

# STOREREPRESENT



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*inside: 2020...the year that sucked - my pain is full of hope - stil nerdy -  
attempting to steal a maga hat - how to own a dragon - rented mulevies -  
rocky but with chess and a lady - an expert in the white house -  
record reviews*



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for the discerning dirtbag.**

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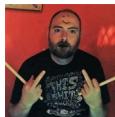
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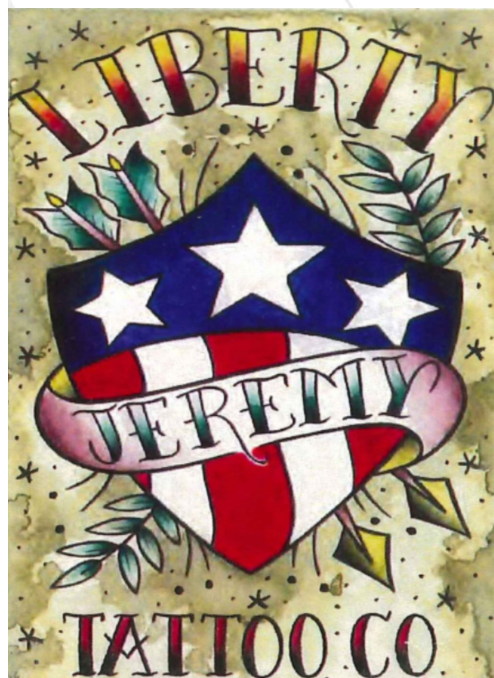
## 2020 ... IT'S BEEN A DECADE

This headline is not hyperbole. You guys know. You feel me. We've aged ten years in nine months. But we are now making our way to the end of 2020. Many people will be more relieved than ever to see a calendar turn over from one year to the next. I fully expect a run on tickets and arrests come December 31st into January 1st. Y'all better start figuring out your bail situations now so no one's surprised. But I am going to be the mean ol' Grinch of 2020 and tell you that you should not expect anything to change come January 1 except the date.

I do not mean to be a boner killer. This year I have experienced tremendous setbacks, unease, discomfort, financial uncertainty, social disconnect, and an overall emotional pressure that I've not often known exactly what to do with. I will be just as happy as any of the rest of you to put this year behind me. However, Covid and its accompanying complications will not magically disappear in January. A full national rollout of a Covid vaccine could take months to execute. No one knows 100% what the efficacy of the vaccine will be like in practice. And honestly, I don't expect everyone to come back out of the woodwork into society the same way as before regardless. Some people will not get a vaccine. Some people will think because everyone else got the vaccine that it's open season on being a dumbass again and go back out into the wild, creating a late period super spreader surge, a last hurrah for Covid as a raging social wildfire. We've seen the reality of Covid fatigue making people who may have acted more responsibly in April or May making questionable choices by year's end. That shit will get much, much worse when a vaccine hits. People who've felt like they've been held captive for a year will go nuts and we will likely be forced to face another six months of lying low.

That said, I do think there is much to look forward to with 2021. For starters, *979Represent* will ease its way back into paper and ink production and distribution in January (more about that next month). I expect we will see live shows downtown by late spring. LOUDFEST XIII may-haps? Let's not get hasty there. I don't think we will see Texas Reds or LOUDFEST or anything else quite like what we've been accustomed to next year, but I do think that largely people will begin to start to getting their feet wet on reentry into the social world. One thing I think folks need to prepare for is that *not everyone who quarantined will want to come back*. Not that they will disappear in a Marvel blip or anything, but some people just won't go back out. In the past year we've become accustomed to being homebodies out of necessity. Some will choose to stay sheltered in place even when it's relatively safe to come out the bunker. Those of you who will gleefully fall out the panic room should remember not to give those who decide to stay in too much grief.

Mostly I believe 2021 will be a year of fits and starts. There will not a steady incline of society going "back to normal". It will likely be as uncomfortable and full of indecision at times as 2020 was. I am cautioning you all to be patient, stay positive (except on your damn 'Rona tests), and try to have some grace with 2021. Just be cool, Fonzi. — KELLY MENACE



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# ATTEMPTING TO STEAL A MAGA HAT

A couple of years ago, our kids went to a Homeschool Co-op, which is held at a church and has pretty strict requirements for enrollment (which we lied about so we could stay in the school).

We didn't lie at first, because at the time when we started, we were believers in God and the Bible and Jesus and stuff and went to church. We began to question our views, stopped going to church, then also pulled away from our beliefs of those made-up and oppressive things. But, in the meantime, the kids were already going to classes at this school, had friends there, liked a couple of the teachers, and were actually learning stuff...along with learning some critical thinking skills as they had to decipher between science and Bible stories, reality and history, and biblical morality as opposed to regular human morality. They also started becoming disgusted at the school's views against gender, sexuality, abortion, women's roles, etc. So, by the end of it, I started realizing that they weren't really being graded very stringently (and ultimately not really learning all that much), and so I took them out and we started doing more schooling at home. More than we had been anyway.

Well, while they were still in school, my oldest texted me one day and told me outright that a dad had just driven up on a motorcycle and had left a MAGA hat on the handlebars, and that she wanted to steal the hat. I didn't tell her not to. I also didn't tell her to do it. I can't remember exactly, but I'm sure I mentioned that stealing was wrong or something like that. But in the meantime, she had already done it, but she hadn't told me that. I was on my way to pick them up and ultimately forgot to ask her if she had done it or not.

I'm all about experiencing things, and my thought was that if she was seriously considering stealing this hat, she was going through all the emotions and physiological responses that come with stealing something. Planning, stressing, noticing everything, strategizing, figuring out what the story is gonna be if you get caught in the act, etc. I was happy for her to be having this experience. Personally, I didn't think she was gonna go through it, but I didn't want to be all "parental" and say, "Hey, don't steal!" She's old enough to know why stealing is not a good idea.

So, we get home, and I get a call. It's the main lady at the school, and she's asking me if my daughter had taken a hat that wasn't hers. I was like, I don't know, I'll go ask. She had. Someone had seen her do it.

I told the lady that I'd take it back. I asked my daughter if she wanted to go with me and she was like, "No." I said, no problem. I'll do it.

Well, I get to the school, and the owner of the hat is a big muscular dude. Oh shit. And he's pissed. I hand him the hat, and he asks me why my daughter stole his hat. I should have really thought through all of this. I told him I think it was a "trophy". That didn't go well. She had posted a picture of the hat in her backpack for her friends, so

yeah, "trophy". Her motivation was, "Fuck this guy. I'm gonna take his MAGA hat."

He basically flexed and got all in my face. Then I agitated him a little (heh) by saying that my daughter thought Trump was terrible. (So did I, but I didn't want to get punched). Man, he went on a tirade about all the good things Trump was doing for the country. I was biting my tongue to not say anything about how Trump was a terrible person.

Sure, he's done things that his followers think are great for America, and I'm sure those things are great for some people, half the population in fact, but not for the other half. I mean, I don't totally know the "good" that he's done and how it's actually affected America. I know what he's done. I know he's all about the economy and cares little for the environment. I know he is against abortion, homosexuality, and immigrants. I'm also pretty certain he's racist, but also certain he is not super smart...unless he's trying to manipulate or intimidate. I can tell

all these things by listening to him speak when he's off teleprompter. That's the real Trump. I think he's a terrible person, and a Narcissist, and a dickhead, and a liar (gaslighter), and not a representative of my values and concerns, but whatever. The dude went on about how terrible Obama was. Something about how he has money in the bank because of Trump. Meanwhile, I am backing up, heading for my car, trying to de-escalate. I should have asked him about his motorcycle. It was really cool.

The main school lady came out and kinda got between me and the musclebound noisemaker, and asked me in "private" if everything was OK. She had been watching the whole thing and I think she was afraid I was gonna get assaulted. I didn't think he was gonna do anything. He was just puffing. He probably had a boner. I apologized for my daughters actions (I only partly meant it), and got in my car and left. She did in fact get written up, which was not the first time...for different reasons of course.

On the drive home, I thought of what I should have done, and I will be kicking myself about it for the rest of my life. On my deathbed, I will say to my daughter, "My only regret is that I didn't get you that MAGA hat!"

Here is what I wish I had done. I really wish that I had, in an honest, almost "embarrassed parent" way, told him that my daughter was actually kinda infatuated with Trump. That she in fact idolized him and maybe even loved him. That she wouldn't stop talking about how great he was and all the great things he was doing, and that he looked so good and healthy and verile. And that I WOULDNT buy her her own MAGA hat because I didn't agree with Trump and his policies. That she cried every night because I didn't agree with her about Trump. I considered saying that her dream was to be grabbed by the pussy, but I know that would have been too much. That would have broken the story.

