

STOREREPRESENT



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for the discerning dirtbag.**

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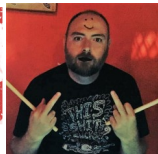
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MIDTOWNIFICATION

I've spent a good bit of time in and around Bryan but it is only within the last month that I've heard the term "Midtown" in reference to Bryan. It is the area between downtown and Northgate north-south and Finfeather and Texas Ave east-west. I've never thought of that area as having a distinct flavor or being a destination. It is largely a residential area that serves a combination of lower income ethnic minorities, college students, and first-time home buyers. The City of Bryan has decided that it would like to plan a development in this area and is interested in entertaining opinions about what such a development might look like.

I have to say that on the outside looking in the initial reports from the city itself and from KBTX suggest that the city is innocently wanting to improve the area and give new developers a guideline as to what new development might look like in the area if they so choose to take the city's suggestions into consideration. According to Lindsay Hackett with the city, "If you are happy with how your property is now, no one is making you do anything". The city calls the initial idea a "pattern zoning". It is a new idea to Texas but not a new idea across the country. Most cities use it to create more population density and combat suburban sprawl. What it looks like in practice is a lot like Northgate, Wolf Pen Creek, and the Biotech corridor: ground floor business/retail with apartments on top. It is pretty much the city plan du jour. Population density served with mass transit to create less sprawl, less traffic on streets, walkable communities, etc.

In the case of Midtown, sprawl is not actually a problem. There are a host of apartment complexes and small houses in the area. There are lots of businesses along the Texas Ave. corridor but the area looks roughly like it did in the 1990's. Tejas Center and North Park are the only two "new" shopping centers in the area and both of those are easily a decade old or more. One need only look as far as College and Broadmoor to see what the City of Bryan has in mind for the whole district: newer townhomes and apartments, wider thoroughfares, bicycle lanes, etc. Developments that show "positive growth" and look inviting to white people with money.

Yes, I am going there. The Midtown project smells to me distinctly like an invitation for business to help kickstart Midtown's gentrification and the City is open for helping you more easily gentrify the area. Couple this with the City's recent attempts to phase out existing trailer homes within the city limits outside of trailer parks and it looks like the City of Bryan is trying to alter the landscape of what Bryan's inner city looks like. So far it has not been that successful in drawing businesses to their new interurban meccas. The growth in Downtown has come slowly and organically. It has not experienced the sudden boom that Northgate, Wellborn Road, and Tower Point have experienced. Yet Bryan wants in on that game (and the tax revenue) desperately. Bryan still hasn't figured out that its hallmark is being the anti-College Station. That is what attracts many of its citizens, property holders, and business owners. The City is holding a public forum on the plan at Harmony Science Academy at a very unfriendly 4pm on Wednesday, August 7. Drop by and let the city know what you think of this city-sanctioned gentrification project. — KELLY MENACE

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**HISTORIC
DOWNTOWN BRYAN, TEXAS**

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A DIRTBAQ'S GUIDE TO THE ECONOMY

Politicians are servants to their ultra-rich masters. It has been this way for quite some time, a pattern that repeats itself — boom and bust cycles that the ultra-rich are largely insulated from. We'll see our next crash sooner rather than later.

Major crashes tend to happen a couple generations apart. One thing that tends to get overlooked, preceding the declaration of independence 1776 was the credit crisis of 1772. The British, looking to increase revenue, implemented the Stamp Act, Townshend Act, and the Tea Act, the latter of which led to the Boston Tea Party. The purpose of the Tea Act was to give the East India Co. full and unlimited access to the American Tea Trade and to exempt them from taxes on tea exported to the American colonies. It was one of the largest tax break in history and at the time most of the British government were shareholders.

In 1857 there was another major crash, banks across the country were failing and it was written that it was the worst financial condition the country had seen in its history. The civil war started four years later.

In 1920 Warren Harding won in a landslide on the platform of "more business in government, less government in business", largely ignoring toothless laws like the Tillman Act of 1907 and Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1910. With wealthy industrialist like Andrew Mellon serving as treasury secretary, they slashed taxes for the super-wealthy in America from 77% down to 24% with the Revenue Acts of 1921, 1924, and 1926. Labor protection was rolled back, unions were busted, and regulations were stripped. All that excess cash led to a bubble in the stock market directly leading to 1929. The average workers' wages did not keep pace with productivity gains of the 1920s, and by 1929 production was outstripping demand. Hoover increased federal spending on infrastructure, but relied on private industry to provide relief and worried against creating a welfare state avoided providing direct relief to those hardest hit (unemployed and farmers).

FDR set us on a different course. It almost didn't happen. In 1933 the ultra-rich tried to setup a fascist government in the US by having two time Medal of Honor USMC General Smedley Butler lead a coup against him. Instead Butler testified to the Committee on Un-American Activities. Then FDR started Social Security in 1935. Labor gained more power. This paved the way for a strong and growing middle class in the 50s through the 70s.

While the ultra-rich agenda domestically had been temporarily defeated, internationally they were just getting started. With a growing concern of the spread of communism (and the nationalization of their business interests along with it), many US companies supported Nazi Germany in their fight against the Soviets (and some for ideological reasons): IBM, GE, Ford, GM, DuPont, Kodak, Standard Oil, Chase, JP Morgan are all pretty provable, but you have to do that on your own, it's a little outside the scope of this little paper to link everything. Postwar, Eisenhower warned of the potential rise of the military industrial complex. The exact thing that led to the overthrow of democratically elected governments often in favor of fascists that were favorable to US business interests.

Domestically, we saw much social change in this time — civil rights movement, anti-war protester, etc. We also saw the creation of Medicare. 68% of Americans were working union jobs. The response to all of this was a

corporate call to arms, which came in 1971. Just before Lewis Powell was confirmed to the Supreme Court by Nixon, he wrote a secret memo that outlined their strategy, which called on corporate leaders to launch an economic and ideological assault on high school and college campuses, the media, the courts and Capitol Hill. Over the past 50 years we have been witnessing this plan put into action.

By 1973 we started to see think tanks like Charles Koch Foundation (later changed to CATO institute), Heritage Foundation and others start to emerge. They recognized that the judiciary was the most important area to infiltrate, which they were pretty successful at. In 1976 in *Buckley vs. Valeo* SCOTUS ruled that political money is speech. In 1977 the Supremes overturned state restrictions on corporate political spending. 1982 the Federalist Society was founded to give a new generation an indoctrination to these types of legal interpretations that favor corporate interest. By 1987 the Fairness doctrine was abolished and GOP TV (late rebranded as Fox News) was created within six months.

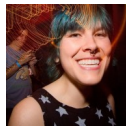
So fast forward to today — taxes on the wealthy and corporations have never been lower. The military industrial complex is roaring. Union participation in private sector is down to about 6%. Wealth inequality is at 1929 levels (but this time around Americans are more highly leveraged with debt).

If you want to know which way the wind is blowing, look at the billionaire class. A study done in 2012 by the Tax Justice Center estimates they have \$32 trillion stashed away, mostly in off shore tax shelters (hint hint Panama papers). They are hoarding cash so when things eventually break they will be able to buy up assets for pennies on the dollar. We didn't learn much from 2008, in fact the derivatives market has ballooned to (admittedly high) estimates of \$1.2 quadrillion dollars (\$1,200 trillion). That's over 20x the entire world's money supply. It don't make no got damn sense, and we're all boned again when this one blows up.

Change is possible, but with a completely complicit GOP (and many complicit Democrats), a 24hr propaganda news network, generations of people indoctrinated to corporate interests, stacked courts, and current Trump administration there is a very small chance real change will happen before the next crash comes.

Every single time you feed someone who is hungry, you stop them from robbing someone else for food. Every time you give someone preventative healthcare, you prevent them from needing more expensive emergency care. Every time you send someone to higher education or into a trade, you turn them from a welfare recipient into a tax payer who contributes more than they receive. It does not matter if those people are black or white or brown or yellow, these are objective facts. People will kill to eat. People will go to hospitals when sick. People would rather work in a trade than retail or fast food.

We need to vote. We need to vote for people that are committed to overturning Citizens United and getting money out of politics (even if it means passing a bill like the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937). People who want the Fairness doctrine back in place. Who are willing to slash the defense budget. Increase taxes on the wealthy, expand Medicare to cover everyone, increase minimum wage, rebuild infrastructure, don't deny science, and will pursue accountability for those that have sold this country out to make a buck. Or just fucking kill 'em all. — STARKNESS



SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

THIS MONTH'S EPISODE—THE VEGAN BURGER CLUB

Dear Big Meat,

We accept the fact that we've been mocked and avoided at cookouts worldwide. For years, we've been flavorless pucks of broccoli, carrots, rice, beans, always trying to mush out from between two buns. But we think you're crazy to make us write this article about what we think we are. What do you care? You see us as you want to see us ... in the simplest terms and the most convenient definitions. You see us as a health nut, a glorified hash brown, a couple of dumb twins, a wannabe, and a bean. Correct? That's how we saw each other at dinnertime. We were brainwashed.

The Health Nut: The Spicy Italian sliders from Good Seed are a real vegan's veggie burger. Nuts, seeds, vegetables, rice, beans, seaweed — all that kinda stuff that a man who's sense of self-worth is tied up in the number of pounds of meat he eats would scoff at. Joke's on that guy, this thing is a got dang PIZZA BURGER. It's a little earthy from hemp seeds and beans, and it's incredibly well spiced. If you've been vegetarian or vegan for a while, you probably know the chronic lack of flavor veggie burgers can have. I thought the patty on its own tasted like a bit of pepperoni Totino's, in a good way. Go to Kroger. Get this burg. It rules.

The Glorified Hash Brown: Trader Joe's has lots of veggie burgers (and if you're not travelling with a cooler when you go to the big city so you can pick up food, you're not unlocking the true potential of veganism!), and this time around, we gave the Veggie Masala burger a try. There's a lot going on here — potato, carrots, onions, peppers, green beans, and pockets of Indian spices. It's really good, but I'm not exactly sure why it's billed as a burger instead of just a patty. Kyr said it's like a jazzed up hash brown and she's right. It would totally be great in a breakfast biscuit with some tofu scramble or veggie sausage. Get this, but don't take it to the cookout!

The Dumb Twins: I've been hearing about these really great veggie burgers from Don Lee Farms for years. Everyone seems to like them out in the world, and we liked them a lot, too! They're thick and red and toothsome, and pretty much look just like a rare meat patty once cooked. They tasted walnutty, and had good texture, and didn't taste beany (they have no walnuts, and no beans, so, thanks broken tastebuds!). No burger mush here, these guys are an all around great veggie burger. They also seemed to be the most photogenic, which is important, because all vegans LOVE to take photos of their food. All of 'us.

