

STOREREPRESENT



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

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BRAYING BLOATED BULLY

The travesty of democracy that was the first "presidential debate" of 2020 was the worst in history . . . at least until the next one.

It's hard to imagine anyone thinking that the braying bloated bully who is somehow the leader of the free world acted anything like a president during the televised free-for-all. Trump is an embarrassment to all Americans who were all insulted by his behavior. Granted, Vice President Biden was not on his game either, referring to the current president as a clown (which he is, but that's beside the point) and telling him to shut up (which of course the whiny orange troll should do). Biden needs to show he's a better man than that rude excuse for a human being currently in the White House. Biden is a better man by any measurement. Trump is a boil, a nightmare spewing example of all the vilest traits of the worse of us.

It is hard to imagine how much more of a train wreck the debate could have been. Trump would not shut his mouth. He lacked the basic moral decency to follow the rules he had agreed to beforehand. He utterly refused to recognize how offensive his boorish behavior was. Like all cowardly bullies, he was too stupid to understand the questions and too ignorantly arrogant—or is it arrogantly ignorant?—to realize the difference.

One thing we are sure of after this first debate—the elected president of the United States is saying he will not recognize the results of the next election. Guess what? As an elected official, he doesn't get to decide that. The voters decide—he works for us. He has been whining like a lobotomized mole rat since he was elected, and he'll still be whining after the next election.

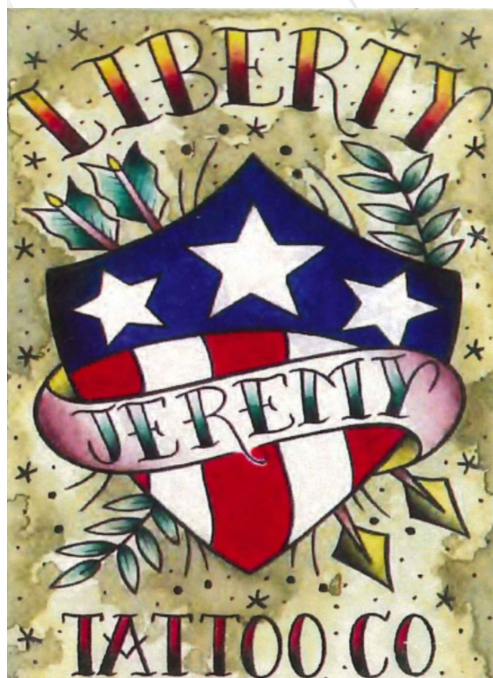
As much as Trump wants to be a tinhorn banana republic dictator like his mentors Putin and Jong-il he loves to lick the boots of, he is in America, and Americans decide who leads the country, not the leaders. I'm sure Putin was knocking back the vodka as his puppet Trump danced to his tune all during the debate. Donald is such a joke.

What was that stuff on Trump's face? Was it makeup? Some kind of brown paint? Leftover bronze cleaner? He looked a decade older than Biden, who is amazingly fit for a man his age. And how much does Trump weigh now? My gosh, one on those rear shots, it looked like two people were inside his suit (sorry for the fat shaming). And he was sweating like a stevedore by the end of the night. It's hard work being the foulest man in America.

We all know that Trump the bigot is playing to his cultish base followers, who scream with spittle-flecked faces at his every twitch. How can Republicans continue to follow this man? Because they thought they could control him. Moscow Mitch McConnell is only interested in collecting more millions and living out his Dark Side closet fantasies. Senator Cruz has been a spineless weasel since Trump said his father helped kill Kennedy and his wife was ugly . . . just before Cruz licked Trump's boots in order to barely win the closest senate race in Texas history.

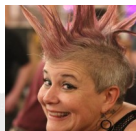
The list goes on and on. Cowards all of the Republicans who cringe before the possible wrath of Trump's tiny-handed tweets, shame on them. Shame on Trump. Shame on America. We all have to rally everyone to vote in this election. We have to vote like our lives depend on it. One thing is certain—Trump's second term will be worse. —

MIKE L. DOWNEY



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FROM THE PROMISED LAND TO GILEAD?



Given the nature of *979Represent*, I don't think I make a huge mistake in assuming that the majority of readers tend to be left-leaning. For the sake of transparency, I too have pretty liberal views falling slightly left of Abbie Hoffman (context for our older readers) or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (for the younger crowd).

Why the run down of my political leanings? Because when you're about to say something that might make people who know you disbelieve that it was you who said it or make those who don't know you think that you might be a closeted conservative, it's best to lay all of your cards on the table from the get go so that everyone is clear about which page we're starting from. I feel like I'm about to say several such things, so I wanted it known up front that really, I'm as tree-hugging a liberal as your likely to find. Now, with that having been said, some thoughts ...

*Fight for the things that you care about,
but do it in a way that will lead others to join
you.*

— Ruth Bader Ginsburg

We've all heard the designation "lib-tard" and most of us are rightly offended, whether it's because it incorporates the R-word in a demeaning way or because it's meant to say that liberals are stupid or both. And yet, I hear a lot of liberals say similar things about conservatives ... that they are assholes or that they are stupid or backwards. Are some conservatives assholes? Are some conservatives less than intelligent? Sure, but so are some liberals. The point is that someone can be conservative without being stupid and without being a jerk

Liberals love to think of themselves as tolerant ... until they're not and then they will often come up with reasons for why that's okay. And, sometimes it is okay. We shouldn't tolerate racism or xenophobia or gender exclusion. But the list of things we can't tolerate should not include things like political views, religious beliefs, food preferences (and if you don't think that's a thing, look at how vegans are treated on social media ... but, I digress). I get that it can be tricky, like when some religious beliefs *could* lead someone towards one of the intolerable -isms, but my experience with multiple religions has been that when someone claims to be a faithful [insert religion here] and is also an -ist it is because they were an -ist first and then twisted the teachings of their faith in a way that backs them up.

It is possible for a conservative and a liberal to be friends.

Explanation:

When Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away there were conservatives on social media who celebrated her passing or who were happy that liberals were so distraught. Assholes, right? And yet, when Justice Scalia passed away there were liberals who behaved likewise. Equally not okay.

Even before Trump made his nomination there were conservatives and liberals alike who suddenly became both constitutional scholars and religious experts about

someone they had only a brief bio-sketch of.

Conservatives love to excoriate RBG because of her pro-choice stance, but most have no idea that in the 60s & 70s, before Roe v. Wade, abortion was not only legal on US military bases, it was actively encouraged and basically mandated.

In 1970 a combat nurse in Vietnam, Air Force Captain Susan Struck, became pregnant. She was given two choices by her superiors: get an abortion or be discharged. She wanted to keep her baby and so was discharged. Once home, she sued the U.S. government. I'll let y'all guess which "baby-killing" ACLU attorney took her case and got the military to change their policy.

SPOILER ALERT: It was Ruth Bader Ginsburg and she then did the same with U.S. businesses who made women "deal with their pregnancy" or lose their job. Ginsburg fought for women to have the right to choose life helping to draft the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978.

That may not be the Notorious RBG that you thought you knew. Similarly, what do we really know about Amy Coney Barrett, Trump's nominee for Ginsburg's open seat on the bench? If I believed only what I've read from liberals on social media, I would assume that she is a radically conservative, religious zealot who is seeking to make *The Handmaid's Tale* a reality in the U.S. Maybe that's true, but she's taught at Notre Dame which isn't exactly a conservative stronghold. When she was nominated and then confirmed for the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, her nomination was supported by every law clerk she had worked with and all of her 49 faculty colleagues at Notre Dame Law School. In addition, Tim Kaine (D-VA), Hillary Clinton's vice-presidential running mate, voted for her confirmation.

There is plenty to be fearful of right now ... and trust me ... I'm terrified AF. But before we start creating scenarios "under His eye" maybe we can trust that Barrett, who by all accounts is a more than a competent legal scholar who has served well on the bench off the 7th Circuit, will continue to do so when she is confirmed as a SCOTUS Justice. After all, she did clerk for Scalia and it's no secret that he and Ginsburg were fast friends who never let politics get in the way of their relationship.

Maybe, just maybe, instead of a descent from the promise land of RBG to a Gilead of Amy Coney Barrett's making, we might instead witness a developing friendship between her and one of the remaining liberal justices. At the very least, can't we who are liberals give this woman the chance to use the skills in which she's been trained and the sharp legal mind with which she has been gifted to simply do her job on the bench without assuming that because she's conservative, she will be the downfall off us all? — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER



BIDEN FOR PRESIDENT . . . DUH

In the early '00s as a conservative talk radio producer I fielded many calls to the program I produced from listeners exasperated with Republicans. They were convinced that their elected officials were a bunch of cowards who did not have the courage of conviction to stand forward and do whatever was necessary to forward the spirit of conservative values and governance. "If only we could be more like the Democrats in that aspect," the callers would lament, "just doing whatever was necessary to WIN..." This was not a sentiment Democrats of the early '00s would have concurred with, but it is this particular sentiment that would eventually foment the Tea Party movement that ultimately got us to where we are sitting today with Donald J. Trump, flim-flam man for hire, as President of the United States of America.