In my fantasy, this puffed up angry motorcycle dad would have softened, and said, "Hey, would you do me a favor and give this to her?" Damn. — JORGE GOYCO

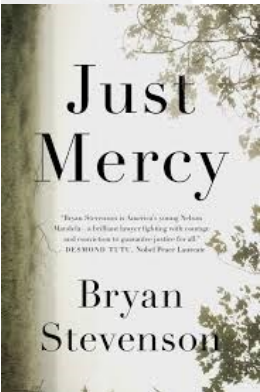


## A FEW BOOKS THAT MADE 2020 MORE BEARABLE (and then one stinking bad lemon)

The prolonged COVID-inspired quarantine season (not unique for introverts), combined with my still drying out and itchy mind (much more unique), meant ingestion of far too much caffeine and way too many pages in 2020. Looking at my list of read-books from the past year, some strike me as a blur. (Did I really read over a dozen *Archie Comics Jumbo Digests*?) I'll avoid anything here resembling a Best Books of 2020 list and, instead, offer seven titles worthy of recommendation (while saving notes on Tara Westover, Nikki Giovanni and Alan Jacobs for the new year)—including the worst book to ever cross my ocular threshold, which is still recommendable for that fact alone. Books below list in chronological order of consumption, not necessarily reflecting preference, and you'll find each title followed by a quick and dirty "WHAT IT IS" and "WHY YOU SHOULD" blurb. I'm open to recommendations for the coming year—(hamsterglory@gmail.com). Let me know what to work in between Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* (reviews say it's like Borges with an actual finale) and Walter Tevis' *The Queen's Gambit* (the blurbs by Ondaatje and Lethem sold me!). On with the nerdery!

### 1. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson (2014)

WHAT IT IS: Stevenson works as a lawyer for the Equal Justice Initiative (look it up).



His book works both as a memoir of his career, including the genesis of the E.J.I., as well as an anthology of his most challenging cases. The story of Walter McMillian, featured in the film adaptation, is just one case of questionable justice presented in his text. Unlike the film, Stevenson's book focuses primarily on youth who are too easily swallowed into obscurity by the legal system, especially as youth are rarely "grandfathered" into the same laws that govern adult offenders while being transitioned into adult-correctional facilities. His reports of youth kept for years in solitary confinement for minor and petty crimes are nightmarish.

WHY YOU SHOULD: I'm beginning my list with the most devastating title here, but I also began 2020 reading Stevenson, who offered a challenging charge of compassion and Christ-like self-expulsion to a year that would require more of me emotionally or spiritually than I could muster. (Just writing that statement feels like an invitation to revisit Stevenson at year's end.) My great concern is that a voice like Stevenson's can be too easily politicized as either too blue-state liberally bleeding-heart ("Set the captives free!") or too red-state conservatively evangelical ("Set the captives free!"), when—in actuality—Stevenson presents himself as an average dude who recognized problems he could devote energies and expertise to solving. He also tells about several times sharing tea with Rosa Parks and never feeling led to speak; rather, he felt content to absorb her stories and wisdom, her quiet determinism, digesting her presence like food. Eventually, the mutual friend (also an older Black lady of Parks' generation) who invited Stevenson to tea asked him to share his career story with Parks. When he told her, Rosa Parks said, "Honey, that's gonna make you tired, tired, tired." Crap. I love that. Such a story provokes me to wonder what makes me "tired, tired, tired" and if it's important enough to need

the stories of saints to feed me. That's reason enough to read Stevenson.

### 2. *Ordinary People* by Judith Guest (1976)

WHAT IT IS: Slim gut-puncher of a family-tale about an affluent nucleus split by grief and trauma. Guest also makes a powerful case for the value of counseling at a time when Americans just did not do that. The novelty of a person destined to listen and ask questions and pass the shovel of self-exploration back and forth feels distinct in Guest's narration.

WHY YOU SHOULD: A film version starring Donald Sutherland and Mary Tyler Moore cannot possibly do Guest's novel justice. I've got a boycott on the film. The novel is book-eared with my too-close-for-comfort moments. For instance, although I read *Ordinary People* expecting to relate to the son, who was alienated by his own melodrama, I instead resonated with Beth, the mother, who was totally stripped numb to the point of inhumanity by guilt. I only mention this because Guest's novel should appeal to anyone born into a shadow-sheathed *Imago Dei* and a non-Rockwellian family . . . which is pretty much all of us.

### 3. *There There* by Tommy Orange (2018)

WHAT IT IS: A novel constructed by interwoven and overlapping short stories about a disparate community of Native Americans living in modern day Oakland, California. There's some addiction and depression and ethnic ambiguity. There's some fetal alcohol syndrome and debilitating constipation and grotesquely bad skin. There's some awkward sex and free-wheeling nostalgic bicycling and guns made from 3-D technology. And there's this big pow-wow where all the stories and characters eventually collide. You totally see it coming, but you still have to be right there in the room when it all blows. Good on Orange for that kinda climax.

WHY YOU SHOULD: Orange's narrative construction alone—his ability to weave and lap so many characters and details with unforced ease—is itself a marvel. The fact that each story functions both uniquely and in concert as a unified arc guarantees *There There* will be studied in MFA programs (or it should). I also appreciated encountering a character governed so profusely by his bowels.

### 4. *The Maid's Version* by Daniel Woodrell (2013)

WHAT IT IS: An Ozarkian backwoods story of deception, small-town justice and one explosive night at the town dance from the dude who penned *Winter's Bone*. This story centers on Alma, mother of three and maid to wealthy community pillars, burdened by the presumptuous secrets of others, as well as their potential consequences. In the late 1920's, Alma's sister is killed alongside a sizable percentage of a small community in an unexplained explosion. Culprits include St. Louis mobsters, local priests, out-skirt gypsies, and even Alma herself. This ain't your Great Gatsby kinda Charleston.

WHY YOU SHOULD: I started Woodrell's novel one morning over coffee and, within a dozen pages, forgot the day's plans. Later that night, I finished the novel and tried to determine which of about half a dozen folks to send my copy. My dad won out. He and I both agreed: it's set in a South Missouri that—dear Lord—feels too much like South Arkansas and, sadly, in all the not-right ways.

### 5. *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng (2017)

WHAT IT IS: The absolute worst television my wife and I watched this year was Reece Witherspoon and Kerry Washington's painfully didactic *Little Fires Everywhere* on Hulu. Ironically, Ng's novel of the same title was

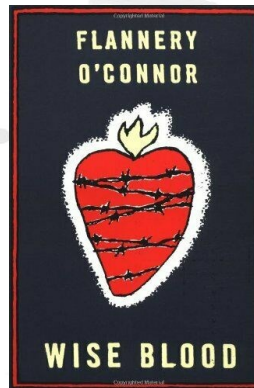
# STILL READING

among the best I read. You've got yourself two families here—one with loads of people and lots of

money; the other with a mother and daughter who can barely afford square meals—who meet with a Shalom-shattering impact like the blistering collision of Hallmark and Lifetime vying to out-Christmas one another. That metaphor barely works *except* that the town of Shaker Heights (kinda like the networks in my metaphor, just go with it) proves as much a manipulative, overbearing, facade-driven character as any in the cast of broken matriarchs. Another two peripheral families—one more with money, but also infertility; the other, a single-mother with a colicky infant—ignite the inevitable fire, so that this is yet one more title on the list here that ends explosively.

WHY YOU SHOULD: Because Celeste Ng is the real damn deal. Unfortunately, Hulu allowed Witherspoon and Washington to finagle a far-fetched race-shaming morality tale from a wonderful—and wonderfully written—novel about the essence of what it means to nurture well. After finishing *Little Fires Everywhere*, I immediately bought and relished Ng's debut novel—*Everything I Never Told You* (2014)—which is so deliciously devastating I read the whole thing twice. Call me a Celeste Ng fan-boy. Seriously, I almost made a t-shirt.

PS. Listen to Brene Brown's interview with Celeste Ng on her podcast *Unlocking Us*. I love Brene Brown (nearly got a Brene-themed tattoo in 2017), but I was enthralled by Celeste Ng's refusal, at Brown's repetitive request, to



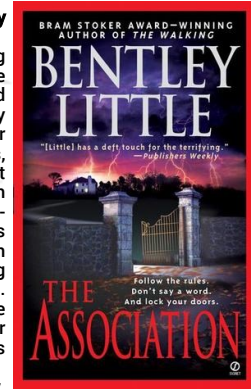
### 6. *Wise Blood* by Flannery O'Connor (1952)

WHAT IT IS: Well . . . that's tough to say. There's a preacher boy with a hat stepping off a train and buying a bottomless car. And there's another boy convinced the preacher boy is a prophet. And there's this dried-up gorilla down at the zoo that might be a deity. And then there's this whole cache of other preachers and whores and blind charlatans with loose-thighed daughters who heap about blasphemies and stinky sex and more blindness—both physical and spiritual—so that even reading about them feels claustrophobic at best. Ain't a single soul in this book truly bound for the Promised Land, and not a one of them gives two flicked nickels about it. And that's the kind of book you forgot this here is.

WHY YOU SHOULD: Flannery O'Connor is unmatched in weirdness and dry, dark humor, and she might very well be a comic amalgamation of Thomas Aquinas, a Loretta Lynn ballad, and the photonegative of a *Saturday Evening Post* cover. I wish to have met her just once if only to run away for fear of her full light on my bald eyes.

### 7. *The Association* by Bentley Little (2001)

WHAT IT IS: Stephen King and Dean Koontz write one kind of horror novel, and then guys like Bentley Little write a totally other kind. *The Association*, without question, that other kind. It begins with an all too true-to-life premise when a couple buys their dream home and then encounters an overbearing Homeowner's Association. What begins with simple annoyances—tickets for illegal landscaping, notices against Joni Mitchell



amplified during the day, massacred cats in mailboxes—turns into all out domestic war. There's even a dude named "Stumpy" who lives in the juniper bushes of the walking trail and who has no arms, no legs, no tongue, but a freshly changed loin cloth. Some murder happens. More dead pets happen. A locked chastity belt and swallowed key happens. A new Stumpy, resembling a recent guest who never reported making it home, happens. And then the scatological finale happens, and, well, you can just never unsee all that. *The Association* is 450 pages of giddy insanity and pure filth that I devoured like sparkling water in a belching contest. Delightful. Dirty, dirty, dirty, and delightful. Some of us never outgrow a certain sort of campfire tale.