Aldi has an entire team of veggie burgers year-round for you to try (and you should), but this time we tried the

seasonal Plant-Based Meatless burger (which is a super generic name). When we pulled these out of the box, we realized they looked suspiciously like the Don Lee burgers. When we ate them, they tasted suspiciously like the Don Lee burgers. When I looked on the internet, Don Lee told me they were the same burgers. Which is good! That means you can get them year round! They're a deep reddish ground beef color they cook up big and meaty and thick - no mush! They seemed to be really well spiced, moreso than the Don Lee ones that are literally the exact same thing, but maybe I was a little more heavy handed on the salt with these. Our resident opinionated minor didn't like the aftertaste on these, but that was the only complaint (and she didn't mention it with the Don Lee burgers).

The Wannabe: The Beyond Burger was the easy favorite, obviously. It's got a huge amount of buzz, is easy to find, and is making a real difference in the food world. And now, can buy a solid one-pound slab and form mondo, mini, or Juicy Lucy style burgers. It's fatty and greasy like a real burger. It renders fat like a real burger. It firms up as it cooks like a real burger. It's great with Lawry's like a real burger. The texture is firm yet crumbly like a real burger. You can cook it on a flat top grill and grill your onions in the leftover fat like a real burger. Frankly, if you're still eating burgers made from animals while the BB is around, you're a monster. Go buy a Beyond Burger and stop paying to have animals killed for your precious little tastebuds.

The Bean: HOT DANG! BIG TEX! BBQ BURGER! It's criminal how let down we all were by this burger. Everything about the packaging made it sound like this was going to be a big, bold, flavorful burger. It's a nice orange color, and it did well on the grill, but once it was in the bun, it was mush city. You can see whole pinto beans and lentils in it, and it just kind of tastes like re-fried beans. Did a northerner [forget to] spice this dang patty?! If you were tricked, too, Bobby suggests fermenting it and turning it into a burger beer. Personally, I bet it would be good if you mashed it up and put it in a taco with some flavorful sauces and veggies. If you want a bean + grain burger that's actually flavorful and doesn't fall apart, check out Sweet Earth's veggie burgers instead.

Dear Big Meat,

We accept the fact that we've been mocked and avoided at cookouts worldwide. For years, we've been flavorless pucks. But we think you're crazy to make us write this article about what we think we are. You see us as you want to see us ... in the simplest terms and the most convenient definitions. But what we found out is that we're all perfectly at home on the grill, savory and satisfying between two buns (well, besides the Bean), and can take over your world! — KATIE KILLER

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THE SOUL OF A COCKROACH

"The more things change, the more they stay the same" is one of those sayings that takes on more meaning as time passes.

Pulitzer-Prize-winning cartoonist Garry Trudeau addressed one of the mass shootings in America during Ronald Reagan's time as president (1981-89) with an NRA representative talking to a *Doonesbury* character.

"Oh, for a few days we took a lot of editorial flak, but basically, it's become a foregone conclusion that you can't beat the NRA and the gun lobby. Consequently, nobody in Congress wants to stick his neck out, and no bills get passed. We end up looking stronger than ever, even though we haven't made a single phone call."

The punchline is it's the perfect lobby, and the NRA will have to let some people go. And, 48 mass shootings later, things are still the same in Congress although the NRA is having some issues of their own for a change.

Doonesbury was also prophetic during Reagan's terms as the strip's Congresswoman Lacey Davenport laments to her husband before heading to the Capitol one day: "What a dreary mess the White House has handed us. It's nothing but another windfall for the wealthy. As if the rich don't already have enough ways to avoid paying taxes." Since 60 of the top Fortune 500 companies paid no federal taxes despite \$79 billion in profits last year alone, things are still the same there if not worse.

Last from *Doonesbury*, back when presidents still did real news conferences, Reagan is gently admonished by a reporter for a tendency to ... well, lie: "Sir, as you know, you've already made 12 misstatements during this press conference, for a career total of 1,982. Should you get your facts wrong on this final answer, you will break your old record set last January 19th."

Of course, he broke his record but compared Reagan's less than 2,000 lies in his career as president to Trump, who told at least that many last week.

The late Hunter S. Thompson is one of my favorite writers of all time, and he wrote extensively about politics for most of his career. Does this example from the 1980s ring true even today?

"Loose lips, old grudges, and ugly personal infighting have reduced the smartest and best-qualified group of presidential candidates that the Democratic Party has come up with since 1960 to a gang of demoralized drifters who quarrel constantly ..."

And, does this 1987 Thompson quote ever sound familiar when it came true again in 2016?

"It is difficult for the ordinary voter to come to grips with the notion that a truly *evil* man, a truthless monster with the brains of a king rat and the soul of a cockroach, is about to be sworn in as president of the United States for the next four years. And he will bring his *gang* in with him, a mean network of lawyers and salesmen and pimps who will loot the national treasury, warp the laws, and stay awake 22 hours a day ..."

Finally, this Hunter S observation from the late 1980s, hits home again after 2016: "That is the problem with this rich and anguished generation. Somewhere a long time ago they fell in love with the idea that politicians – even the slickest and brightest presidential candidates – were real heroes and truly exciting people. That is wrong on its face. They are mainly dull people with corrupt instincts and criminal children."

Corrupt with criminal kids – does that ever ring a bell today?

Maureen Dowd, a Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times columnist, loved to go after the Bushes when they were president, but some of her observations in 2001 have an eerie prescience today.

"Over the years the country's ethos has gone from John Wayne to Jerry Springer, from gunfighter nation to anger management nation, rugged frontier mentality to designer lifestyle mentality ... The president continued to cozy up to the Saudis and protect them with American forces, even though the Saudis were educating, exporting and financing terrorists."

More problems in the Middle East? Check out what Dowd wrote about that in 2003.

"We're about to invade and occupy an Arab country, so Islamic radicals all around the world are angry at us ... The hawks say things have to get worse before they can get better ... one said, 'we can get rid of the weapons and squelch the sources of terrorism. And we can set an example to other countries: If you cooperate with terrorists or menace us in any way or even look cross-eyed at us, this could happen to you.'"

So, 16 years later, we can see how well that worked for that Republican administration.

Last, but not least, here is this reflection from Dowd about the second President Bush that sounds remarkably like the current prez: "The president and secretary of defense boast about not reading newspapers, presumably because they don't want any contrary opinion or fact to shake their faith in the essential excellence of their policies. It's astonishing the amount of stuff these guys don't bother to read, preferring to filter their information through their ideology."

The good news from all of this contemplation of the past is that as bad as it got then, the country came out of it in okay shape. Sure, the Reagan years had some horrors, but then President Clinton served two terms where the country did very well. Yes, he personally was a jerk, but the country survived it all.

The Bush years were rougher with 9/11 and the trumped-up Iraqi war, but then the country had Obama for eight years with countless successes including healthcare. The current boil in the White House can be lanced in 2020. Hope can triumph over hate.

Keep reading. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

[All Trans Call-In Episodes are adaptations of actual exchanges I've had with real, live persons.]

TRANS CALL-IN RADIO

THEM HYPERSEXUALIZED TRANS WOMEN

(Bethany): In this episode of *Trans Call-In Radio*, we deal with kooky notions of how trans women should present themselves!

(Caller #1): Hi, Bethany! Someone should open a beauty consultancy for young transgressors who seem to think that femininity is defined by Mae West or Burlesque! So many adolescent boys making the transition exaggerate the sexual aspect of being feminine.

(Bethany): [Ruh-Roh look on face] First of all, they're not "boys"; they've *always been girls*. They're now courageously stepping out in glory.

(Caller #1): Since I've worked at LGBTQ clubs and have gotten to know probably more transgressors than 95% of Americans, I have some insight.

(Bethany): [really Ruh-Roh look on face] Then you should know that "transgender" is an adjective and never a noun. We're *PERSONS*, not things.

(Caller #1): Yeah, sure. Anyway, boys transitioning from adolescence to maturity as transgressors don't have role models except hypersexual characterizations of what it means to be a woman. They operate like all women have huge uplifted breasts, bulbous lips, and mascara ... so much mascara. They adopt this image because, in their attempt to "become" a woman, they have little to go on.

(Bethany): Let me break in here for a *MUCH-NEEDED* message from our sponsor — Transbuprofen®, the pain-reliever for trans folk!

(Sponsor): Transbuprofen® brings you *Real-Life Trans-Pain Rescue #207—the Would-Be "Ally" Who Makes A Better Enemy Than A Friend*. Transbuprofen®'s remedy is to just blink your heavily-mascaraed eyes and think peaceful thoughts. Engaging these folks is almost as fun as trying to persuade James Dobson that the Bible doesn't prohibit homosexuality. *But*, if you feel called to challenge wanna-be allies, do *NOT* pull any punches.

(Bethany): [nauseated look on face] Caller #1, your having been in contact with trans folk doesn't privilege you to assess us. Declarations like yours come off as "cis-splaining."

(Caller #1): Cis-splaining? No! I want to help! Too many transgressors go into prostitution to feel wanted and loved. Being female doesn't mean they need a self-image that exudes, or makes a living through, sex.

(Bethany): [taking four Transbuprofen®] Dr. Leson N. Humanity, our resident expert, do you want to take a swing at this?

(Dr. Humanity): [slugging back a fifth of Maker's Mark, then shaking his head] Bethany, I wouldn't touch this huge uplifted breast with a 50-foot pole.

(Bethany): [blinking] Gee, thanks, Doc. Ahem. Where to begin?



Caller #1, your term, "self-image" reduces trans persons to costumes. We don't "masquerade" any more than you do (maybe much *less* than you do!).

You say trans women have no role models except "hypersexual characterizations of what it means to be a woman." You miss that the trans women you mention are perfectly aware of their chosen presentation's source. After all, they're going out to a club, which, by its nature is hypersexualized.

That these trans women present themselves this way doesn't have to be 1:1 with their self-perceived and self-declared identity. Thinking so is like shaming sexual assault victims — "They dressed that way 'cuz they wanted to be raped." Why don't we say that a cis person has a warped self-image because they're wearing a Dracula costume for Halloween?

(Caller #1): 'Cuz they're just playing.

(Bethany): So trans persons don't get to play or dress as they want without being accused of warped self-image? Try donning feminine attire as a trans woman — I guarantee you I've had to make decisions as to whether I "pass" in order to save my life or, at the least, elude those who will silently, vocally, or via battery assail me for having a warped, hypersexual self-image, when it's nothing of the sort.

I stopped doing that second-guessing shit of myself a long time ago. My criterion for what I wear is what a cis person thinks of: 1) Is this comfortable to wear in this weather/setting? and 2) Do I fucking look good to *ME*? Don't worry so much about trans people, Caller #1. Ponder instead why this bugs *YOU* so much.

(Caller #1): What about trans girls who do prostitution to feel wanted and loved?

