johnson's stories in

as many weeks, believing you've seen the best he had to offer, you'll still reach that last line and unintentionally but verbally pronounce, "Whoo-ooofff!", inviting your wife down the hall to ask, "What's the matter?", to which you'll reply, "Oh, nothing-a dead writer just reached through the page here and shook my hand", and even

though you can't see her face you know she rolled her eyes because it's not even 6 AM on a Friday. Sometimes a sentence does that. Not always. Not all sentences. This sentence right here is not doing that. But there is one that might.

See, it's here on page 150 in the Random House hardback copy of Johnson's *The Largesse of The Sea Maiden: Stories.* It's easy to find because, as mentioned, it's the last line in the story, which means it's the last on the page. Our narrator has recounted the deaths of several friends and acquaintances over the past some-odd pages. These deaths have not been remarkable except that they are deaths. And death itself, as ubiquitously certain and common as it is, remains the most remarkable thing we do after our birth. After all, there is that first date and then the last, and those are

the only two etched in stone. Forget winning the Spelling Bee or watching your kids pop out or your driving your first car off the road or scoring front row tickets to Garth Brooks. There is start and then finish. And our narrator's been charting the finish of several people when he says there on page 150:

"Oh-and just a few weeks ago in Marin County my friend Nan, Robert's wife-if you recall my shocking phone call with Nan at the very top of this account-took sick and passed away. It doesn't matter. The world keeps turning. It's plain to you that at the time I write this, I'm not dead. But maybe by the time you read it."

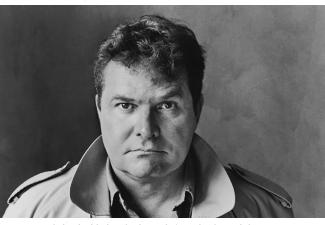
Whoo-ooofff! You can't help but feel the air jump out of you like your own ghost because the voice that created the voice of that narrator is now dead. Denis Johnson died from liver cancer in March 2017. In fact, you chose to read this book, so long after his passing, because it is his posthumous collection, possibly the endmost of his earthly writings. And so, yes, you knew, by the time you read it, Denis Johnson-the voice of the voice of that prophetic narrator-would be dead.

But how did he know?

If Johnson was anything like the narrator of his 1992 debut story collection, *Jesus' Son: Stories*, he should have died a dozen times—hell, maybe he did. *Jesus' Son* follows this single junk-fueled narrator, an addict we only know as Fuckhead (no really, check page 41 in the Picador Paperback for dialog from the story "Dundun"—"I'm glad he's dead," I told Dundun. "He's the one who started everybody calling me Fuckhead." Dundun said, "Don't let it get you down."), who relays stories that rarely resolve as much as just stop *later*. We



have good reason to believe Fuckhead does resemble Johnson, who was himself a fabulously grotesque alcoholic and heroin addict as a young man under the literary and substance abuse tutelage of famed addict-writer Raymond Carver. They flourished and drowned together at lowa's Writers Workshop. Johnson-also following



Carver's lead-dried up in the early '80s, fearing sobriety might stifle his creativity, but found it instead a boon to his productivity, bringing to mind the humorous torments (and vice versa) of addiction and recovery that became a mainstay in Johnson's short fiction.

Jesus' Son begins, in a story titled "Car Crash While Hitchhiking", with Fuckhead strung out and hitchhiking across lowa. He accepts a ride from a family he prophetically sees will perish, but, overly exhausted by his altered state, Fuckhead makes no intervening efforts. He sleeps instead beside the baby in the backseat, certain the child will not survive the next few miles. The collection ends, in the story "Beverly Home", with Fuckhead in rehab. But we find him slipping off from his busroute each day, spying through a Mennonite couple's window, hoping to catch them in the sweaty throes of marital bliss. He grows obsessed with the couple, and obsessed with the realization that their domestic rituals are as enthralling to him as the possibilities of voyeured sex. Jesus' Son begins with Fuckhead, entrenched in his own self-destruction, witnessing the destruction of one family, but it ends with him watching as a Mennonite husband washes his wife's feet tenderly in attrition. Has Fuckhead come full circle himself through his family visions? From destruction to restoration? From strung-out to rehabilitated?