WHY YOU SHOULD: Honestly, you probably shouldn't.

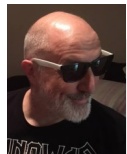
### 8. *A Good Neighborhood* by Therese Anne Fowler (2020) WHAT IT IS: The worst novel I've read in years.

MORE ON WHAT IT IS: Black people. White people. A property line. Black lady and White lady attend a long-winded bookclub (see \* below). Star-crossed and racially forbidden teenage love. Forced metaphors about trees. Landscape drama! Toxic masculinity. NPR vs. SUVs. Step-daughter incest. Some sex. A hunk of cheese, a bottle of wine, a knife. Incestuous rage. Some death. Some forgetting. More trees. Alas, more landscaping. A dramatic How-(Not)-To-Be-Woke companion to Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. \$24.99 in hardcover.

WHY YOU MAYBE STILL SHOULD: In his book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Stephen King recommends that all writers should read a few really bad books (he even offers suggestions, including V. C. Andrews' *Flowers in the Attic*), just to understand what did not work. I think this is true for readers as well: we should see the worst of the worst just so we might acknowledge why the hell it's so very, very bad. Also, reading Fowler helped me appreciate Flannery O'Connor and Celeste Ng, even Bentley Little, all the more.

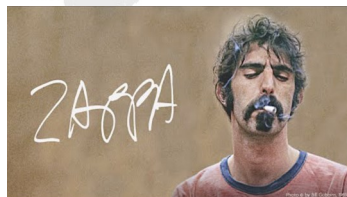
\* Fowler, what are you doing writing a book club discussion into your book? That's so amateur. Nothing screams sophomore sermonizing like a bookclub discussion in a book—or even a TV show based on a book, like in the Hulu adaptation of *Little Fires Everywhere*. Such heavy-handed micro-managing of your characters assures readers that they cannot be trusted with nuance or the complexity of true human drama. Celeste Ng did not write a book club discussion into her book (she's too good for that), but Witherspoon and Washington still stared holes into each other in their televised book club. OH HEY! I just put it together: in both weak titles—Fowler's novel and Hulu's adaptation -- a sermonizing book club is how they forced Black and White characters into a room and a bottle of wine together. And *voilà*! Centuries of racism solved via literature and a charcuterie board. — KEVIN STILL





## RENTED MULEVIES

*Joe's Garage.* Then there is the silliness of inane songs such as "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow" and "Valley Girl" (but even his stupid tunes are catchier than I'd like to admit).



Zappa was a fearless iconoclast possessing musical freedom most musicians only dream of. Or was Zappa a musical genius or a pretentious

bullshit artist? The documentary *Zappa* more or less answers this question with a straightforward look at his life. This film is mostly clips of Zappa telling his own story; which makes for a stronger film. Talking head intrusion is kept to a minimum – family members and Steve Vai only. The central point *Zappa* makes is of Zappa was a focused, serious (though not lacking a dark wit), composer obsessed with getting his music out the way he wanted it heard. His asshole moments came not from being a pompous "rock star" but from people misunderstanding his work and/or getting in the way of his craft. The part of *Zappa* that really got this point across was his daughter Moon Unit writing her dad a note asking if she could work on a song with him just so she could get some face time with her dad. So was Zappa a bullshit artist? Maybe. Was he a musical genius? Absolutely. *Zappa* as a documentary works for two reasons: 1) the strength of the subject being covered in the film; and 2) not falling into the standard cliché moments of rock documentaries. — *RENTED MULE*

## HOW TO OWN A DRAGON

Many young adventurers treasure their first flight on a dragon as a rite of passage. However, it is important to remember that flying is a privilege rather than a right. Dragons are not mere tools like swords or even wands; they are powerful magical creatures who have lives of their own, and can be very dangerous, especially to an untrained youth. Here is some wisdom to recall as you take to the air:

- Unless you have reached your understood day, you should not expect to be granted custody of a dragon. In extraordinary circumstances (suddenly orphaned, prophecy foretells it), petition the monarch for an exception.

- Just because dragons can breathe fire does not mean they ought to do so at all hours. During daylight, your dragon should only occasionally be exhaling smoke. If your dragon breathes fire during the day, that is usually a sign that you are directing it too aggressively, and you should take a break. However, if your dragon does not breathe fire at night, it may be invisible to passing beasts. Consider traveling with a floodlight to indicate your position.

- Runestones in the earth are there for your guidance. It is important to know the difference between runes guiding you straight ahead, marking unicorn habitats where dragons are not permitted entrance, and warning you of changing weather/magical conditions. Although carved with the finest axes, runes may become obscured in inclement weatherlike conditions. It is important to direct your dragon slowly, and be alert for changing conditions on the ground.

- A jug of ale is often a well-earned refreshment after a long day of adventuring. However, if you have been carousing, your dragon will become ill-tempered and restless. You could be strangled by the leash, or your dragon could begin clawing at your brothers-in-arms on the ground. Never fly a dragon if you have been at the bottle. Seek refuge in an inn or an encampment, and let your dragon rest.

- If you are under an enchantment, be it to heal your wounds or increase your strength, the residual magic aura may distract your dragon and cause it to behave unpredictably. Make sure you consult with the sorcerer who has enchanted you before attempting to fly your dragon.

- A well-fed dragon should not prey on other animals. However, if your dragon is ill or irritable, it may interrupt its flight to eat wild deer or hounds. If you find yourself in such a situation, do not leave the scene. Look for a nearby vassal or ranger, who may ask you to pay restitution to the local feudal lord. If you are unable to provide restitution, your dragon may be confiscated. For this reason, it is highly advisable to join a guild for mutual aid and protection.

- Your dragon's leash may wear with repeated use. It is good practice to have it inspected by a blacksmith once every full moon.

- You should make sure to feed your dragon fresh crystals before it becomes fatigued from starvation. When journeying in unfamiliar areas, consult with runestones to find the location of spellcaves.

- Never touch dragon droppings, whether yours or someone else's. Crystal dust in the atmosphere may pose a catastrophic risk to accelerating the rise of evil overlords, but this is a small price to pay for dominion of the skies.

- When flying in winter weather, do not rely on frozen lakes or rivers to support your dragon. If your dragon alights on a lake, abandon it and trust it to reconvene with you later. Remember, you can replace a dragon, but you can't replace your life. — *STARKNESS*

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# ROCKY, BUT MAKE IT CHESS & A LADY

Men will applaud a woman's success in an arena they traditionally dominate, so long as they can mitigate the terms of her success every step of the way. So it's no surprise that in a series written and directed by men, the story they choose to tell in *The Queen's Gambit*, the popular Netflix series, is of a talented, headstrong woman (Beth Harmon) who is only able to obtain stratospheric success after a series of chess/life lessons with well-meaning men who have deemed her worthy of their tutelage. And all of these well-meaning men, with the notable exception of her very first mentor, orphanage janitor Mr. Shaibel (played by Bill Camp, who easily out-acts every other male cast member in the series), conveniently see no issue with seeking a sexual relationship with Beth, regardless of the fact that she was a literal child when they met her. It's the same tired message women have heard and absorbed from countless books, movies, TV shows, and songs: if a man is nice enough to you, he earns the right to have sex with you. (It's also a common narrative amongst the "good guys" turned men's rights activists.) Luckily, Beth is down for both mating and checkmating — RIP another suffering victim of the "not like the other girls" trope. The writers are so insistent that we understand how "not like the other girls" Beth is that they introduce her to Cleo, a French woman who works as a model, so Cleo can clarify (Cleo-fy?) to both Beth and the audience that Models Are Pretty And Extremely Dumb, but Beth Is Pretty And Extremely Smart, Which Is Rare! Wow!

In case we needed more lessons on How Women Are, Beth's two mothers — her biological mom and her adoptive mom — are also extremely talented in their own ways. Her biological mother is implied to be a math genius, and her adoptive mother is shown to be a deft and passionate pianist. But neither of these women have a consistent male presence in life. Unlike Beth, kindly men do not teach them to harness their raw talent. Beth's biological mom spirals into a dark mental illness and commits suicide. Her adoptive mom spirals into ennui-fueled substance abuse and dies of a drug overdose. Without the steadying force of a Nice Man, the show tells us, talented women will simply wither and die when left to their own devices. Uh oh!

The other key female presence in Beth's life is her friend

Jolene, whom she met when they were both children at the orphanage. Jolene is the only Black character in the

show with a storyline, but her storyline is tiresomely tethered to the white protagonist. So much so that when Jolene reconnects with Beth after nearly a decade without contact, she tells Beth she's been breathlessly following Beth's chess career this whole time. In the intervening years, Jolene has apparently experienced a glow up from orphanage troublemaker to aspiring Civil Rights attorney who proudly boasts that she is sleeping with her white boss. (Unsurprisingly, the show treats this as a fun and rebellious quirk to Jolene's life, not an example of heinous workplace sexual abuse.) Jolene's character skirts extremely close to the edge of the racist trope of the wise Black person whose existence in a story is defined by their desire to help a white protagonist. The writers know this, too, which is why they basically have Jolene announce as a

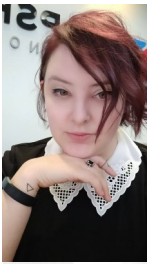
line of dialogue that actually, she is not that trope, thank you very much. But in the same sequence, Jolene decides that helping her white friend win a chess tournament in Russia is more important than the law school tuition required to be a Civil Rights attorney, and gives Beth the thousands of dollars she needs to get to Russia without a second thought. Ultimately, with Jolene, the show does what is unfortunately very typical when white writers are in charge: they check off the box of "Addressing Race Struggles In A Show Set In The 1960's" without giving the single Black character of consequence in the show anything substantive to do or say that isn't directly in service of the white protagonist.

