

STOREREPRESENT



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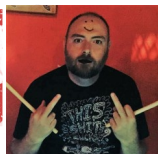
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SIGNAL TO NOISE

It has been a long 33 months since the Donald J. Trump revolution swept like a great wave all across this country. Trump fatigue has become a real problem. Every day, sometimes hourly,

Trump or someone in his administration does something stupid, immoral, illegal, or uncouth. It is a constant wave that crashes over the country and it is nearly impossible to keep one's head above the tide before more bullshit washes one under the drink. That has been every day since January 2016. It adds up.

I am constantly using the sound production metaphor of the signal to noise ratio to help explain why it seems that lately everyone is an exposed, overly sensitive, bare nerve just waiting to get pissed off, jump off a bridge, say something awful, or just be placed into a bad mood in general. Trump, the heat, the shootings, the natural disasters, the economy, society...it all just piles up as noise to crowd out your pure signal until your bandwidth is entirely used up. Your "you" is clouded out by the you that's covered in everyone else's bullshit. It's background that becomes foreground, distorting the intended content until it becomes non-musical, discordant, annoying, angering. You're mad as hell and just can't take it anymore.

So how do you maintain some modicum of chill against such strong tides of moral outrage, steep obstacles, debt, existential dread, and general bullshit? You could drink, drug, and/or fuck yourself into oblivion. You could hunker down and try to get on with things as best as you can. You could go with the flow, buy a white supremacy tiki torch, fly the stars and bars, lose all sense of empathy, and quietly abet the shitshow. Or you can look at the people around you and realize that they too are up to their eyebrows in bullshit just as you are. Their shoulders stoop with the weight of the world just like yours, their signal is distorted by too much ambient noise from the world. They and you need someone or something to repurpose all that noise towards, to purge it from your lines so you can again breathe in that pure signal. Rather than bury yourself in Netflix call a friend and go have a drink together. Get dinner together, share a pizza. Get up early before it gets hot and go walk together. Interact, talk, communicate, be with one another and lance the boil full of bullshit that's been growing on your ass. Depressurize. Reach out. Understand we are all trying to get through it as best we can. Doing something about it by being kind and being a good friend to your friends and letting yourself be a burden on your friends in turn will help you keep your head up above the waves and the rising tide until it brings you to shore again and your signal to noise ratio comes back down to true normal, not to "the new normal". — **KELLY MENACE**

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LIZBETH WARREN



The 2020 presidential primary race looked very different just a couple months ago: Senator Elizabeth Warren was polling around 5%, Life had Been Good So Far to Joe Walsh and he was just a racist talk show host with no presidential aspirations, and ole Sundowning Joe Biden was still able to remember President Obama's name after 3:00 PM.

Look, I get that this is coming from the same guy who writes at length about his many drunken antics and otherwise shit behavior in his private life, but hear me out. Elizabeth Warren is it. Seriously.

First, she's a policy wonk. Her proposals are easily the most detailed and plentiful of any of the 2020 candidates. And unlike her competitors, Warren is careful to ensure that her policies are evidence-based, meticulously citing each statistic she uses and claim she makes about her policies' projected efficacy. Bernie Sanders also has policies, but they tend to be pretty vague on details and very heavy on the same sound bites he's been howling for a hundred years to no avail.

Second, she's calm but can defend those with vigor. Temperament is an important quality for the leader of the US. In her memoir *What Happened*, Hillary Clinton writes about how fears of being viewed as angry or unhinged constrained how she acted on the debate stage:

It was the second presidential debate, and Donald Trump was looming behind me. Two days before, the world heard him brag about groping women. Now we were on a small stage and no matter where I walked, he followed me closely, staring at me, making faces. It was incredibly uncomfortable. He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled... Do you stay calm, keep smiling and carry on as if he weren't repeatedly invading your space? Or do you turn, look him in the eye, and say loudly and clearly: 'Back up, you creep, get away from me! I know you love to intimidate women, but you can't intimidate me, so back up.'

She continues to explain (over what seemed like four thousand words) that she opted for the politically-favorable first option. This is not to say that Clinton should have been more aggressive than she was in the debates, I doubt it would have mattered either way. I mean seriously, people are still chanting to lock her up and the most public thing she's done since 2016 is release the aforementioned book and tweet mean girls gifs at the current president. Bernie Sanders is a constantly screaming old, white dude that really needs to examine the contents of his 50+ year old stump speech and figure out why, after 50 years of saying the same things nothing actually changes.

Warren has demonstrated that she's unafraid to clap back, but does it in a professional and poised manner. In the July debate, John 'Assclown McShitface' Delaney, offered some rather unlettered criticisms of Warren's plan for universal healthcare. He decried the alleged financial and political infeasibility of passing such a plan — a tired argument that really just sucks. Warren wasted no time in burying Delaney and saying exactly what

needed to be said: *"I don't understand why anybody goes to all the trouble of running for president of the United States just to talk about what we really can't do and shouldn't fight for."*

Third, Warren is an actual fucking person. She admits when she's wrong and apologizes when necessary. (Remember all that shit with Native Americans?) And despite her long-term shift in ideology from the right to the left, one needs to look no further than her creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and her votes in the Senate to see that her service in government does tend to benefit the working class. Also, isn't a good thing that someone learns and grows as they get more experience? Shit, I remember being a chud Tea Party/Ron Paul supporter. I learned that was dumb and moved on.

Look, being called unelectable isn't a novel critique of women running for political office, and it's usually easy to dismiss this take when it spews forth from the mouthasshole of the average WaPo or TV news ghoul. But even high-quality outlets that meet the rigorous standards we should expect from journalists fall victim to this sexist trope. *NPR* did not cover the Warren campaign for two weeks following her appearance on their politics podcast save their newest piece, the entire point of which was to call her unelectable.

People rarely raise questions of electability for even mediocre male candidates. Joe Biden has been the presumptive nominee for months despite having few serious policy proposals and a stunning surplus of gaffes. I mean seriously, the dude said he wanted to beat up Trump on the debate stage and people cheered. Let's get Dwayne Elizondo Mountain Dew Herbert Camacho up on this mf'ing stage already.

Let me say it again for the especially dense: the critique of electability a sexist and contentless trap. Those who use it attempt to absolve themselves of the need to evaluate policies or contrast the candidate in question to their opponents. Instead, it offers a swift and abject rejection of a candidate for no reason other than an appeal to the vague and highly-subjective notion of "electability."

So let's drop it. Seriously, enough fretting about which democratic candidate is most likely to take down Trump in 2020. Any of them, and I mean *any* of them**, presents a bold enough contrast to bolster their image in the eyes of the public.

The country is, to boomer it up for a second, going to hell in a handbasket. If those affected most by Trump's policies throw themselves behind his opponent in 2020, he doesn't stand a chance — regardless of that candidate's "electability." — *STARKNESS*

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** But seriously, fuck John Delaney and the health insurance money he rode in on.



HALLOWEEN SHOULD BE MOVED

Halloween should be moved to the last Saturday of October. This is not my original idea, but I feel the need to propose it so it's in more minds. It's not attached to a specific day like July 4th. Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Easter...those are all sliding dates. Halloween should be too. It's one of the biggest party days, and one of the top spending holidays. I mean, look at the Halloween stores that pop up in September. There are usually like four in the BCS area?

Bars and event venues would benefit. People party on Halloween, and if it falls on a Wednesday you might not get as drunk as you'd like to because of work the next day. Maybe that's not true for some people, but I know that the thought of waking up Sunday with a hangover is better than the other option. Saturday is a big day for most bars. Haunted houses and movie theatres would get tons more people. I mean, I don't have the numbers, but I am assuming that the years Halloween falls on a Saturday are more lucrative for the economy.

Parents would be happier. They wouldn't have to rush home to get their kids costumed up. In fact, last minute changes in costume needs can be easily be remedied because the Halloween stores would all be open on Saturday...duh! Also, Trick-or-Treating can happen while there's still daylight! That's a good idea, right? Then the kids can come back home, eat their candy while watching *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Beetlejuice*, *The Exorcist*, *Halloween*, *Child's Play*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Death Becomes Her*, *Flatliners*, *Lost Boys*, *Adam's Family*, *It's The Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown*, *Babe Pig in the City*, *Coraline*, *Edward Scissorhands*, or, you know, *Nightmare before Christmas*.

Schools can still have their Halloween festivities on Friday...I mean, if they still do. I remember in elementary school back in the 70s and 80s, the whole school would be decorated, and we'd all get to walk around to other classrooms and get some candy. The science classroom would always have a bubbling, smoking cauldron, the mean math teacher would always dress up as a witch, and the Cafeteria stage would be transformed into a crawl-through cardboard haunted house.

I love Halloween. It always feels like an "Everyone can let go" kinda party to me. I mean, it's 100% true for me (and most people I know) that when you put on a mask, or even just a wig, you also put on a persona, and I love watching people get into character. I also love the creativity of costumes and decorations and all that shit. It's fun.

So, will there be Samhain believers that will fight for their rights? Maybe. They can still have the Sunday to do all their dark rituals or whatever they do. Will the Christians still be able to have their Harvest Festivals to counter the Devil's dark deceptions and manipulations? Sure, on Sunday. Truth is, most of those kids still convince their parents to let them Trick-or-Treat and also go to the Harvest Festivals. Kids are smart.

There's a Change.org petition that you can sign to get the president to change it:

<https://www.change.org/p/president-of-the-united-states-join-the-saturday-halloween-movement>.

When I wrote this (in mid September), it was REALLY close to 150,000 signatures. They've confused it a bit though, and I'm bummed about that. It used to be just the "Move to the Last Saturday" change, now it's something about adding a Trick-or-Treat day. Bleh. Not sure a petition to the president would do fuck all, but it's something.

On the opposing end, there is an argument for keeping it just as it is, and adding a Trick-or-Treat day to a Saturday. It just seems confusing to me. The argument has something to do with the religious holiday "All Saints Day", which for anyone not a Catholic/Methodist/Lutheran is just bullshit anyway. Plus, Sunday!

As a side note, I think Trump is terrible, but if he changes this, he will get some points from me. If he abolished daylight savings time and legalized weed, that would be great too, but I still won't vote for him for a second term. I'm not even sure if the president makes this decision anyway.

Either way, this year, go fucking crazy. Be that character. Buy in, own it. It will make it more interesting for you, and for us. — JORGE GOYCO





ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

It's fall, y'all.

The autumnal equinox was on Sept 23 and the wheel turned into a new season. Summer is officially behind us but if you live in Texas you won't believe it. Texans just entered into what we like to call False Fall. The calendar says October, the pumpkins are popping up like pimples before prom night, all your friends (that don't live in Texas) are sipping spiced lattes and *gasp* wearing scarves. But if you have the joy of calling yourself a Texan then you know that really it isn't fall at all. It can't possibly be. There is no way in hell that it could be fall when it's still 92°.

We had a tough summer here on Granny Moon Farm. I'm not even going to sugar coat, EVERYTHING IS DEAD. No amount of work that I performed to strategically and efficiently prepare the gardens for our previous season, Hell's Front Porch, could save our plants from certain death. I am currently in the process of cleaning out, composting, and salvaging any small amount of life that might be left, hiding scared under the earth.

If you are digging around in your garden too, I hope that you are finding more signs of life than I am. Did you learn any hard lessons through this summer season that will prepare you better for next year? Write that shit down! Keeping a garden journal is essential for successful planting year round. Cataloging important details like planting dates, seed germination rates, cross pollination, or harvest times was essential history that our ancestors made certain to remember. One thing I always remember to plant in October is garlic.

'Garlic goes underground, when the trees lose their crown.'