In Johnson's second collection, *The Largesse of the Sea Monster*, published 26 years after *Jesus' Son*, various narrators relay oddly inconsequential details about the sort of mundane days that make an entire life, that hurl it off-beyond grasp-spinning towards its inevitable end. Here the omnipresence of addicted despair is not as present as the thunderclap conviction of life's brevity, perhaps even its surface-level meaninglessness. Largesse opens with a title piece presented as a series of vignettes framing a life that has become so superficial the narrator can't determine, when greeted on the phone by

his dying ex-wife, which ex-wife he's talking to-a fact that matters less when he realizes his list of marital sins was equal towards each former wife. Therefore, penance and apology, regardless of its dying recipient, would sound the same. Largesse ends with "Doppelganger, Poltergeist", a story that follows a suc-

cessful poet who loses himself-and his craft-in an obsessive hunt for proof that he is the reincarnation of Elvis Presley. His own life and successes seem inconsequential in comparison to having lived the ultimate existence-as existence that should offer some level of validity, right? In stories such as these, life spins out so quickly beneath the narrators-and their readers-that even the mundane becomes essential, becomes worthy of narration and reflection. In The Largesse of the Sea Monster, just as in Jesus' Son, resolution occurs less than simply landing on a finalized later-a style that's become a fad with young writers, but works successfully in very few hands. Johnson excels at the resolution-less story so deftly that he appears-though he did not-to have invented the move himself. Besides, life so rarely provides resolution, shouldn't honest fiction often work the same?

Still, looking back to that last sentence that will floor you, the one at the beginning of this essay-"But maybe by the time you read it."-that bit right there is Johnson at his best. The single sentence. The turn of a minute phrase. Johnson's craft was storytelling, and his tools were those finely woven and pitched sentences. He excelled in brevity. His humor prevailed in the precision of conversation. (Johnson once said in an interview that he valued "the language of people jammed together, like in the military or prisons" because those places were "pressure cookers of language".) And in all this narrative conciseness we find the irony of his thematic obsession with life's brevity. Johnson reminds us that, although our craft is that of an entire life, stretched between two specific dates, it's the possibilities inside a single day-with all its oddly out-of-tune minutiae-that is our greatest tool. It is all we are ever truly given-this day-and it contains, whether we can see it or not, the seeds of a story worth telling. Johnson knew that. Johnson wrote into that hope. And so his stories exemplify the insanity of living, the whirling vein-bursting buzz of needing something in every single today to be better, until we realize-like a rehabilitated narrator retreating from window-gazing on another life he wished to envy-that whatever already is not can be. - KEVIN STILL

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Camper van Cracker

Dosey Doe is a music venue in the Woodlands (where yuppies who want to play "redneck" live) that has mostly singer songwriters, country musicians, and occasional rock and roll shows. The venue is a



former tobacco barn shipped in pieces from Kentucky and reassembled. I'm guessing there were no suitable tobacco barns closer to the Woodlands. Doesy Doe combines a honky tonk, a Cracker Barrel with a serious singer/songwriter vibe into a venue that I'm sure the locals find quite "quaint". In order to keep the sense of decorum said venue requires, the plebeian riff raff – i.e., people like me – are priced out of these shows by fairly high ticket prices and cozy assigned seating at tables. It isn't unusual for shows at Dosey Doe start at over \$100 range; though many of the shows in this price range come with a free meal.

In defense of Dosey Doe, the sound is really good (the best in town as any number of employees there will tell you; whether asked to or not). The venue is quite strict in getting people to shut the fuck up while bands are playing (a horrible affliction of audience members in the Houston area) and people photographing the band/selfie antics are kept within reason. As an added bonus, having the audience seated means I don't get the 6' 8" hipster standing directly in front of me that seems to make every show I attend.

I hadn't seen Camper Van Beethoven in about 30 years (!?!). Though their blend of folk rock, polka, ska, punk with cheeky, smart-add lyrics was unusual for its time, their sound has aged well. Camper's songwriting maestro David Lowrey and company played the fan favorites: "Take the Skinheads Bolwing", "Eye of Fatima", Pictures of Matchstick Men" and "Good Guys and Bad Guys" (a more or less straight cover of the Status Quo hit) and pushed their newer CD's "El Camino Real" and "La Costa Perdida". Sure I would have like to have heard them play their send up of the Circle Jerks song "Wasted", "When I Won the Lottery" and "Bad Trip" but Camper Van Beethoven were the opening act for Lowrey's post Camper Van band Cracker.