*The Queen's Gambit* is a slick and gripping show that aims to produce cheers of feminist triumph from its audience (they may as well have titled it "The YAS QUEEN's Gambit"). But the story is told from such a retrograde male perspective that, not only does it fall short of any basic feminist litmus test, it actively promotes the idea that racism and patriarchy are essential for women to thrive.

On a much pettier note, I find the character of Benny Watts wispily irritating. What is going on with his hair, his wispy mustache, that gross jacket, those necklaces? Truly a mess. Not buying this re-emergence of the kid from *Love Actually*. — KELLE KAMPA







# MY PAIN IS FULL OF HOPE

I was 12 or 13 and doubled over in pain. I had started bleeding and thought I was going to die. But no, I was not dying, it was my first period. The pain felt deep inside me, like barbed wire or tiny knives stabbing my pelvis or as if my insides were going to be squeezed until they burst. I was scared and I was a kid. I did what any kid my age would do and I talked to my parents. I expressed my abdominal and pelvic pain to my mother who said it was just cramps and they are normal. I was only in pain the first one to two days so I assumed it was what every person experiences when they have a period. No one could feel what I was feeling so I had to trust that what I was being told was true.

By high school the pain had gotten worse. Oftentimes I would throw up throughout the day at school. It felt like something was burning inside of me. I didn't understand how all these other people could be experiencing this same pain and appear to be fine. I was nauseated and would lay on the bathroom floor at home and sob every month. I vividly remember throwing up from the pain and reaching out for anything or anyone to help comfort me but I was alone in the bathroom. I touched the wall for some comfort or support. I'm not really sure why. The pain began to spike again, my nails dug into the paint and scratched it off as they began to tear and crack from the pressure.

My parents took me to a doctor and discussed the symptoms I had been having. The doctor said I may have endometriosis which is a chronic pain disease believed to be caused by tissue that mimics the lining of the uterus or endometrium growing in my abdominal cavity. The doctor said I should start on light birth control to stop the pain. Changing my hormone levels would probably make it go away. Of course my extremely Christian parents didn't want me to start on birth control at age 15 -16 because they thought, I guess, that I would start having crazy amounts of sex thinking I wouldn't get pregnant. But they knew how much pain I was in and agreed. The medication seemed to help and so I returned back to normal teenage life, without teen orgies or sex magic.

My first sexual experience I remember thinking about how everyone told me it would probably hurt but it would get better. So I just tried to enjoy myself and tried ignoring the pain during the very quick encounter. Sex as a teen doesn't have a lot of flare and my experience was semi clinical. The pain was in my entire pelvis, not just my vagina. It moved into my hips and shot down into my thigh. It was burning, spiking, stabbing and I was sure that the pain I experienced during my first time wouldn't happen again. I mean it's just because it was the first time that it hurt, right? Eventually, when I did have sex again, it still hurt and it would hurt afterwards for a few days. Not so much the stabbing pain but it was more soreness and irritation. I just chalked it up to being "too tight" or the lack of lube. I didn't know anything about sex. I was a kid. I was hopeful.

Fast forward into my early 20s. I expanded my sexual experiences. It was always somewhat painful and I would be sore for days afterwards. Not just sore from cool positions and stuff but actually sore inside my body. My pelvis always felt inflamed and I would have light bleeding for a few days. I didn't talk to any of my friends about this and just assumed it was all normal. I

assumed that sex was painful for all people with vaginas in some ways and that while some parts of it were enjoyable, over all, it was a mixed bag of experiences. I still was convinced that there wasn't anything wrong with me. I thought maybe I just had a smaller body or I had a low pain tolerance. I was taught when growing up that "pain is weakness leaving my body," an awful phrase told to my father throughout his military career. He would say it jokingly to us as kids. I guess I thought there was truth in it. I didn't want to seem weak and as a young adult I definitely didn't want to admit that there was anything wrong with me when it came to sex. I just wanted to be normal and fit in. I wanted to have normal experiences and live what I thought were the best years of my life.

Around 25/26 years old I noticed that my periods had become excruciating. Once again the pain somehow came back but this time it wasn't just isolated to the timeframe around my period. It could happen at any time. I read up on ovulation and thought maybe my pain was happening during my period and when I was ovulating but I was on birth control so it didn't quite make sense to me. I decided it was time to see a doctor and discuss what I was going through. I was recommended to a doctor in town and went to see her. This doctor was different. I felt at the time like she really listened to me. Like she really understood that my pain was real and we tried multiple medications/birth control pills over a few years to see what would work. At first I thought it just must be that my body didn't like certain medications. I mean not every person responds the same way. Our bodies are all different so not every medication will work for every person. As I kept trying more and more medications I felt defeated. I had tried every birth control pill that was on the market at that time. I settled on what I thought helped me the most and didn't bring it up again with my doctor. Constantly going into a doctors office and not having any positive results left me crushed and numb. I didn't want to keep going and spending money on a lost cause. Still no one had told me really that all the pain I was experiencing wasn't normal.

Taking a good look back, I think I didn't bring up my pain for so long because I was ashamed of it. No one else talked about it happening to them. I didn't want to feel like the weakling. I had been taught to suck it up, to endure and to keep going no matter what. I didn't want to rock the boat. I didn't want to feel like a burden or a basket case.

After being on new medication for a while I started a new serious relationship. That's really right when my pain started to be what I now consider to be chronic. Like day in and day out CHRONIC. It felt like I had this mass of pressure in my pelvis. Like I always felt this heaviness and this weight inside me. It would ache and scream and rear its ugly head often. Had I really been paying attention I would have realized that this pain would ruin my relationship in more ways than one.

At this point, I was in and out of the doctors office trying new medications AGAIN. I was trying to have a new relationship and trying to please my boyfriend, just assuming that pain was part of the deal. I was struggling mentally every day to keep it together. I felt that I needed to live up to this version of myself that I had in my head, this version of myself that other people wanted me to be. Eventually my pain became so intense that I couldn't really leave my bed. When I tried to get up I

would get these massive cramps. My entire body would start cramping. It was like calf cramps were in my abdomen, my whole body was wrapped in invisible thorns. Using the bathroom was painful. I started having deep stabbing pains in my rectum. Trying to use the bathroom was a chore. I couldn't let my bladder get too full or else my entire body would cramp and I would wince in pain. I remember going to the grocery store with my boyfriend and having what I believe was a cyst rupture in the middle of the chip aisle. I doubled over in pain. I put my hand over my mouth because I wasn't sure if I was going to scream or vomit. Slowly I gained my composure and told my boyfriend we needed to leave. He just kind of looked at me like when you see an animal in the wild. He didn't really know what to do. He just stared. I never really took the time to express my pain to the people close to me. I didn't even tell him then how much pain I was in. He could just tell by how pale my face got and my shaky hands and sweaty palms that I didn't feel well. I should have said something but I didn't. I should have gone back to the doctor or the emergency room immediately but I didn't. I had heard horror stories of people with chronic pain being treated like drug addicts in the ER and told the pain was all in their head. I felt alone and kept it to myself. Don't make a scene, don't make a fuss, just keep everything easy and keep everything going.

Even after this instance, my boyfriend would ask if we could have sex and of course I would say no. I was in pain. I was uncomfortable and I was faking a smile every single day. There was no way I could have sex let alone try to "help him out" when I felt exhausted and like Freddy Krueger was living in my abdomen.

I went back to the doctor and she suggested I have an exploratory laparoscopic surgery to see if I had endometriosis. Endometriosis is a disease in which cells (that appear similar to endometrium, the lining of the uterus) grow inside your body much like cancer, imbed themselves in nerves and can squeeze and bind organs together. The disease won't kill you but it can cause extreme chronic pain. Pretty much imagine that Spider-Man decided to go inside your abdominal cavity and just go crazy with his webs and run amuck. There is only ONE true way to diagnose endometriosis and that is through a laparoscopic surgery where you remove the tissue and send it out for testing. No other test or procedure exists today that can actually diagnose you with it until those cells can be found and tested. I had to wait three to four months before I could have my surgery because my current insurance plan wouldn't cover it. So for those months, I stayed mostly in bed or seated. I smoked weed to help with the pain, I tried to do as little activity as possible. People thought I was lazy, I was uninterested, I was distant and yeah I was two of those three things for sure. I could only focus on surviving and keeping the mask of health on for so long. I physically could not handle anything else. My relationship was falling apart and I didn't know how to express to my boyfriend why I couldn't be there for him or even why him asking for sex knowing some of the pain I was in was inappropriate. He didn't get it. I didn't know how to explain. I just stayed high and slept a lot.

Finally, I went in for surgery in January of 2015. I was 27 years old. I wasn't even scared to have surgery. I was ready to figure out what was causing me so much pain all the time. Well, what was supposed to be an hour and half long surgery turned out to be closer to four hours.