Some day historians will write about the political operatives from the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party and their stroke of genius to ally themselves with a reality show celebrity to ride his coattails into power. It was not a move anyone thought was possible let alone could be successful four years ago. And yet here we are, standing on the precipice of America becoming its most insular and backwards-moving since before World War II. America has shown its capacity for cruelty and selfishness in its history many times over. Just ask the descendants of former African American slaves, Native Americans, women, people who didn't think communism inherently evil, homosexuals and all on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, Latin(x)s, non-Christians, and artists, amongst others. But Americans could at least kid themselves into believing that America was progressing, getting better. Unless, of course, you were a Republican in the culture war. You were convinced that America has been on a downward spiral since World War II. Some time in the early '70s the nascent neo-fundamentalist movement decided to do something about it, wedding the soft racism of the "law & order" Nixon silent majority to Christian conservative evangelical leadership through the shared desire to exempt religious schools from forced acceptance of non-whites to their enrollments and the abolishment of a woman's right to an abortion as a medical procedure guaranteed by the Supreme Court of the United States in the *Roe Vs. Wade* decision. This movement gained steam in the late '70s and found its first taste of victory in helping to successfully propel California governor and actor Ronald Reagan to the White House.

For the next dozen years Republicans dominated the national political spectrum. The neoconservatives lost on school admittance policies, no matter how hard they tried to demonize affirmative action. The courts have upheld the requirements of admittance of non-whites to all schools, public and private. But they began to pick up ground on the abortion front. Churches activated their members to protest, becoming the Right To Life movement. Laws began to be passed chipping away at *Roe V. Wade*. Far-right terrorists began to hassle doctors who provided abortions, even going so far as to shoot doctors and bomb abortion clinics. They could weaken the

statute but they could not do anything about it ultimately without having access to devolving the stance of the Supreme Court. In the early '10s during the Obama presidency Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell began aiming towards making that change at the highest judicial level. By 2016 he had his opportunity. By denying President Obama the ability to nominate a replacement to Justice Antonin Scalia in the last year of his presidency McConnell set into motion the circumstances that would ultimately place America in the position it has found itself.

In 2016 everyone knew Hillary Clinton was a flawed candidate. Not because she wasn't imminently qualified to be President of the United States. As a former lawyer, Senator, Secretary of State, and First Lady Clinton was supremely qualified. For starters, Democrats had no real say in her nomination. It was *inevitable* that she would be the candidate. 2016 would simply be her turn. The party miscalculated the public's distaste for Clinton. OK, I call it distaste, but for conservatives it was a frothing mindless howl of a hatred. Obama may have been an uppity high yellow Kenyan, but Clinton was the Devil herself. If your candidate is considered at best with an "ugh" and at worst with a "high thee away Satan" then you have a very weak crossover candidate. With the Republican nomination entirely in the hands of the Tea Party in 2016 it was only natural that we would see Americas faced with a Faustian choice for its executive. The party faithful bypassed safe choices (Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio) and a more natural hard-right choice like Ted Cruz for Donald Trump. Evangelicals understood that the Supreme Court was aging. It was only a matter of time before one or two more vacancies to the court would become open. If they could just get over the fact that Donald Trump was anything but a proper church going Christian then they could finally have access to change the centrist Supreme Court to tilt conservative and finally do away with *Roe V. Wade*. Rolling back advances made for non-Christian straight white males would be a welcome bonus.

Oh but Trump was a hard man to back. He seemed to be a successful businessman but it turned out that he was: 1.) a trust-funded buffoon who made dozens of pitiful business choices over the years that only through immense charisma and chutzpah was he able to operate past to become America's most prominent businessperson on a level with real American successes like Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, and Jeff Bezos. However, his wealth was brittle and was owed largely to foreign investors who to this day are entangled in Trump's holdings, using those holdings to hold political and economic power over him; and 2.) Trump was no Christian. He was a misogynist, racist, homophobe with dozens of rape accusations, two divorces, an adultery streak that found him paying hush money to porn stars and tabloid journalists, a daughter he barely helped to raise, a gold-digging Eurotrash wife with an anchor baby whose soft-porn past makes her the first First Lady whose boobs and beaver are easily found on Google; and he was not pro-life but was

actually pro-abortion. This was a hard pill to swallow for Evangelicals, but to have real power at their grasp was too sweet not to taste. And so they allied themselves with Trump's nomination and eventually the Republican establishment, while abhorring the man himself, realized they could get things done with him that they had only have dreamed of with former administrations. Therefore it became Trump vs. Clinton. And still, even faced with this choice, the majority of Americans reluctantly pulled the lever for Clinton. Alas, because of the Electoral College system, Trump became the next president.

Now, four years later, we know what kind of damage having Trump in the White House can do. Hundreds of conservative judicial appointees eager to erode American civil rights for Jesus; the separation of refugee families at our borders and locking their children in cages; running up the country's deficit to historic proportions to enrich the 1%; declaring people and governments who do not agree with his policies enemies of the state, mobilizing federal troops and police to disperse citizens with violence; declaring climate change a hoax and rolling back environmental protections in favor of practices that enrich corporations; weaponizing an alt-foreign policy team that changed U.S. policy in the world to benefit Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia, three countries to whom Trump's personal business (which he never divested from as President) are personally beholden to; sending his children and in-laws into the world as diplomats and ambassadors for the Trump brand at the expense of the United States brand; Trump's "law and order" regurgitation supporting police departments' institutional racism, prohibiting granting the policed citizenry the tools of proper oversight; and ultimately to declare as hoax a deadly global pandemic that has infected millions of Americans, killing 200,000 of its citizens and leaving those who recover with a lifetime of medical complications. And with last month's death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Trump, McConnell, and a Republican majority Senate now have the ability to turn the Supreme Court to a conservative majority. A generation's political fight culminating in triumph for the Boom-er neoconservatist movement.

Do not kid yourself into believing that saner heads will prevail. Republicans have been aimed like a missile towards this moment for longer than most of you have been alive. Even the handful of centrist Republican senators will step in line. So what if Mitch McConnell invented some sort of precedent that a Supreme Court nominee will not be voted upon during an election year. It is not law. And even if it were law McConnell would find a way around it or merely ignore it. Hypocrisy? Lies? Sure, and ultimately who cares. This will be Mitch McConnell's lasting legacy and whatever means it took to get him and the rest of the country there *the ends will justify those means*. This is the movement that used Trump as a puppet. Whatever Trump's personal foibles are, whatever distasteful and insulting things he may have done or said in the past four years, this is what it all boiled down to. This is the essence of 45 years of

conservatism. And sadly, the only thing holding it back was a 5'1" 87 year old woman.

So if the conservatives have won already why bother voting next month? I'm sure you have noted that I've spent this entire column explaining to you what byzantine forces have coalesced to lead us to this moment. I have not mentioned Joe Biden yet in what is supposed to be an endorsement of his candidacy. I believe we are at an immense historic crossroads in this country, a once in a lifetime situation. I do not think Biden's election will heal the wounds America has inflicted on itself with Trump as the blunt instrument. Trump's term ripped the scab off America's centuries' old wounds of racism and classism. Americans are having conversations now for the first time with themselves and with each other about the problems at the country's very foundations. Many are just now contemplating the original sins of America and what part those sins may have played in their lives involuntarily and subconsciously, how decisions made hundreds of years ago still continue to undulate below the surface. Those who already felt marginalized by the reducing voice of the underemployed undereducated white straight cis male will feel even more threatened now that Trump exposed their ugliness to the light. Without Trump there as a rallying point and symbol of pride we will likely see a rise in homespun right wing terror. This is too complicated and deep a problem for two politicians alone to solve. Yet I do believe Joe Biden and Kamala Harris offer a way out and forward for America.

Biden is admittedly a career politician. He has said and done some dumb things in his 40 years in office. There are strings on him as well. Those strings are not tied by foreign investors looking to make a quick buck and to sew political discord, ultimately weakening America's economic and diplomatic standing. Biden will listen to America's scientists and physicians to get a better handle on coronavirus response. Biden and a forthcoming Democrat majority Congress will help to enact laws that will undo the vast economic inequality that Trump's policies have accelerated. My children may get to go to college without agreeing to 20 years of crushing debt in exchange. I believe Biden will begin to rebuild the international alliances that Trump callously cast aside, tamp down poor trade policies that enflamed relationships, enriched stock portfolios while running beleaguered American manufacturers and farmers out of business. We may even get a basic health care plan out of it.