(Bethany): Trans women tossed out of their homes, with no access to food and shelter, and denied employment

hell yes are unloved and unwanted. But they do *NOT* seek sex work as a replacement for love. They're

SURVIVING; feeling loved, accepted, and wanted are mere niceties in comparison. Witness the high suicide rate among trans persons — many of us conclude no better day will come. Others of us self-numb because SURVIVAL doesn't afford us the luxury of quaint analysis. We hurt. To survive is to go on hurting. No wonder some of us numb it with forms of self-oblivion — 'cuz raw survival doesn't help us enjoy merely surviving.

That I've never been a sex worker or self-abuser doesn't mean I don't know these harrows—just that I was privileged and spared what others sadly go through. [For 54 years, though, all I was doing was surviving](#) — joining any group, any faith, any club, any tribe to give myself the illusion that I was accepting myself and thriving. *That's the masquerade we are DONE with donning*. We wore that costume because we've been told we're abominations, that our self-image is warped and hypersexualized, that *WERE JUST NOT RIGHT ENOUGH TO BE WORTHY OF LIFE*.

(Caller #1): I'm not saying you aren't worthy of life — you just have very little to go on when it comes to being women.

(Bethany): We have *EVERYTHING* to go on because we *ARE* women. The only reason anyone accuses us of not being women or not being the "right kind" of woman is because society has told the same shit to *ALL* women for centuries. That's *misogyny* — cis men feeling threatened by and trampling the feminine.

Fuck that noise. I love "hypersexualized," "trying too hard," "chasing after an illusory female identity" women ... because we're *WOMEN*, each and every fucking one of us. *And we get to be women in WHATEVER FUCKING WAY THAT WE ARE WOMEN*.

The only reason anyone accuses us of not being women or not being the "right kind" of woman is because society has told the same shit to *ALL* women for centuries. That's *misogyny* — cis men feeling threatened by and trampling the feminine.

(Caller #1): You don't have to be so touchy about it. So you're a woman.

(Bethany): Caller #1, go touch yourself. To help you with that, we're sending you a year's supply of Transbuprofen® and Dr. Leson N. Humanity's unfinished bottle of Maker's Mark. [Dr. Humanity snores in background.]

Listeners, my story is no one else's and, as such, can never be a template for anyone. An account, yes, [as to how one woman became aware of her true identity](#), but not an exemplar for others. *We get to be who we want*. I'm not *trying* to be a woman, 'cuz I've always been Bethany, whether I or anyone else knew it. *I'm not anyone's definition of womanhood beyond the one I have of Bethany, me, myself, I*.

That's all till the next Episode of *Trans Call-In Radio* when we talk to a Catholic priest about trans identity! — *BETHANY BEELER*

DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS



Me: Ummmmmm, Blacked Out Me? Was this your doing? I mean, it obviously must have been, but I'm just pretty fucking amazed, here. I thought I was doing something superhuman when I remembered to actually cancel that Cinemax free trial we signed up for to catch *Tales From the Tour Bus*. But then I log in and it was already canceled?

Blacked Out Me: Uh, ya dude. I gotcha. I did that like a week ago. That's beer money we're talking here. I wasn't about to let us get charged for that bullshit. I mean, I'm a lunatic, but I figured I could make time in my busy schedule of pacing around back and forth, listening to Cold War Kids and Warren Zevon on loop, for however many hours to make sure we didn't lose half a handle worth of cash over some dumb bullshit subscription. Contrary to popular belief, I do know where booze money comes from.

Me: What?! What, what, what?!?! Hold up. Since when have you ever been conscious of our financial situation? Do you even know how much cash you've pissed away in bars and buying dumb shit for other people? Cause I do. I keep track. And it is a looooooooot, like, a lot, man, like, really more than you could ever imagine. I am half convinced you don't even understand the concept of money. I thought you had dollars bills confused with valentine's cards or something and just handed them out cause you thought it was funny. Where did this sudden financial responsibility come from?

BO Me: Ahhhh, you're missing the operative words in that sentence: "*pissed away in bars and buying dumb shit for other people*" See, I like booze and our friends, so yeah, I'll spend cash on them. But I'm actually really responsible about spending money on anything else. Seriously, how long have we been doing this and you never noticed that I've never spent a dime on anything but booze/cigs/emergency recovery food for us?

Me: Now that I think about it, you're right. I was wrong to ever question you. Continue on, you devious fuck. Drinking early today, so I guess I'll see you soon.

Jesus, my alter egos. Christ almighty, they're either royally screwing me or saving my ass and either way, we have a good time. It's good to have discussions like these to keep your marriage alive. — *STARKNESS*



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The title pretty much says everything you need to know about this book. However, unlike other recent books (most that I've read) that detail the misdeeds by the squalid buffoon in the Oval Office, Wilson comes from a longtime conservative Republican viewpoint in laying out just why this president is so horrific for America as well as for conservative Republicans nationally. He is and was a "Never Trump" advocate from early 2016.

Wilson's prose is darkly humorous and profane as he retraces how a failed businessman reality show celebrity who couldn't get elected dogcatcher was able to be nominated for president in the first place – and who is to blame for that on the conservative Republican side as well as the Democratic side. The media and evangelicals are hammered as well for their roles in electing this excuse of a human being.

Wilson does have one regret though as he notes early: "The problem in writing this book is time; every day brings some new outrage, scandal, excess, or moment of historic dumbassery by this president. That said, deadlines wait for no man, so I trust you'll pardon this volume for not chronicling every moment of president Death Touch's misrule."

First, the baffling support of Trump by Christians – Wilson writes they had their standards even if he personally didn't agree with them: "Until 2016. That was the year political and professional evangelicals went off the cliff with a candidate who was a walking, talking pornstar-screwing offense to their every belief." Wilson writes that the usual argument is that this president is appointing conservative judges to the Supreme Court and other courts.

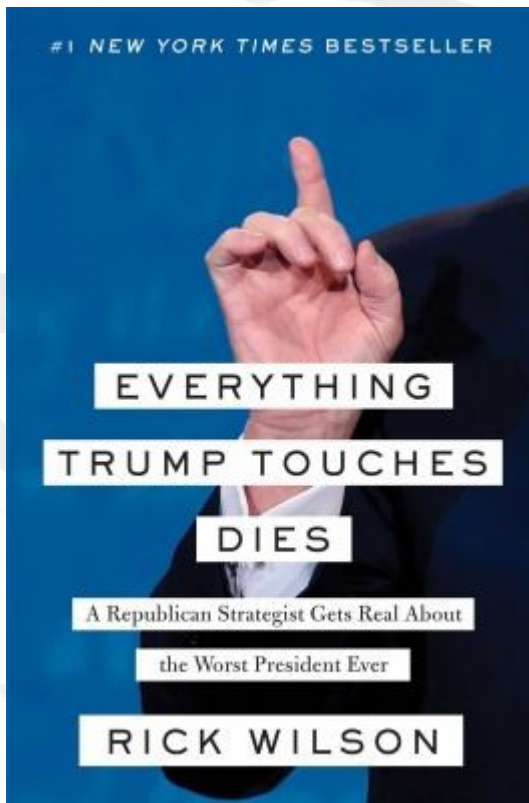
"Do Gorsuch and a handful of court nominations make up for the seemingly enormous, looming political costs? . . . Do Trump's shallow, dick-measuring juvenile feuds with everyone who has ever looked at him cross-eyed make America look more or less like a nation led by a serious person? . . . pardon me, dating porn stars while your wife is pregnant and then paying them hush money is frowned upon in modern Christianity, yes?"

Part of the fun in reading Wilson is seeing how expertly he lambasts the current president with a vocabulary that would send the White House occupant haplessly scurrying for a dictionary (assuming he is literate enough to read).

"Donald Trump is like a monster from the laboratory of a jackass mad scientist, built to represent the perfect antithesis of (George) Washington's example . . . Trump is a clownish figure, a deserved magnet for mockery. From his absurd hair construct to his ludicrous ego to his pathetic, whiny need to have his alpha-male status affirmed every moment . . ."

Wilson doesn't just deservedly pummel and mock the present President. He offers up plenty of facts and evidence from numerous sources (remember: conservative Republican – this guy worked for the first George Bush, quotes Reagan, all that) showing how badly this

EVERYTHING TRUMP TOUCHES DIES



failure of a human being has damaged the country.

By April 2018, Donald Trump's administration lost more Cabinet members and senior staff than any administration in the past 150 years. . . In all, 34% of the White House staff was gone in the first year, a number unprecedented in any country that isn't run by pirates, drug lords, or cannibal dictators."

Conservative media, led by Fox News, was and is complicit in the damage to conservative Republican values – and to blame for Trump, according to Wilson. "They and others actively elected to elide (ignore) Trump's endless catalogue of ideological sins, thinly veiled racism, moral shortcomings, mob ties, Russian money men, personal weirdness, endemic cheating, trophy wives, serial bankruptcies, persistent tax shenanigans, low-grade intellect, conspiracy email-forwarding kooky grandpa affect and disregard for American values and standards."

Oh, this about Fox's Sean Hannity: "The president of the United States is addicted to an endless stream of praise from a shallow, dangerously stupid man. That same dangerously stupid man feeds America's president a

constant flow of conspiracy nonsense, uncritical praise, and unin-

formed opinion. It's a disaster . . ."

Wilson views this president's war on the press as "the deepest affront to our traditions, values, and freedoms." . . . I wish this was just a game played by a president more suited for the World Wrestling Federation than to the Oval Office, but it's not."

The author further writes about this president assaulting this fundamental democratic ideal by whining: "I can't believe the media is allowed to write anything they want' is the language of despots and tyrants. In many ways, this attack on the press and the roaring approval by Republicans illustrates the real divide in American conservatism today. . . . Republicans are failing the test of our time, and slipping into the warm bath of totalitarian language, practice, and politics."

Pointedly, Wilson compares the half century-long racism of this president ("good people on both sides") with President Ronald Reagan's history of denouncing the Klan and all bigots such as Reagan stating "The politics of racial hatred and religious bigotry practiced by the Klan and others have no place in this country . . . Many people are welcome in our house, but not the bigots."

Wilson also answers the conservative media's bleat that liberals like to paint all Republicans as racists by affirming as a conservative Republican: "No, not every Trump supporter is a racist, xenophobic, alt-right man-child. However, every racist, xenophobic, alt-right man-child is a Trump supporter." One hard-to-cleanse residue of Trump's time, Republican Wilson writes, is the open arms – and tiny hands – Trump extended to welcome these bigots into the daylight.

"The fury I felt after defending my party for decades from attacks that it was inherently racist, only to have it elect a man racist in deed and word, tolerant of even more vile racists, and a hero to racists, white supremacists, and anti-Semites leaves me almost speechless with rage."