Endometriosis and scar tissue were found all over my uterus, ovaries, intestines and colon. The adhesions had bound my right ovary to the back of my uterus, my uterus was then bound to parts of my colon and my entire pelvic cavity was full of cysts and adhesions. My tubes were 100% blocked with scar tissue and there was no way that I would be able to conceive a child naturally. The doctor performed an excision surgery where the endometriosis is cut out instead of ablation/burning so that all the endometriosis, even the cells that had rooted deep within other tissue could be removed. It was so much longer in fact that they had to call in someone who was off work to come in and help assist that day. It took about two months to recover from surgery but to be honest I felt alright afterwards and was very hopeful that I would be able to experience life again.

My boyfriend and I started making more plans for trips, shows, just generally having a good time and for four months it felt like I was on top of the world until suddenly the pain crept back in. It started as just little hints of pain, like lightning bolts, and I pushed them aside thinking it was just nerves growing back but it kept getting worse and worse. Once again I was having abnormal bleeding, burning, twisting and stabbing pain. I remember screaming into pillows and into sinks full of water in frustration. What the fuck is wrong with me and why am I always so damn sick!? At this point the doctor's office seemed pretty annoyed at me and at one point I'm positive the head nurse there thought I was addicted to drugs and just wanted them to write me prescriptions. It was a whole ordeal that I don't want to get into. She thought I was an addict and not in pain. I was discouraged and felt humiliated so I didn't go back. I hated being treated that way. I just sucked it up for a few more months.

It got so bad that I couldn't take it anymore. I finally went back to the doctor. At first she made me do a bunch of tests and put me on medication for IBS even though all of my symptoms were endometriosis related. Finally after BSing around for awhile and wasting money on shit I didn't need to have done I was told that there was only ONE thing left to try that I had not tried yet. This was a drug called Lupron. Lupron is a drug that was originally created to treat prostate cancer. It is considered a type of chemo drug. When used in people with endometriosis it halts your body's hormones. For me that meant all my estrogen would stop being produced almost overnight as soon as I started the treatment. The idea is that by your body producing less estrogen it will start to heal the endometriosis areas and will reduce pain. It's thought that estrogen fuels the growth so this seemed like an option. I thought for a long time about the treatment and I read articles and talked to other women with similar conditions. Across the board it was a pretty mixed review but I decided that maybe temporarily going through menopause wasn't going to be such a bad idea. I regret the decision now but I am not mad at myself for trying anything and everything to feel better when medicine and medical science had little to offer me.

The fall of 2015 I began a six month Lupron treatment. Seemingly overnight I was rushed into menopause and not just the moody hot flash menopause, I mean one day I had estrogen coursing through my body and the next I had pretty much NONE. I gained weight, I was sweating and freezing all the time, I lost hair, I couldn't sleep, my skin became dry and thin, my little

**CONT.->**

interest in sex became nonexistent. But this wasn't some sort of train I could just hop off of. I was stuck. I was miserable. One treatment round lasts around three months. It was like the bad acid trip train I couldn't get off of. Emotionally I was drained and I couldn't express how I was feeling because I had never felt these things before. I was confused and depressed. I was miserable and dare I say more miserable than before.

This was the beginning of the end of my relationship too. My boyfriend would constantly ask for sex and I of course being in constant pain and doing this hellish treatment could not and would not have sex with him. He started to resent me for being sick and I started to resent him for asking for sex all the time. How he worded things made me feel like he thought it was my fault for having this disease and for not wanting to be intimate. It was six months of arguments and feeling like shit. Six months of me feeling bloated, defeated, like a fucking hobbit in Mordor who can't get rid of a ring and is constantly asked if they want to get naked. It was awful. I felt like the world's worst girlfriend. The world's worst "woman" and just generally the world's worst. The treatment ended in May/June of 2016 and by the end of the treatment my pain had decreased by half. It seemed like all the hell had saved me and granted me more time without pain. There was a massive cost but it did do what it was supposed to do. I felt somewhat relieved. I kept apologizing to my boyfriend and trying to do anything he wanted to do (within reason, also keep your head out of the gutter folks)

At this point I was not having periods at all. I was taking only active birth control pills and skipping the weeks I would have a period. I tried my hardest to show how much I cared and that the disease had not beaten me. I tried to act like the past few years hadn't happened and that I could mend our relationship. I was carrying so much guilt about my health condition. I couldn't save the one thing I thought I loved and cared about. We broke up that summer after I got off Lupron. I was more angry than anything. I was angry at him that he stopped trying. Angry because I felt like I tried and I checked in with him so often. I was constantly asking if it was too much to handle and telling him if he needed space or some time away from our relationship that I understood, but he always said he was fine. He was sweeping the feelings under the rug the entire time just like I had been. We weren't meant for each other but my disease did not make it any easier. I decided that with this newfound semi-pain-free life I was going to do something worthwhile and have some fun even if all the bridges I had crossed up until this point I had to burn. I met some new friends and we ended up starting a band a year later so it did in fact pay off a bit and I consider myself to be better off.

For a year it seemed like my treatment plan was working. I would have occasional intense pain but overall I felt like a semi-normal adult with a semi-normal life. I was playing in a band, going to shows, making plans, dating and just trying to be a person again. I felt supported in my community and I truly thought I was out of the woods. But by summer of 2017 the pain was back. I went back to the doctor who I knew by this point probably hated me. I knew all the nurses in her office by name and had most of their cell and office numbers. We decided to try the Mirena IUD before attempting surgery again. She still didn't want to do surgery until I had exhausted all my options. I should have gone to seek a second opinion but I really trusted her and trusted her input.

My IUD experience was not an easy one. It was definitely not a textbook case. I went to the doctor's office after a friend's funeral service cause I figured... why not, that day already sucked. I hadn't eaten much and was pretty glad once it was "installed". I didn't get nervous. Everything I had been told had been positive so I had no idea

that this was going to be a super awful experience for me. It's normal to cramp and have some pain when getting an IUD. They slowly insert the device into your cervix and it can take awhile for it to adjust and "settle" into the right spot for your body. Apparently it is NOT normal to have such excruciating pain that you cry and scream asking them to stop during the procedure and then promptly vomit the full contents of your stomach into the trash can directly after. Who knew? -- Definitely not the doctors or nurses at this office. I am really glad I thought a bit ahead and had my mom there with me so she drove me home where I laid in bed for quite some time and took some not so legally acquired pain killers. To be honest, they were given to me by my dad because he couldn't bear to see me in so much pain. After about a week of what felt like a giant fork being shoved up my vagina I felt a little bit better. I felt like maybe this would work. I had so much hope. Every time I try a new treatment plan I am hopeful. It took awhile but the Mirena seemed to work enough and made my pain a lot more manageable. I would still have monthly flares where my pelvic area would become inflamed. I would get cramps, stabbing feelings, sometimes even cysts would burst occasionally but it wasn't anything I didn't think I could handle. Usually during a pain flare my body will start taking on a lot of inflammation so I would gain anywhere from five to fifteen pounds of bloat in my abdomen each time. Other than feeling like an actual blimp in cheap oversized Old Navy leggings and hand-me-down sweat-shirts, I was managing. I still smoked weed and took pain killers for the pain but it made it more monthly pain than weekly or daily pain so I was happy to take it. Anything to not have a massive surgery again.

Fall of 2018, yup we're still in pain and, no, it did not get fixed that year. I was still in pain and going back and forth to see the doctor. I was really hopeful that she would suggest another surgery. We did another fun square dance of "is this gastro related" and I again told her no and pretty much said she needed to read a new medical journal and research about the disease. When I went back to her office she told me about a brand new medication that had just been approved by the FDA specifically for endometriosis called Orilissa. I had never heard of it. She had never prescribed it to anyone and she was pretty sure I was the first person in Bryan/College Station to be put on this medication. I was hopeful, so I tried it. I wanted to do anything I could to be better. To feel like I was strong and not a weak link. And I'll be damned, it worked. Holy shit! I had my life back once again! It took awhile for the medicine to start kicking in but once it did I was able to play shows, drink beers and have sex...and kind of like it. Don't get me wrong sex never felt great even through all these treatments. I'm now 33 years old and I'm wondering if sex is always going to feel like I'm being stabbed my Edward Scissorhands but in the time being I had my life back and felt pretty normal again.

Well sadly the story doesn't end there. Trust me, I'm as exhausted as you are after reading this! Fast Forward to Fall of 2019, and, you guessed it, the pain was back. I had already upped my doses of Orilissa to the highest dose. I'd tried every medication they make that MAY help with this disease. I'd lost friends, relationships, sanity and hope because of this disease. I went to refill my prescription and was told by the pharmacist that my doctor was no longer my doctor anymore and I needed to find a new OBGYN. I was in my car in the line at Walgreens pretty much speechless because a pharmacist just told me I don't have a doctor anymore. So now I don't have my boyfriend, I don't have a pain free life, I don't have any medication and now I don't have a doctor. I called their office confused and panicked and the lines were down. I'm stressed and angry and trying to figure out what the hell is going on. Is she giving up on me? Did something happen to her? What exactly is happening with this doctor that I trusted. I finally got through to



a nurse (The nurse who hates me) and she said my doctor is no longer doing normal OBGYN visits but she isn't retiring and that they had NO plans of notifying patients until they called their office. I was livid. I go to the doctor when I'm in pain and cannot find a way to ease it. So now I had to find another doctor and hope that they won't start the entire dog and pony show over again and try a bunch of medications that won't work. FUCKING GREAT!