In my mind, Cracker is about half as good as Camper Van Beethoven and about twice as successful. Since this is the case, Cracker got to headline. This show did nothing to change my opinion of Cracker. Cracker sanded off the more idiosyncratic parts of Camper Van Beethoven and played more straight forward rock and roll. When it works, it works quite well: "What the World Needs Now" and "Low" were both deservedly "hits". Honestly, I lost track of them after their second album. Apparently, they have drifted into alt-country territory which really wasn't too far from Cracker even in their high cotton days (and Cracker was a few years ahead of the alt-country curve when they started). They played very well but my opinion of them was/is unfairly colored by my preference for Camper Van Beethoven. I would certainly see Cracker again if it meant seeing Camper Van Beethoven. - RENTED MULE

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Salacious vegan crumbs

Hearing the car door slam outside, and the dog start barking her head off, you frantically scribble the last

sentiments inside your homemade Valentine before your sweetie makes it inside the house. After a flourish of the arm and a quick dusting away of colored pencils and Sharpies, your V-Day card is nestled sweetly amongst soft cheeses, tart dried fruits, and more crackers than you can shake a stick at. Your vegan Valentine is here, and you've made them the most romantic (read: delicious, because really, what makes you swoon more than a huge plate 'o salty fatty morsels?) vegan cheese plate.

The two of you (or one of you, be your own Valentine! You're worth it!) plonk down in front of the Martha Stewart style cheese spread in front of you, cleverly placed on top of a lazy susan so your cheese comes to you! You begin spinning, explaining all of the enticing blocks and blobs:

You start with some classic cheese slices a la the refreshments counter after a Lutheran church service. Slices of mellow Follow Your Heart **smoked gouda** and **provolone** are paired with some sun-dried tomato Wheat Thins. The more assertive **tomato and herb** Chao cheese and a hunk of Daiya **farmhouse cheddar** are nestled among those little Keebler butter crackers. You normally go for GoVeggie slices because they melt great, but they taste like Kraft singles, and you want none but the best for your little agave bun. Before you know it, all of the smoked gouda is gone, and there are crumbs everywhere. Oh, Valentine!

You remind your lil' fruit of the loom that there needs to be some pacing going on if you're going to make it through 360 degrees of cheese and crackers. You spin and stop on some fancy rosemary roasted almonds you found at Aldi. Salty, fatty, perfect accompaniment on a cheese place when you get a little cheesed out (is that even a thing?). Next up, some soft, creamy cheeses. Your sugar booger makes a beeline for Miyoko's sundried-tomato and garlic, spreading it on a warm sliced of baguette you lovingly toasted. You go for the garlic-herb. Both are sumptuous-your cheese itch is being scratched in just the right spot. The two of you agree that you should save a bit of the creamy cheeses and to melt into some pasta later. There's some thick, spreadable Treeline, perfect on top of a garlicky bagel chip. You wonder-can you grilled cheese a bagel?

A 40 degree turn later, you find yourself spinning towards a mountain of dried fruits-cherries, dates, and apricots-the perfect sweet, tangy foils for the cream cheese and ricotta sliding around the corner. Kite Hill's almond based **ricotta** is remarkably similar to animal-based ricotta-dare you say, even betterespecially swiped on top of a golden baguette with a single sun-dried tomato on top. So fance! Your sweetykins babycakes travels the sweet route-a schmear of Kite Hill almond **cream cheese** on a cinnamon-raisin bagel chip, topped with a date. So refined! You remind your little cream puff that you have the chive flavor in the fridge for celery stick snacking later

After a couple of deep, dark HEB brand chocolate truffles, you tuck into two piping ramekins of queso. Cashew based **queso** and **queso blanco** from Siete-warm, just a little spicy, and gooey. You think of all of your friends who say "But cheese!" and "But queso!" and you think, well, yeah, I guess dairy does come from pretty close to a butt! Paired with Siete's nacho and ranch flavored chips (aka vegan Doritos), you reach a crescendo of crunches and satisfied groans. You lick those ramekins so clean, you'd think they were fresh out of the dishwasher!