Despite the anger over what this president has done to his party and his country, Wilson has laced the book with such humanity and wit (dark though much of it may be) that the overall impact is one of glee. Yes, these are serious issues, but Wilson takes such fiendish jubilation in skewering Trump and his bootlickers with the facts as well as with his creative imaginings presented as a five-act play threaded through the book.

Finally, asked how his Never Trump thing is going, Wilson can still answer: "Fabulously. I never have to defend a verbally incontinent, psychologically unbalanced, grotesquely ignorant failure who is reviled by his country, mocked by the rest of the world, and who embarrasses himself and the nation with every crude, impulsive act."

We should all be so principled. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

THE BIGGEST STEP



You've got so many reasons that convince you to not do it yet. Let's see...you don't have the time, you are scared to take the risk, you are comfortable, you don't have enough sober moments to form a plan, you REALLY like Facebook.

These are all amazing excuses.

You can stop reading now. Oh, you are curious? You are gonna keep reading? Well, that's a great start. In fact, I'm proud of you. Let's call it "The Biggest Step!"

Now, before you get to celebrating, part 2 is: keep it up. Keep making forward decisions...or at least lateral ones. Remind yourself that you are on a path.

Risk can hurt. It can mess up relationships. It can put you in uncomfortable situations. Risk can kill your old self...and we all know our old self is a conniving, aggressively persuasive, brake pumping motherfucker.

But here's the thing, you probably aren't thinking about massive life changers, right? You are probably just wanting to clean up your living area or start exercising or ask someone out for coffee or tell someone a deep dark secret or just slow down and take a deep breath. Right?

I mean, START there anyway, especially if you aren't used to going against your every whim and rewarding yourself for every little miniscule dopamine hit.

Here's the challenge: Do something small, but make it good. All of us around you want to see you shine. You've got it in you, and it's probably the most amazing thing we've ever seen. We won't know...YOU won't know, unless you try. We're looking forward to what you do and being part of your journey. Again, hopefully we're talking about a "positive" move here, not heads in refrigerators and bomb vests, right? Or at least I THINK it's what everyone wants. Well, me anyway. The dude that wrote this. Some of these things you are thinking about need to be calculated...but some don't. It's not always important to know what's next, but sometimes it is.

Put this message away so you find it later. Put it in a place you won't check for a while, like in a "memory" box or in a photo album. Maybe put it inside that thing that's probably going to end up in a garage sale a few years from now.

Here's the thing: break out, do you, do something "crazy", but don't break your relationships. You'll regret that. Be that "better you", but don't kill your support system. Don't be a dick. I've found that my boredom and lackluster outlook is a product my own attitude and self inflicted slavery. Slavery to what?

YOU have to answer that.

Some of these things will take finances or a financial risk. I know. Calculate that. Money makes things easier and more convenient, but who the fuck said shit was gonna be cake? But there's gonna be cake, you are just gonna have to bake it.

My personal slavery (stop reading if you haven't figured yours out yet) is that I can't be good enough. – JORGE GOYCO



ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP WHATAQUITO

Welcome to the dog days of summer! It's fucking HOT out there!!

The Greeks associated this time period with mad dogs and drought as they watched the Sirius star system rise into the sky. Personally, these dog days of summer represent the culmination of all the hard work we started back in January. From seed saving to composting, row covers to irrigation systems, every minor detail contributes to the final harvest. And with the final harvest comes bounty. And with bounty comes preservation. Because you better be damned if I am going to watch any of it go to waste! You may be lethargic (I am) and your garden may look like it has suffered through a drought (mulch, mulch, mulch) but stick with me and try a few of these tricks and recipes to preserve your summer harvest.

- DO NOT with any subtle suggestions from your Aunt Gertrude try to can/preserve without a recipe. Proper canning techniques have been established for very specific reasons to avoid FOOD POISONING. It's serious business. Please do not die.

- RECYCLE those jars!! Save any Ball, Kerr or canning jar you may have from old preserves, holiday gifts or your apocalypse pantry. Check into your local grocery store for summer sales on lids and rings. These pieces need to be replaced EVERY TIME.

- Scour the local farmer's market or produce stand for bulk veggies or fruits that are on sale! Some of my best selling preserves like Blood Orange Marmalade (Kiry, I'm talking dirty to you) and Prickly Pear Syrup came from the discount shelf, marked 50% off and half squished. These ingredients elevate any recipe and make a memorable experience.

- Go to your local library and look for recipe books. Some of my favorites have been found tucked away on a shelf, spine stiff, begging to be cracked open. Do them a favor and seek them out.

- Get drunk or high. Being slightly stoned/inebriated has always put my palate on Level 101. I can have some dank ass cucumbers that sat too long under the blinding Texas sun but with a little help from my friend Tequila they became a flawless pickle.

- Crank the A/C up high. It's going to get HOT. Hotter than hell. Hotter than Lizzo snatching that ass and taking that cash. Drop that thermostat down low, low, low.

- Make it a party! Many hands make light work. Call up your gal pals, your grandma or your sugar daddy and make some new memories.

Good luck and good riddance. Is it Halloween yet?

PEACHES IN APPLE JUICE (SUGAR FREE)

Yield: about 6 pint or 3 quart jars

INGREDIENTS

6 to 9 pounds of peaches (about 18 to 27 medium)
5 cups unsweetened apple juice, fresh or bottled
Ball Fruit-Fresh Produce Protector

PREP Wash peaches/drain. To peel peaches, blanch in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds. Immediately transfer to cold water. Cut off peel. Cut peaches in half lengthwise; remove pits and fibrous flesh. Treat with Fruit-Fresh to prevent darkening.

COOK Drain peaches. Cook peaches in water, one layer at a time, over medium heat until peaches are hot throughout. Heat apple juice just to a boil.

FILL Pack hot peaches, cavity side down and layers overlapping, into a hot jar, leaving ½-inch headspace. Ladle hot juice over peaches, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Clean jar rim. Center lid on jar and adjust band to fingertip-tight. Place the filled jar on elevated rack over simmering water in canner. Repeat until jars are filled.

PROCESS Lower the rack into simmering water. Water must cover jars by 1 inch. Adjust heat to medium-high, cover canner and bring water to a rolling boil. Process pint jars 20 minutes or quart jars 25 minutes. Turn off heat and remove cover. Let jars cool 5 minutes. Remove jars from canner; do not retighten bands if loose. Cool 12 hours. Test seals. Label and store.

FIRE ROASTED TOMATOES

Yield: about 4 quart jars

INGREDIENTS

12 pounds tomatoes
1 tsp salt
4 bulbs garlic (which really means 8)
½ tsp coarsely ground black pepper
¼ cup EVOO
Ball Citric Acid or bottled Lemon juice
1 ½ cups chopped Onion
1 tbs fresh oregano

PREP Wash tomatoes under cold running water. Drain. Dry. Peel onion. Chop.

COOK Roast tomatoes (and garlic, wrapped in foil with EVOO) on a grill or under a broiler until skins begin to wrinkle and become blackened. Turn to roast evenly on all sides. Remove from heat. Place roasted tomatoes in a paper bag and close. Cool. Peel and core tomatoes. Separate garlic from skin. Combine garlic, tomatoes, salt, pepper, oregano into large saucepan. Cook over medium heat until hot throughout, about 30 minutes.

FILL Add ¼ tsp citric acid or 1 tbs lemon juice to a hot pint jar; ½ tsp citric acid or 2 tbs lemon juice to a hot quart jar. Pack hot tomato mixture into jar, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Clean jar rim. Center lid on jar and adjust band to fingertip-tight. Place jar on rack elevated over simmering water in boiling-water canner. Repeat until all jars are filled.

PROCESS Lower the rack into simmering water. Water must cover jars by 1 inch. Adjust heat to medium-high, cover canner and bring water to a rolling boil. Process quart jars 1 hour and 25 minutes. Turn off heat and remove cover. Let jars cool. Remove jars from canner; do not retighten bands if loose. Cool 12 hours. Test seals. Label and store jars.

JALAPENO JELLY

Yield: about 5 pint half-pint jars

INGREDIENTS

¾ pound jalapeno peppers (or fuck it up with habaneros/ghost peppers)
2-3 oz pouches Ball Liquid Pectin
2 cups apple cider vinegar
6 cups sugar

PREP Wash peppers. Drain. Remove stems and seeds (WEAR GLOVES). Puree peppers with 1 cup acv in food processor or blender.

COOK Combine pepper puree, 1 cup acv and sugar in large saucepan. Bring mixture to a boil over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Boil 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Add pectin. Bring mixture to a rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim off foam if necessary.

FILL Ladle hot jelly into a hot jar, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Clean rim. Center lid. Blah blah blah. Repeat until jars are filled.

PROCESS Boil until death (approximately 10 minutes). Turn off heat. Let cool overnight.

I bet y'all read through this entire thing to see if I would share my pickle recipe. Hell naw, y'all. But here's a raw food fermentation that requires NO heat and will definitely slap you silly.

PIKLZ

INGREDIENTS

2 cups shredded green cabbage
3-6 hotter than hell peppers
1 bell pepper, seeded/sliced
1 carrot, grated
1 onion, sliced
1 scallion
Pinch of sea salt
8-10 whole peppercorns
3 whole cloves
Pinch of thyme
3 cups white vinegar
Juice of ½ lime

Combine the cabbage, peppers, carrot, onion, scallion, salt, peppercorns, cloves and thyme in a bowl. Mix well. Pack veggies in large jar. Mix the vinegar and lime juice. Pour over veggies until completely submerged. Screw lid down tight and store in refrigerator to cure for at least 5 days. Keeps in refrigerator for up to 3 months. — *HALEY RICHARDSON*

Mexican Village offered thick corn chips right out of a bag, heaping bowls of grocery store salsa, and many striped fiesta ponchos mounted on the walls as decor. Sometimes my high school friends and I would laugh for hours and eat casserole-consistency quesadillas until the place closed. My mom joked that she could smell the garlic on me the next morning. I didn't know any better. I thought the food was delicious.

When I moved to Texas at age 19, then, Tex Mex cuisine was a revelation. Transparently thin tortilla chips scooped from a hot fryer directly into paper-lined plastic baskets, then salted generously. Avocados. Big ones. Tomatillo green sauce. Tacos made with corn tortillas, not wrapped in white flour blankets. Taco trucks. Taquerias. I loved it all. On my first visit to Texas, I ate at Los Tios, a tasty Houston favorite, then at Ninfa's, a beloved Houston establishment. There was no going back to the chunky salsa and chunkier chips of Mexican Village.

For years after, I believed myself a student of the authentic cuisine. I loved stumbling onto a taco truck on some Austin side street or seeking out a San Antonio restaurant the Riverwalk-ing tourists would never find. I devoured tinfoil-wrapped tacos from gas stations. Taco connoisseur was part of my personal identity.