I put out a SOS status post on Facebook for friends to give me suggestions. I tried to keep my calm. If I'm stressed my pain will flare even more than it usually does. I'll tense up my body and that makes everything already irritated and sore hurt even more. I sorted through the recommendations and found a doctor I thought might work. To be honest, I was ready to just dig a hole in a ditch, lay down and die there. I'm not sure how many times someone can be knocked down by the exact same thing but goodness does it feel like I have a Hall of Fame record for Most Endometriosis Strike Outs. It took awhile to get in to see this doctor and to be honest it felt hopeless to hold on for so long. I couldn't guarantee anything would get better or that anyone would take my pain seriously. I have read and connected with so many people who have worse horror stories than I do with this disease and with medical professionals not taking them seriously. But now we're here: Spring of 2020. The doc looked over my file, asked me questions about my previous treatments, and then just told me it was time for surgery. In fact it was past time for surgery. I immediately started crying in the office. I was sobbing. I couldn't stop crying and telling her thank you for believing me. Thank you for immediately believing my pain was real. So many doctors throughout my life would pawn me onto another doctor would send me to gastroenterology and then tell me I had IBS, after being burned by my past doctor who I trusted this felt like a release. She agreed that my previous physician had been passing me back and forth on medication for far too long. She suggested a surgeon in town and when I was able to make an appointment with him (which was three months out) I got in to see him.

To be honest I'm not sure what I was expecting when I sat down with him (Fall 2020). I knew I had done EVERYTHING that modern medicine had to offer me. If you want to spend time looking up this disease and treatment plans you'll find that I've done it all. At this point I know more about my condition than most doctors do. He leveled with me and told me based on my history it was time to do something drastic. He suggested a full hysterectomy and oophorectomy (the removal of the uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries and cervix). When he said the words I didn't process them. I knew that a hysterectomy won't cure my disease because we still don't know what causes it and removing an organ won't guarantee I have no pain. At the same time he was right, maybe JUST maybe it would give me a chance to live my life, to have a FUCKING life. I took some paperwork and told him I would think it over. I got in my car and started driving. I didn't turn on the radio which if you know me I'm always playing music. I don't even think I was breathing at this point. I barely hit the highway and I started heaving and sobbing. I have lived with pain for over 15+ years of my life and all medical professionals can do is damage control. Just like every other person with this disease I was constantly getting the runaround. I'm constantly on the back burner and then when it came to action all medicine can do was say, "Uh... maybe we should just remove some organs?" I don't want to knock his suggestion, he was willing to do an excision or just another exploratory surgery. But he knew based on my medical history that it was highly possible that I would have pain again and removing the organs affected and ovaries that produce estrogen I might be pain free.

So there I was, stuck at a crossroad.

Do I have a smaller surgery knowing the percentage of having my pain return is high at this point?

Do I have this procedure and take the opportunity of having my own children be taken off the table?

I was shaking. I didn't know what to do. Does anyone know what to do in this situation? Have they made a manual and I just didn't get the memo? I wished I had the answers but I didn't instead all I had was a bunch of questions.

I decided to go to Houston and see a specialist for a second opinion. Much like my new doctor here in town she told me that I've done it all except for the hysterectomy but cautioned me to only do what I felt I was mentally capable of doing and handling right now, even if that meant other future surgeries. She also let me know that this surgery would not cure my disease. We don't know what causes endometriosis so of course there is no cure. I would still have endometriosis but maybe this surgery could help ease the pain or completely remove it. I thanked her for her time, I thanked her for being upfront, honest and real, and then drove to a friend's house where I got wicked high and stuffed my feelings down.

It's such a hard thing to process. All my life I've thought I would be a mom. I've dreamed about how I would be that weird pregnant lady that somehow wears overalls and eats pickles and peanut butter and snuggles her baby at night, who cries when their kid goes to prom and learns to drive and who gets old and spends Christmas with her grandkids. But I can't have kids naturally, I found that out five years ago. That "dream" doesn't exist for me, at least not how I dreamt it. I thought a long time about it. I cried in the shower, at 3am in bed, on family and friends shoulders and I finally realized that maybe just maybe this surgery would give me the opportunity to live life and get to experience so much more than I've ever imagined. It might not be what I dreamed, it could be better. Being in pain is no way to live and it's really all I've ever known.

I sit here now, five days until surgery. I am choosing to have a hysterectomy and hopefully keep one ovary, if viable. I am nervous and I am scared but not scared about dying in surgery. The fear of the unknown and the future is what scares me. How am I going to live my life if I'm not in pain? Pain has defined so much around me. I'm scared that I'll take my new pain free life for granted or that this surgery won't help my pain at all and I have lost the chance to carry my own child one day. If I still have pain, what other horrors are in my future? There are more questions than answers and no one can help me. I'm in this alone.

I don't know if this is the right decision but I have to try to forgive myself now just in case it wasn't the best one down the line. I have to choose to fight for my life now just like I've been doing since I can remember and not for what my life could be. Something I've been doing for years now and it never gets any easier. I'm tired of wearing the mask. I'm tired of hiding my pain. I'm tired of being ashamed for something I have never had any control over. But GOD do I hope. I hope in the new year I can let you know if I succeeded. I hope that in the new year I will be a better version of myself: a pain free, joyful version of myself with all the possibilities of the world in front of me. I hope that my story will help you with your journey whatever that may be. I hope that if you are in any kind of pain you will try to seek help. I hope you know that you are more than the pain and trauma you think define you.

I hope. — KIRY JACKSON

# COMICS I ENJOYED WHILST AWAITING THE COLLAPSE...PART 2

This is a continuation of my series of short reviews of comics I am reading lately. But first, some story.

I used to steal comics. Actually, I used to steal a lot of things. Had to be careful with comics, as to not fold them so they would still be "collectible" when I got home. Not "mint", but "fine" at least. I also would steal *Hit Parader*, *Circus*, and *Metal Edge* magazines, especially if they had centerfolds of bands I was into. It was the 80s, so Motley Crue, Ratt, Iron Maiden, Ozzy, AC/DC, Van Halen, etc. My walls were plastered with those guys. It was mostly on base in Torrejon, Spain as my dad was stationed there for four years (80-84).

The little "shoppette" had some areas out of sight of the cashier, so it was pretty easy...of course, buying one comic was always a good idea to dispel any suspicions. There were also some stores in Madrid that if I was careful, I could gank stuff there too. I still have some old Iron Maiden postcards from back then, and dang I wish I still had my patches, but alas, the Satanic Panic of the 90s hit, when my mom threw out all my band shirts and my jean jacket full of (vintage) patches and spikes. There was this huge blocks-long flea market on Sundays that we'd go to called "El Rastro". It was amazing. So much crap, but also several stores and booths to get a 13 year old metalhead erect.

But stealing is wrong.

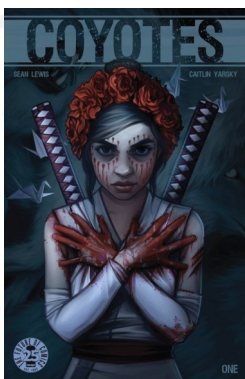
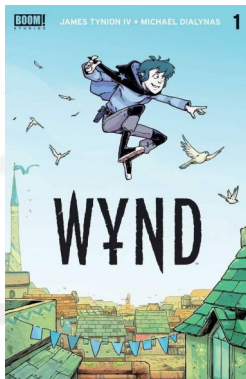
Does my brother (who is the "executor" of the comic collection) know that some of those comics are "hot"? I asked him and he didn't know. He also told me he didn't ever steal any, but he does still have them all. My younger brother became the executor of our Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars collection, but sold them a long time ago for drug cash. Bummer.

BTW, yes, I did get busted shoplifting. Not at the comic book store, but at the BX (kinda like a Target). I stole a blank cassette tape so I could make a mixtape or record the base's radio rock hour on Friday. I had the money in my pocket, but stealing was more fun. I stopped after that. Mostly.

When I was younger, I knew I liked a certain type of comic, but as I've gotten older, my taste has gotten pretty specific and particular. I'm noticing a more specific trait in the comics I like. The stories and world building have to be deep. I need to be transported. I need it to be immersive. I'm kinda also seeing that I need some darkness and I like a little gore. I also like when the characters have depth. Not like, oh, the big lug is the tank...more like, the big lug is really caring and also a tank. He's also sacrificing everything, and he is probably not gay (although the protagonist wishes he was), but is thoughtful, sensitive, and not a bully, but also hotheaded when needed. BTW, this character is from "WYND" (see below).

**WYND** Acceptance, being different, hiding from prejudice. Magical heritage is punishable by death. This story has just begun, but it's fascinating and enthralling. It's the beginning of an epic tale, and the world building

is fantastic. It's got a touch of *The Last Airbender* and a bit of *Lord of the Rings*. Sort of. Greed and fear by the forefathers of the four tribes made the "god" of nature break out of his bounds and infect the whole world, causing chaos, rejection, hate and aggressive survival behavior. The king of the fortified city that is closed off from the effects of magic's infestation is about to die, and his last wish/law is that his son stay the course to never let the "Weirdbloods" infiltrate the city. The Weirdbloods are the ones who have been touched by magic, and they live hidden, below ground, having mutated faces and limbs. Mutated with a plant-like growth. Really interesting mythos. Our hero, a kid, apparently has a purity of this blood, and has to leave the city and go outside to find the truth, and I assume, some way to bring things back to peace. Who knows where this story will go, but it's really cool. As of this writing, there are five issues in the first arc, where they escape from the bad city.