If you have the heart to keep trying, I encourage you to plant garlic and cilantro this False Fall season. Texas still has enough warm (and hopefully wet) days to encourage these three individual plants to establish a strong root system before any sign of winter starts to settle in. Once our crisp cold days do arrive, garlic depends on low temperatures to successfully split and produce multiple cloves.

Here at Granny Moon Farm we always put cilantro down in October too. Cilantro is a winter loving herb and come Spring it will produce some of the first flowers. I make sure I fill every empty space I have with handfuls of coriander seed. Love it? Hate it? Planting cilantro guarantees a food supply for the bees after they come out of their winter hive. Do it for them, y'all. They need all the help we can give 'em.

Enjoy the new season, y'all. Remember the most radical thing you can do is grow your own food. — **HALEY RICHARDSON**

A WEAK

The Knight filled his arm while I managed to crucify myself on the V of a four-letter word meant for me.

I fell from the pyre and landed at the base of his mountain made of the broken records from his favorite sad songs.

Maybe they'll find me in a week; made of flowers and earth.

No, rather, in the basement of our haunted tower, draped in the spider web melody from that one love song that crawled out of those cold November fingers, wet and mustard from the rain and billowing Pall Mall smoke.

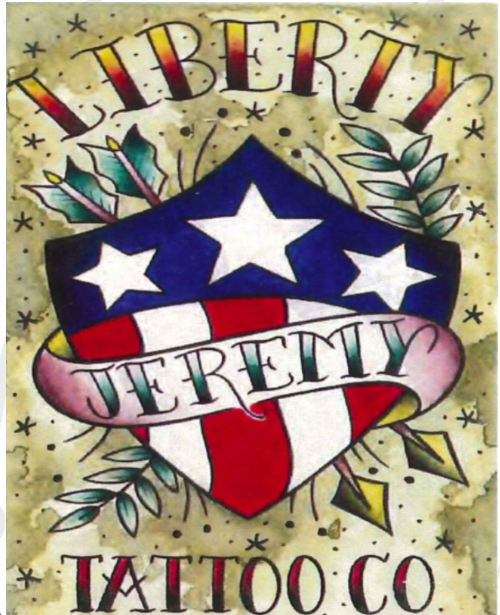
Decay slipped in and out of my mouth; tasting of pain and sweetness.

The yellow birds from his mountain swooped down to peck my eyes out.

The damp concrete ate my flesh.

Even as a tatter corpse, I get up to sway to the sorrow humming from the Knight of Wands.

What a Fool I am.
— **JESSICA LITTLE**



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Late last month Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi announced her intention to

bring an impeachment inquiry to the House of Representatives against President Donald Trump. The charges stem around allegations that Trump withheld \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine to pressure officials to investigate former Vice-President and current Democratic Presidential Primary candidate Joe Biden's son. Hunter Biden had business dealings in Ukraine earlier in the decade and in 2016 Joe Biden called for the removal of Viktor Shokin, a prosecutor looking into Ukrainian corruption. It turns out that Shokin was himself corrupt and the international community backed Biden's call for Shokin's resignation. Ukraine's parliament removed Shokin from office and Ukrainian investigations turned up no evidence of any conflicts of interest or corruption in Hunter Biden's business or in Joe Biden's calls for Shokin's resignation. The investigation concluded and has been dormant for over a year. In a phone call to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky Trump attached a quid pro quo to Ukraine investigate Biden to the flow of military aid. This is, of course, illegal, unethical, immoral, and just down right wrong to do.

This is the second time in my lifetime that an impeachment inquiry has been opened against a president. In 1998 President Bill Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives for perjury under oath during the Whitewater investigation. Special Prosecutor Ken Starr investigated the Whitewater real estate deal the Clintons benefitted from in Arkansas in the 1980's and found no improprieties. However, at the end of the investigation he was tipped off that Clinton had a sexual relationship with a White House intern. Clinton lied under oath about this relationship and was ultimately impeached for it by the Republican House. The Democrat majority Senate voted against impeachment so Clinton remained in office. This was the second time in history a president had been impeached and the results were the same: yay vote for impeachment by the House and nay vote by the Senate. Articles of impeachment were in the process of being prepared against President Richard Nixon in 1974 over the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up but Nixon resigned before any votes could be held.

I was not alive during Watergate. I was however a young news producer for an NPR affiliate during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Most in the country did not think President Clinton deserved to be impeached for lying about his affair. It was seen as a political witch hunt by hungry Republicans eager to get back at Clinton and have revenge for Watergate. While cheating on one's wife was certainly not approved of, most Americans believed that an affair did not warrant an impeachment inquiry. It was a bad look for Republicans who came out like Puritan prudes in the process. Clinton maintained approval ratings in the upper 80% range and Republicans lost key races in the 2000 election based on their impeachment voting record. What I remember of the times was that the public largely ignored Clinton's perjury (which was what he was actually impeached for)

THE ROAD TO IMPEACHMENT

and instead made the debate entirely about the act for which Clinton committed the perjury. It became a public debate about marital infidelity that was tried on legal technicalities. So what if he cheated on his wife. That's not illegal. President Trump will not be tried over a legal technicality. Holding financial support of a foreign country hostage in exchange for having a political rival investigated is patently illegal and considered treasonous by some. This comes on the heels of the Mueller special counsel investigation into Trump's ties to Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Mueller concluded that had Trump been anyone else but the President of the United States he would be tried in court for his role in the interference and subsequent cover-up. Along with the Ukrainian quid pro quo it now establishes a pattern of wrongdoing that Congress can no longer avoid taking sides on.

History judges the impeachment of Bill Clinton to have been a political mistake for the Republican party. It is why Democrats have been reticent until now to seek impeachment and why many believe President Trump has been clamoring for it. He, like many Republicans, believe that history will repeat itself. Most Americans did not support the impeachment of Donald Trump in polling taken right after the conclusion of the Mueller Report. Public opinion polls suggest the tide is turning against Trump with now barely a majority of Americans supporting impeachment. Trump has no worry that he will be removed from office. Nor should he. Democrats control the House and can vote through articles to the Republican majority Senate who will assuredly vote against them. Trump believes this will play in his favor and assure his re-election in 2020. He may be right.

We know that at least some Republicans have started to break from the party line. Those who have been squeamish about their support of Trump from the start now have had enough, and as the political landscape shifts these Republicans will feel more confident in speaking out. Also, if Watergate can be used as a template for what will happen moving forward, I believe more and more corroborating evidence will emerge as the investigation continues and more witnesses feel confident in speaking out. Even his supporters know that Trump is a crook. This was common knowledge before he ran for president and many still pulled the lever for him. Impeachment is far from over and there's still time for some who have been faint at heart to perhaps have a *change* of heart instead. But I wouldn't count on it.

I sat at a table of Trump supporting old Ags last month watching Aggie football. Towards the end of the game the talk turned to politics. To a person the table quickly concurred that impeachment was indeed a witch hunt over technicalities, no smoking guns, no "there" there, and ultimately just Democrats attempting to undo the results of the 2016 election rather than running a fair campaign in 2020 on the issues and ideas. This was the

same defense given throughout the Mueller investigation. There is already evidence from

the Sunday talk show trenches that Trump's people don't believe this same defense will work against Ukrainegate as the evidence so far is much easier for Democrats to explain to voters. The phone call's "transcripts" were issued by the White House. The language clearly supports the whistleblower complaint and at times both versions match. It is hard to argue against Trump's own words repeated back, though we have learned that Trump and his team are master gas-lighters.. The likely strategy will be to state that Trump may have done something "wrong" but not "illegal" and not impeachable. Of course, Trump doesn't have to do something illegal to be impeached. But this tells me already that Trump's supporters are willing to overlook the facts to support him when there is enough room for interpretation to excuse his actions. Could they explain away proof of murder? If the evidence was iron clad I do believe there would be no way that his supporters could turn away. If there is even a shadow of a doubt or there's room to work in a sliver of apprehension then Trump's people will continue to put on blinders and double down on his support. After all, if they could ignore illegal immigrant children locked into cages along the southern border then what's a phone call to a foreign leader to ask for dirt on Joe Biden in exchange for financial aid?

Doing the right thing is often times not easy. It can cost one everything except the knowledge that the right thing was done. I supported the impeachment of Bill Clinton. He broke the law. Clinton was a lawyer and he of all people should have known when he told the world and the special prosecutor emphatically that he did not have sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky nor did he ask anyone to lie about it that it would come back and bite him on the ass. I believe the right thing was done. Whether or not history judges it as so, Clinton has a black stain on his presidency for posterity. I believe Donald Trump deserves the same official censure for his much more egregious crimes. I believe the Senate will be spared the ultimate decision about ousting Trump. Clinton's impeachment came at the end of his second term; Trump's comes at the end of his first. The American voters will ultimately have the last say. Whether or not this plays in Trump's favor is still up for debate, and it will be debated ad nauseam on television, social media, talk radio, and at kitchen tables for the next year. I fear that Trump is correct and that it places the 2020 election entirely in his court of expertise. Democrats won midterms in 2018 focusing on health care and the economy, not on Trump. The economy is slowing and Democrats were preparing to hang it around his neck like a millstone. Impeachment will place the onus entirely on Trump and arguing about Trump. This is indeed Trump's greatest strength.

How this all plays out is anyone's guess. One thing is for sure. Gird up for a long 14 months until election day 2020. It may be the toughest fight America has ever faced. — KELLY MENACE

DREAMER

"What do you think happens to people in a dream when the dreamer wakes up?" she asked.

I thought about the question, and looked at her. She was pale and slender, with long black hair, dark eyes, and an accent he could not quite place. They were sitting in a dark bar, talking about nothing that really matters, one of my favorite places to be, doing one of my favorite things to do.

"Well..." I said, thinking it through, "If you follow me, those people aren't really people. It's all just in the dreamer's imagination. So there's no 'them' for anything to happen to, right?"

"Certainly an interesting view," she said, neutrally. "And what do you do for the living?"

"For a living? I'm an engineer by trade. Hydraulic and electrical systems design mostly, but I do build and test my own solutions. Theory is great, but there's no point if it doesn't actually work. I do other bullshit too, but I don't really want to get into all that here. The bar isn't a place for work."

"An engineer? How wonderful. Back to the question though — if when you die in your dream then you die in your sleep, then if you die in your sleep, do you die in your dream?" she asked, rhythmically, as if it were a poem.

I was distracted by the rhythm, but managed to untangle the sentence and said "No. I mean maybe, but, that's not how it works. It's A implies B versus B implies A. The converse conclusion doesn't necessarily apply to the original."

"Converse, like in conversation?" she asked liltingly.

"No, converse is like the opposite of something, or maybe some shoes, conversation is what we're doing right now," I said, totally missing the point, but maybe the words did have the same root? Maybe I could look it up. Where is my phone? She touched my arm lightly and asked, in her slightly-off accent, "And where was it you were taught?"

I thought about it, but couldn't really remember. I had a class ring on my finger, but it didn't ring any bells. And come to that, where exactly were they? And who was she? This is weird. I need to go. I'm going to get up and leave. There's got to be another bar nearby. That's how bars work right? There's always another one down the street. I'm going to go find that one.

"Ok then, before you go," she said, a little bit of pressure in her no longer musical tone. "Here we are, in the converse-ing. Suppose you think you are dreaming, and you try to wake up. Are you sure you will like what you find? Could someone die in his sleep, but live on in his dream? What would you bet?" Then she slid a beer and a shot over to me with a lovely smile.

Hm. Pause. Well then. Shit.

"I'd be a damn fool to risk it," I said.

I took the shot of room temperature whiskey and washed it down with a swig of the not all that cold beer. There's always a reason to talk about nothing that really matters at the bar. — STARKNESS

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DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

Just waking up to the smell of stale coffee and cigarettes in a twin bed in a house that is not mine.