I still love the hunt and the find, but the truth is, I have also eaten a lot of Whataburger breakfast taquitos this year. And last year.

Not surprisingly, this 11 p.m. - 11 a.m. menu item doesn't even have the right name. It's not really a taquito. It's not deep fried, nor is it spicy. It is scrambled eggs, a melted American cheese slice, and hash brown sticks wrapped in a warm flour tortilla. And it is more than a little addictive.

Pam knows me by name. She knows the sound of my voice when I order a number 20 combo in her drive-thru. She calls me "Miss Erin." She asks, "Are you a Whataburger Rewards member?" I think she has to ask the question even though she knows the answer.

The answer is yes. The rewards app means I earn a free taquito after five visits to Whataburger, any Whataburger, maybe the one by the airport that we hit after a late flight or the one right by the doctor's office in College Station or the one on the way to work. I have earned more than one taquito this year, let's just leave it at that.

And though I have not heretofore publicly admitted the private selling out of my taco identity, the cheapening of my tastes, because it's a little embarrassing, I take solace from a Reddit AMA with Britt Daniel, the lead singer of Spoon, who grew up in Temple before becoming an Austin rock legend. One of his AMA questions was "favorite Texas food joint?"

Daniel's typed response was exactly this: "In Austin -- Salt Lick, Rubys, Fonda San Miguel, Maria's Taco XXXpress, Matt's El Rancho, Madam Mam's. in dallas -- Rafas, Mias, the Egyptian Room, Chips. in houston -- Ninfas on navigation, Armando's. In San Antonio - Paloma Blanca, Rosarios, Mi Tierra. In Temple -- Whataburger."

Sure, he's poking a little fun at his hometown's offerings, but he's admitting something I've had to admit to myself too. Those other places, and I've eaten at some of 'em, are stellar, but the list isn't complete without WB. — *ERIN HILL*

JORGE PLAYS FAR CRY 5

So, I was playing *FarCry 5*. I was walking around doing the open world exploring thing and I noticed there was music playing. I decided to look to see where it was coming from and ended up on quite an adventure, so I wrote while I played.

Where is the speaker that's playing the song. Its outside, wait, maybe inside. In the bait shop. The songs playing are cool, it's just a little unnerving. I wonder if I can shoot the speaker to turn it off. Oh shit! I found one inside and shot it. The music shut off for a second...sort of. It went a little quieter. There's another speaker somewhere. OK. found two more. Shot them. Also shot a TV. It looked like one...kinda. I had to search for them, and they had some sort of proximity hit test on them. They'd get louder if I got closer. They were in the corners of the bait shop. The music is quite a bit quieter. Found the last one and shot it. I think I got them. Wait. I can still hear it. I still hear it though. I'm wondering if it's not possible to shoot out the sound. It's playing "My Life" by Billy Joel, but it's a 50s crooner redo. It's actually really cool. Dang.

OK, I found the other source. There was a boom box playing outside the shop. It's an in-game cue to where the weapon and resource benches are all over the game world. The developers knew you'd probably need ammo and shit after accidentally happening upon an outpost that needed liberating. It's all just enticing me to keep playing.

I am wondering now if it's about making the game so interesting that the player tells people about it. And that's the way to monetize the game. We (the players) are the monetization...the "battery" for the economy (a la *The Matrix*). We tell friends (or readers of a local zine) about how cool the game is, they get interested and buy it. The game company knows that we need distractions. We need immersive experiences. They know exactly how hard it is for us to fight urges, so we keep working to get paid to keep the "distractions" distracting us. Ol' Tim's adage to tune in, turn on, drop out is starting to make sense. But also, games are fun. Shooting speakers to shut off music in a video game is fun.

OK, moving on, I was suddenly forced into a cut scene that progressed the game. It's a story about a cult that's taken over a whole county in Montana. One of the "mini-bosses" is the sister. She has control of production and dispersion of a drug called "bliss". It's all over the place while walking around the world, and you end up ingesting some along the way, so she gains control of your mind through it, and that's how she pulled me into a cutscene. Ultimately, I assume they have captured me in my unconscious state and have taken me somewhere. In this blissed out state, she's trying to get me to understand the "truth". She's telling me that all I need to do is have faith. She's forced me to stand at a really high vantage point and "jump off" to show my faith to the father, who is the end boss. He's the cult leader. Dang. I'm standing on a large book, that's being held open by a massive statue on the top of a hill with cliffs all around it. I don't wanna jump. I kinda do though. She explained that she was in a terrible place, but now she's not...because she believed. Fuck it...I'm jumping.

(honestly, I don't have a choice...to progress the story...but I'm trying to believe I do.)

Welp, looks like I was miraculously saved from a falling death from a massive height. But not everyone gets saved. I woke up at the bottom of the cliff, looking up at the statue, among a bunch of dead bodies. I guess those are people who weren't miraculously saved from being forced to jump to their deaths. Maybe I am special. Maybe I SHOULD believe. Maybe I DO believe!

Wait, hold on. I'm sure they just put me there after drugging me. I didn't actually jump off. They are just trying to convince me that it was a miracle that I didn't die. The dead bodies are a nice touch for believability that it was a miracle.

So, I'm no longer under the influence (in the game). I decide to climb the cliff wall to get back up to where I jumped from. I don't know why, but I can, so here goes. We will see what I do when I get there. So, while I was climbing, I look over, and what do I see but the body of some person falling to their death. They were convinced to do the "Faith Jump". Oh, shit. They splattered at the bottom. That was kinda fucked up. This game is freaking me out.

I finally get to the top, and there's a group of people hooting and hollering while they are watching a glowing zombie thing (called Angels) sitting on top of a prisoner. I don't know what's going on. I've never seen this in the game before. It looks like a rape scene. Why are they doing this? What does this have to do with the story? It seems to me that the AI got bored of waiting for me to enter the area and haven't noticed me yet.

I snuck closer. Seriously looks like it's supposed to be a rape scene without being a rape scene. The game developers would surely get shit for that. It's kinda like he's riding the "victim" like a horse. WTF! I shoot the one doing the "riding" and it startles the rest of them. I kill the rest of them. I'm not even sure where the victim went. They just ran off. And that "Angel" thing?...well, here's the description from wiki: "Angels are former civilians or resistance members that have been placated through extreme doses of exposure to the powerful hallucinogenic drug Bliss. Angels have lost all capability to think or reason, except to mindlessly follow orders." WTF!

This scene totally felt like a scene I wasn't supposed to see. Like the AI were messing around and they forgot to be on guard for a player coming through. Remember, this was at the top of the sacrifice area. (That's what I'm calling it right now.) I don't know what the hell is going on but it's fucking fishy. I mean, like, beyond the storyline. Like the "Smoke break" the villagers were taking in *The Witcher* (979Represent February 2019 - V11 I2). The AI seem to be sentient in a sense. Like they have lives outside of just being bullet eaters.

Wait that sounded like I was a crazy conspiracy theorist. Nevermind. Cool game. You should buy it and play it. — JORGE GOYCO

HYDROGEN JUKEBOX

This month I address the important difference between an artist's *best* album versus *your best* album, meaning that you can recognize that a band's finest work may not be the work that resonates most with you. I call it the *Led Zeppelin IV Corollary*. We can all agree (or should agree) that *LZ IV* is the band's zenith creatively and commercially but maybe you'd rather pick up *Houses of the Holy* or *Physical Graffiti*.

This used to be record store geek contrarian 101 for separating yourself as a *true* fan from the casual fan. It is also perhaps a byproduct of the omnipresence of classic rock radio and broadcast ad campaigns. I again use *LZ IV* as an example. While it is possible to admit that album is the band's best, perhaps you have heard "Stairway To Heaven" or "Black Dog" one too many times and just can't fucking handle that record anymore, man. Classic rock radio is purely *awful* at playing the same three dozen songs over and over again and leeching the joy out of the music. I admit that yers truly was this way about "Stairway To Heaven". I couldn't handle it anymore. I'd heard it one thousand too many times and I was *over* it. Plus it's the one record you are going to find in most people's collections, a usual suspect so to speak. A moratorium helped me get right with Jesus again on *LZ IV*.

Another factor is coming at an artist's catalog as a whole rather than coming in at it while the artist is continuing to record new music. I call this the *Raw Power Theorem*, named after The Stooges' third album. *Raw Power* is held up by many as the band's finest moment but I'd much rather have a C90 tape with *The Stooges* on side A and *Funhouse* on side B over *Raw Power* any day and twice on Sundays. I was told that *context* was very important to consider in deciding the greatness of *Raw Power*. In 1973 nothing else sounded like it and *Raw Power* landed like a bomb on the music scene. I have since come around to the concept of context but I don't think it always applies, and most certainly not in relation to why the Elektra Records era Stooges is superior to *Raw Power*. It's not like 1973 was any more enlightened than 1969, yo.

Another aspect of this same scenario is the fan that comes at a band from a greatest hits perspective. Often this is as far as a fan will dig into an artist's catalog. In some cases the greatest hits or singles collection is a fantastic way to be exposed to a band and sometimes is a vital portion of the band's discography (see *Singles Going Steady* for reference). Sometimes, however, the greatest hits collection doesn't dig very far into the artist's output and doesn't necessarily show the breadth of the artist's work. Another aspect is the *First Is Best Equation*. The album that exposes one to an artist's back catalog becomes the fan's favorite and remains the favorite even after the rest of the catalog is consumed, even if a different album is often held up as the band's best effort. In 1988 I bought two Siouxie & The Banshees cassettes at a swap meet: *Tinderbox* (1986) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1987). This was my first exposure to the band, though I had read about them for years. To this day *Tinderbox* is a Top 25 Albums of All-Time placeholder. Most fans would not consider that album to be in the Top Five S&TB releases let alone a

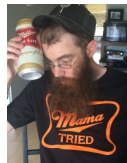
top album of all time. I still hold to this, even after hearing the rest of the band's albums, singles, b-sides, and Peel Sessions. Yet I recognize that it is probably not the band's best album. That might be *JuJu* or *Kaleidoscope*. I would also include Peel Sessions and live albums in this spot too. They are often gateway drugs to the artist's official studio work, though in many cases the live and radio session albums can be superlative to the albums (I refer to *Hatful of Hollow* and Humble Pie's *Rocking The Fillmore*).

The last example is the "sellout" album. This is a quandary posited by the move from small-time independent or self-released albums to the major league of corporate owned major label record label land. It is a metaphor for the artist becoming more commercial and that somehow recording for a major means the band will go soft or change their sound to go after a wider market. This refers famously to Nirvana's multi-platinum *Nevermind* (1991) that came after the more gnarly and abrasive debut *Bleach* (1990) on celebrated independent label SubPop. This example can also be applied to Husker Du, The Replacements, Dinosaur Jr., Sonic Youth, and virtually every good underground band of the 1980s. Nirvana is a fun one, as they make the argument both for the major label sellout (*Nevermind*) and against (1993's *In Utero*).