**Coyotes** Quote: "Funny when monsters lose their power—they don't really want to fight, they just want to run." This comic is intense. The art style is fantastic and dark. The storyline is awesome and painful. I guess it's basically about Feminism...to an extent. The main characters are girls and women, who are a resistance army against a corporation that uses ancient wolf pelts to turn men into aggressive and arguably evil wolves. Turns out, the corporation has no idea that they have been empowering these ancient wolves into reviving their power, and the army of women must ultimately fight the ancient wolves. The characters are Latin(x), and the wise ones are "Abuelas" (grandmothers) who are in fact, fucking badass fighters with supernatural powers. The Abuelas end up having to give their lives to bring forth "Gaia", who is the only being able to (or maybe allowed to) fight and kill the ancient wolves. The men/wolves were terrible, the final battle was awesome, the visuals and themes were dark and unrelenting. It was a beautiful story and a beautiful mythology/metaphor. Really glad I found this one.

**Little Bird** Resistance against religious fascism, super dreamlike and surreal. There is communication between memories and prophecy, religious fervor against

modified humans who have evolved in specific ways to fight the oligarchy, and connections between the mind and time.



Well, this story is definitely cohesive, and it's followable, but it starts in a very odd way, basically throwing you in without intros. That's a hard sell for me normally, but the art was so cool and the details and world building so intriguing, that I kept at it. I usually don't. So much gore and surrealness kept me interested. Uber-visual and intricately detailed. I mean, the first scene is of a meeting of the rebellion preparing for an attack, and the characters in that scene are all so intriguing and have a story attached to them. Why is that guy's backpack so big? What's up with that person with vines growing all over him? Who is that lady with a really long sniper? What's the story behind the four robed/faceless beings? Really well done world-building. Excellent bad guys. Little girl hero who isn't really interested in fighting. Those usually make for good stories. Still didn't understand most of it.

**Danger Girl** Dang, such tight clothes and so much fan service. I'm not complaining, but mostly because the story is great. Sort of like an Indiana Jones with hotties, or Nathan Drake and Lara Croft wrote this adventure series. Very tongue in cheek quippy one-liners, and loads of adventure, explosions, bullets flying, artifacts and dastardly evil bad guys. Pretty fun, and so many butt cheeks and cleavage. I believe there's a movie being worked on, or has been worked on or something, which will be fun. I'm assuming it will be a *Charlie's Angels* meets James Bond type action adventure. I read the original series, and am interested in reading some of the spinoffs and extensions. Again, there was enough adventure (and sexiness) to keep me interested, unlike *Lookers* (an over-the-top comic book with a bunch of unnecessary nudity and sex), which is only worth mentioning in passing. *Danger Girl* is fun.

**Something is Killing the Children** Biggest thing that surprised me about this one is how quickly the read is. It's got a very nice pace. The characters are very

likeable, and a good amount of gore. They don't pull punches in making this a horrible tale about a monster that kills children. They've written in some cool rules too. Children can see monsters (even if they've told themselves they don't believe in monsters), most adults can't, some can. The ones that can are the hunters and killers of these monsters. The main girl/hunter gets her info from a plushie octopus. Seems to be a monster's soul or something that has been captured and placed in there I think. There are a ton of secrets that are only for the elite to know. There's a system for identifying the classes of monsters, and a "boss" who our protagonist is reluctant to answer to. The kid who teams up with the monster hunter is bullied and misunderstood. The monsters are fascinating and uninged in their violence. The art style is fairly minimal and just...kinda...off. Really great series.



**Black Hammer** Black Hammer is a whole new universe. It's got it's own superheroes and villains, mythos and worlds, rules and back stories. It's pretty fascinating. I've read the first series, which has the group of heroes stuck in a weird rural town where they can't escape. This is the pedestal for the telling of backstories and how they are dealing. There was an event that happened, then suddenly they were here. They've been here for ten or so

years. One has lost her powers and is stuck in a child's body, which is when she got her powers. One is a witch of sorts, who possibly wants to stay where she's at, and has sabotaged at least one attempt at escape. One is a shape shifting alien who is used to be a cop. The fact that they are stuck in this twilight zone type place makes for a great start to a new set of heroes and stories in a new universe. There are already quite a few published series, including an origins type series that looks like old comic books from the 50s. I hope this universe gets some general audience play. It's really good, and it's darker than Marvel and DC. The World of Black Hammer is sort of a commentary on superheroes and villains, in that, like *The Incredibles* (sort of), we see life after supers are shelved. Very interesting storylines, and art style that looks unlike mainstream superhero comics. — JORGE GOYCO





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## AN EXPERT IN THE WHITE HOUSE

The election of Joe Biden to the presidency in 2020 is the proudest moment in American history since the country elected Barack Obama president in 2008.

Biden's election marks a return to sanity for American politics. We all know the failed policies of the outgoing administration will be a stain on the United States psyche for some time, but that is the past. It's time to move on.

Much has been made by some that Biden's long career of service to America is somehow a detriment to him serving as the most powerful leader in the world. What could be further from the truth? We wouldn't want a used car salesman, whatever his skill level, to perform heart surgery on us. We want someone with experience. The same is true in politics. We've seen the results the past four years of amateurs in the White House.

That the chaos of the last four years has been capped by a world-wide epidemic that was largely ignored as "political" by the lame-duck U.S. leader is fitting. Science and medicine will once again become the norm, thanks to Biden and his growing already-incredible team. Team — that's a key word that has been missing for four years. Did anyone ever feel like they were part of a team in the exiting administration? It was like everyone below the leader was serving time, or maybe that's just how it seemed on the outside.

The most qualified person for president in the past few decades was the first George Bush. The talented Bush had served in the military, was elected to Congress, appointed as UN ambassador, served as chief diplomat to China, selected as CIA director, and elected as vice-president. He knew how to work with people and make deals.

Bill Clinton and George Bush Jr. were both elected governor while Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate. Even before them, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter had been governors of their respective states. Gerald Ford spent a quarter of a century in Congress while Lyndon Johnson served in the House of Representatives, the Senate, and as vice president before becoming president. John Kennedy was elected to the House and the Senate before becoming president.

Experience matters in America. The lack of progress in the United States the past four years is the fault of the transient in the White House.

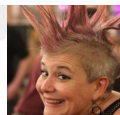
Biden has spent nearly half a century in service to the American people as a U.S. Senator and as vice president. His expertise is sorely needed in the executive branch. However, his greatest gift may well be working with the legislative branch the next four years, which has been the most ineffective in passing legislation than in the past 100 years.

Obama's election in 2008 was an astonishing achievement as Americans chose a Black man to lead the country. When Obama was born, every state in America had Jim Crow laws restricting Black people's right to vote, much less run for office. Yet, in his lifetime, America overcame its racist past to promote change by choosing Obama as the leader of the free world.

The 2020 election of Joe Biden by those 80 million-plus Americans is a return to That promotion of change. The past four years were a misguided attempt to try a different direction, one whose miserable failure is apparent by its repudiation by the majority of Americans. The outgoing administration will be an aberration in American history.

Joe Biden is the President of the United States beginning in 2020. It's a new era of inclusion and of promise. It will be well worth the wait. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

## 2020...THE YEAR THAT SUCKED



In recent years there has been a trend as the year comes to a close to lament the passing year as horrible with proclamations that whatever the new year holds, it has to be better than the current one. Those of us who said such things at the end of 2019 couldn't have been more wrong.

I've made more than a few trips around the sun and as we approach the end of 2020 I'm here to say that it's been a shit year. In fact, despite some really significant highlights (seeing *Hamilton* on Broadway, PRE-APPROVAL COVID and getting a VW camper that I've wanted my whole life) I'm willing to go out on a limb here and proclaim that on the whole, 2020 is the worst year that I've lived through. Fight me.

However, you know I'm not one to complain about things [pause for uproarious laughter], so rather than compile a list of my 2020 grievances which really would be an incredibly long list of whine, whine, whine (however justified that whining may be), and instead delve into what I've learned this year from the pandemic, the election, working retail for the first time, and life in general. If this does nothing more than cause some of you to pause and consider your own growth through this year, that's a result I can live with.

So now, in no particular order, what I've learned from 2020.

—You can never tell people that you love them too many times. There's the obvious reason that none of us knows how long we have so we need to say the important things now before the opportunity passes us by. It's a good reason. But another reason is that life is hard ... sometimes really hard ... and while knowing and hearing that we're loved may not make things any easier, it does remind us that we're not facing hard things alone. When things are at their most scary or frustrating or difficult, the going seems less rough when we have someone holding our hand, whether literally or figuratively).

—I was originally going to say that 2020 had taught me that people are assholes, but I've revised that a bit. Instead, I've learned that in times of crisis, people become more of what they already are. Someone who is kind or generous or supportive tends to become more so, stepping up to the plate to help others even amidst their own issues. Those who are mean-spirited, selfish, and/or narcissistic likewise become more so when crises loom.

—No matter how much you consider Rankin and Bass' *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer* an integral part of the holiday season, and even if you can still sing ALL of the songs from it by heart, hearing the soundtrack on a continual loop while at work will turn you into something of a Grinch.