Me: Hey Drunk Detective Starkness, can you get over here? As per usual I don't know where I am when I'm calling you.

Drunk Detective Starkness: Ok my mans, you're in a bed. That's positive. Alone, also positive. Lake, you're at the lake. You came yesterday, remember? Empty truck whiskey bottle next to you. Must've been a good day. Why the fuck did you choose to sleep in a bunk bed? Whatever.

Me: Dude, you know how much we love bunk beds. Blacked Out Me musta just been real excited. Let me go find some clothes and we'll keep unraveling this mystery.

DDS: Why do you need to find clothes? You passed out completely dressed still wearing your boots. Damn dude. You really are out of it this morning. Is anyone else here? Like physically present?

Me: Fine. You keep handling this. Please. I need some life giving water before I succumb to sitting on the cold, cold bathroom floor for the next forever. I don't know about people. I hope not. Do we need to talk to people in the real world?

DDS: Nah, I guess not. Looks like they all left already, place is pretty well cleaned up.

Me: Well, at least there's that. They must have forgotten about the drunk asshole on the top bunk in a bedroom by himself. Small miracles, amirite?

DDS: Yeah. You're telling me. Phone? On the kitchen table. That was easy. Minor drunk texting, but nothing too embarrassing... also last message was at 8:00 PM, so you must have passed out early. Probably for the best. Also, probably why they forgot about you. Wallet? On the counter by the door. Good news all around. Now let's just grab the keys and go because you don't actually own this place and I'm not at all sure who does. Do you?

Me: Shit I mean, could be Bobby, could be Billy, could be Bibby, maybe Bolly? I dunno man. Why you gotta be so mean to me this morning? We're all in this together.

DDS: Oh no... You did that thing where Blacked Out You hid the keys from yourself so you don't drink and drive. And your spare definitely isn't here.

Me: Blacked Out Me! Come on out dude. Maybe you can reason with this world class detective who is getting to the bottom of the highlight of his career "Starkness got drunk at a lake and did something dumb." What was it you little bastard?

Blacked Out Me: Hey guys! How's it going? Lake party was baller as fuck right? We did that beer pong thing, we did that fishing thing, we did that thing where we put our head underneath the hose spigot for an inordinate amount of time! It was the times man!

Me: Dude, Drunk Detective Starkness is on a tear. He can't find the keys. And neither can I. Do you know what you did with them?

BO Me: Shit! That's a good thing! That means we stayed where we were at. Probably. I mean, I don't think we went anywhere except maybe the nearest gas station to buy some more cigarettes.

DDS: To the wallet! Did you save any receipts?!

Me: No. No receipts. Not this time.

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DDS: All right... we've been at this a couple hours. Looked under things. In things. Gone through the trash. What's left? Well, you haven't been to the boathouse. All right. Check there. Then bite the bullet, call someone, and think of a better explanation than "Sometimes when I'm drunk I hide my keys from myself and now I can't find them and I'm trapped at the lake a couple hours away" before whoever is dumb enough to come save you gets here.

Me: Ok, keys aren't in the boat...not on the counters or the table...not by the sink...not with the rods an-

DDS: Wait! Blacked Out Us! You said you went fishing right??? There's a rod and reel sitting on the dock... Ok, well let's pick it up. What the fuck is on this thing? Not a fish... Jesus what did you bait it with...?

Me: Dammit Blacked Out Me. You fucking idiot. You tied your keys to the end of the fucking line and threw them in the goddamn lake. What the fuck? You drunk idiot. Clicker's not working. Big surprise. These cost like a couple hundred to replace remember? Goddammit. Guess we'll deal with that later. Next time, maybe just put them under a coffee cup in the medicine cabinet or some shit. Jesus. At least the valet key unlocks the door and we can get home. — STARKNESS

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CONVICT IN CHIEF

The fact that so many Republicans continue to support "The Don" Trump continues to be baffling to me, particularly in light of the recent Ukraine issue leading to impeachment. Were the years of President Obama so galling to the party that they feel they must grovel to The Don? What is it about this small-handed lying bully that is so appealing to more than 90 percent of the Republican party members?

By his own words, the current American president threatened the leader of another country unless he helped him in the upcoming U.S. presidential election. You can parse the words all you want, but those are the basic facts. The American criminal in the White House told a new president of a struggling country that if he wanted economic aid for his people, he would have to dig up dirt on the leading Democratic candidate: former vice president Joe Biden.

Again, it's astonishing that Republicans are falling over themselves to lick Trump's shoes when it's baldly obvious that he is a crook interested only in lining his own pockets like forcing the military to stay at his hotels, strong-arming his toadies to hold functions at his properties.

How low are these people willing to go to prop up this egotistical barely-literate oaf? Why is Congress letting the government be continually embarrassed by a racist who announces federal policy through the same social media that generates clicks for cute cat videos and video game reviews?

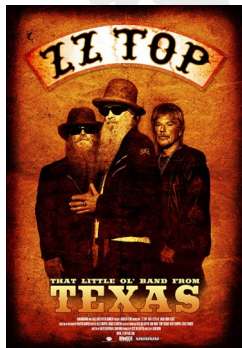
One can only hope that the House of Representatives impeachment process moves quickly, so that the onus can switch to the Senate in order to force the majority Republicans there to finally grow backbones to stand against this child-like traitor who hates Americans.

Like most people in Texas, I have many friends and family who are Republicans. I love them for who they are, not for their political affiliations. However, I fear that the time may come before or by the 2020 presidential election that those family and friends will have to come to reckon with the nasty creature staggering through the White House and come to their senses about removing his stain from the United States.

I only hope I can still love them if they don't see their folly of supporting The Don. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

THAT LITTLE OL' BAND FROM TEXAS

I was a bit surprised at the soft roll out the debut of this documentary received; at least in Houston. The nearest showing I could find was on a Monday at a movie theater in a shopping mall in Humble. I thought this would have been a sold out screening as ZZ Top have claimed to be a Houston band. Eventually, the movie theater filled to half capacity and became essentially a mini dad rock convention. The guy sitting next to me claimed to have seen them 14 times. I didn't doubt him.



ZZ TOP is a band beyond criticism. For 50 years ZZ Top has not changed their rock/blues/honky-tonk hybrid sound much; if at all.

Even with the slight adjustment in the 1980's of adding of accoutrements of the day such as drum machines and occasional synths, ZZ Top sounded...well like ZZ Top. They looked and sounded "old" when they began and seemingly haven't aged at all since they began. Despite much disdain from music critics, ZZ Top managed to win over crowds and eventually critics. Yet for their success, ZZ Top has always played their cards close to their chest; polite Southern gentlemen but slightly eccentric. They seemingly sprang from nowhere without out a back story and no real desire to let you in on that backstory. *That Little Ol' Band from Texas* takes a look from the inside, sort of.

ZZ Top started in 1969 by guitarist Billy Gibbons (formerly of the Houston psychedelic band The Moving Sidewalks), bass guitarist Dusty Hill, and drummer Frank Beard. The biggest strength of *That Little Ol' Band from Texas* is it allows the band members to tell their own story with a minimum of talking head interference (excepting Billy Bob Thornton, Steve Miller, and Joshua Homme). The three members detail their slow rise to the top in an era when bands would actually say "fuck it", throw caution into the wind and attempt to "make it". Funny anecdotes abound in this documentary: a band using live cattle and snakes as "stage props" of their "World Wide Texas Tour", sneaking in overdubs on an album that were forbidden by their manager by sending him on an hour long trip to pick up BBQ for the band and recording them while he was gone and my favorite – getting around their manager's two-drink only before the show limit by ordering a four foot tall concoction called "Chimp in Orbit" and having two of them.

Archival footage combined with a present day jam session in Gruene Hall bring home the fact that ZZ Top would have likely have sounded the same whether they had "made it" or not. The documentary wisely stops after their high water point (sales wise anyway) *Eliminator*. Does anyone ever care about the ZZ Top albums after *Eliminator*? *That Little Ol' Band from Texas* gives a enough of a glimpse inside to not destroy their mystique. — RENTED MULE

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Looking back, I cannot fathom how it became the first book I read. Up to that point, I had bought books, borrowed them from libraries, pulled them from friends' shelves, even sniffed cracked open pages. But I had not yet read a book — a real book — other than a few juvenile bits in elementary school. I loved books. I had always loved books. I felt preternaturally drawn to books as vehicles of comfort and unknown possibilities. However, I did not yet know, nor was particularly interested to know, books as technologies of nourishment. Books had been given to me many times in my life. People knew that I loved books. My mother told people I loved books. I also loved video games and weird VHS movies and hair-metal music, but, perhaps, people felt better about themselves by giving me a book. I had shelves of books at home I had never read and never intended to read. Reading was never the goal between me and books. Simply being near books was enough for me. Considering this, it strikes me as bizarre — as much now as it did then — that one day in eleventh grade I sat down at lunch in one of our school courtyards, opened the front cover, and began reading a Signet Classic paperback edition of Stephen King's *Carrie*.

In that first sitting, I read nearly twenty pages. By the end of lunch, I did not want to put the damn thing down.

The story goes that King was selling a heap of short stories to pornographic magazines in those days and wall-papering the laundry room of his trailer, where he wrote his stories, with rejection letters. At some point in the early 70s, after he'd written several novels that did not prosper, he began writing a story about a young, troubled woman with telekinetic powers. She was oppressed on all sides — socially, religiously, by her mother and even her own body. King connected with the story. He connected with his lead character even though he was a grown man and she was a high school girl. They were both pariahs. They both endured some level of delusion about how the world should operate. At some point the writing of the book became too much for King, so he tossed the manuscript in the trash. His wife found it later, dug it out, handed it back to him, and reminded him that the family had made too many sacrifices for him to simply throw all that work away. If he was quitting on the writing that easily, he could give up the whole dream, get a better job, and move her out of the trailer. He finished the book. He sent off the manuscript. A publishing company called Double Day offered to buy his novel with a check large enough to sound like hyperbole. *Carrie* was published in April 1974. Quickly, the non-pornographic population of America would know the name Stephen King. And his story about writing and publishing *Carrie*, shared here above as I remember and tell it frequently, is the kind of story that makes the teller and his audience drool, order another stiff drink, and feel the pang of many a dumpster too far gone for a good, redemptive dive.

I did not know this story about King and the trashcan and his wife and the wall-papered trailer when I started reading *Carrie* in eleventh grade. In fact, I knew nothing about King except that he had written some books that became movies I had not yet seen. Actually, I also knew that Stephen King was one of the names — along with devil-metal bands like Slayer and Iron Maiden and Motley Crue — that had been featured in the Satanic Panic prayers at my Southern Baptist church. To this day, I do not remember where I found the copy of *Carrie* I glued myself to that week in high school. I also can not recall what inspired me to read it. The only notion I have now is that I saw King's name on the cover, remembered those

STILL NERDY

Satanic Panic prayers, considered how much I loved Tommy Lee's cowbell on "Live Wire", and figured maybe Stephen King was the Motley Crue of writers. Somehow, I think he would find that entire scenario both entertaining and complementary.

While I remember little about what drew me to the book, I clearly remember reading the opening scene. We meet Carrie White — pale, frail, and ousted by everyone who knew her — in the ladies' locker room at school showering after P.E. class. The other girls, with voluptuous bodies and stories about being explored and charted by various boys, surround her, taunting her with their grown-up curves and their inclusive conversations. Carrie runs her soapy hands over herself and pulls her hand away to find blood on her fingertips. She looks down, seeing blood cascading her inner thigh, leaving her body from "down there". She panics. She panics and begs for help. The girls, already practiced at ignoring and teasing Carrie, cower her into a corner, pelting her with tampons and chanting "Plug it up! Plug it up!" The scene does not end there. The story of Carrie White, for us, has only begun.