Mostly I think Joe Biden is a good human being. The value of this cannot be overstated. Biden will make mistakes, he will do things we all disagree with. But I don't believe that Biden will sacrifice his country and its citizenry for personal gain. We have had four years of having a crime boss president. We now know what that looks like. It's time for America to stare down this precipice and step back from it and began to repair the destruction. It is for this reason that I wholeheartedly endorse Joe Biden for President. — KELLY MENACE



STILL NERDY

Amanda Mull, in her recent essay from *The Atlantic* titled "Generation Work-From-Home May Never Recover", speaks to a reality I stare down daily. The subtitle to Mull's essay states her topic more directly as "The social and economic costs borne by *young people* without offices" (emphasis mine). I agree that, in the long-run, young people will suffer most from the woes of our modern distant-economy. As Mull argues, beginning financial and academic careers in remote settings hinders young people from developing the rhythms, the relationships and the holistic immune systems necessary to succeed in the American economic system. However, the more immediate effects of forced remote labor in higher education is equally shared between students and instructors. Perhaps the "social and economic costs" will reveal themselves down the line for the youth, but, as the old guy in the room, I'm experiencing real-time consequences to the hybrid learning environment that suggest two things: we will never return to "normal" and any hopes you thought of having for "a more perfect union" should be dialed *way* back.

Mull reveals early in her essay that any positive benefits reported in studies of at-home or remote working generally feature data from self-selected home workers: people who have sturdy self-start, time management, and boundary setting skills. Self-selective at-home workers, Mull reports, are "people who have already built strong social and professional networks [that] may not suffer much from the lack of face-to-face contact". In other words, they are true introverts, able to kick their own butts into gear without the awkward eye contact of co-workers and the boss peeking around the corner.

Personally, I've never been that guy. Like most people, I relish a quiet day or two (frequently) with no phone and a clipped internet line, but by day three of four in solitude I begin inventing self-sabotaging narratives and sucking my own thumb. This came into full view for me when COVID hit and forced us all home. At that time, I did not self-select to work from home. For one thing, I did not have the proper equipment, relying normally on the Academic Technology provided and maintained for me by someone else. I'm a Luddite. I still buy CDs and keep a pen clipped to my hip to jitter notes in the Moleskin perpetually kept in my back pocket. On top of that, I need the routine of leaving and returning home. I require my small commute to and from campus to both "get my head in the game" and then later to "leave work at work". The seamless thread of never clocking-in or out means that deadlines and due dates become fluid, even for myself. Work is always there, so work can always be done later, which means that, while work is constantly on my mind, little of it gets accomplished meaningfully. These are reasons why quarantine hit me like a breathless panic attack. Although the first week of sharing our dining room table as a joint work space with my teacher-wife was rather novel, I started clawing the walls before the end of the second. Amanda Mull

suggests my response is quite common among the population forced to work from home. Few of us truly thrive to work well when we do not go to work.

Mull says the greatest benefit to going to work—outside the home—is the chance to embrace "functional inconvenience". The very act of performing the ritual, as I attested to requiring above, of "getting ready" for work, physically leaving the house and making the commute to work psychologically prepares us in subliminal ways for the work day ahead. The inconvenience and awkwardness of shared spaces—public restrooms, coffee break stations, smoking areas, elevators, stairwells: all of which can only be reached by leaving the comfort of our own work station—provide unrealized moments of social connection that, according to Mull, "build a sense of belonging and warmth that makes spending so much of your life at work a little more bearable." In each of these instances, we are mentally and emotionally (perhaps spiritually?) transported into a space of productivity that makes the retreat home at day's end all the more celebratory. All that "functional inconvenience" of the workplace provides something worthy to retreat from at day's end, something that makes entering the front door of our home feel like a retreat. (By the same token, how often does the "functional inconvenience" of the work space provide a retreat from domestic dramas? As I tell my students as a plug for silencing cell phones in class, "For the next 75 minutes, I don't have to think about any of the nonsense out there that drives me crazy. For the next 75 minutes, it's just you guys and bad sentences being made better. The drama will still be there after class, so give me right now away from it." No one ever takes me up on this invitation.)

This notion of embracing "functional inconvenience" played directly into a conversation I had with a student last week, which I'll discuss shortly. First, let me explain the current model of higher education. This semester, as the nation remains under the threat of a pandemic, we have instituted a hybrid model of classroom instruction in which half the class roster attends in-person one day and then by Zoom the next. This alternates for the other half of the roster who attend first on Zoom and later in-person. Due to COVID, we are not allowed to demand anyone attend class in-person. Students may choose their attendance per day without even a word of notice. This means that, by this point of the semester, in-person attendance is low, Zoom presence is high, and I have a handful of students on my roster I've never met outside of a virtual square no larger than a Las Vegas playing card.

Let me assure you that I am not about to rag on college students for being non-academic dolts. No, I have no intentions of ragging on students who are merely playing the hand they've been dealt. Most days I do not want to attend class in-person, and I do not necessarily have to, but, as mentioned above, the Spring 2020

semester convinced me that embracing "functional inconvenience" is an unwritten fruit of God's Holy Spirit, and now I shall never turneth back. Very few of my students have had the chance to consider the benefits of "functional inconvenience", but those who have asked me directly if they could attend classes everyday—"even on my scheduled Zoom days". Five students have asked me so far. I expect more in the Spring. Primarily because of the conversation from this past Friday teased above.

As stated, I met with this student via phone as no in-person Office Hours are hosted this Fall. This student's grade is low. His submission rate for assignments is low. He's attended few in-person class sessions, relying more on Zoom. However, despite his lack of perceived effort this far, his approach to our call was humble, honest and professional. As we talked about the reality of his performance thus far I asked him what he thought about the psychological effects of attending Zoom-class vs. in-person class. He said, "Mr. Still, I need to speak my truth: Zoom doesn't feel real. None of it feels real. I turn off class just like I turn off everything else on my laptop. And once I turn it off, because I'm not in the school building, it's just over. I'm onto the next thing." I wish Amanda Mull could have gained his response for her article

I have long loathed the rhetoric behind online education. We sell digital higher academic courses as "School on your time". Too many assumptions are made in this single sales pitch—from one's ability to manage their own time to academics being one more thing to shuffle in between work and the gym. This past summer, a student told me she thought she could complete a Freshmen composition online course during her lunch breaks at Texas Roadhouse. Really? Freshmen Composition is a reading and writing intensive course. When did she expect to do all the reading and writing? Or did she take that level of work into account? After all, the advertisements promised a class of convenience that matched her lifestyle. Those advertisements never mentioned the grading standards, work load, institutional policies, academic rigor and basic scaffolds of scholarship demanded of her as a thinker and student—all of which she would need to accomplish at home without the benefits of a real-life person to consult or a uniquely brick-and-mortar workspace to separate school apps from social media or gaming or entertainment apps. Of course the advertisements did not present any of these unpleasant realities that because the goal of marketing is to present only the shiny possibilities of a service, which is how online higher-education is marketed: one more service to the consumer. So who could blame my student for expecting as much?

This story illuminates an assumption that is now made about most employees and students, whether they truly benefit or not, which is that everyone should be capable

of working successfully from home via digital technologies. When have such short-sighted assumptions ever been made about institutions as significant as education and our American workforce? We are a nation that thrives on the celebration of individualization, on self-empowerment, on marching to the beat of our own damn drums. Even in American education, we've preached the lie of individual "learning styles" (even though that nonsense has been debunked) for too many decades because it tickles our need to be unique. The web thwarts individualism. The web is no respecter of persons outside their consuming habits. The web, like electricity and basic plumbing, is a utility. And because the web is a common utility, all men and women are now created technologically equal—or so we expect them to be.

The ramifications of these assumptions are too important and far-reaching to not consider the consequences, particularly the social and personal deficits that will be difficult to remedy. Embracing "functional inconvenience" also means embracing the types of selflessness that force maturation of interpersonal skills, professional acumen, the ability to accept critical feedback, and empathy for the Other. Homogeneous, overly safe, uber-sterile home environments do not afford the chance to build strong relational immune systems. I have sensed such sterility in myself this Fall as I've battled with issues of self-doubt, paranoia and the inability to live off-the-clock mentally. Granted, I say that as the old guy in the room who despises and avoids social media. Still, we are learning that being social media savvy does not translate into online-academic socialization. The students and I both struggle at reconfiguring the psychological expectations of a glowing screen: we all generally turn to our screens to escape reality, not to engage it more studiously.