I now refer to my many examples of preferring a different album to the more readily-accepted contenders.

- 1.) Black Sabbath. Most will agree their first four albums contain their best work, yet I most often reach for their derided 1977 album *Never Say Die*. Hell, even Tony Iommi dismisses this era as his attempt to sound like Foreigner. And god do I love Dio Sabbath too!
- 2.) Speaking of Zeppelin, 1976's *Presence* has long been my favorite LZ album, if only for "Achilles Last Stand" and "Nobody's Fault But Mine" but lately their first album has been coming on strong for me.
- 3.) Rush. No question *Moving Pictures* (1981) is the band's high watermark creatively and commercially. The band likely invented pop-prog with the success of "Tom Sawyer" but you will find me holding up *Signals* (1982) as my ride-or-die Rush album (and one of my all-time Top Ten favorite albums).
- 4.) Beatles. For years *Revolver* was shorthand for understanding that perhaps all the fuss over *Sgt. Pepper* was undue and that the real band's masterpiece came with the album before it. I do not disagree. *Revolver* is indeed superior to *Pepper* (though Giles Martin's 2017 remix of *Sgt. Pepper* has me again appreciating the genius of *Pepper*) however I will always reach for *Magical Mystery Tour* over the others. And make sure it's the U.S. version that has the addition of the singles on the second side of the album.

It is fascinating how such external factors can play into how a person chooses what album off the shelf to play, what mp3 to load up, or what playlist to stream. Ultimately it still comes down to liking whatever it is you like and not giving any fucks to anyone that says otherwise. This sort of stuff is fun bar argument fodder and social media soapbox material. Humans put the oddest of barriers around their joy and where to find it and sadly how to deprive it of others. — KELLY MENACE



STILL NERDING

ARCHIE ANDREWS AS TOM SAWYER

Archie Andrews made his pop culture debut in *Pep Comics* #22, December 1941, with the introductory tagline, "Here y'are gang, America's newest boy friend, Archie Andrews. Right now he's risking life and limb to impress his new neighbor - Betty Cooper ..." The storyline finds Archie falling into all-manner of slapstick tomfoolery. After bragging to Betty that he "could even walk this fence blindfolded", Archie falls face-first into the portrait of a decorated war general. Seconds after destroying the portrait belonging to Betty's father, he steps on a rake and breaks a "priceless vase". A few frames later, Archie's father is calmed by Archie's grandfather, who says "Come, Fred, he was just showing off before a girl. He's a chip off the old block." Archie's father declares he'll pay for the vase, but he's also told by his grandfather, "Yessir, women like men with courage." From here, Archie attends the circus with his buddy, Jughead. Hijinks ensue to the detriment of the big top.

Archie's debut proved a success. He appeared in *Pep* and *Jackpot Comics* several more times before landing his own *Archie Comics* in Winter 1942. The timing of Archie's inception is essential to his significance. As comics writer and editor Paul Castiglia states in his introduction to *The Best of Archie Americana: Golden Age (1940-1950s)*, "1941 was a watershed year. December brought the end of the Great Depression and the onset of World War II. 'Rosie the Riveter' became a symbol of the effort on the home-front, as women became factory workers while men went off to war. Photos of pin-up girls such as Rita Hayworth and Donna Reed and Betty Grable encouraged soldiers and reminded them of home."

Archie Andrews stepped into this world theatre as a distraction from such headlines. He was the bumbling fool set to remind American youth about the simple pleasures — and nonsense — of life apart from the grand American struggle. And Archie, like Tom Sawyer, embodied a different kind of American hero: the comedic anti-hero. As seen in his *Pep Comics* debut, Archie is the blistering foil to the war general's call for heroism — a mere Sawyer-esque "chip off the old block". He's the dividing line between an older generation that recognized hard-won values (exemplified in an antique vase) and a younger, more foolhardy one (degenerate breakers of valued norms). Still, the message of American bravery persists in *Pep Comics*: "Yessir, women like men with courage." And that courage, bolstered to impress the girl next door and her daddy, will either lead young men to victory on the world stage or to embarrassment in the pages of a comic book. Archie Andrews faithfully embodied the latter.

ARCHIE ANDREWS AS G.I. JOE

The past two decades have found Archie battling zombies, Jughead wolfing out, Veronica Lodge slaying vampires, the entire gang sharing stages with The Ramones and KISS, and all this while exploring themes of race, gender, and sexuality. One particular series, *Life With Archie*, conceived the trajectory of Archie's life following

his marriage to various Riverdale debutantes before tragically ending in Archie's death. The zeitgeist proliferation of Riverdale's finest — piqued by the success of a CW primetime TV drama — begs the question of what remains for Archie and gang? Where could their story go next?

Comics legend Mark Waid, author of the landmark *Archie* (2015-2018) reboot series, believes the way forward for Riverdale is to look back — specifically by retelling Archie's genesis. Where Archie originated as a court jester, Waid and fellow comic writer Brian Augustyn (*The Flash*, *JLA*) redeem his legacy, in *Archie 1941*, as that of a war hero. The writers declare in the introduction to *Archie 1941*, "Instead of Archie reflecting the escape, this time he's put smack dab in the middle of the real world of 1941." Inasmuch, Waid and Augustyn's also discover Riverdale concerned with more than the Great War.

The story begins with Riverdale High School's graduation ceremony. When his father asks about future plans, Archie confesses he has none. Although America has not yet entered the war, Archie knows the world is falling apart, forcing him into a drama bigger than pursuing the girl next door. By the end of chapter one, we find Archie alone in a movie theater watching footage of Roosevelt and Churchill signing The Atlantic Charter, leading Archie to question his own courage in the face of battle. He is reminded by his father that "men your age all over the country are enlisting to take the fight to Japan!" When Archie asks why he should go to war, Fred Andrews replies, "I want you to make something of yourself." As in his actual *Pep Comics* debut, the message Archie receives is clear: "men with courage" possess true character.

Shortly after enlisting, Archie finds himself deep in the shit on the coasts of Algeria, alongside — of all people — Reggie Mantle. Meanwhile, the war effort back home finds Jughead in charge of Riverdale's cultural epicenter, as Betty and Veronica confront the gross politics of war profiteering, and big Moose, who was denied enlistment, engages a Jim Crow battle for equality. Each Riverdale character, including their parents, receives the revisionist treatment. Certainly, the comedy in *Archie 1941* takes a backseat to the story's ultimate purpose: to explore actual realities young people sought escape from at this time — realities that called for courage in various forms.

Even with its Frank Capra-esque sappy ending, *Archie 1941* is a strong addition to the Archie Comics canon. Mark Waid even announced plans to visit various decades and generational themes in future series; *Archie '55* is slated this fall to revisit the birth of rock-n-roll. This business of revising the past as a path forward seems a worthwhile endeavor. By redeeming a beloved love-sickened nincompoop as a lionhearted warrior, Waid inadvertently recommends readers to consider un-fooling their own genesis. He calls this a "New Beginning" story. I can't fathom a better name for it. — KEVIN STILL

TRANSPORTATION CORNER

For the past couple years, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT, for the uninitiated) has been working on a proposed plan to redo major sections of Interstate 45 in Houston, chiefly the section of I-45 that goes through Downtown. The project would tear-down the section of I-45 that runs between I-10 and U.S. 59/I-69 (fun with highway number salad here) around the western side of Downtown, locally known as Pierce Elevated, and reconstruct I-45 to instead run along with I-10 and U.S. 59 on the eastern side. TxDOT promotes this plan as a way to create better connections between the Downtown freeway interchanges and open up the western side of Downtown, which is currently closed in by Pierce Elevated, for further development with the Midtown area.

The project has recently come under increasing local scrutiny during the public involvement period, as well as analyses from planners and engineers on what the actual impacts of investment would mean for Houston and where the benefit for highway development would be realized. This write up will be a modest attempt to hit some of those key points, while interjecting stray thoughts about what a new I-45 would or would not do for travel in Houston. Be advised that there are numerous people who have done a lot more work in looking at the proposal than the present author.

Let's start with the potential pros of the project. First, Pierce Elevated is a terrible freeway. Drive on it at most times during the day and it will be gunked up with cars in both directions, as people continually switch between three available lanes trying to jockey for the best spot to get to their exit. Part of this is due to Houston drivers, who I believe are the reigning championship belt holder for worst in America, but the experience also comes from poor road design with left- and ride-side exits available. It's amazing that there are not more accidents on Pierce Elevated. A new I-45 offers the opportunity improve the design of interchanges with other area freeways and exits to Downtown and Downtown-adjacent areas smoother and safer. Of course, if done poorly it could be another Mix Master like I-35 in Dallas.

There is some real weight to the idea of demolishing Pierce Elevated for the purpose of boosting development and connectivity between Downtown and Midtown. Midtown has been booming (and gentrifying) for several years now, and construction of mixed-use and condominium buildings has moved closer and closer to Pierce Elevated in that time. The elevated freeway presents a man-made barrier from that development reaching its full potential. The Woodall Rodgers Freeway project in Dallas shows what removing that barrier can do in enabling expansion of high-density development (though that project tunneled the freeway rather than moving it to another location). It's hard to argue that removal of Pierce Elevated wouldn't do the same in Houston.

However, moving I-45 to the other side of Downtown means that the new freeway path will apply eminent domain to take away land from apartment and commercial property owners in East Downtown, essentially taking away 1-to-2 blocks away from that area. In this regard the project does seem to give preference to the Midtown area over East Downtown in terms of where Houston is trending, and Midtown is certainly the more affluent of the two. East Downtown has been reborn since I moved to Houston six years ago, going from an area with a couple bars and Warehouse Live to the new neighborhood that have sprang up are very new, and others aren't even locally owned. There are still holdouts from the old East Downtown, even going back to the time when the neighborhood was Houston's original Chinatown. Other than drinks and dining East Downtown is mostly industrial, save for a

couple new upscale apartments and townhomes. On the northside is a low-income housing neighborhood (direly needed and difficult to establish anywhere) that would surely be demolished. Also, under U.S. 59 is a large homeless encampment that would need to be relocated (which the city had no qualms about quietly doing when the Super Bowl was in town).

Taking away a slice of East Downtown and demolishing Pierce Elevated would probably mean more to the East End neighborhood of Houston, where there are more residents going to and through Downtown by the existing road network. Currently the footprint of the convention center alongside U.S. 59 leaves only a few local roads to cross between Downtown and East Downtown. The new I-45 would take away more of those local east-to-west roads and create access ramps to the freeway that would spill more traffic onto the roads remaining. The existing Pierce Elevated branches also enable travel between East End and First Ward circumventing Downtown which would be taken away with the new plan. This combination of factors could make local travel in and around Downtown and East Downtown more difficult for automobile travel.