You're nearing the last 90 degrees of cheese, and you've saved the best for the finale. Your lil' head of cabbage has always been a sucker for a smoked cheese, and Miyoko's smoked farmhouse cheddar is just as smoky, salty, and savory as any applewood smoked lactation you've bought before. It's right at home slabbed on top of a buttery Ritz cracker (and now you've committed yourself to eating the entire sleeve of crackers!). Next to that are two different mozzarellas-a big hand-formed sphere of Miyoko's vegan mozz, and another of smoked mozz. While you enjoy using Follow Your Heart mozzarella shreds on top of pizzas, you really splurge for the Miyoko's when you want to impress someone with a fresh cheese. The regular mozz is super mellow, just as at home on top of lasagna as it is on a toasted baguette with fresh tomato and basil from the garden (we live in Texas, y'all, we have great weather for growing your own!). The smoky mozz is to die for (but since it's vegan, no one had to!) and you simply eat slices on their own. Mildly smoky, creamy, and salty, you wonder why you hadn't given up dairy earlier.

And with that, the cheese carousel has reached its original starting point. Your valentine, in a complete cheese stupor, reaches right into the center of the platter, pulling out your homemade valentine, thinking it's the final cheesy installment, and gobbles it down. Happy Ballentimes! – *KATIE KILLER*

Cheese (in order of appearance)

Follow Your Heart slices—HEB Tower Point Chao slices—HEB, Kroger, Village Foods GoVeggie Slices—HEB, Kroger Daiya Farmhouse Cheddar Block—Kroger Miyoko's cheeses—Village Foods Treeline cheeses—Village Foods Kite Hill cheeses—Village Foods Siete queso—Village Foods Follow Your Heart shredded cheese — Village Foods

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Pedal Pushing: Yamaha Reface CS

I should know better than to believe conventional wisdom from online music instrument forums. Sure, there are indeed some universal forum truths (as detailed in this column in previous issues), but often times one finds reviews or opinion on an instrument from those

who base their posts entirely on the published specs of an instrument rather than from demonstration clips or personal use. Recently I bought a certain



hoard

synthesizer widely panned on the Internet that has actually a real jewel in the rough, and my music has already started to reap the benefits.

I have been on the prowl for several years to find an inexpensive replacement for the Korg Minilogue I've been using largely as a live performance tool and a USB -> iPad controller. I have been dissatisfied with the Minilogue. I find that synthesizer to be an unholy compromise between a well-equipped analog monosynth with a somewhat acceptable though generic tone and the four-voice polyphonic polysynth it truly is. Four voice multi-timbrality is cool when one is sequencing percussive, short, attack-heavy sounds but when one programs long decay and release times per voice (like myself), one runs out of voices in a hurry and runs into the non-musical effects of voice stealing. Unfortunately, there aren't many affordable analogesque options for a Minilogue replacement. While doing research to see if something new was coming up at NAMM this year that might fit my budget I ran into a video from the Yamaha Reface series. This series of mini-key synths debuted several years back. Reviews were not positive. Recently Yamaha had dropped the price on the CS model to \$300 and at that price some people were starting to give the CS another look. Video demos looked positive so I made the leap and purchased one, even if the conventional forum wisdom said the Reface CS was a dog. They were wrong.

The Reface CS is an 8-voice virtual analog synthesizer. It has one oscillator/filter/envelope per voice with an onboard loop recorder, an effects chip, USB & MIDI connectivity, powered by a wall wart OR batteries, and an onboard speaker. Some reviewers called the CS a sort of 21st century reboot of the early '80s Yamaha CS01 analog monosynth, the last analog synthesizer to be mass produced before the dozen year drought between the mid '80s run to digital and the mid '90s analog renaissance. They are not entirely incorrect. While the original CS01 had a great basic tone, "basic" was certainly the operative term. The Reface CS is much more intricate. There are five oscillator choices: sawtooth, square wave, oscillator sync, frequency modulation, and ring modulation. The square wave has pulse width modulation, the sawtooth can multiply against itself as a "supersaw", oscillator sync kinda sounds like what it's supposed to, and both the RM and FM modes are gloriously clangorous. An LFO can modulate pitch, filter cutoff, or other modes. Some of the sound sources allow for a suboscillator. The effects chip allows for

WYSIWYG. There are very few commands that require any menu diving. There are no presets to the Reface CS. Programming the synthesizer is much easier for someone with experience using subtractive analog synthesizers. Some of the faders step. This is a sign that Yamaha cut corners a bit with the software, not allowing for the continuous sweep of the cutoff frequency and oscillator pitches. The loop recorder is not exactly a sequencer and whatever material is recorded cannot be saved once the machine is powered down. MIDI connectivity is done through a curious Y-cable dongle. The CS will receive MIDI on all 16 channels but only transmits on channel 1. It does not have a modulation wheel, only a pitch joystick. It has portamento but only in mono mode. When changing between effects the audio cuts out, so one cannot switch smoothly from chorus to delay. The envelope mod control is on a fader with center both VCF and VCA control. You can have variable levels of envelope applied to both, but the fader isn't exact: the effect is always on to a degree for both sources.