In-closing, I'll offer a confession. This summer I attended an online training seminar about teaching online. Daily Zoom courses ranged from one to two hours, about the duration of a single class session most of my students endure each day. My instructor for the online course requested that we turn off our cameras to assist with the speed of her presentation. The first day I diligently watched the entire hour of her presentation, stepping away only once to refill my coffee and another time to toss a toy penguin for my pugs. The second day, however, I sat for ten minutes in front of my muted mic and camera before I started sweeping the floors, dusting the furniture, and wrestling my eldest pug to clip his nails. After the instructor's presentation, we had a quiz over the day's information. We needed an 80% to pass. I made a 55. Three attempts later, I passed the damn quiz, shut down my laptop, and turned back to my pug with the ganky toenails. He puts up a good fight. He makes pug-maintenance more than inconvenient. Maybe that's one reason I love the snorty-farter so much.—KEVIN STILL

THE CREATURE AND THE BEAST

It always starts the same. The moonlight shines through my curtains like a projector, inviting the oak tree claws to slither over my walls as the chill from the breeze blows a shadow puppet show through my room. I can't help but feel like I don't belong here. Like there's something wrong; some thick feeling of terror floating through the air that was borne in all the corners of this house. This massive, antique-like doll house, with hidden nooks and secret doors. I hate it here. I think of all the people that went missing, not only here, but all around this land by the great lake. Miles and miles of cornfields and forest. Doors and doors of all shapes and sizes that seem to pop up in random areas of this fucking house. I close my eyes and pretend to sleep. Maybe the floating fear will fall away if it thinks I'm sleeping. But, it never does. It stays for a while, tickling my toes at the end of my bed, asking me to open my eyes for some ungodly reason. I hum to myself the tune of a Billie Holiday song. Humming makes it a little better. I can hear little tapping sounds all over my walls. I stopped looking for an answer to these little sounds a few weeks into the move. There's no cause; no rats or cats or opossums hiding in the attic. I'm not really sure what that little tap tap tap is. But, the taps turn into knocks and then fumbles down the hallways. I've ran around this place at various times of the day and night, looking for the little tap dancer, but there's always....nothing. Just an obvious void of a body but the very real feeling of a presence. It's fine, I tell myself over and over until the taps stop and the wind seems to grow as tired as I do. I drift off in all the heaviness my eyes hold.

There's a slight wisp that swoops over the skin of my legs. It startles me enough to wake up and cover myself with the old thick quilt that fell on the floor during my short sleep. I nestle back into a warm spot, right on the verge of dreaming, when I feel it. A hand. A stone-like hand dragging its cold fingers down my back and resting on my hip. The empty space to my left all of a sudden fills with a tangible mass that whispers in my ear. My heart drops and my blood curdles cold. My first thought was someone broke into the house, but the alarms didn't go off. The doors are locked, "and yes, the windows are closed, my darling" it spoke. I can't move or speak or scream. I can't even breathe. Tears fall from my closed eyes as a dread washes over. The whole room is filled with it. A sticky, muggy, swamp-like dread that you can't help but sink into. I'm too afraid to open my heavy, tear-soaked eyes. I feel a pair of warm lips touch the back of my neck that slowly sear into my skin. It burns so bad that I jolt and open my eyes. I wish I didn't. I wish I would've had just stayed still and held my eyes shut. I wish I would have never come here...I wish a lot of things right now. Sitting in the shadows are big black dogs. But, they aren't quite dogs. Some have sharp teeth protruding from their snout. Some have long white talons that tap tap tap on the wooden floor. They all have these pointed ears that look sharp like razors, and these catlike maroon eyes that never blink. There's one sitting at my feet smiling this WIDE toothy grin. It's long canine-like arm reaches out and strokes my toes with its snow white nails. I scream. How could I not. It smiles even bigger and licks its lips with a burnt forked tongue.

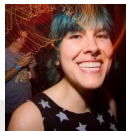
It didn't say anything, but I heard it in my head. "Let me lick your sweet little toes, child. Let me nibble on your ssssweet skin." I decide to jump up and out the window when I hear a growl and a loud SNAP! With that snap, all of those beast like things cower and crawl to the closet door to huddle together. I shut my eyes. "Don't mind them, Emily. They're just ill mannered is all" said a deep, smooth voice, rolling over my ears. I can feel it smile behind me. It sounds amused or delighted. My neck is still burning and I'm still crying. How did this thing know my name? What is this? It sighed and my nose filled with the most beautiful scent of vanilla and roses. It was intoxicating.

In a split second I forgot why I was crying and why I was so afraid. The hand resting on my hip became warm, and my body was growing flush in the crook of another. Its hands ran over my skin with an electricity I've never felt before. My thighs quiver. "Lay with me for a bit, my dear. We have the time" it whispered down my spine. Music came from nowhere but bounced ever so lightly off those dark walls. It was that Billie song I hummed as I fell asleep. Her voice echoing through my ears...or my head. I couldn't tell the difference anymore. I move to try and face the thing that cradled me so perfectly, but with a soft hand placed on my side, it told me to stay still. It kissed my back and moved up to my neck and then my cheek. My blood rushed through me. I turned warmer and warmer, forgetting where I was or what I was doing. I was flipped onto my back with my eyes still closed; I gasped and felt something heavy on top of me, but for some reason I welcomed it. With its fingers entangled in my hair, it pulled my head back and ran its tongue up my exposed neck to my chin and back down again. It asked me to let it in and I didn't even hesitate to say yes. It kissed me. At first it was like falling a thousand feet from the sky with only the smell of roses. "What bliss" it said.

Its hand slid over my neck and I quickly fell from upon high when it squeezed my throat closed. I tried coughing but nothing came from it. Not the slightest hint of air could pass through that grip. I tried to move my arms and push it off, but something was holding them down. I finally opened my eyes, and atop of me was a ghostly white stone-ish figure smiling down. It had sharp teeth and velvet black eyes with chiseled cheeks and thick black brows. It let out this deep, window rattling growl when I tried to move, but it was just too heavy, and I couldn't lift my fucking arms. I glanced to the side of me only to see the little beast's sitting on my hands. I could feel their teeth nibbling at my finger tips, their tongues tasting my toes. They dug into my nails, ripping them off one by one, taking little bites as they went along. Their claws tickled my feet before they peeled the skin from my heels. I let out the last gasp I could muster. It wasn't much but it was the last thing I had left in me. My lungs burned as my throat began to cave in; I could feel my ribs slowly splitting open as the heaviness grew more solid. There was no one coming to save me. There was no angel peeking through my window, only the moon shining through the bare oak trees.

—JESSICA LITTLE

SALACIOUS CRUMBS



October is the BEST month, Halloween is the BEST holiday, and Kelly is the BEST Papermeister because he gave us extra time to turn in junk for the paper. Here's some fall-timey stuff you can do on the cheap this month!

Carve Pumpkins

Duh, run to a pumpkin patch—I like to visit Farm Patch, because I'm pretty sure I'd burst into flames if I set foot on one of those church pumpkin patches, and I know you would, too! You can even invite a couple of friends over and do this outside where it's safe because it can get kinda messy. Do the big knife stuff, like cutting the big hole in the pumpkin while you're still on your first drink so you don't take off a finger. Scoop that thing out and save all the seeds! Decorate it with something that'll make your neighbors say, "Ugh, she's really bringing down property values!". Compost it, give it to a friend with chickens, leave it for the wildlife to feast upon, or have a ball throwing it off a parking garage when you're done with it!

EAT THE PUMPKIN GUTS

I hope you saved your seeds! You'll need to dry them out, so just get all the stringy pumpkin bits off of them and set them out on the pan you're going to be roasting them in while you carve your pumpkin. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F, and toss your seeds with oil and a little bit of salt. I really like putting a little bit of maple syrup and a spice blend like Old Bay or Tony Chachachahaerereres on them. Toss them in the oven for 20 minutes until they just get toasty. Burn the heck outta your tongue!

Make Spooky Houses

In the 1940s and 50s, people would make these little cardboard houses as decorations for Christmas time called Putz houses. BUT you can also make them for Halloween! Save your cereal and snack boxes, and draw a house pattern on them, or google for putz house patterns. I get mine from retrorenovation.com because they have some cool mid-century modern ones and half my furniture is 70 years old, but do what you like! Grab some paint and glue and whatever, or just Sharpie them all black and spooky and cut a little hole to put a fake tealight inside. I use old dried up grass and twigs from the yard to make yard and trees for my houses. If you can find it around the house, it's the right thing to use! If you're making your house using a Cricut, get the fuck outta here!

Figure Out Your Spooky Falltime Meal

Maybe you already have one, I don't know, but it's nice to have something that makes your brain think of the weather changing, the darker nights, the impending spooky holiday, something savory with pumpkin, get really into homemade spiked apple cider, or load up on pumpkin beers. If I crack into a Pumpkinator in the middle of June, I get one of those TV flashback things where suddenly it's falltime, and I'm watching a scary movie in a room lit only by flickering candles, waiting for the next trick-or-treater. I make butternut squash alfredo every year in October because it's too hot the rest of the year for alfredo, and it's orange and falltimey. You can also make it with a leftover pumpkin from your Halloween decorations!