Part of the reason local travel might get worse is because, like most freeway projects, the new I-45 alignment is instead concerned with cars coming into and out of Houston from outlying suburban areas, making vehicle throughput as high as possible at the expense of other travel modes. Like most freeway projects, a new I-45 alignment will not solve traffic on the roadway. There will be some traffic alleviation on I-45 immediately following completion of construction. For example, U.S. 290 is currently great to drive on, but give it a few years for induced demand to fill those extra lanes. The I-10 expansion from Katy is a prime example of this effect - driving on I-10 during peak times now can take up to an hour despite being one of the widest freeways in the country. Some point to autonomous cars for congestion relief, but those vehicles will still take up the same amount of space, while also being a couple decades away from widescale implementation.

The argument put forward by many is the money and effort spent on realigning I-45 would be better spent on investments towards regional transit and local road investments. Regional rail has been proposed multiple times in the Houston region over the past few decades but has never gotten far past brainstorming, right-of-way availability being one of the largest barriers in the way. Houston's sprawling development has always made public transportation service difficult, but there are uses for high-capacity and higher-frequency transit on either bus or rail that would be helpful in providing reliable alternatives to driving for some areas. Another alternative proposal to the plan is to realign I-45 and keep Pierce Elevated in place as either a local road or an urban park alongside downtown. The local road option is an intriguing one in order to maintain local connectivity on the network, though I doubt the viability of using the structure to create Houston's High Line. Spending the money to realign I-45 and not tearing down Pierce Elevated, thereby negating the benefit of increased urban development, seems like a worse investment than doing nothing at all.

Overall, how you feel about the project probably depends on where you live. If you're passing through Houston or commuting to Downtown from the outskirts, it could make your trip more convenient. If you live east of Downtown, it looks like public agencies are playing favorites. The next couple months will be interesting to see whether the project proceeds or instead is shut-down due to enough public backlash. If it's the former, don't expect it to take any vehicles off the roads. — *TODD HANSEN*

RENTED MULE VS THE STONES

The Rolling Stones – NRG Stadium, Houston 7/27/19

Initially I was a bit reluctant to go to this show. It had been 29 years (!) since I had seen The Rolling Stones. While they were really good in 1990, I doubted that circa now they would offer anything but a pale musical shadow of their musical greatness. Why pay enorme dome prices to see a once great band that hadn't gotten the memo that their time was up? Even more troubling, the

original Rolling Stones date in April had been rescheduled after Mick Jagger had heart surgery. Not only that, they were touring for yet another greatest hits package.

The prospect of seeing octogenarian (or perhaps a few years shy of octogenarian) rock stars with some

members not in their best health play the hits to promote the latest, greatest, hits package sounded like a huge waste of time and money (case and point – the last tour of The Who). Against these bad omens, I relented; mainly because a friend was willing to do the heavy lifting by getting the tickets as soon as they went on sale and was willing to allow me time to round up enough money for a ticket.

The band Bishop Gunn opened the show. Gunn answered the following question: What would a cross between Aerosmith, Blues Traveler, and The Black Crowes sound like? This wasn't exactly a question I had really been seeking an answer to. From the crowd reaction, many of the crowd wasn't terribly excited about them either; instead choosing to brave the very long lines to buy Rolling Stones merchandise during Gunn's set. Bishop Gunn was competent, professional, and far from terrible but a bit faceless. Whatever the case, fortune smiled upon them with an opening slot for the Rolling Stones so more power to them. If radio stations played this sort of music these days – aside from album rock oldies from bands like the Rolling Stones – Bishop Gunn would probably be put on heavy rotation.

As for the Rolling Stones, I'll freely admit that I was completely wrong. On this night, The Rolling Stones sounded vital, putting every inch of 50-plus years of experience into selling the audience on the notion that they still commanded enorme dome status. The few mistakes they made – Forgetting a verse on "Sympathy for the Devil" for instance – made them sound more human rather than an income generating enterprise. The Stones circa now are competent and tight as a band

but do not sound as if they are dialing in their performance or sound or so practiced and "show biz" that their performance or sound or so practiced and "show biz" that their performance lacked heart. Mick Jagger worked the crowd like every inch the pro he was and had amazing energy for a person who had recently undergone heart surgery. Keith Richards was Keith Richards; enough of a job for anyone. His guitar playing had as menacing growl as ever and was thankfully high in the

mix. Ron Wood effortlessly pulled off the thankless task of playing guitar next to/against Keith Richards.

Despite a bemused demeanor, Charlie Watts provided an ever reliable beat. They were rounded off with bass guitarist

Darryl Jones (who has been with



them since the 1990s) and top notch backing vocalists, keyboardists and horn players.

As for their set, of course they played the hits: "Jumping Jack Flash", "Let's Spend the Night Together", "Tumbling Dice", "Sympathy for the Devil", "Honky Tonk Women", "Start Me Up", "Gimme Shelter", "Brown Sugar", "Satisfaction", "Miss You", "Midnight Rambler". Showing that these old guys know the value of that thing called the internet, the Stones have an online survey for each city of the tour where they have fans vote for a deep track to play. Houston's fans chose "Heartbreaker". That wouldn't have been my first choice but fair enough. They didn't ignore their later catalog either, playing "Out of Control" from *Bridges to Babylon*. For two songs, the Stones moved from the main stage to a smaller stage connected to Mick Jagger's center stage catwalk in the center of the Enormo dome a few acoustic numbers – "Sweet Virginia" and "Dead Flowers". For me, this was the most interesting part of the show, as these songs were deeper tracks rather than crowd pleasing hits and they seemed even more committed to these songs than they did the hits. The only weak part of the set was a slightly sluggish version of "Paint it Black" which was still played competently but with not quite as much fire as the rest of their set. As expected, the Stones ended the night with "Satisfaction".

It is amazing that a band at it as long as The Rolling Stones can still turn it on as well as they did for this show. It wouldn't surprise me if the Stones were still playing in another 20 years. If this happens I'll probably go to that show as well. – RENTED MULE

CONCERT CALENDAR

8/1—Chris Welch & The Cicada Killers, Magic Girl, Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/2—Aaron Stephens, Kane Alverado @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

8/2—Cactus Flowers, Ak'Chamel, Pseudo Desnudo @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/3—Daikaiju, Triplip, Thread Atlas, Wisdom Cat @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

8/8—Chris Edwards, Johnny Ray Hubbard @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/9—Jay Solo, The Swift Drag, Josh Aaron Willis @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/10—The Docs, Sick Ride, The Fox In the Ground @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

8/10—Dirty Echoes, Manifest Destiny's Child @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/15—The Shoobiedoobies (video shoot) @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

8/16—Anna Stockdale, Joey McGee @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

8/16—Desdimona @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/17—The Cover Letter, Half Man, Magic Girl @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

8/17—1692, Aphotic Contrivance, Iron Slut @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/23—Lady Starbeast, Desdimona, deCasa @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/24—Duncan Fellows, Relic @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

8/24—From Parts Unknown, Demonic Hen, Sykotic Tendencies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/26—Jail Socks, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/29—Nash @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

8/30—Mid-Summer Night's Scream with Black Catholics, Kyle Shutt, HEELS, Hellfury, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 7pm

8/31—Doomstress, Fiddle Witch & The Demons of Doom, High Desert Queen @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/6—The Cherubs, Black Catholics @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/7—deCasa, Mad Rant @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/12—Jimmy Raincheck, Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/13—Some Kind of Nightmare, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

9/14—Jay Satellite, Glasshealer @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm





black midi Schlagenheim

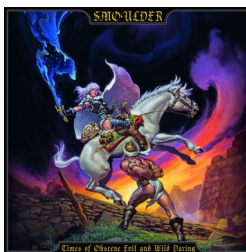
I can't remember the last time I dropped the needle on something and sat back and said, "goddamn, what the fuck is this?!" I can tell you this was the reaction to my first listen at *Schlagenheim*, the debut album for British teenage quartet black midi. The music is just absolutely *crazy*. It's like the sound of amphetamine. Jittery, nervous, like Tourettes on vinyl.

black midi is just a band of kids who are making whimsical psychotic post-mathcore indie rock. A convergence of art rock insouciance, challenging progressive rock rhythms and structures, found sound collage, poetry, dada, and a dumb explosion of blueball hardcore aggression all tied up into one somewhat unique sound. Or really, one could say quite earnestly that black midi is the 21st century Slint. They can sound like King Crimson, Mclusky, Radiohead, *Uncle Meat* era Mothers of Invention, Pere Ubu, Minus the Bear, Captain Beefheart's first Magic Band, and Mute Math all within the same three minute song. Their drummer sounds like he's been programmed at random to play the most off-kilter beats yet live video shows that dude can play that shit on demand. Their guitars remind me that really all that instrument contains is wire, magnets, and electricity.

Album opener "953" veers from bare wire odd meter bursts of electronic noise and cymbals in syncopated rhythms that color outside the lines of the beat with sloppy aplomb before the band comes down to Georgie Greep's round mouth vocals before the band collapses into a car crash pile of notes and squeals only to rise up as a whole and gallop hardcore style to the end in another mass of electronic scrawls that gradually slow to a dead stop. The restrained march of "Speedway" has the genius addition of congas, go-go bells, and triangle to bolster the vocoded vocals from bassist Cameron Pictou. At times like Can with a genetic crossbreeding of both Malcolm AND Damo uproot (ha! the true Mooney Suzuki!) and the more chamber orchestral moments of *Larks Tongues In Aspic* the textural restraint in the title track shows the band

understands the power in alternating the bombs with the dreadful silence of waiting for the bombs to drop. "bmbmbm" has much information wound tightly around the song's coil but I get entirely wrapped up in the many different ways Greep wraps his English mouth around the word "purpose". I never knew one could say that word in as many entertaining ways as this kid does. Album closer "Ducter" turns from a punk rock samba into a tense, quiet storm while Greep artfully mispronounces words or rather overannounces them like someone so fucked up on drugs that they are trying too hard to sound like they aren't fucked up and the language comes out almost extraterrestrial, like an alien in an Edgar suit. And the band explodes in bursts of music around the vocal that explode like a star but then immediately implode into vacuum, into absolute nothingness.

What I most enjoy about listening to this black midi album is that while I can certainly hear parallels of things that have come before I'm almost positive were I to sit down with these four lads and talk at them like I've just talked at you I would get a blank stare. "What Crimson? Who the fuck is Slint? We sound like drugs and video games, mate." And that would not be wrong. This is completely new music assembled from disparate somewhat recognizable parts into a completely new thing that must be experienced to be believed. The best thing I've heard all year. — KELLY MENACE



Smoulder Times of Obscene Evil and Wild Daring

I have never had the pleasure of reviewing an album from a band whose singer is herself a well-known reviewer of metal albums. The person I'm speaking of is Sarah Kitteringham, who is one of the eight hosts of BangerTV on YouTube. I've always enjoyed her metal review videos, as she has an

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adorable personality and is a complete nerd like myself, but I had no idea she could sing, much less that she was in a band. Charging forth with their debut album into the new wave of traditional heavy metal (NWOTHM), cold steel in one hand and one incredible title in the other, Smoulder brings us *Times of Obscene Evil and Wild Daring* ("Times" from here on out).