This was horror fiction. For me, the book needed to go no further. This was true horror fiction to me. I read that opening scene. Closed the book. And read it again when I got home. I may have even read it a few more times. The scene with Carrie in the shower — her body betraying her, the girls taunting her — was genuinely horrific to me. It was also the kind of thing I would have been told good Baptist boys should not read. Why? Because it was about menstruation? Because it was about a girl's body? Because it was icky, as fluids from bodies often are? I knew, by the preferences of my religious up-bringing, that I should look away from Carrie bleeding in the shower, but I could not. The grotesqueness of the scene to me was not what I had been taught to ascribe as grotesque. What I was taught to see as grotesque — girls in showers menstruating — seemed a normal context to explore vulnerability, to explore the terrors of a body within a society. No, the grotesqueness that I found in these pages were something else, and they were two-fold. First, the grotesqueness of the girls shaming Carrie was gut-wrenching to me. I was not female, but I could feel her fear and her shame. I could feel the tampons and insults bouncing off her wet, naked skin. But I also recognized the grotesqueness of Carrie White learning something new about herself, about her body, taking note of something that was suddenly true now that had not been true only seconds prior. And it was in the trauma of that moment for Carrie, looking down to see the blood leaving her very self, that I was stunned. Stephen King, a grown man, had written a scene about Carrie, a high school girl, getting her first period that reflected something deeply personal and horrifying in me, a high school boy, who didn't even know the difference between a tampon and a maxi-pad. The triangulation of how perfectly King and Carrie and I all fit together into those few pages at the onset of that book felt downright spooky to me.

Two and a half years prior to my reading of *Carrie*, at the end of my ninth grade year when I was 14 years old, my own body had betrayed me. Although the scene for me, of course, was very different than Carrie White's, the

sensations and the terror were similar. My left leg had all but stopped working. My upper left thigh had developed an electric, muscle-shredding pain so severe I could barely walk through my days at school. My friends nicknamed me "Peg" for my limp. Rather than ride bikes or play basketball after school, I went home to gobble Aspirin and spend hours soaking in a hot tub. The heat of the water and Epsom salt provided the only relief I could find. Eventually, a new set of CT scans revealed a ghostly presence at the top of my left pelvic bone. A set of MRIs and a biopsy concluded that the image was not phantom, it was very real, and it was malignant. A doctor and his team stood in my hospital room, held tests to the light pouring through the window, and revealed the new truth about my body that had not been true — at least not to my mind — only seconds before. In May 1992, I began chemotherapy treatments for Ewings sarcoma bone cancer. The following autumn I endured radiation therapy — directly into both my intestinal tract and groin — which successfully burned everything it shined through. My prognosis would end on a positive note. I eventually returned to my life giddy about being a local cancer-crowned celebrity. I spoke in every church in a five-state radius that would have me, and I grew a mustache that looked like a roach had diarrhea across my upper lip. Life was good. Life was fine. Everything was back to normal.

And then Carrie White fucked up my whole scene.

I had focused so intensely on being healed and whole and proclaiming the good name of the Healer that I forgot (or did I?) the horror of having my body — God? The universe? Mother Nature? — betray me. Life had not just yanked the seat away while I was sitting back into my routine of becoming a hot-blooded pubescent question-mark of confusions and stolen cigarettes, it had dropped the entire floor completely. I hadn't even begun to deal with that yet. I hadn't known or had the space — and no one had yet thought to ask me — to consider how terrifying and lonely and utterly nonsensical harboring a cancerous mass inside your still not yet fully formed body truly felt. I had experienced bone marrow tests and port-line infections and mothers wailing in the room directly next door before I had done many of the things that mark a young life as adventurous. I had walked instead through a door and into a room that, secretly, I knew I would never fully exit. Chemo would end. Hair and appetites would return. People would move on to new concerns. I could check out, but I would never leave. I knew that fully and already by eleventh grade.

And Carrie White seeing blood on her finger-tips in the shower brought the full weight of my greatest suspicion — what H.P. Lovecraft would call a "cosmic horror" and what the end of the Old Testament would call a "prophetic vision" but, most significantly, what King called "the shining" — into focus. My body was not my friend. My body contained powers beyond its market intentions. And I knew I could never fully out-run what was contained within my own skin.

I did read the rest of King's debut novel. Like I said, I carried it around for a week and stared deeply into those

mirrored pages, marveling that the story of this girl was so much the story of me. The bizarre religious closets. The overbearing parent. The pariah smallness of living with secrets. And by the end, when Carrie walks the streets alone calling down the heavens onto her small town, I recognized that need to burn it all to the ground and just start the hell over. But I also knew, truly, that this was where Carrie White and I parted ways. For all the blood on my thighs and face, I did not want Carrie's final scene. And, somehow, I also believed that Stephen King was less for Carrie White and more for something well, just something more. Something without new forms of fire and brimstone. Carrie, in the end, embodied the greatest of all horrors: she became what she endured. She became vengeance. Was there another way for Carrie? Maybe that's the great question of King's novel. Was there another way? Is there ever?

I've read *Carrie* half a dozen times over the years. It's probably my most favorite of King's novels: the one that gut-punches me the hardest and reminds me why I stopped merely collecting books and started reading them instead. *Carrie* also reminds me of what I love most in a good story: to recognize myself in unlikely people and places, to find words for the secrets I try to keep hidden, and to consider questions that require three hundred or so pages to ask fully.

As for now, if you must know, I'm at the end of King's 1984 novel, written under the pseudonym Richard Bachman, *Thinner*. It seems oddly and perfectly appropriate for this time in my life. The radiation I received in my pubescent years finally caught up with me. As if an old Gypsy had laid a hand on the side of my face, I began losing weight nearly two years ago. And I haven't stopped since. All told, I've lost 50 pounds, which brings along many of the same challenges Billy Halleck in the book *Thinner* faces: fatigue, social awkwardness, low immunity, vitamin deficiency, a generally cantankerous digestive track. In a manner akin to my reading *Carrie* fresh out of chemotherapy treatments, I marvel at King's ability to describe aspects of my own reality in another person's narrative. I'm not at the end of *Thinner* yet — less than 100 pages to go — so don't spoil the end. Don't even come calling in to reveal the big question King is unraveling towards at the end here, the punctuated inquiry that'll cause me to harness up the pugs and go hunting for turtles down in the creek over here, staring at the water as a guise for looking deep into — again — Lovecraft's void or the prophets' dreams or little Danny's shining. Those questions are worth the journey of the entire novel to face head on for one's self. At least, that's how I feel about those questions.

Stephen King just published a new title this past month, *The Institute* (novel #58, my research says), and my sweet mother, the one I often raged at in my youth, bought me a copy for my birthday. According to the synopsis, there's something of an X-Men vibe here. Kids who embody special powers — fugitive phantoms buried unknowingly in their physiology — get hauled off to an institute for testing and perhaps extraction. Damn. That's sounding eerily familiar: malignant and radioactive. Now I'm looking forward to a long weekend, several pots of coffee, and a hope that the turtles are still swimming the creeks when I finally get around to this end of this new one. Twenty-seven years after I first cracked open *Carrie*, I'm still reading Stephen King. And, as with *Thinner* and the synopsis to *The Institute*, I'm still pulling my hand back from his pages to find blood the edges of my own fingertips. — KEVIN STILL

Oh yeah, we all got's them. We've all seen shit we can't explain, shit that spooked us out, and lifted the veil from the world we can for the most easily explain to show us some strange things. In celebration of the Halloween season your friendly neighborhood 979Rep hooligans detail some of their close encounters with the paranormal kind.

I've never seen a ghost. I'm prepared to get shit for this, but it's what I believe. I believe that belief in ghosts is faith. Faith is believing is something that's not provable. Kinda like religion. In fact, believing you've seen a ghost probably says more about you than it does about the so-called "supernatural". I believe ghost sightings and hauntings and all that is basically your own personal imagination, perception inclinations, natural occurrences, and confirmation bias. Basically, we as humans need to manage our fear of death and loss, and this is what it turns into. Maybe I watched too much Scooby-Doo growing up, maybe I'm jaded and burned by Christianity, maybe I know that I have tendencies toward paranoia and turn to face my shit (which ultimately makes it disappear). For example, Walking through a dark hallway if I get the Heebie-Jeebies, instead of bolting and launching onto my bed, I stop, turn around, look in any place there might be a dark figure or wraith or Chupacabra or Slenderman or zombie or Headless Horseman or Casper, and every time, there's nothing. I would totally hang with those fuckers. I am fascinated by the psychology surrounding apparitions and supernatural beliefs, so bring on the stories. But, just as a compassionate act, please read the room when you are telling ghost stories, as I have found there are three kinds of people: those that believe, those that don't, and those that are truly freaked out and anxious about the whole thing. It can really mess with those last guys. — JORGE GOYCO

My family totally believed in ghosts. My mother was positive that her grandmother walked with her and talked to her often through little non-circumstantial events: a broken fingernail, a hole in a glove, someone saying a certain phrase that no one but her grandmother could have known. I believed, like Jorge above me here, that this was wishful thinking on my mom's part because she loved Mamaw Gray so much. I was eager to be proved wrong. One of the places we lived for a few months in 7th grade was a shotgun house in Mt. Juliet, TN on a lonely stretch of country road with the house pretty much backing out onto a set of railroad tracks. I fancied this would be the perfect location for a primordial "ghost train" and would spend hours at night on the back porch watching the tracks just waiting for that spectral engine's wind or the glimpse of a ghost porter's lantern. But I never saw a trace of a phantom freight train on those tracks.

It wasn't until my junior year of high school that I finally got my glimpse of something unexplainable. I was friends during that time with a guy who was really into the idea of spirits, energy, tarot, Ouija, and all that jazz. One night we decided to drive an hour away to the closest true college town to goof off at the mall. That night on the way home my friend decided he was going to do something really dangerous: he was going to drive home at night without the headlights on. In a place like College Station you could get away with doing that because the streets are very well-lit. Even out on the highway it is fairly bright. We were driving in the middle of rural

GHOST STORIES

Kentucky on what was then known as Green River Parkway, a toll road that ran between Owensboro (my hometown) and Bowling Green (the closest "cool" town, and I use the term "cool" very loosely). There were six exits in total over a 73 mile stretch of four lane divided highway. It was like driving Highway 6 between Hempstead and Navasota at 3AM: there's NOBODY out on the highway for dozens of miles at a time. It was fairly straight. One could easily drive for minutes at a time without any headlights late at night and not drive off the road. My friend did this off and on for the better part of 20 minutes. During one such stretch we had the stereo up loud, window down so my friend could ash his cigarette outside, blazing at 75 MPH when the dark was pierced by what seemed like a semi tractor and trailer rushing right at us on our side of the ride. My friend freaked the fuck out, rammed on his brakes, and we spun around several times in the middle of the road. A quick look up and down that stretch of road revealed no taillights behind us, no headlights ahead. Where the hell did that truck come from?! Did we really see it? My friend saw it, I saw it, we heard the horn, we saw the smear of headlights in motion, the gleam of the flat-faced chromium grill. But how did it run right into us, then through us, and we were not harmed? Dunno. We laughed it off and drove the rest of the way home, this time with the headlights on. — KELLY MENACE

I have experienced a fuck ton of supernatural bullshit. And I say bullshit now because it has pervaded me for so long that it is no longer exciting or extraordinary. It's bullshit. When you were that child that skipped circles with your dead cats at recess or learned to play piano from your great grand father's ghost, the entities of other souls don't surprise you anymore. It gets rather annoying. So annoying in fact, that most recently, in my adult life, I completely and totally shut it down and have refused communication. It's not an easy task for a clairvoyant channel to undertake but after my final, absolute last experience, it was necessary for me to do.