Butternut Squash Alfredo

Serves 4-6

Sauce

- 1/2 cup cashews, soaked if you have a crappy blender
- 1 1/2 cup vegetable broth
- 1 1/2 cups roasted butternut squash, pumpkin, or canned pumpkin
- 2 tablespoons miso
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast (NEVER OPTIONAL)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Other stuff

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dry rubbed sage, or 1 Tbsp fresh sage or rosemary
- 3/4 cup dry white wine
- S&P to taste

1. Heat the oil over medium heat and saute the onions with a pinch of salt until translucent.
2. While those guys are going, put all of the sauce ingredients in your blender and let them blend until they're smooth. You don't want them to be gritty when you rub the mixture between your fingers.
3. Once the onions are translucent, or even a bit caramelized, toss in the garlic and herbs for a minute. Throw in the white wine, and deglaze the pan. Let it all simmer until the liquid is mostly reduced. White wine sucks, so you'll have leftovers for your next batch.
4. Add the sauce mixture, and lower the heat to medium-low. Stir everything to combine, and let it simmer and thicken for a couple of minutes. Season with S&P.

Happy Spook-o-weening! — KATIE KILLER

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RENTED MULEVIES: *PLANDEMIC*

As is the case with our President and Covid-19, I was hoping that Covid-19 denial would go away. No such luck. I originally was going to submit a review of this "documentary" to 979Represent back in April but I couldn't bring myself to write it. Surely I thought, this will be over, or at least under control, by summer. No such luck. As of press time the death toll from Covid-19 continues to climb. Despite the rising death toll, Covid -19 is alive and well with Facebook having "Reopen" websites. Like the virus itself, these pages mutated from simple pleas from "patriotic" Americans to reopen Applebees, Walmart and hair dressers (because you can't fight tyranny without a well-trimmed neck beard) and have since mutated into full on Pandemic denial sites (check "Reopen Texas" on Facebook if you need confirmation). It is odd indeed that these mostly right wing folks, who pride themselves of self-sufficiency, weapon ownership, and Darwinist self-sufficiency, find themselves in full panic mode at the prospect of Chili's being closed for dining or not being able to go to Chick-Fil-A without wearing a mask. Don't weapon bunkers come with gas masks? This is, however, not within the scope of this review.

The Plandemic "documentary" part one is roughly thirty minutes in length. Honestly, that is a bit short as far as conspiracy videos go; especially for a "documentary" allegedly as "vital" as this. The 9/11 conspiracy video *Loose Change* clocks in at over an hour. I've seen alien abduction videos longer than *Plandemic*. The documentary is a brief walk through the claims of a Dr. Judy Mikovits. Mikovits first claims she was arrested and put under a "gag order" in an attempt to "silence" her. This is incorrect. She was arrested and later released for taking a laptop computer from her former place of employment. As for being "silenced", while *Plandemic* is not on YouTube, I found it online in less than three minutes on several websites. So although she claims to have no "constitutional freedoms" her video is widely available online. Mikovits further claims that she had completed pioneering research on the AIDS virus that was suppressed by Dr. Anthony Fauci in order for Fauci and the Department of Health and Human Services to profit from a cure they rolled out (if Mikovits had an AIDS cure why didn't SHE patent it?). Wrong. Mikovits, research was discredited as having flawed data and methodology (long of the short of it, she was leaning on her research assistants to doctor the data to get the results she wanted).

As for the actual Plandemic "documentary", Fauci and the Center of Disease Control are to blame for Covid-19; along with George Soros and Bill and Melinda Gates. According to *Plandemic*, Covid-19 was man made in labs in China and then deliberately released. Millions of dollars in bribes—presumably paid for by Soros and Gates—have been paid to hush this up. No documentation is offered for this other than the word of Mikovits and two other nameless medical talking heads.



Mikovits then claims that wearing masks causes the virus to spread. Nope. In what must be a coincidence, or the work of Fauci, Soros, and Gates, the states that opened early and stopped mask restrictions had the number of Covid-19 cases rise (see sources below for further confirmation). In what must be the most absurd claim of *Plandemic*, Mikovits essentially claims that a nice trip to the beach will prevent people from catching Covid-19; a memo spring break participants in Florida didn't seem to get. From her video (and website below): "Why close the Beach? That is Insanity. There are healing microbes in the sand and sea water". She also claims that the drug Hydroxychloroquine will get rid of the virus. Several scientists have debunked this. Admittedly, some research has shown that it **MAY** work against Covid-19 **SOME** of the time. Even with that caveat, it is vastly irresponsible for Mikovits to state Hydroxychloroquine is a silver bullet cure for Covid-19. Perhaps the second part of *Plandemic*, which was released on August 18, addresses what I've seen as glaring errors in this video. If the track record for part 1 continues for part 2, I rather doubt it. I had enough after part one. I couldn't bring myself to watch part 2. On my death bed, I'll already regret the half hour squandered watching part one.

There are several elephants standing in the room regarding *Plandemic*. First, thanks to the nefarious scheming of Fauci, Soros, Gates and the Chinese, a manmade virus is released killing hundreds of thousands of people. However, a no name doctor is able to release **TWO** "documentaries" exposing their schemes. With the all the money, power, and Machiavellian scheming of this triumvirate, why didn't they simply kill her? Second, while she doesn't come right out and say she is a Trump supporter, her beliefs coincide with President's Trump's. If Trump is on board with Covid-19 denial or at least downplaying Covid-19—and several statements of his seem to confirm this (see below)—why doesn't he simply fire Fauci and put in someone like Mikovits in his place? He's had plenty of time to address this as knew about Covid-19 since at least January 2020 according to the Washington Post.

Third, the battle cry of conspiracy theorists is "do the research". Yet *Plandemic* offers little in the way of

substantive proof for their claims of Covid-19 denial. To hear the Conspiracy theorists tell it, people are "Sheeple" if they believe CNN, MSMBC, or other "mainstream" news sources (but oddly enough not Fox News, Breitbart News, Infowars, or One American News Network). However, *Plandemic* a "documentary" made by anonymous people is believed without question. On the comment section of the website showing *Plandemic*, I saw a few people gamely attempt to offer facts that contradicted the "Plandemic" version of events. These people were torn apart; and of course called "Sheeple". But really, who are the real "sheeple" here? A minority of people so scared of beliefs they don't like that they buy into the first video that matches their beliefs without question. The real conspiracy here isn't an evil cabal releasing a virus on the world.

Instead, it is a group of people who are willing to cherry pick a version of "facts" matching their pre conceived notion of the Covid-19 Pandemic to make themselves feel better and to get their President off the hook for the spread of Covid-19. At over 200,000 dead, believing *Plandemic* isn't just stupid but potentially deadly.

Plandemic Fact Check sources:

<https://www.factcheck.org/2020/05/the-falsehoods-of-the-plandemic-video/>
<https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/may/08/fact-checking-plandemic-documentary-full-false-con/>

Fact check of Part 2 of Plandemic:

<https://www.factcheck.org/2020/08/new-plandemic-video-peddles-misinformation-conspiracies/>
 Judy Mikovits:

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/05/fact-checking-judy-mikovits-controversial-virologist-attacking-anthony-fauci-viral>

More on part 2 of Plandemic:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/08/25/fact-check-plandemic-sequel-makes-false-claims-bill-gates/5627223002/>

Mikovits' side of the story if you must:

<https://fromrome.info/2020/09/16/dr-judy-mikovits-if-we-do-not-stop-this-now-we-will-be-killed-by-this-agenda/>

Hydroxychloroquine:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/02/health/hydroxychloroquine-coronavirus-detroit-study/index.html>
https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-hydroxychloroquine-and-covid-19?gclid=Cj0KCQjwzbv7BRDIArIsAM-A6-11RpiE9pGv52sKQlceSg8nuiC27i5FUUmduZ8734z-tluyv-OFU6QaAuHsEALw_wcB#

Trump and Covid:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/34-times-trump-said-the-coronavirus-would-go-away/2020/04/30/d2593312-9593-4ec2-aff7-72c1438fca0e_video.html
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/08/trumps-lies-about-coronavirus/608647/>

— RENTED MULE

ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP



I haven't planted anything since I left the farm. Being away from the beauty that I grew, has opened a huge chasm in my heart. My hard work and optimistically imbalanced determination, built my dreams, from the ground up. Now it lies barren in my absence.

It is hard sometimes to return to the beauty that you had to put down for a spell. Knowing when to fold the cards or walk away into a different direction, may be one of the hardest things you learn to do. I am learning that I can do hard things. I hope you are learning too.