Just look at that artwork! A shield-maiden clad in armor atop a mighty white charger holding an enchanted sword raised high against a dark sky while glaring down at a bound prisoner of war. Before even spinning the record, you know that this going to be trad as hell! There is a bit of a surprise to the overall sound of *Times*, and you may think that I'm referring to the fact Smoulder has a female vocalist, which I will admit is a rarity in the NWOTHM, but what I'm actually referring to is the slow, doomy atmosphere of the album. Unlike most traditional heavy metal music wherein one could expect to find fast, galloping, almost speed metal, melodies, *Times* is nearly the opposite. With the exception of songs like "Bastard Steel" and "Voyage of the Sunchaser", the slow, doom metal atmosphere permeates the album from beginning to end, but it does so without compromising the essence of traditional heavy metal; instead of warriors belting out a marching song, imagine cloaked wizards chanting mystical incantations. Smoulder has produced some heavy metal hymns that are both epic and memorable. "Llian of Garathorm" possesses a catchy singalong chorus and a headbang-inducing rhythm, "The Voyage of the Sunchaser" possesses a mid-tempo and showcases Sarah's vocals perfectly, and "Shadowy Sisterhood" is dark and altogether terrifying! One of things that I love about *Times* is that it clocks in around 37 minutes and has six tracks; pair the time length with the overall sound, and such characteristics make the album succinct and easily digestible.

So what do I have to gripe about? Surprisingly, it's one of the same things I praise *Times* for, which is the six track catalog. It's not the fact that there are six tracks, but the fact that the last track, "Black God's Kiss" is over nine minutes long. It is definitely the weakest song on the album. The chorus is bland, while the instruments and singing seem to drag on longer than they should. What's even more disappointing is that

being the last song on the record, this track becomes the freshest thing on the listener's mind when *Times* closes. In all honesty, I would have liked to have had two really good songs instead of one long, slimy slug that makes you want to add salt after four minutes in.

Overall, for a debut record, *Times* is a worthy offering. The doom elements that Smoulder has incorporated into the traditional heavy metal sound, as well as Sarah's stunning vocals, definitely makes them stand out among the others bands in the NWOTHM; however, the album suffers with the last track, which feels half-baked and much too long to be likable. Nonetheless, I enjoyed *Times*, despite this set-back, and I'm glad to have it in my



Zig Zags They'll Never Take Us Alive

I really should be listening to Zig Zags' *They'll Never Take Us Alive* through a cassette walkman's orange foam headphones while riding my BMX down death-hill with a balloon full of gasoline in one hand and a lit Marlboro Red in the other. (True story.) Everything about this record screams "period piece!" and "throw-back!" and "fairground funnel cakes!" The production here is too loud and too fuzzy, like it was recorded on Maxwell tapes in some dude's basement while his parents were at church. What is this music anyway? Thrash metal? Skate punk? Stoner rock? Acid gaze? A crossover pass-pass-give? Does it even matter? It's Metallica's '81 debut reborn and void of all our latter-day-Metallica filters. *Kill 'Em All*? Zig Zags just did!

Zig Zags has a story that goes something like this. Los Angeles. 2010. Two guitar bros start a band, record a 7", and play shows as a duo. Another dude joins on bass, even though he doesn't play bass, and they cut more 7" records — one with Iggy Pop — until Ty Segall gives them a proper record deal. Over time the band sheds members,

REVIEWS

gains members, records two full lengths — self-titled (2014) and *Running Out of Red* (2016) — and finally lands in current day with only lead singer, Jed Maheu, as an original Zig Zag. In all the ways *They'll Never Take Us Alive* sounds bristle-chinned and burrito-bellied big, those other two full-lengths are as thin as the papers that inspired their name. That is to say, in previous encounters with Zig Zags, I could not have expected this record. It's a revelation and it's fun, and I can't hear songs like "Why I Carry a Knife" without picturing an old Cheech and Chong movie where Cheech pulls a beer bottle out of a fish-tank and drinks the dregs. Why that scene? Cause I saw that movie at the same age I discovered this kind of not Bon Jovi metal. We all have to grow up sometime.

A few notes to legitimize this review. First track, "Punk Fucking Metal", bursts open the record like puberty's first wet dream. Track two, "Killer of Killers", practically plagiarizes riffs from "Master of Puppets", and I'm way okay with that. Matheu's vocals are gruffly tough to interpret, but "Fallout" sounds like a bunch of titles and catch phrases from classic slasher and zombie movies — mostly in the chorus — which, again, I got zero beefs with. "The Shout" sounds like a backwoods redneck 2x4 chopping karate cult anthem. "Nothing to Do" bends its riffs with a surf-guitar swagger. And closer "God Sized" slows the tempo, amps the anger, pisses straight on the listener's feet, and reminds me that my 41 year old neck doesn't head-bang like it did at 14. I'm feeling a strong contender for inclusion in my 2019 AOTY list right here. My only reservation is deciding between vinyl or cassette. How about YES to both? — KEVIN STILL

High On The Hog is the first release since 2017's *New Metal*. It's also the first release since the duo made the move from Brisbane to New York. It's easy to draw the analogy between relentless machine drumming and dissociated melodies and atmosphere, to the duo's relocation to New York where the machine of capitalism and finance are chewing up the planet and her species in a sleepless march to fulfill an agenda of growth at any cost. That all might be well and good if as a consequence it inspires such industrial funk excellence as is displayed by Multiple Man.

Four tracks in all, *High on the Hog* boasts all the same brilliant qualities as its predecessor. If we think of industrial music as a spectrum, Multiple Man lands deep in the funkier, electro end of the spectrum. Think NIN's *Pretty Hate Machine*, rather than, say, Ministry's *Psalm 69* industrial flavor. There's no better label for the twins brand of EBM than Berlin's Fleisch Records.

High on the Hog is reminiscent of a time when 90s sci-fi movies communicated people's healthy distrust of cultural hegemony by corporate technologies. Instead we've chosen to acquiesce to participating in our own social engineering in exchange for the delicious liminal experience and dopamine spikes of social media and the undeniable convenience of having Google sign into everything in exchange for the right to commodify every aspect of our life. It won't be much longer before we're all being implanted by Amazon in order to have access to our Amazon apartments and so we can shop at Amazon stores using our Amazon bucks we earned working for Amazon. Multiple Man serves up the perfect score as humanity hurdles towards the end credits. — MICHAEL ROE

vocals, rock-steady drums, and a sinuous bass conspire for a mesmerizing sound that is swamp pop edged with Kraut rock and Credence lathered around Jesus and the Mary Chain with Joy Division seasoned by the Cure.

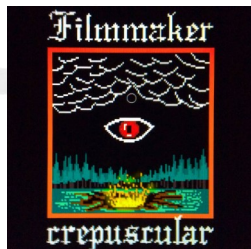
One thing this Fort Worth band does so well on almost all the ten tunes on their self-titled album is find a great groove that they stay with to the end. The album opens with the ominous discord of "Waiting for a Train" that settles into a steady drumbeat, bass line, and guitar before the voice-from-the-bottomless-well oozes out. It's an amazing beginning that could be the band's best tune, but there are more jewels rich with this sound.

On the album *The Fibs* feature the vocals and guitar of Preston Newberry with the solid rhythm section of Jennifer Rux on bass and Robby Rux on drums. Synths are contributed by Newberry as well as by Jennifer Rux who also adds theremin. When I saw them live, Joel Raif added a second guitar.

"Kerosene" is just as good as the opening tune. Newberry's insistent guitar, followed by Rob Rux's chugging drums, Jennifer Rux's driving bass, and then those portentous vocals weave a menacing spell. The album closer is equally strong — "Morning Train Slide" boasts the same eerie measured accumulation of musical elements that just get better the longer the song goes.

While *The Fibs* may seem the strongest on tunes with the methodical approach, they can leap immediately into full-fledged rock as evidenced by "Chica," "Tyranny," and the propulsive "Cut Hands" that harbors an amazing bass underpinning. "Chica" may be the only cover on the album, but the Fibs imbue it with Ennio Morricone soundtrack fervor and Newberry's wailing vocals. Evidence that the Fibs are not slaves to one sound can be found in the surprising chorus of "Simple Divine," the near-tender ballad "Sapphire Eyes," and the piano intro to "Stella" that shares space with distorted guitars before picking up the Rux duo's drums and bass rumbling under Newberry's yowl.

The Fibs by the Fibs is the kind of rock and roll that my father used to say all sounds the same. Well, yeah, that's the idea. Find *The Fibs* on Dreamy Sounds. See them live. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



Filmmaker
Crepuscular

I'll start off using Filmmaker's own words to describe their music. "Raw minimal electronica from Medellin, Colombia. The lost media found in future." And further down the Bandcamp page, "This album is about the earth broken by insider fire, and the rising of new dark ages. Crepuscular songs are one-take improvisations featuring the voice of drums like EMU Orbit, Vermona DRM 1, Wersi WB24, Dr. Böhm... and a guitar." Now that you've got the details, allow me my two cents.

Electro pagan death rock dance party thrown at a modern art museum. Hype music for crawls through the tunnels of the Ultima underworld. A battle to the death between a Rock Gnome shaman and a Grey Dwarf witch hunter. Young Drow experimenting with Robitussin.

Deliciously dark and fantastically experimental, every texture creeps and crawls. *Crepuscular* is an after party in the slave quarters of Menzoberranzan where they're serving up dishes of laced black pudding and punch bowls of spiked slime. Before you delve into this dungeon you're going to want to save your game because once you enter there's no checkpoints and you've nothing in your inventory to light the way.

I love that Filmmaker manages to create something that has little to no cultural context, something best described with senses and evocation of emotion and ideas, all layered and cast around an open sarcophagus overflowing with exotic textures. Filmmaker's music is an elemental experience that's more about inciting imagination than euphoria. It's possible that might read like the music is boring and something a person couldn't live with and enjoy at any given time. That would be a failing on my part. Filmmaker lays down killer riffs that cling to crags that support a mutant body magically constructed for the purpose of driving ever deeper into the abyss. — MICHAEL ROE



Multiple Man
High On the Hog



The Fibs
The Fibs

Multiple Man is made up of twins Chris and Sean Campion.

What are the Fibs? Distorted guitars, reverb-drenched doomy

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, 2019

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