One day, in our second winter on the farm, we were sauntering through the woods as we normally did once the cooler days had arrived. Our line of bodies snaked around the oldest oak trees and stood pointing when we all spotted the horned owl. As we prepared ourselves to cross the creek for the third time, I quite suddenly came to a halt. This is the last thing I remember. What follows has been retold to me by my family who witnessed what I can only describe as a physical embodiment or possession.

As they turned around to receive me across the creek, my lover realized that I was not moving as I normally would. My body remained rigid and unresponsive, frozen in place, my eyes fixed upon the unseen. No amount of calling reached me, wherever I was. My eldest daughter began pulling at my arm, encouraging my attention. I remained lost to their contact. At last, she slapped me. This was probably not the best thing to

do in this particular situation but it did get a response, just not from me. My mouth opened and my voice began to raise a blood curdling scream. I screamed as if not a soul on earth could hear me and I needed to reach beyond the veil with my noise. I continued screaming as my body began thrashing about as if bound by invisible ropes. I threw myself onto the ground never ceasing my clamorous broadcast and it was at this point that my family realized that something most definitely unnatural was going on.

Over the course of the next 30 minutes, the story of Hannah Pritchett was told. Hannah was a young maid of 15 who was wooed and beguiled by a male member of her community. A prominent male member, in fact, a judge. A judge who was married, had a small family and had quite carelessly got Hannah pregnant. Through further deception, this man convinced Hannah that his love for her transcended the love he had for his career and his family and they should immediately elope lest their secret be discovered. Instead of marriage however, Hannah met a very tragic death. The judge took Hannah by carriage through the Great Piney Woods of Texas for two full days and nights then tied her to a tree and left, never to return again. Hannah died there from exposure after her cry for help was never received. That is until the day she met me.

As you can understand folks, I don't really want to have anything to do with spiritual reception after an ordeal like that. I never regained MY consciousness that day. It wasn't until the next morning that I was my full solitary self. I remember nothing, as I said before, but from my lover's personal account some "extra" paranormal help revealed itself along the way instructing him to cast salt around my body, light a candle and ring a bell three times three times three. With that the bond was broken. And I hope that with the telling of her story, Hannah Pritchett was able to set her Self free. — HALEY RICHARDSON

I don't know if this counts as a ghost story, but it does take place in a cemetery. In the early 2000s, I was reeling from my second wife leaving me to raise our two kids alone, so I was in therapy for depression and all that. During therapy, some unresolved issues with my youngest brother who had died some twenty years earlier came to light. My therapist said to write him a letter and read it to him wherever he is buried. So, I wrote the letter and drove some five hours away to the cemetery where my brother is buried. I somewhat awkwardly sat on the curb by his tombstone and read the letter aloud. By the time I finished, the weirdest feeling came over me, like a calming prickliness. I felt absolved, but it was still a bit uncomfortable. It was just like the relationship I had always had with him. It was an affirmation from somewhere; whether I generated it in myself or what, I couldn't tell. All I know is in that moment, my brother and I were finally okay. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

When I was very young (I must have been about 5 or 6) I would have very vivid and terrifying dreams involving monsters coming through my windows. One night in particular I was dreaming of walking along, when I got picked up by a UFO. I remember very little of the dream after that. Then I woke up in my own bed, and I remember opening my eyes to a glowing blue box at the foot of my bed. Then the image of the box faded away almost like it was dissolving pixels. I sat up and looked to the other side of the room, where a humanoid shape, wearing a silver bodysuit and a copper helmet (it looked like those old deep sea diver helmets) was facing me. It held a glowing blue rod, pointed at me. Before I could do anything, it dissolved away. I don't remember what happened afterward but I probably cried for my parents.

Then this happened in Bryan: I am a terrible scientist who believes in and regularly interacts with nature spirits. Where I lived before I moved away was teeming with spirits, there were sort of woods areas owned by the university (I think) that extended from Finfeather to the airport. A few highlights of some of the more dramatic things I have seen in those woods....one night, I was pretty drunk and exhausted, sleeping in my bed (my former home was on the edge of the woods, with my window facing it). I clearly remember seeing two humanoids, with blue skin and white hair and clothing. One of them had antlers like a deer. They looked like elves from Tolkien otherwise. They leaned over through my window (which was closed by the way!), looked around, didn't seem to see me, and then left.

One night after teaching at the observatory on campus in the woods, I was driving out and had an urge to stop at a part of the road. I did, and walked to a clearing with a crossroads. While there, I started talking and offered whatever was there some food and something to drink. I saw a pillar of soft light near me. I was very scared, but it didn't seem threatening. It didn't seem to like me out there if I didn't give it food, though, and I would get really nervous and need to leave right after class if I didn't have any. I was walking around in the woods one evening, right as the sun was setting. In my religious practice, one of the spirits I call on was said to come to places like the place I stopped at in these woods. I had some wine to share with it. I went to the place, called for the spirit, and knocked on the ground. I felt like he wasn't going to show, but then that electrical feeling came to me, and I started getting nervous. I heard a voice in my head tell me "Do not be afraid," and I was instantly calm. Some leaves on a tree in the clearing formed the shape, very clearly, of him. It was the strangest thing to see a tree change how its branches and leaves were oriented in order to form him. — LEO ALCORN

I have never seen a ghost. I think if I was to see one I would be terrified but I have felt one. Not in a creepy, goose bumps, fearful way but, in the comforting, warm your heart way.

An absolutely beautiful friend and I decided that we would do a Dumb Supper. I had never done one before but was excited to participate. A Dumb Supper or Silent Supper is a pagan ritual where you invite the dead to dine with you. You consume all red foods and eat in silence allowing the spirits to join you.

CONT.->

I brought my cat Darth Vader's ashes and put them at his place setting. We started our ritual and began our first course.

At first I felt pretty silly. I'll be honest. Sitting in the living room with my friend and her two cats and eating in total silence by candle light seemed totally strange to me but, I knew I was honoring those who I had lost and tried to stay focused.

We started our second course and I started feeling more and more emotional. I missed my grandparents, I missed the friends I had lost, I missed my cat of 17 years.

On the third and final course something interesting happen. I felt a cat weave through my legs. I looked up thinking it was one of my friends cats but I could see them laying in front of me across the room. I was overcome with emotion and started crying. I could feel that my sweet prince DV was there. I could sense him in the room. It was a wonderful experience. I felt warm and comforted and loved.

I know this isn't your typical ghost story. This isn't some spooky tale about going into a haunted house or having something grab you while you're walking alone at night. This is a story about a girl and her cat. The best damned soul she ever loved. The love of her life and the companion that saw her through the worst times in her life. I'm glad I got to connect with him again. I'm glad I was given the opportunity to know that he is waiting for me in the great beyond. — KIRY JACKSON

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Growing up as the 9th generation on my family farm in Lancaster Pennsylvania came with a lot of interesting advantages; walking barefoot in the woods, swimming in the "muddy creek", riding horses, watching the seasons change and working hard with my family. The list could go on and on.

The most interesting of all this though, was the fact that so much life has come to and passed on this single location over the years. Family, friends, beloved pets, workers. All of which seemed to stick around. I grew up seeing things in the corner of my eye every day and sometimes catching things in full view that I couldn't explain. It also wasn't just seeing things. Sometimes you could smell the cologne or perfume someone wore that you once knew or hear them humming a familiar tune in the next room. My grandparents' house was a good place to sit down to listen for people walking from the upstairs bedroom in the empty house. That building vibrated with life coming from every old wood panel and stone it was made from. Nothing bad, just there.

One cold winter night my sister was reading a few books in her bed. As she read she got more and more tired and the heated blanket that we had all received as Christmas presents months before was no help in staying awake. As she drifted off to sleep a stack of books laid on the blanket at the end of her bed and it started to get hot. Really hot. First it started to smoke, then the slightest flame ignited quietly in the dark cold room that surrounded it. I was dead asleep in the room across from hers when I started to wake up. The first thing I noticed was that my bed was moving. It was making a rather dramatic rocking motion like I could feel someone pushing it from right behind me. Confused, I stayed laying as if I was still asleep, but I could also see an orange light bouncing off the wood on my open door. That's when I heard a large 'THUMP' and sprang out of bed looking back across my room. No one was there. I looked to my right out of my door and saw my sister standing in her doorway with her bed engulfed in flames. My mom came running up the stairs and sprang into action with a fire extinguisher battling the flame. We called for help and eventually got a fire crew there to put it out. Later my sister would tell me that she had been picked up and thrown from her bed. Someone was trying to get our attention.

Moral of the story: Reading is dangerous. — IAN GOSLING



#LITTLE WITCH BITCH

If you've ever been curious about witchcraft, or even the aesthetic, well, you've found the right column. First things first, lets get one thing straight, eh? All Wiccans are witches, but not all witches are Wiccans. All Wiccans are Pagans, but not all Pagans are Wiccans. Finally, some witches are Pagans, but some are not — and some Pagans practice witchcraft, while others choose not to. Cool? Okay, lets break it down and make it a tad simpler for you.

Paganism is an umbrella term used by the Catholic church way way back in the day to classify people who did not worship the good ol' JC, and were totally into polytheism. Which is a fancy word for people who worship multiple gods and goddesses in the form of nature. Like, tress and the sun and shit. Wiccans worship two gods. One is the Moon Goddess, and the other is The Horn God. When you google Wicca, they're going to throw a million subgenres of theisms at you, but really, they all sum up Wiccans to believe in two deities instead of one (duotheism.) It's like paganism, but with less gods and lady gods. Wiccans also have parties for the lunar cycles called Esbats, and sun cycles called Sabbaths. Wiccans can also choose to practice magick, but is not required.

Witches ARE NOT PAGANS NOR WICCANS. Witches do not worship multiple gods or goddesses. Now, there are such things as witches who do have a religion, despite what the Jesus book has said...mom...but, mostly, witches keep their beliefs and practices separate. Witches practice magick. The difference between magic and magick, is that magic is performance for entertainment, while magick is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity at will. These are things like herbology, metaphysics, astronomy, astrology, and theology. Given the power of science, the witch has been marked with an ugly stamp of being in cahoots with Satan, or other dark deities. It's simply not true. Course, just like the rest of the population, you have the option of Satanism, but most of the time, witches are just normal people who have tapped into a science of intent that others have not. It's all about intent, babes. There are many types of witches as well. Green witches and white witches, solitary witches and eclectic witches. They all specialize in different things, and you can choose to be an array of witchy just like you would want your none-fat, half caf, latte with no foam. Any way you want it. But, eclecticism would probably be simplest.

Super rad, now that we've gone through the basics, I'll give you a few things to experiment with.

Banana Bastards. This is a super easy spell for those of you who want your ex to feel some karma. Grab a banana for the dudes, or a peach for the ladies. You'll also need some hot pepper powder, and seven pins or needles. Peel the banana or slice a sliver out of the peach and rub the chili powder into the fruit. Focus on what you want this person to feel as you do this. Tell the universe, out loud, who you want to hex and for how long you want them to hurt. Magick is all about intent, so focus on what you want clearly with courage. Cause, babe, once you throw that out there, it'll come back threefold...be careful. Once you've figured out your words, recite them over and over while you slowly stick the pins in the banana (or peach) and bury it. I like to bury things as I feel like I'm planting my intent into the earth so it will grow. For a slow agonizing revenge, freeze your banana for seven days. This spell will make someone's gentiles fucking hurt, so, no sex for them! It also hurts to pee, so

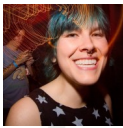
there another plus.