analog-esque delay that will self-oscillate, phaser, flang-

er, chorus, and distortion. The loop recorder can playback up to six minutes of performance and will MIDI

sync. All in all this is A LOT of features on a small key-

If you can get past what it doesn't do so well, you can get to what it does do well. It really sounds good. I mean it REALLY sounds good. Yamaha used the same virtual analog synth engine as was found in the AN1X, one of the '90s most celebrated virtual analogs. The 18dB/octave 3-pole filter can be squelchy but also very smooth. The CS is a pad machine that can make very thick and gentle new age strings with ease. Judicious use of the supersaw can fake double oscillator leads and bass. The FM, while only two-operator, is surprisingly easy to use and sounds great for percussive mallet sounds and electric pianos. FM and ring mod, combined with the delay function, help to conjure up wild space sounds easily. Surprisingly, I preferred the overall tone of the CS, a virtual analog, to the all analog Minilogue.

The biggest concern was that the Reface series was overpriced. This critique has merit. At \$500 the things that are wrong with it would outweigh what Yamaha got right. But at \$300 no other keyboard on the market can touch it IF you want to play chords. If you are looking for analog monosynths there are others from Behringer, Arturia, Novation, and Dave Smith Instruments that be a better buy. But if you are looking for a Roland Junoesque keyboard in a small package at an affordable price AND with 8 voice polyphony you'd have to look long and hard to find something more effective than the Yamaha Reface CS.— *KELLY MENACE*

There are some questionable choices Yamaha made with the Reface CS that have been deal breakers for some. For starters, it is almost entirely





Ashes of Ares Well of Souls

Likely you've heard of lced Earth, as they are one of the most prominent bands in the power metal scene. One of the things that makes them so prominent is that they mix in quite a few elements from thrash and traditional heavy metal into their formula, which means there is a little something for everyone. Having had four singers in their thirty-four year long career, sometimes fans begin to wonder what becomes of those frontmen, particularly the longest running, and arguably, most legendary vocalist, Matt Barlow.

When he retired from Iced Earth to join the police force, Matt couldn't stay away from music long. After getting into contact with ex-members of Iced Earth and Nevermore, the group formed a new metal entity known as Ashes of Ares, and released an incredible self-titled debut. Having left fans in five years of silence, Ashes of Ares is back with their sophomore offering.

With a title like *The Well of Souls*, you can only imagine what you're getting into. One thing I love about Ashes of Ares is that they truly have a singer with one of the most unique voices in metal. Strong and altogether masculine are terms that describe it perfectly, which I think adds so much to this band. Compared to the last album, *The Well of Souls* has held true to the band's original sound in terms of consistency, but unfortunately, this is where the praise for this album ends.

I like Ashes of Ares to be sure, and I have spun their first record quite a few times, but my expectations were neither low, nor high, for this release. In fact, I didn't even know Ashes of Ares had released a new album until a few weeks ago, and it is has been out since November! As much as it pains me to say so, *The Well of Souls* is a definite backslide for Ashes of Ares. The word which would describe the sound of the record is "forgettable". The first album was full of delicious melodies, catchy choruses that got the listener to sing along, a sensible progression, and riffs that were easily distinguishable and unique to every song, whereas this sophomore offering seems to lack all of these elements. After several listens, I tried my hardest to choose a few songs that I thought were good, and the only ones that came close were "Let All Des-pair" and "Sun Dragon", but even those song had huge flaws which primarily lay in the versechorus relationship. They also had great climactic build-up, but it died stillborn before delivery. To be honest, the best song on the record was "You Know My Name" which is a cover of Chris Cornell (RIP), so I honestly can't count it.

Since their debut, I was hopeful that Ashes of Ares would prove to be a metal force to be reck-oned with, as the self-titled album certainly indicated that they would, but *The Well of Souls* was very disappointing. The songs feel mediocre at best, and repetitive and unoriginal at worst. Nevertheless, I still like the band and continue to hope they will recover from this setback. *The Well of Souls* gets a 2.3:5 from me. – *CALEB MULLINS*



Kristy Kruger Fever of Unknown Origin

It's been 20 years since Kruger's first album-Bachelor of Apathy -was released (a dozen since her last: Songs from a Dead Man's Couch). That this is just her fifth album is a testament to her staying power in a field known for chewing up its practitioners.