I have some pots that I have been collecting off the side of the street. I'm repurposing a kiddie pool and an old wash basin. There are seven tires that could be filled with dirt. And even though I have none, my mind begins to swirl. Ideas begin to materialize. Dreams begin to blossom like an oxblood lily after the rain.

I can paint the tires and put them in the front yard. I can position the wash basin under the gutter and collect rain water. The kiddie pool is just shallow enough to sprout onion bulbs. Life can begin here. Love can help it survive. It's the perfect time to plant kale and the rabbit would benefit from fresh greens. If I scoop up the chicken litter, I can brew compost tea. I need to start raking leaves and gather mulch for the colder weather that will be approaching. What if I transplanted that fig tree? Would it survive?

As I ponder the life of the fig tree, I am reminded of my truth. I survived. I picked up my roots. I gathered up my skirts and with dirt still clinging to my boots, I traveled on and away from my home. I settled down into a life that was different. A life that I had to work extremely hard to rebuild, one heap of dirt at a time. If I can do it. So can the fig tree.

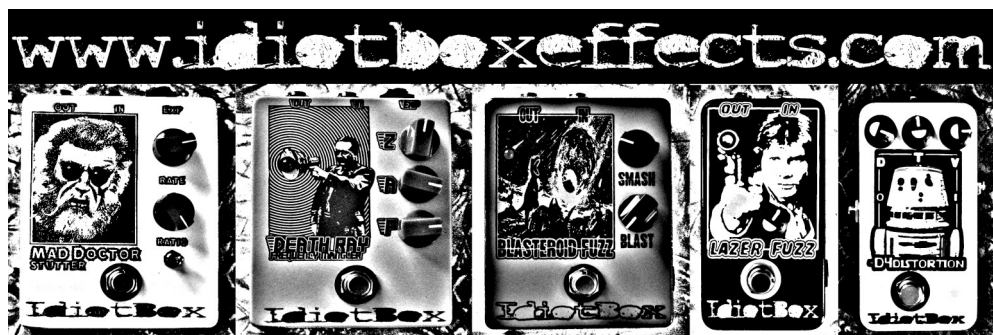
"We like things to manifest right away, and they may not. Many times, we're just planting a seed and we don't know exactly how it is going to come to fruition. It's hard for us to realize that what we see in front of us might not be the end of the story." - Sharon Salzberg

Tomorrow I will plant the fig tree. As the wheel of the year continues to turn, I hope you all find a way to keep growing. This is my prayer for you.—HALEY RICHARDSON



Table 1. Average planting dates for fall vegetables in various growing regions of Texas.

Vegetables	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V
Beans, snap bush	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Sep 10	Oct 1
Beans, Lima bush	Jul 15	Jul 25	Aug 20	Sep 1	Sep 15
Beets	Aug 15	Sep 1	Oct 15	Nov 1	Dec 15
Broccoli	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 1
Brussels sprouts	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 1
Cabbage	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 1
Carrots	Jul 15	Aug 15	Nov 10	Nov20	Dec 15
Cauliflower	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 1
Chard, Swiss	Aug 1	Aug 15	Oct 1	Oct 20	Dec 15
Collards	Aug 1	Aug 15	Oct 10	Oct 20	Dec 15
Corn, sweet	Jul 1	Aug 10	Aug 20	Sep 10	Sep 20
Cucumber	Jul 15	Aug 1	Sep 1	Sep 10	Oct 1
Eggplant	Jul 1	Jun 15	Jul 1	Jul 10	Aug 1
Garlic (cloves)	Jul	Aug	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kohlrabi	Aug 15	Sep 1	Sep 10	Oct 1	Nov 1
Lettuce, leaf	Sep 1	Sep 15	Oct 10	Nov 1	Dec 1
Mustard	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 1	Dec 1	Dec 15
Onion (seed)	Not recommended	Not recommended	Nov 1	Dec 1	Dec 15
Parsley	Sep 15	Oct 1	Oct 10	Nov 1	Dec 1
Peas, southern	Jun 15	Jul 1	Aug 1	Aug 15	Sep 1
Pepper	Jun 1	Jun 15	Jul 1	Jul 15	Aug 1
Potato	Not recommended	Aug 1	Sep 1	Oct 1	Not recommended
Pumpkin	Jun 1	Jul 1	Aug 1	Aug 10	Sep 1
Radish	Sep 1	Oct 1	Nov 25	Dec 1	Dec 15
Spinach	Aug 15	Sep 1	Nov 15	Dec 1	Dec 15
Squash, summer	Aug 1	Aug 15	Sep 10	Oct 1	Oct 10
Squash, winter	Jun 15	Jul 1	Aug 10	Sep 1	Sep 10
Tomato	Jun 1	Jun 15	Jul 1	Jul 10	Aug 1
Turnip	Sep 1	Oct 15	Nov 1	Dec 1	Dec 15



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HYDROGEN JUKEBOX

By 2000 Radiohead had accustomed itself and the world to expecting unconventionalality from the band. The world thought they knew the British band from their first single, the American grunge of "Creep" only to discover the rest of the album sounded like U2 Lite and nothing like "Creep". Several years later Radiohead stunned the world by creating its own new sound with their second album, *The Bends*, an album that had such a lasting impact that one could trace the careers of sound-alike bands like Coldplay and Travis straight back to "Fake Plastic Trees", the album's big single. After touring arenas around the world opening for R.E.M. the band could have doubled-down on their newfound success and formulaically repeated *The Bends* but instead turned in a left-turn of an album, 1997's *OK Computer*, a mess of progressive rock, Britpop, and cinematic alienation made into beautiful music. That curveball won the band even more fans while rewarding their creative yen. But what would the band do next? More of *OK Computer*? Go backwards towards a song-oriented *The Bends* approach? In 2000 the band took yet again another detour with *Kid A*.



It is widely agreed by most serious music fans and critics alike that *Kid A* is one of the most important albums created this century. It turns up on many folks' top of the decade, top of all time, etc. lists. Radiohead blended their progressive rock leanings with a newfound knack for atonality, serious 20th century composition, discarded electronic instruments and techniques, and state-of-the-art cutting edge electronic music production tools and approaches. Honking dissonant saxophones and brass coinciding with found sound collage, the theremin-like Ondes Martinot (a kind of analog synthesizer), digital bit-reduction and non-linear cut-and-paste rhythmic editing, and ring modulated vocals on "The National Anthem" to create a mounting, building sense of paranoia and tension, musically and emotionally. This was not the prog rock of "Paranoid Android", not the piano balladry of "Karma Police", though there would be no progression to *Kid A* without first the successful experimentation of *OK Computer*. There was barely an electric guitar within earshot on the album (with "Optimistic" the obvious exception). This is not the first time that an artist has discarded their known instruments and songwriting process in order to free themselves from the usual traps and tropes, nor the first time that avant garde 20th century composition would find its way into pop music (hello The Beatles). But at a time when bubblegum R&B singles had begun to reassert themselves on the pop psyche, rock radio had moved entirely towards mook metal/hip-hop fusion and dying sub-Seattle commercialized grunge an album like *Kid A* was an obvious shock, and not one everyone would get. However, *Kid A* was a commercial success and artistically a high point that the band would never