Paint me like one of your French witches. This is a really cool and positive tool you can make at home for all of your spell work. You'll need a jar of full moon water, ashes from herbs or what you like to smudge with (I'm all about that palo santo!) and blessed salt (you can bless it yourself). Get your ingredients and blends it all together until it makes a nice paint like texture. Once you've created this black inky stuff, you can use this to draw symbols, charge sigils, or for a good time with your significant other, you can paint on each other. I like to use this to draw symbols on my partner for some intimacy and also some bangin' sex. I mean, come on. It's sexy and metal af. Turn on FVNERALS from spotify or youtube to really set the mysterious vibe. You can keep this homemade potent paint in a mason jar to store for up to two weeks. After that, toss it and start again.

Love Thy Self, Bitches. I am all about selflove because it is one of the hardest things to do and there's a major lack in it round these parts. I include myself in that category real hard, so I do this often because it feels good, and it makes me open up. Grab some dried rose buds and petals, some rosemary, cinnamon, and any kind of carrier oil. I like coconut and rosehip oils, but you do you, honeybee. You'll also need some rose quartz and three pink candles. You'll need to draw a hot bath and pour your oils in along with your dried roses. Add in the rosemary and the cinnamon and stir. Light them candles and set them around you to make a space of love. Climb in that bitch and stew yourself while holding on to your rose quarts. This is a perfect time to meditate and think about how much you love. Doesn't have to be about yourself at first but think about the things and people you truly love and say it out loud. Watch your candles burn and then gentle start naming things you love about you. It sounds cheesy as fuck, but I promise once you're done, you'll feel amazing...Plus that oil and those roses are great for your skin, so glow the fuck up. Being a witch calls for a lot of selfcare and a lot of dried herbs. Stock up, bb.

Full Moon Rooms. One of my most favorite things to do during a full moon is to make a space for myself so I can read my tarots, practice my spell work, set my intentions, and meditate. You'll need some chalk, five white candles, some palo santo or sage (or whatever you like to smudge your house with) and you'll need some things that represent the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. I usually have a shit ton of seashells, rocks, feathers, and insane with my candles to represent these things. Get whatever you have and lay them according to the north, south, east, and west points of where you will set up your circle. Once everything is laid out, and your candles are at their points, grab a blanket and make a soft spot to sit in the middle of your circle. You'll need to get your chalk to draw some symbols. I like to draw out some selflove symbols, protection symbols, and some symbols to invite that esoteric energy into my space. Turn on some music and meditate for a bit. Once you're open to the universe, this is the perfect opportunity to work on whatever spell you've wanted to try. It's also a great opportunity to read some tarot. This is just satisfying thing you can do for the full moon to honor it and yourself. You can add things as you get more comfortable with your practice or take things away. Just do what feels right for you.

Hopefully this has help clear somethings up. Next time, we'll touch base on dressed candles and herbs. Happy Halloween my beautiful goblins. Blessed Samhain, my sweet Pagans. — JESSICA LITTLE



SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

The BEST month of the year is upon us, and no unseasonably warm temperatures, lack of vegan PSL, or dearth of orange and red leaf confetti on the ground will kill our Halloween spirits (jokes on you, they're spirits, they're already dead!). You've been planning out costumes since you left the last Halloween party of 2018! You've had your Halloween decorations up since the middle of August! You adopted a black cat because they're the most frequently overlooked and abused, AND also the most spooky! YOU ARE A HALLOWIENER — er, um — HALLOWEENER!! And you have no idea if your Halloween costumes is vegan! HALP!

There are lots of scary things lurking in the costume aisle — animal fat-based grease paint, beeswax in tooth wax, leather in swashbuckles, carmine in lipstick. A lot of Halloween and stage makeup is tested on animals. And that doesn't mean putting lipstick on a pig, or lightly brushing a bunny with blush. Animals have their eyes held open, *Clockwork Orange* style, and any and every type of product you can think of rubbed into their eyes to see their reactions. They're force fed things no one should be eating. They're injected and forced to breath in fumes (remember Volkswagen and the monkeys in the room forced to huff exhaust fumes?). They're starved and denied water, kept in cages, and killed once their bodies have worn out their "usefulness". It's brutal and not anything you or I or anyone should want to take part in, especially where there are cheaper, more efficient, better ways of testing products without animals. Way scarier than any horror movie you have queued up in Netflix!

The spooky spectre you're basing your costume on wears leather boots, a belt, and some accessories. Fortunately, it's really easy nowadays to find vegan leather shoes, wristbands, bondage gear, whatever suits your fancy! And it's almost always a WHOLE lot cheaper, which is great for something you may only wear a couple of times for a costume. The only bad thing is that a lot of vegan leather that's widely available is basically plastic (this goes for other things like silk and wool alternatives, too, which sucks). If you can, something secondhand or borrowed is great (and doubly cheap!) If you find a secondhand leather piece that works perfectly, search your little heart and decide if you're okay buying something that no longer is adding to the demand for new leather and make your decision. This is your dang costume and your dang life!

Over the course of the year, you've been collecting and borrowing bits here and there in preparation for the big night, and it's finally practically upon us! You have a

test run tomorrow in front of all the squares at work (they didn't get your Bob's Burgers costume and only appreciated your Ricky and Morty costume three years later — do these people have any culture?!), and you're making sure you've got everything all ready. Who wants to be fussing with a costume while they're running out the door on the way to a party?!

You've had a wig and some extensions tossed in the back of your closet since June, waiting until the you have an evening to get it all put together and styled. Ah! But it's 10 PM! And tomorrow is the Halloween party at work, aka your costume test run! Why are you such a procrastinator?! Don't worry — you don't need to go to Ulta and find the high-end, super expensive vegan labelled stuff! Get your frazzled butt to Walgreens, skitter down the hair products aisle, and grab some OGX or Salon Grafix hairspray. They're cheap, not tested on animals, and have vegan-friendly ingredients. Watch out for ingredients like beeswax and lanolin, which is from sheeps wool. A lot of places will CUT OFF THE SHEEP'S BUTT so they're less prone to dingleberries and bugs biting them back there. It's called mulesing. You know Zootdog? Imagine if we were tired of her butt dreads, and just lopped off that top layer of skin near her butt that grows all that crazy dog wool. That's messed up. You just want some crazy hair. You don't wanna be cuttin' off butts.

Wig crisis averted, you remember your face — normally, you just stay up til 4 AM, smoke a bunch of cigarettes, and funnel grain alcohol into your body to make it look a fright, but there's a particular creepy you're looking for that only makeup can get. You snag some undereye sallow-er and a little-too-pale foundation from e.l.f. to make yourself look rill bad. Wet 'n Wild and NYX both weird seasonal eye and lip colors to make you look weird, and they're cheap, so a whole handful falls into your basket (just watch out for carmine in red stuff and beeswax in lip stuff!). CoverGirl recently went cruelty-free (as far as animal testing), so you grab some eyebrow whatever and cheek smudgeroo (sorry guys, I don't know anything about makeup). You peruse the Halloween aisle makeup, but it's all grease paint, which typically contains beeswax or animal-based fats, and they are definitely tested on Bunnlicula's cousin. Just sneer, turn away, and grab a bag of Spicy Sweet Chili Doritos and some Chick-o-Stix on the next aisle. You're done!

Back at home, you lay your costume out on the bed like the twin you never had (or the one you ate in the womb). You crawl in, next to it, and drift off, dreaming of all the OOHs! and EEKs! (but mostly HUHs? of confusion) your costume will elicit tomorrow. Happy Spookoween! — KATIE KILLER



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"Shit, it looks like the clouds are not going to let up." He heard the observer mumble from his speakers. "I guess you were right."

"Yeah the weather has been bad all week. I really don't anticipate that this will change at any point tonight." The support astronomer, Jim, had been telling his observers this all night, but the observers had wanted to attempt viewing anyway on the chance that a miracle occurred. There were high clouds at the summit, but the sky was clear at headquarters...generally a bad sign.

George sipped his tea slowly while he continued looking at the live feed from the all-sky camera. He was located at the summit, and the observers and support astronomer were at headquarters in town. Not too cold in town right now, but up at the summit, he was extremely cold. Colder than usual. The forecast had given them plenty of warning, though, so he was prepared to spend the duration of the night there, even when the observers gave up and decided to go to bed or drown their sorrows at the bar a block over.

Tim was running the telescope next door. He seemed like a good guy, though still pretty new to the mountain, only two months into the job. They kept in touch on their walkie-talkies in case Tim needed some help. Luckily for Tim, his observers had given up at 10pm when it became apparent they would get no data that night.

The observers on George's telescope left to go to sleep. Jim stayed in headquarters and checked the satellite images.

"Hey George, do you see the system coming in from the east? It's looking pretty iffy." Jim sounded exhausted. He was used to dipping out around 10 or 11 unless there was poor weather and persistent observers.

"Huh, I didn't until now. The forecast didn't say anything like this would happen. They were just saying high cloud cover and maybe rain."

"Well since our guests are gone, do you guys want to come down now? I don't really see a point in staying up there. You might get stranded if this turns out to be severe."

"I doubt it will be that bad. I got everything we need for the night, but yeah if it will help you feel better. Need me to get Tim?"

"Yeah he is not at his screen at the moment."

George picked up his walkie talkie.

"Hey Tim, where are you at?"

"I'm in the kitchen, what's up?"

"Unexpected storm coming in, I think we should head to town just in case since my observers left."

"Damn, I thought they would never give up. But yeah, I'll be at ops 1 in a sec."

"Hey George, you are going to want to take a look at this." Jim sounded alarmed through the speakers.

OUR LADY OF THE MOUNTAIN

"What's going on?" he replied, turning on his mic.

"You can see the storm coming in from the Pleiades east cam. It's looking pretty bad. I'm going to call the rangers to see if it's safe for you to come down."

The camera showed a thick white wall approaching the mountain. If an observer had not known that the view was normally clear, showing over the mountain with a small glimpse of the ocean in the distance, they would have thought that an ice shelf was approaching.

"Oh shit..." George whispered. Best to check with the rangers to see if the conditions were safer here, possibly stranded, at the telescope, or if it was safer to risk the trip down to the base of the mountain.

"George?! Are you there?!" Jim's voice was coming in distorted. Then the power went out.

In the six years George had worked as an operator on the summit, the power had never gone out. All the observatories on the summit had backup generators and at worst he had seen those go on. The emergency landline rang.

"Remote ops 1, George here. Power is down."

Jim was on the other line. "Are you guys okay?"

"Yes, we are okay here, I will check on Tim."

He called Tim on his walkie-talkie and confirmed that he was on his way. In the meantime, Jim contacted the rangers to determine what the best course of action was.

"Okay guys, the rangers say to pack up, this one is going to be bad and you will be stranded if you stay. Drive safe. At the visitor center area, you should meet with the rangers on duty and they can help you down. They are expecting very low visibility so be safe. When you get to the base, if you have signal, call me, or head back to headquarters if not."

George and Tim locked up the telescopes, then moved to the parking lot where the company vehicles were. They both drove up in different cars, but decided it would be safer to take one car down. George drove, and Tim kept an ice scraper handy.

As they left the parking lot, they noticed the storm from the east again. Less like a wall and more like it was reaching for them. It no longer looked solid, more like a teeming mass bubbling clouds, extending tendrils of white.

"Nope!" Tim stated quickly. "Nope, let's get out of here as fast as we can."

"I'll go as fast as I can, but if that thing hits us I doubt we will be able to see anything."

They pulled out of the parking spot before the storm hit, and George started to drive urgently, but carefully, down

the unpaved, rocky road. The ground was dry and red from the dirt, but he was not sure how long that would last. The storm seemed to be moving much faster than anyone anticipated, and he had never encountered anything like that before. When major storms or blizzards hit, they generally had a lot of warning, and these systems never moved that quickly. But they would worry about that later, for now, they had to get down the mountain accident-free.