The immensely-talented instrumentalist and singer-songwriter with roots in Texas has played all over the country, having once attempted a 50-state tour. She's played in Bryan at the 3rd Floor and Revolution where she mentioned in early 2012 that she'd turned down Jack White's request to play steel guitar in his *Blunderbuss* album female touring band, the Peacocks (later on "Saturday Night Live").

Fever of Unknown Origin contains tunes that Kruger has been playing live, one-"Goodbye Brother"—at least a dozen years. Many of the songs were originally recorded in New Orleans with musicians there. Overall, the album is a languid melancholy affair as evidenced by song titles like "It Hurts Most of All When I'm Standing Still" and "I Cried for All That Might Have Been."

Still, there are rays of light. "Home is Everywhere I Roam" is a perky Dixieland/New Orleans horn-driven look at life on the road: "My home knows no bounds." The two versions of "Johnny and June" are stately Americana featuring nice piano as the singer longs for a love like the late Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash. Kruger also radically reworks Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" as a doomy experimental iazzed song with the album's rare electric guitar. "The Carpenter" is a jaunty banjo-fiddle tune of unrequited yearning while "What I Do" opens the album unrequited with acoustic instrumentation as the singer croons "Why sleep alone?/It's just what I do." The slow "I Fell in Love with a Man Who Said He Loved Me" contains the great sad line "It wasn't very nice of him to resuscitate a dying heart" while the unhurried Dixieland fiddleled jazz of "I Long for the Night All Day" laments "The brighter it is/The sadder I am."

Oddly, the album's best tune that musically almost doesn't fit is "Goodbye Brother," an upbeat song written for her soldier brother's funeral in 2007 after his death in Iraq. Steel guitar, banjo, and harmonica accent lines like "Hard to believe this is the end," "I'll see you in every sunset," and "We'll meet again." The album closer – "Come and Gone" – also seems for him as Kruger's naked voice and guitar intones "I do the things you might have done" and "I find the joy for both of us" while a solemn fiddle closes out the last half of the tune. Even the oddly-titled "Directions for a Sudden Death" seems to be about her brother with lines like "fighting for your things," no resting in peace," and "time after the crying for fighting over the estate."

The unremitting gloom that permeates every song can make listening to this record a challenge, but it can be worth it. The album is available on State Fair Records along with the solid Songs from a Dead Man's Couch and the richly-produced An Unauthorized Guide to the Human Anatomy that contains her best song ever: "I Got my Back." – MIKE L. DOWNEY



Swervedriver Future Ruins

This is not an immediately great album. It takes a little time to soak in, unlike Swervedriver's previous album / Wasn't Born To Lose You, the band's first album in nearly 20 years. No, Future Ruins has to have time to germinate because there is a LOT of information to unpack on this album.

The band's moniker of "Space travel rock & roll" was coined in the early '90s but never on record has it felt as apt as it does for *Future Ruins*. There are lots of artful and interesting sounds at play in these songs. On album opener "Mary Winter" the guitars bray like donkeys; on the title track bits of ring modulated guitar startdust play at the edges of the stereo field while singer Adam Franklin's vocal harmonies, hushed and soothing, float over the bubbling of oscillating echo; synthesizers add texture to accompany the spoken word of "Everybody's Going Somewhere and No-One's Going Anywhere". This is perhaps Swervedriver's most psychedelic headphone space album they've ever made. That said, there's still a few pop gems amidst the sonic experimentation. "Drone Lover" sneaks in a monster hook in a dark song about the West's increased use of drone warfare: "If you slaughter me in the dark from your lazy space in the sky/And if you murder me in the dark/make sure you hold your conscience high".