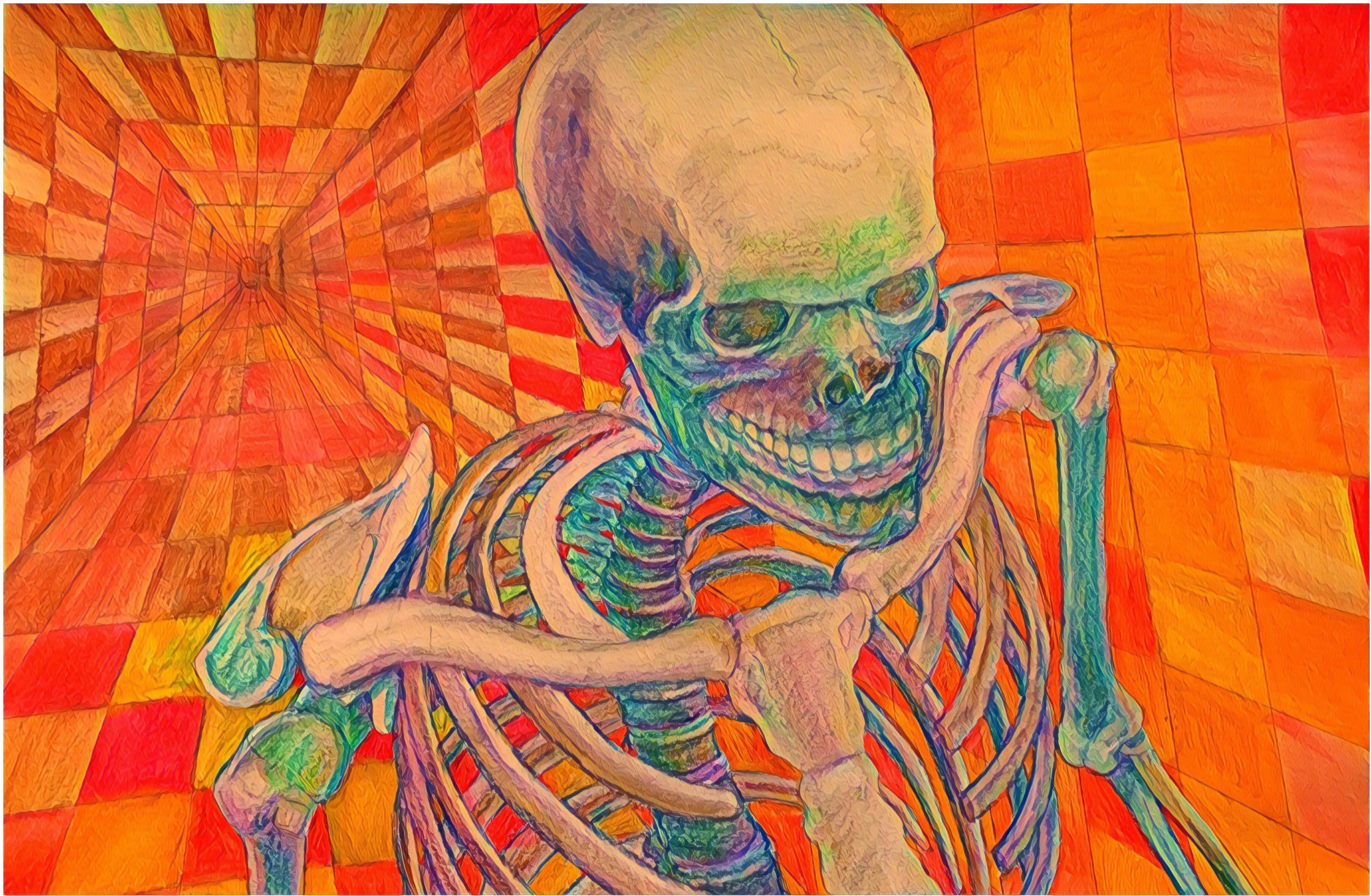
attempt to outdo. All their subsequent albums build and expand on the territory covered with this album and its companion piece, the less claustrophobic, more guitar-oriented *Amnesiac*, recorded at the same time as *Kid A* but released the following year.

The album is often talked about by critics as a tome of alienation but for me the album is quite personal. Normally I would've heard the album on its release day but I did not run out and buy it. I got it a few weeks later, on one of the more momentous and fucked-up days of

my life. My wife gave birth on October 19 to our first son, stillborn at delivery. We lived in Seattle at the time and in the wake of this tragedy we fled 100 miles north to the San Juan Islands, where my wife's family lived. I was tasked with driving back down to the city to figure out cremation arrangements for our son. My wife was stunned into a stupor and was unable to perform such functions. So I spent some rainy morning in the basement showroom of some funeral home in Ballard trying to choose the perfect urn that would somehow contain a child's ashes, a broken dream, our stunning disappointment, and our towering grief. After making a choice and crying all the way back to the car, I decided I knew exactly how to get a hold of myself for the long drive back to Anacortes. I stopped by nearby Easy Street Records and set my credit card on fire. *Kid A* was one of the CD's I bought that day. I listened to it on repeat over and over again that afternoon, all the way back through shitty weekday traffic. It suited my mood.

Thom Yorke sang like something was irreparably broken and he did not now exactly what to do about it. I knew what he meant. "Yesterday I woke up sucking on a lemon" he sang in "Everything In Its Right Place". Yeah, Thom, me too. In "How To Disappear Completely" Thom looks around and declares "I'm not here, this is isn't really happening". I concurred. I was suppose to be holding a little baby and learning how to take care of it and mitigate its impact on my household and family, not figure out what do with one's remains. Yet, as Thom Yorke later avowed in "Idiotique", "THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING". Yeah, it really was happening. "Treefingers" had no words but it sounded like the afternoon looked. Gray. Over and over again on repeat for the almost three hour drive, Radiohead sang and played for my little wounded bird soul like the band knew. And it did. This is the transformative quality of music that no other art form except for perhaps poetry can arise to. Whatever it is that Radiohead decided to make an album about it was assuredly not me and my situation. 20 years later I do not hear it with the same ears I did that day. I recognize the album for artistic masterpiece that it is. But on that rainy, shitty day in October 2000 it connected to me on a completely different level. Just the way that good music always has and always will. —

KELLY MENACE



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Bob Mould Blue Hearts

Yahoo is my search engine. I know that reveals my age, but I am loyal to my first search engine. These days the front page of Yahoo is clogged with clickbait articles about what makeup tips people are living for, what celebrity's fashion choice is everything, and what Tik Tok video is the mood we need right now. Back in July when Merge Records released the lyric video for "American Crisis" as the lead-off single from Bob Mould's album *Blue Hearts* I watched it probably a dozen times in a row. It was, as the clickbait article claimed, everything I needed for life in one two-and-a-half minute blast. *This was how I felt about everything around me. Bob is saying what I don't have the words to say.* But then after that initial dozen times I did not go back to that video.

When the album was actually released into the wild last month I was afraid that it wouldn't hold up. You see, I LOVE Hüsker Dü but I've not connected as much to his work that has come after. I'll like a song here and there and hear what I like to hear from Bob but never for an entire album's worth. I liked to see Bob's bands live because the new material would be sandwiched between old classics and it all felt right. So imagine my surprise when the 14 songs of *Blue Hearts* just kinda blazed by me the first, leaving me in a daze. The songs are short (barely over 2 minutes in most cases), rock balls out or, in the case of the acoustic tracks, act as thematic interludes into the next salvo of distorted guitar and crashing drums.

The album's highlight is still "American Dream" and it sets the pace and tone for the album. Bob's pissed, the world sucks, and he feels every hurt of it. Bob opens the song with a scream before declaring "I never thought I'd see this bullshit again". The middle 8 culminates in Bob rearing back, opening his mouth, and simply ROARING, that trademark howl that makes Husker's cover of "8 Miles High" probably the best alt-rock cover of all time. He steps singing and just roars like a wounded animal. It's that sound again, and as I say above, *it is everything we need*

right now.

As for the rest of the album, it is hard to glean the lyrics because the vocals are mostly buried beneath an avalanche of rock band. Not that the album is perfect. Bob declares on the album opener, "I wear my heart on my sleeve" and announces the line in a really odd old man Eddie Vedder sort of way. Makes me wanna grab him by the lapels of flannel shirt and tell him to cut that shit out. Much of the album, when you read the lyrics, they are almost embarrassingly straight forward. "The earth is burning" he declares in "Forecast of Rain". But again, this record, while not winning any awards for poetry, it's just straight catharsis with moments of sweet melody rising up from the chaos. It makes me want to listen more and more so I can hear more of what Bob's saying as it bubbles up from under the noise. Huh, he's singing a song about a butterfly? What kind of hippie shit is this? Doesn't matter, Bob's singing it at the top of his lungs while Superchunk drummer Jon Wurster bashes along and Jason Narducy's bass holds it all together. It certainly fits my mood these days and I can hardly stop listening to it. — KELLY MENACE



Skeletal Remains The Entombment of Chaos

It was not but two years ago that I reviewed Skeletal Remains' third album titled *Devouring Mortality*. To the say least, I had high hopes for that album (even preordered a t-shirt), so one can imagine my disappointment when, after finally heard it, I had to give it a less than favorable review. It was simply too much of a one trick pony with little creativity to speak of. For this reason, when I heard Skeletal Remains planned a 2020 release titled, *The Entombment of Chaos*, I was extremely cautious.

The first thing I noticed from

the new release was the artwork, which is another Daniel Seagrave piece with a very similar design and color scheme to the previous cover art. Despite the similarity, it was not bad design at all—it's Daniel Seagrave for crying out loud—but I was beginning to get the impression that familiar cover art was this band's way of telling the fans, "We found our niche with our last record, and we're sticking to it." However, once I listened to the single titled "Illusive Divinity", I was pleasantly surprised.

The approach of *The Entombment of Chaos* is one which can best be described as if Skeletal Remains steadied their pace from *Devouring Mortality* but without reining in the aggression and intensity. Rather than relying on speed and overwhelming technicality, the band has trimmed out all the excess fat and reintroduced the necessary elements from their first two records that made them so catchy. Throughout the record, the listener is given back those killer hooks that were missing from the third record, and the riffs—O, the riffs!—are absolutely delicious!