Tim looked back at the telescopes as they moved out of view. The slowness of the descent was painful but necessary. The teeming clouds reached toward the buildings, as though wanting to wrap around them. At the last moments of the telescopes were viewable, what looked like a gaping maw smashed down on the telescopes, encasing them in fog. Tim knew his fear was starting to get to him, and started breathing slowly, deliberately, to lower his heart rate.

George kept his focus on the road, but out of his peripheral vision, he saw the mist creep around the car and blanket the landscape around him. In his mirrors, he only saw white. He slowed down, the grade was too steep to safely move quickly, and the road barely paved. But he had driven through fog like this before, you just needed to keep your focus, keep your fog lights on, and anyone could be fine.

Within minutes fog encased the vehicle, and all they could see was white. It took a half an hour to descend the mountain normally, but with the low visibility George slowed down further. He suspected they were about a third of the way down, when they saw a mass in the road, where it became paved.

The mist parted, and a clearly human figure was huddled in the road. They were pale and naked, with long, tangled black hair covering their face. The figure was tinted slightly blue.

"Oh shit," George barked as he slowed to a stop.

Tim's eyes bulged. "It looks like hypothermia. We need to get them inside."

"Agreed. Hope we are not too late."

They both stepped out of the car, noticing the extreme cold. Sometimes experienced hikers successfully made it up the mountain, but usually the people who tried were over-eager tourists who did not have the right gear, and sometimes they froze to death, or passed out from altitude sickness. Tim grabbed a blanket from the back seat and started unfolding it as they approached the figure.

The figure started violently shaking.

"Hey!" George yelled. The figure did not respond.

"Well at least they are alive..." he murmured to Tim.

"Yeah, let's go get them in the car as soon as we can, it still doesn't look good."

Tim stepped on a particularly crunchy piece of asphalt, making a noise. The figure's head snapped up, revealing a blueish face. She was beautiful, and clearly indigenous, so not a lost tourist.

But she looked half-starved, with sunken cheeks. Her eyes were still closed, and she shook harder.

"Miss! We are here to help! Are you okay?" Tim said.

"We are going to get you to some help," George elaborated.

The woman's head turned toward them, still unspeaking but responding to them. She stood up, and the men froze. Something seemed very wrong, maybe she looked too sick to stand, and her limbs seemed too thin to support any weight at all.

As she stood, her beauty rapidly faded as her cheeks sunk further, and her skin turned bluer. A wind blew, and her hair moved from her face. She opened her eyes, revealing pure whiteness, as though she had no pupils at all, and stared at the panicked men.

They were both unable to move at all. Both men clearly felt something wrong in the air around them. The hair on their necks started to rise, reacting as though everything around them was watching. They waited for her to move.

George's vision started to fade as he stared, on alert, with his heart pounding. But he did not weaken. Instead, he felt rooted into the asphalt on the mountain, and slipped into a state of calm. When his view became black, he saw light dancing at the corners of his eyes. The light formed curls and solidified into a picture, of which he was simply an observer.

He saw the land he grew up with, where the mountain watched over his family from a distance. Unlike the mountain, it was a paradise, where fruits grew from trees and were found freely on the side of the road. It was warm, welcoming. The ground sang to him, for he had the literal bones of his ancestors in the dirt below him, for generations, binding him in a contract of mutual respect and service to the beings who lived there. He had believed in these spirits long ago, but rejected their existence as silly when he started his engineering degree at the capitol city.

The vision shifted, and the green of the trees faded, as the fruit fallen to the ground rotted. The singing became moaning as the ground shook. The soil churned with the quake, revealing the remains of his ancestors. Their skulls joined the moan. Meanwhile, the storm that enveloped the mountain moved in on the vision, threatening to white out the land. It spread along the base of the mountain, and blanketed the land beneath, and reached into the corpses of his relatives.

George came out of the vision, and the sickly woman with all white eyes stared into him. Despite the lack of pupils, he knew she was looking at him. He tried to look at Tim, but he could not move. The calm had gone, and was replaced by terror. While he had never seen her, he knew the identity of the woman standing in the road.

The hypothermal woman bent over with a jerk, and spasmed. Her

CONT.->

body rapidly moved forward and back, but she made no sound. The snow did not move as she jerked, and the men saw her begin to lift from the layer of snow, eventually floating softly above the ground as she heaved.

She snapped back up, pulling her head to look above her. With a final heave, she opened her mouth, and vomited white flecks. At first they poured down her mouth, but as the spasms continued, they were forced up, slamming into the clouds above them. With every jolt, a burst of cold and wind slammed into George and Tim. Her eyes remained open, glowing white, and her hair flowed behind her wildly. Her arms and legs shook with every imagined punch to her gut. The white vomit poured back over the men, revealing itself to be snow and wind.

She rose as the snow increased in its intensity, and floated into the dense and teeming swirls of clouds. As her feet disappeared, the men broke from their trance.

"What... what was... shit... fuck..." Tim mumbled.

"Wow... give me a minute," George replied.

Tim dropped to his knees and put his face in his hands. Occasionally, he screamed obscenities between rapid hyperventilating breathes.

George dropped his gaze and became unfocused. He grew up seeing the mountain every day, and had worked at the telescope for 15 years. He had never seen anything unnatural outside of his dreams, despite the testimonials of his parents and grandparents, who had constantly seen spirits and magic around them. They had told stories of the Lady of the Mountain, a goddess of snow, who loved the people who lived around the mountain, and protected them from her sister, the irritable goddess of fire.

"You saw that, right? Tell me you saw that, George!" a panicked Tim screamed.

"Yes, yes I did," George said, dazed and robotic.

"That was real? Am I losing my mind?"

"What?"

"I've seen her watching me when I come to work. I thought my schizophrenia was acting up," Tim broke into sobs.

"That... might not be in your head," George mumbled. "I saw it too. She floated, right?"

"Yes, she did."

"Get in the car. Let's get out of here."

The blizzard weakened as they drove toward the visitor center. Neither of them talked, instead focusing on staying on the road during the continued slow descent. As they approached the visitor center, the ranger's emergency vehicle flashed, and she guided them down to the base of the mountain, and they headed back to headquarters.

Jim had stayed in the visiting scientist quarters, napping until he heard news that George and Tim had gotten back to headquarters safely. Drowsy but prepared, he offered each a ride back home, which they accepted. On the way, George felt an itch of what to ask others who worked at the summit.

"Jim, have you ever seen anything... odd... on the mountain?" George asked.

"Only once. I don't really talk about it. You would call me crazy."

A week later, George and Tim were scheduled for another shift together. The sky was still a little cloudy, with a chance of some flurries. In the mid-afternoon, on their way to switch out instruments on the telescopes, they stopped a little outside the visitor center, at a small grove of wood and brush. A circle of brush surrounded a cleared area, with a wooden stump at the center. The stump was covered in small trinkets: carved wooden statues, folded papers, delectable little treats of varying ages and stages of decomposition, bottles of alcohol. Tony carried a small bottle of rum in his coat. As he approached, he pulled it out. Wordlessly, he and George both took a swig, then poured the rest out onto the stump. They stared for a few seconds, then turned back and walked to the car, on their way to the summit. —
LEO ALCORN



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BARS AND OTHER PLACES



A trip to Broadway is mostly required for the visiting tourist in Nashville. Nowadays resembling a version of Austin's 6th Street, it is lined on both on both sides with bars, clubs, and honky tonks bursting with loud cover bands that have expanded their definition of both kinds of music. Fortunately, there are still a couple places on the main drag offer a glimpse of what the old downtown must have been like, covered in wood and not allowing a tune before 1990 to be played within their walls. Robert's Western World was in between bands when we were walking by, but Layla's next door was in full swing on a Friday afternoon. A six-piece band on stage complete with keyboard and steel-guitar was tight and enjoying themselves on old hits and leaving plenty of room for individual solos. The support beams beneath the low ceiling were covered in state license plates, and wagon spokes and guitars occasionally adorned the walls. I ordered a Southern Wit from Tennessee Brew Works, which did solid work in refreshment for a warm summer day while sitting on an old barstool and facing the band in the window. A cowboy couple in their 70s danced and spun for a few numbers, clearly in their element and without a care. The rhythm guitar player on acoustic in the back of the stage appeared to be pretty young, and this was confirmed when the band leader had him come to the front of the stage to sing a few numbers. The kid, looking all of thirteen years old, proceeded to serenade the crowd with tales of heart-break through songs that were several decades older than him. It was impressive and hilarious, a working band clearly knowing how to charm an audience.

Broadway on previous trips was merely a crazy place to visit on weekend nights. Now it seems the hours of operations for drunken revelry have extended into the midday period. This would be mostly fine were it merely tourists responsible, but without a doubt the culpable hands belong to the dozens and dozens (and dozens) of bachelorette and bachelor parties that now inhabit the city from Friday through Sunday. At minimum each member of the group wears a corresponding set of custom t-shirts along with accessories indicating the future husband or bride among them. At maximum the group is also riding together either on a pedal-bike-beer-mobile or an eighteen-wheeler-sized trailer bed, yelling along to "Don't Stop Believin'" and other assorted hits. These vehicles slowly crawl up and down Broadway, often two or three in succession in a makeshift parade, all the while gladly accepting the attention of gawking pedestrians. The avenue is also now sports multilevel country clubs owned and branded by various truck music artists, such as Kid Rock's Big Ass Honky Tonk and Rock N Roll Steakhouse, that these groups of blundering visitors patronize. For a moment I couldn't help but think that I had found The Bad Place.

We escaped the raiding parties on mobile beer contraptions in search of a cocktail bar called Old Glory, directions leading us to a hip redeveloped restaurant complex near Music Row. There wasn't a secret knock or reservation required, but the entrance location provided

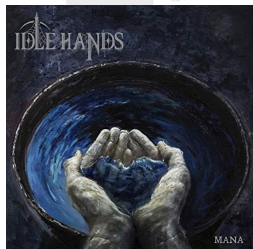
a high enough barrier to entry to give it a speakeasy feel. After going down multiple brick alleyways with no results, process of elimination determined that the unmarked black door surrounded by a painted yellow triangle must be the place to go. Opening the door unveiled a huge room the was at least four stories tall, the staircase descending down to the floor and bar level while some windows near the top allowed in just the right amount of natural light. In a previous life the building had obviously been part of some kind of factory or utilities room, now converted to include host semi-private booth and tables to the sides and boxed benches on ascending levels by the general plaza. It looked like a good place for a concert, or a party scene in a throwback buddy cop movie.

Old Glory's menu offered a limited selection of specialty cocktails, a few reaching for shades of tiki while others did not have enough brown liquor in them. The Panther Panther did just fine for a late afternoon; the bartender poured bourbon over a cold brew large ice cube made in house. The large whiskey ice cube is now easier to find at places, but the cold brew variation was a new discovery and gave it an interesting flavor. Sitting in the large factory space and sipping away, you begin to notice unassuming easter eggs along the interiors. On one wall a (probably) fake taxidermied horsehead nearly blends in with the red brick high above the main steps with no neighbors around. In one corner, a (probably) fake skeleton paused climbing an old emergency staircase after trying to run out on a tab.