There are a couple of perhaps lazy moments in the album. "Golden Remedy" and "Good Times Are So Hard To Follow" are rewrites of other more successful Swervie songs ("A Day Like Tomorrow" and "The Birds", respectively) but what band hasn't written songs that sound like other songs they've written? The band even admits as much about "Good Times..." These two moments aside, this is another fine album in the band's five year comeback. The band says they brought 30 songs to this session. Here's to hoping they shake more of them loosel - KELLY MENACE



2/1—Northern National. Night Traveler @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm 2/1—Mutant Love, The S chisms, Hammer Party, The Shutups @ Rev Rats, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/2—Khan, Electric Astronaut, The Vinous, Tongue Punch @ Rev Rats, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/7—Keith Michael Kallina @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/8-Crew & Gilley @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

<u>2/9</u>–North By North, Mad Rant, Mutant Love, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/14-Corusco, Groundhog's Day, The Hague @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/15—The Fox In the Ground, Guys On a Bus @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm 2/15—The Reploids, Mortales, Arc Set Empire @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/16—Thread Atlas, Electric Astronaut, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/21—The Gray Havens Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

2/21—Magic Girl, Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm



Halloween (2018) Original Soundtrack

The Halloween franchise has, since John Carpenter's original in 1978, hinged on themes of family. Be it Michael returning for his sister, Jamie Lee Curtis Laurie Strode, in the first two films or then for her daughter, Danielle Harris' Jamie Lloyd, in mid-franchise installments. The 2018 Halloween remake, directed by David Gordon Green, does not alter or challenge these family dynamics, but rather picks up where they left off at the end of Halloween 2 (1981) as if all those other sequeled nonsenses never happened.

The family connections in Halloween are worth mentioning in a discussion of Carpenter's score for Green's new film because-as with his past three albums-John Carpenter has collaborated with his son Cody and his godson Daniel Davies. And while such facts may be interesting on a trivial level, it's also helpful in understanding this score-Carpenter's why Halloween first soundtrack since Halloween III: Season of the Witch (1982)-feels so different than previous Carpenter scores.

It's worth remembering the Halloween 2018 Official Soundtrack is precisely that: a film score. Many of the tracks here offer quick, emotive slices rather than the long, gaping synthy passages Carpenter's been offering fans on recent albums. But even in this format, several tracks reach the two to two plus minute mark (the final track tops seven minutes), affording listeners a chance to actually grapple with the tension in the music before it slides off to another tensely jarring track.

2/22-Windows95, deCasa, Blue @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm 2/23-The Shoobiedoobies, Splice, Misotheist, Jasper @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/28—Cactus Flowers, Amplified Heat, Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/1-Stellar Roots, Bright Knight, Cayla French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/2-Kristy Kruger @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/7 - Crew & Gilley @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

<u>3/8</u>—Pardon Our Mess @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/12—Keep Flying, Bloom, Mutant Love, Charm Bomb @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

3/14-Sludge By Sludgefest feat. Iron Slut, Dirt Hooker, Shoobiedoobies, Benghazi Osbourne @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

<u>3/15</u>—Keith Michael Kallina @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

<u>3/16</u>—The Ex-Optimists, A Sundae Drive, The Prof. Fuzz 63, Jay Satellite @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

Compared to Carpenter's earlier Halloween work (or film scores in general), there's a lot of music in this new film (welcome to new Hollywood budgets). This is notable for fans who revisited the sparsely scored original, which makes profound use of silence and slow moving frames, before viewing Green's remake. This is not a critique as much as a note to the mainstreaming of horror cinema and genre celebrity. Slap a name like Carpenter on a score and you instantly sell more tickets, more merchandise, which affords more music in the film. This is certainly not a complaint, especially since all that extra music has created an extremely listenable album.

What's also immediately notable about the score itself is the amped up industrial nature of most tracks. This is an angry record. It's not just horror cinema tense-it's damnation-fueled pissed. And that works in a film about clashing siblings, about long buried grudges and paranoias resurfaced. Even the original piano score has been bulked up by dense synth rhythms and drums. Several tracks even bring in minor-keyed guitar tones -heard in the Lost Themes albums-that partner and swell around the traditional piano parts. Overall, Carpenter's 2018 Halloween score is not so much a solid film score as it is a truly great industrial rock and symphonic metal album.

But it's also worth noting that a good album draws listeners to all its members and parts. And while most old-school Carpenter fans will relish the nostalgia deeply entrenched in these tracks, his collaborators have also brought elements to the tried and true Carpenter formula that are unique and progressive. Good on the old man for welcoming new dogs to his old tricks. Many Carpenter fans may not know precisely what Cody Carpenter and Daniel Davies brought to the table, but an album such as this, riding on the successes of three previously powerful studio releases by the same trio, begs studio listeners to explore individual influences. their Again, that's a good record: one that invites listening beyond the immediate bounds. - KEVIN STILL.

SPECTOR STORE