"Cosmic Chasm" and "Illusive Divinity" start things off nicely as a dual intro featuring with a short instrumental followed by a groovy death metal track. "Congregation of Flesh" picks up the tempo, giving listeners an all-too-catchy chorus with Chris Munroy repeatedly roaring out "Ravenous!" over the vox. "Tombs of Chaos" slows things down to a mid-pace layered with expertly crafted guitar solos. "Enshrined in Agony" is an instrumental which gives the listener a welcome breather. "Dissectasy" kicks things back into gear and brings a fast-paced assault in a Carcass-esque sort of fashion while livening things up with strong solos. "Eternal Hatred" creeps in as doomy and slow-paced crusher that is absolutely sinister (and my favorite track on the album), while "Unfurling the Casket" beautifully ends *The Entombment of Chaos* with a song that is an internal battle between mid-paced and fast-paced tempos.

To say the least, the variety of sound and the level of creativity on this record is impressive. There is a clear experimentation with brutal death metal that is pervasive in the guitar work. Even Chris's vocals are different, as he opted to go for a more raw and unpolished

approach; it fits very well, and gives Skeletal Remains that needed gruffness that is often missing from previous releases. Even death metal vocals can get too polished at times.

Despite the praise I can lavish on *The Entombment of Chaos*, it is not without its drawbacks. "Synthetic Impulses" and "Torturous Ways to Oblivion" are less than memorable tracks, and seem to be little more than filler songs. If that's the case, why not omit them entirely and then have eight well-crafted songs, especially with most being well over five minutes long? Well, no one asked me, I suppose.

Given the previous offering, *The Entombment of Chaos* is massive improvement. It is a death metal release that fans can latch onto easily and bang their head to endlessly without having to sacrificing an overly attentive ear. Despite its imperfections with filler songs, I have to give mad props to Skeletal Remains. This is one hell of an album, and, for that, I give it 4.5 out of 5. — CALEB MULLINS



Ringo Deathstarr Ringo Deathstarr

This 2020 release by the Austin shoegaze trio, its first in five years, is not to be confused with the group's 2007 similar eponymously-titled self-released recording. This album can be considered Ringo Deathstarr's fifth studio release since 2011 (although 2013's *God's Dream* just had seven tracks).

Fans of the squalling feedback-laden tunes that made up most of *Mauve* (2012) and *Pure Mood* (2015) may be surprised by the return to the dreamy psychedelia of *Colour Trip*. The trio led by guitarist/lead singer Elliott Frazier, bassist/vocalist Alex Gehring, and drummer Daniel Coborn seem to have mellowed a bit in their musical approach.

"Heaven Obscured" and "Cotton Candy Clouds" are prime examples of tunes marked by Gehring's ethereal vocals and the simple paisley pace of the songs. About half of the tunes feature her wistful lead vocals which almost act as another instrument for the unpretentious songs.

This is not to say that the trio has abandoned its love of feedback and noise pop. "Just Like You" rocks a great fuzzed guitar while "Be Love" is trademark Ringo Deathstarr with startling percussion, wailing guitar, and Frazier/Gehring vocalizations.

"The Same Again" is almost experimental in composition with atonal drumming that's like a different song than the keenly guitar and Frazier's vocals. "God Help the Ones You Love" echoes My Bloody Valentine before Gehring's vocals slide into the easy rocker.

The overall sedate mood of the album is hinted at with the opening cut; it's a pensive and atmospheric instrumental entitled "Nagoya" after the place where it was written and recorded in Japan.

"Lazy Lane" in title and its slow rocking exemplifies the album's design. The disc never drags though, mainly due to the crafted tunes. Whether the calming quiet and easy pace of Gehring's voice on "Disease" or the chirpy bounce of "Gazin'" with its tasteful bass, the recording is never dull.

Ear candy swirls like "I Don't Want to Lose This" and the languid "In Your Arms" are subtly contrasted with tunes like the aptly-titled "Once Upon a Freak" with its disjointed guitar that still clicks along marvelously.

Ringo Deathstarr completes the promise of 2011's studio debut *Colour Trip* that contains many of the band's best tunes. The vinyl version comes in coke-bottle green (this writer's choice) or tie-dyed psychedelia. Groovy. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



Mary-Charlotte Young L.A. Again

Mary-Charlotte Young is the new stage name for the local favorite Magic Girl and *LA Again* is her newest album and first released under this name. This highly personal album is influenced by a life filled with love both gained and lost and the experiences and feelings over time.

Right from the jump it becomes immediately apparent that Young's fantastic voice, with that slight Americana vibe is perfect for a cold beer in the Texas sun. This album also makes it clear that as she's grown as an artist her ear for memorable melodies is only getting better. Even after just a couple of plays the album feels like it's been in your collection forever.

The quickness of the song and fun fiddle in "Any Old Rainbow" is something that catches your ear and makes you want to get on a road trip to anywhere and sing along. Then you immediately transition into "One to Fall," a much slower ballad with soulful lyrics and guitar that is suited to a night of whiskey by a fire. As you continue through the album "Dead Stars" shows the real range of Mary-Charlotte Young and why it would be a mistake to write her off as just another singer-songwriter. The heavy electric guitar perfectly contrasts Young's piercing vocals and wouldn't be misplaced around older Lucero or Old 97s albums. *LA Again* closes with "This Beautiful World" and it does everything that Young has done throughout her career perfectly. It's got strong lyrics, a great melody, and a phenomenal chorus that you are immediately singing along with out loud or in your

head.

Overall, beautiful melodies, thought-provoking lyrics, and a very clean, crisp production *LA Again* is an extremely impressive album and 100% worth putting on anytime you have a long drive or just want to get lost in your own thoughts to great music. — STARKNESS



Thurston Moore By the Fire

Every review I read of *By the Fire*, the new solo album from former Sonic Youth member Thurston Moore, had me super amped for hearing this album. "It's his best work since *Dirty*," or "he's figured out how to balance songs with experiments", etc. I had to go to the torrents to pick this up because delivery on the vinyl was pushed back a month. I popped it into my iPod and pushed play. Then had to double check to make sure I was actually listening to the new album. Opener "Hashish" sounds like a dead-ringer for "Sunday", the lead single from 1996's *A Thousand Leaves*. I understand an artist whose decades into a career will often copy oneself either on purpose or by accident. Why wouldn't Neil Young write a song that sounds like Neil Young? But in this instance it made me wonder if perhaps Thurston as a solo artist perhaps had too much control to indulge himself without having three other voices to tell him, "yeah, it's a good one but it sounds just like this other song you wrote".

This is not to say that *By the Fire* is 90 minutes of retreats. Once one gets past "Hashish" there are some really interesting moments, building from the sprawling instrumental moments on *Spirit Counsel*,

2019's 3-hour foray into sanctified drone. The songs on *By the Fire* that have that vibe, like the beautiful arpeggios of "Breath" that recall moments of both '80s and '00s Sonic Youth and the fast-strummed pedal-tones of "Locomotives" and album closer "Venus" give a sort of Cliff Notes version of what the Thurston Moore Group was up to with the long instrumental pieces. For years when reviewers would talk of Thurston's roots playing with Glen Branca and Rhys Chatham it was usually to give lip service to the origins of SY's weird tunings, but it does seem that Thurston has come back around 360 to the orchestral possibilities of detuned electric guitar presented with an almost Summer of Love yen for tantric love. In a way these pieces are reminiscent of the late '90s SY series of EP's but less jarring and atonal. Thurston isn't trying to be esoteric. He's just trying to bliss you the fuck out. The pop songs scattered throughout are not bad at all, but really aren't improvements on the previous SY and Thurston solo songs that they are obviously patterned on and divert from the more interesting real estate Thurston is covering elsewhere. I would almost prefer a single album that had those songs on it without the pop songs. One highlight of "Hashish" that is totally new to the Thurston crayon box is the unhinged Ron Asheton abandon of James Sedwards. It is obvious Thurston and former partner Lee Ranaldo were influenced by The Stooges they never went all out for that kind of fuzzed out, facile lead guitar that Sedwards is able to command. In his previous recorded work with Thurston Sedwards would cop more of Thurston's vibe. It is cool to see him step up and out with more confidence to do his own thing.

The more I listen to this album I get why reviewers are going nuts for this album. The pop songs are a great gateway to lead those curious about the many myriad side projects of more challenging music that Thurston has made on countless indie labels towards that music. I forget not everyone is a deep Sonic Youth head that knows the b-sides, side projects, and compilation tracks where the band was more accustomed to making truly bizarre mindfuck music. In a way this is a presentation of the total Thurston rather than to categorize and file the different sides of music into one place or the other, both standard and turnt inside out. — KELLY MENACE

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