Back in East Nashville around evening time, it was time to get Dino's hit on our punch card. The simple brick exterior, faded red awning, and twin windows promised ice cold beer, while a decades-old Coca-Cola sign hung over the sidewalk for Dino's Restaurant. The place proudly wore its old townie bar vibe, warning that it won't go down from gentrification without a fight. On a Saturday night the inside was half full of hipsters. Upon scanning the posted menu, Dino's fondly called to mind the aesthetic of Houston icehouses which have sadly closed shop in recent years (RIP Jimmy's). Save for three beers on tap (including the banquet beer) everything was canned or bottled, with the variety of selection you'd expect at a roadside Shell station. The liquor behind the bar was non-descript, and beer-and-shot combos served the role of house cocktails. Yuengling and bourbon suited me just fine – I'm prone to order the former whenever I'm east of the Mississippi River and within its legal territory. Possibly the Bandit should haul some over to Texas when he's doing his reverse commute. Half of the walls were decorated with Dolly Parton paraphernalia, Christmas lights did their best without payoff to light up the room's dark corners, while The Cramps played over the PA. Perhaps this was the most perfect bar in the city, hiding in plain sight. Being different because it was rather than because it was trying to be. — **TODD HANSEN**

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RECORD REVIEWS



Idle Hands
Mana

With the new wave of traditional heavy metal (NWTMH) on the rise, the ancient sound of yore has resurrected, showing that the old school is indeed the best school. A classic sound truly needs no improvement to be good, it only needs dedicated fans who will pass the torch on to the next generation. In way, the rise of the NWTMH, as well as other old school sound revivals, is a way of fan's tipping their hats to the greats that have before them.

Despite the fact that a classic sound needs no improvement, this is not to say that experimentation is out of the question. Traditional heavy metal has often experimented with elements of classical music, speed, and even doom, but then enters Idle Hands: a five-piece band from Portland, Oregon. Unlike other more well-known acts in the NWTMH, Idle Hands has gained increasing notice since they put out their EP titled *Don't Waste Your Time* because, simply, they stand out due to their love of gothic rock and pop.

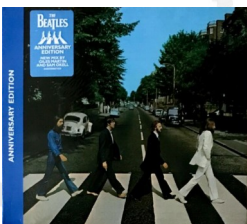
Idle Hand's debut record *Mana* is one of those records I likely never would have checked out for myself had it not been for the recommendation of a reputable source (i.e. Sarah Kitteringham of BangerTV). At first listen, the record is rather perplexing. The first track, "Nightfall" feels like a song that jumped straight out of an 80's music video, but the guitars and horror lyrics that sound eerily like a sequel to Iron Maiden's "Number of the Beast" quickly reveals that this is something different.

Gabriel Franco's vocals are very different from what is normally expected in traditional heavy metal; a strong monotone voice that almost sounds like chanting until he begins to change

his pace as the chorus closes in. The overall sound of *Mana* is best described as Iron Maiden meets The Cure. Dark, gothic, somewhat heavy, and poppy all perfectly describe this record's musical approach. Songs like "Jackie" and Give Me to the Night" are just unbelievably catchy and had me singing along within a few listens. The band takes the time to give the listener some nostalgia with the song "Dragon, Why Do You Cry"; from what the lyrics convey, it's very much an ode to "Puff the Magic Dragon", which is one of my favorite childhood songs, one that still leaves me in tears.

As far as weaknesses go, *Mana* is an album is somewhat mislabeled. Having ex-embers of Spellcaster, it was expected that Idle Hands would simply pick up where the previous band left off, but I don't believe this is the case. Many have placed Idle Hands in the NWTMH, but I don't believe this is correct. Mana is a gothic rock album with traditional heavy metal influences, but it is not a metal album in and of itself. Not only this, but as catchy as the songs are, there are some filler songs, some of which are the most metal songs, but these sound too much like a gothic rock band trying to be metal.

Idle Hand's debut is certainly a defining one. The songwriting's overall pop appeal and gothic rock formula makes it attracting for children of the 80's. This is not to say that metalheads won't like it, but they shouldn't go in expecting traditional heavy metal; they should go in expecting quality hard rock, and they may find it enjoyable, as my wife and daughter certainly do. *Mana* gets a 4.5 in my book. — CALEB MULLINS



The Beatles
Abbey Road: 50th Ann.

I do not have the hubris

to write a critical review of the artistic merits of *Abbey Road*, the last album The Beatles set out to make during their historic career. I will say that *Abbey Road* has not historically been one of The Beatles' albums that I am quick to reach for. I'd say it's probably in my bottom third of personal Beatles album rankings. That said, in recent years I have warmed up to it more over the last ten years. This 50th Anniversary reissue has certainly bumped my rankings of this album up to the top third.

Yeah, you've heard this album before. And the new mixes by original producer George Martin's son Giles Martin do not create a completely new listening experience. But Giles' work helps to separate the layers of the recordings and make all of them audible clearly. You've heard "Something" a million times but did you ever hear the pizzicato strings in the arrangement behind the middle 8? Odds are you haven't. It's the fine details like this that come forward. Like Martin's previous remixes of *Sgt. Pepper* and *The Beatles*, it's Ringo who truly benefits from this process. The drums were usually recorded with 3-6 microphones but would be submixed to one mono track and compressed so the other Beatles would have room to overdub other instruments and voices. Through nonlinear digital editing Martin aligns the original recordings and aligns those layers with the layers made later, in effect letting all the overdubs breathe better and allow for them to be individually affected rather than grouped. This really airs Ringo's drums out. His tom toms thunder on "the End", the rivets on his ride cymbal bounce and sizzle along well into the verse of "Something" after the downbeat. The individual detail is what Martin's mixes bring out and it will have fans wanting to compare versions and listen to this album with a focus perhaps they've never paid to it, or haven't since they first heard it.

The bonus tracks...well, if you liked The Beatles' *Anthologies* you will like hearing all the outtakes of mistakes, slightly different performances, and such. I love hearing the isolated string and brass overdubs and I was hoping Apple would include the acapella recording

of "Because" though that is not included (it is on *Anthology 3*).

I find Martin's process of "dereducing" the reduction mixes intriguing and certainly worth the listening time. I can't wait for him to get at the multi-tracks for *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Revolver*, and *Rubber Soul*. I hope other master recordings from crucial artists of that 1965-1969 era will go back to the masters in this fashion and make new mixes. They should do so if for no other reason than to preserve the original recordings. Magnetic tape devolves over time into a sticky sodden mess and often requires low temperature "baking" to dry out the emulsion so the tape doesn't stick to itself. We've already heard *Pet Sounds* rendered in beautiful stereo thanks to this process. How about *Forever Changes*, *Odessey and Oracle*, *Ogden's Nutgone Flake*, *Are You Experienced?*, *Her Satanic Majesty's Request* and other classics of that era? I for one would love to hear Giles Martin's crack at all of those. — KELLY MENACE



Invasion Boys
Pleasure Lounge of the Smooth Overlord

Invasion Boys is, as many know, the one-man-band identity of Kelly Minnis, he formerly of countless bands in Bryan for years and now ensconced in North Carolina. Some Boys albums are filled with traditional songcraft, others hew closer to Guided by Voices snippets or Pete Townshend's "Scoop" releases. *Pleasure Lounge of the Smooth Overlord* falls into the musical morsels category ... sort of.

Nine of the tunes are under two minutes while another is over eight minutes. Despite their brevity, the songs feel finished rather than incomplete or under construction. You have the Devoesque "Upwardly Mobile" and the straight-ahead rock of "Ante Up" while "Daydrank Honeykut" most resembles the Ex-Optimists sound. The

CONCERT CALENDAR

10/1—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/3—Desiring Dead Flesh, Sykotic Tendencies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/4—Deep Blue Something, Antique Gardens @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

10/4—Charm Bomb, Skunk Money, Matthew & The Arrogant Sea @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/5—Peter Panties, Long Tongue, Atarimatt, The Shut-Ups @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

10/8—BoscoMujo, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/10—Corusco, Neuromantics, Jasper @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/11—Hardwired to Kill 'Em All, People of the Sun, UnicornDog @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

10/11—Carter, Rooftop Boxer, UnicornDog @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/12—Tongue Punch, Sick Ride, Jasper @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

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

10/17—Kristy Kruger @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/18—Burnett, Desdimona @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

10/19—Zombie Pub Crawl @ Downtown Bryan. 2pm

10/19—SARC Benefit feat. Boy Wonder, The Ex-Optimists, The Damn Times, Bum Out, Cornish Game Hen, City Life, Antique Gardens, Other Horrible Animals, Shoobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 8pm

10/23—Charley Crockett @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

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

10/25—SSSPINE, Virgin Sluts, The Shut-Ups, Manor Threat, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

10/26—SalsaFest 2019 @ Revolution, Bryan. 4pm

10/26—Tongue Punch, Jasper @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/1—The Killer Hearts, Hot Crimes, Virgin Sluts @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/2—Zero Detail, Mad Rant, Pardon Our Mess @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/7—El Oso & The Honeybears, Wisdom Cat @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/8—The Schisms, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/9—Tyler Jordan & The Negative Spaces, Desdimona, Skunk Money @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

11/14—Prettyklawz @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

powerful largely-acoustic-driven "I Only Love You (This Much)" confessional about love changing boasts the cleanest sound and clearest lyrics as well as being the nearest in length to a "normal" tune (whatever that is). A trio of succinct instrumentals are each evocative in different ways: the haunting chorale of "Black Marks Won't Erase," the disembodied voice and strummed guitar with blips of "Hotel Fire 1953," and the bouncy soundscape of "Free Space Jamz Space Jamz."

Minnie's electronic persona of great unwashed luminaries comes through on the previous tunes as well as the album closer, the meandering oddly-named "Suite for Four Grandmothers BMW 201 as conducted by Joshua Siegel." What it most harkens to is a live

recording in a bar of an electronic piece while conversations ensue under and over the music: more than eight minutes of weirdness, nice.

"I Don't Curr" sounds like a slow Hangouts punk tune while "She Got Soul" is an effective love song as "X-ray Eyes" features disjointed drums and angry vocals.

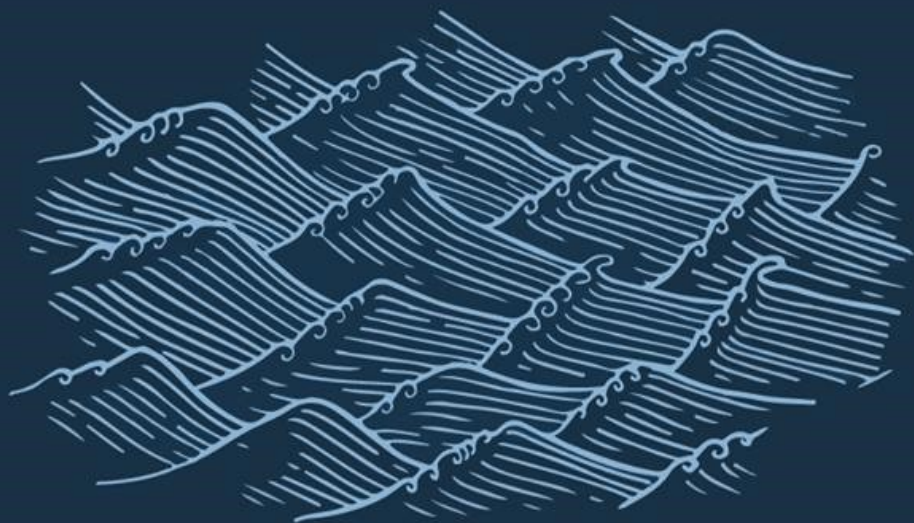
After decades of following a variety of artists, I have learned to just accept what they have created rather than carp about what they didn't. Invasion Boys is what it is: an intriguing mix of music one can return to again and again. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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Bum Out - The Damn Times
The Shooiedoodies - The Ex-Optimists
Antique Gardens - Cornish Game Hen
Other Horrible Animals*

*Revolution Cafe & Bar.
Saturday, October 19. 8pm.
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