—Bosses come and bosses go, but when you come across a good one, let them know that they're appreciated. They're few and far between.

—Clorox wipes are a valuable commodity. Same with TP. If you're stocked up but know someone who's been to every store in town trying to find some, share. Like we all learned in kindergarten, cooperation makes things better for everyone.

—Rule followers will follow the rules even when there a little to no consequences to breaking them. Rule breakers will break the rules, consequences be damned.

—Systemic racism will not end in this country until white people understand that a) it exists, b) they benefit from it, and c) they intentionally choose to no longer reap those benefits so that others can know true equality.

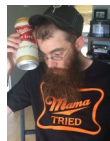
—Cheap hand sanitizer smells like bad tequila. Hand sanitizer that doesn't smell gross is seriously over-priced and/or impossible to come by.

—It's easier to dismiss or ignore pandemic numbers when none of them represent someone you know.

—And finally, we really are stronger together. 2020 isn't going to last forever. And the new year has just as much potential for promise as it does for pain. Just please, please, please, for the love of all things good, do not say that 2021 has to be better cuz it couldn't be any worse!

— **PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER**





# STILL NERDY: WILLIE, SISTER BOBBIE, AND RAY PRICE'S DEAD ROOSTER

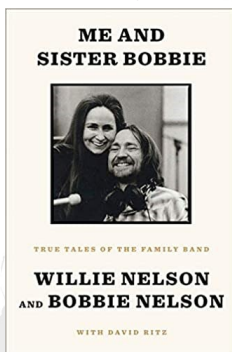
In at least two memoirs, including the recently published *Me and Sister Bobbie*, Willie Nelson tells the story of killing Ray Price's rooster—thereby igniting Price's own "Faded Love" for the Red-Headed Stranger himself. According to these memoir accounts, Price's rooster, who had come to abide the Nelson family coop while Price was on tour, murdered two of Willie's best laying hens. Willie found his wife—I can't remember which wife, as Willie collected a full set—charging the coop with a shotgun. Willie took the gun saying, "If the rooster has to go, I should tell Ray I did the shooting." So he did. He did the shooting, and he did the telling. Price was nonplussed by the news and vowed to never speak to or sing one of Willie Nelson's songs again. This was a great trouble to Willie as the two had shared quite the mutual endearment before the rooster fiasco, but Ray Price stayed true to his word. He did not return phone calls. Did not come out to see Willie on the road. He even turned down spots to share the stage and studio. Naturally, Willie was surprised that so much dissension should sprout from one dead rooster. He even tried to explain, "Ray, you know a rooster ain't nearly worth that of a good laying hen." Willie even offered to replace the hen, but to no avail. Eventually the music won over the bird as Willie caught Ray Price singing one of his songs on TV. So he called his estranged friend and said, "I saw you singing my song. Am I forgiven?" Ray Price said, "Hell, no. It's just too good a song not to sing."

Like the wives, I can't remember which Willie song is in question. Most Willie songs are worth more than the whole coop of cocks and broods. In the words of Kurt Vonnegut, so it goes.

*Me and Sister Bobbie* offers a beautiful testimony of family bonds and broken hearts and jangly tunes. I turned to Willie's shared memoir with his sister thinking it would be a nice, quiet, easy before-bedtime kinda read. I did not expect the writing to be so rich or the stories so compelling. Bobbie Nelson can write her brother under the back porch. Willie may be the family poet and songwriter, but Bobbie is the storyteller. Together they painted images of rural Texas—specifically that stretch out and around Hillsboro and West—that made me forget for just a moment how embarrassing our fair state can be (particularly in political times). Willie tells of discovering the beauty of beer and dance-halls in the Czech communities of West while Bobbie was played a milder-mannered piano for Protestant tent revivals closer to Hillsboro. In those early days of carousing and repentance, brother and sister came home with quite different wines on their breath.

Bobbie also detailed the struggles she faced as a woman playing music in rural Texas. After a certain age, she was seen either as too virtuous to play honky-tonks or too loose to play the church circuit. Men—her brother included—were held to the strict moral code that "boys will be boys", which allowed them to drink and holler all

they wanted on Saturday night and then teach Sunday school the next morning. In fact, this is precisely what Willie Nelson did for several years. Bobbie, on the other hand, had to choose between the two. Because the church circuit proved more dependable and profitable at the time, she left her first band with brother Willie and then husband, Bud. Bobbie's stories of gendered politics grew more dire after her Bud left her with their three children. Bud's parents, and the state of Texas, determined that a piano playing single mother could not provide a stable home or moral backbone for her kids. Bobbie denied several offers to play music professionally in hopes of gaining parental rights of her own children. When she finally signed the papers, she joined Willie's family band. They've been inseparable since.



Willie is also quick to give Bobbie credit for every solid choice he made, outside of trading Chesterfield cigarettes for pot. According to Willie, it was Bobbie's idea to pull together the songs and hymns of their youth to create the *Red-Headed Stranger* record. Next, he claims it was her grasp of the great American songbook that led him to consider making an album of standards titled *Stardust*. In both respects, his record company told him those records were too simplistic or traditional or uninteresting for modern audiences. But Willie trusted Bobbie's instinct and stuck with the tapes he'd made. Both records are still among his most loved and highest selling. I only hope he paid her in royalties what he now pays her in compliments.

Willie's memoir *The Facts of Life (and Other Dirty Jokes)*, which I read just prior to *Me and Sister Bobbie*, compiled as many photographs and song-lyrics as it did stories from the road and, yes, dirty jokes. Here's one of Willie's little dirties. A lady walks into a golf pro shop complaining of a bee sting. The golf pro asks where she got the sting. She said, "Between the first and second hole." Golf pro said, "Your stance is too wide." If you kinda chuckled at that one, you just got the best joke in the book. Lord, it wasn't easy reading, but it did go quickly. *The Facts of Life* also include several blog-post style passages of Willie reporting what he ate earlier that day or who he talked to on the phone. Between the photos and lyrics and jokes, the actual "memoir" aspect read like a glorified Facebook feed—and an uninteresting one at that.

It's for this reason, as well as the much welcomed voice of his now long-standing family band pianist, that *Me and Sister Bobbie* read like cool water in parched Texas heat. The book appealed to the novice historian, politician, sociologist, music fan, and folklorist in me. I also appreciated reading about the hyperbolic love between siblings during our election season. I'm not even on social media, but I felt the venom in the air. The giddy affections Brother and Sister espoused about and over one another proved an antidote for the body politic. For that, I'll hold close my copy of these Nelson family tales for future reference and refreshment. — KEVIN STILL

# RECORD REVIEWS



## The KBK

*Acute Exposure: The First Ten Years*

As the uninitiated will guess from the title, the KBK have been around for at least a decade although guitarist Noah Holt is the sole constant. The Alabama-based surf/instrumental group was formerly known as Kill Baby Kill, a moniker shortened likely to assuage any unnecessary ramifications.

The KBK are not a conventional instrumental surf band; they tend more toward a punkish interpretation. While not as intense as, say, Estruemental of Brazil, the KBK are certainly more frenetic than traditional surf bands like the Ventures and most post-surf bands like Los Straitjackets or the Bambi Molesters.

Of the 27 tunes on this disc, most are originals except for a sprinkling of covers including the rare vocal on Beastie Boys' "Egg Raid on Mojo" done in an expected demented style. Half a dozen of the included songs are remakes of earlier band recordings that sound certainly improved over their previous versions in comparison.

That the KBK are intrigued by the macabre is evident from their song titles: "Hunting for the Dead," "Psycho Beach Party," "Love Theme for a Twisted Mind," "Vincent Price in the Deli Section of a Publix." One of the top tunes is "Duck and Cover" that opens with the 1950s-era spoken word warning about how lame ways to protect yourself during an atomic bomb blast. "Suppose the Domsday Cults Were Right?" has equally powerful drumming to accompany the churning guitars. "Corridor X" opens with a krautrock force while "Turn Your Insides Out" boasts an atypical keyboard intro. "Commandments" mimics the surf standard "Hawaii Five-O" drums on steroids. "Meltdown in Sector 9" features keyboards competing with the guitars.

Both versions of "Trioxin Twist" resemble typical surf instrumentals except for the frantic

pace of play. The opening cut "Stop Off in Ridgeview" begins with the basic surf picking before the thundering percussion launches the energetic rendering. Even the half-century-old standard "Out of Limits" gets the Dickiesque amphetamine treatment.

*Acute Exposure* is available through Austin's Deepdaddy Records and on Bandcamp. — MIKEL DOWNEY



## Eternal Champion Ravening Iron

The boys are back at it again! Four long years after release one masterful piece of epic, traditional, heavy metal titled *The Armor of Ire*, fans of Eternal Champion have been honing their steel in anticipation for another imminent call to arms. With the hordes of evil riding upon the waves of a plague that has swept throughout the world, Eternal Champion met the challenges of fear, depression, anger, and confusion head-on with a fearsome display of might and power. That display came in the form of *Ravening Iron*, an album far darker, far heavier, and far more aggressive than its predecessor.

To say the least, traditional heavy metal is probably my favorite of all the subgenres. It's hard to keep a classic down, and the New Wave of Traditional Heavy Metal has certainly proven this sentiment to be true. Hailing from my home state of Texas, Eternal Champion has risen through the ranks, proving themselves to be a flagship band, displaying the machismo of Manowar and echoing the ferocity of Manilla Road. Judging from the cover art of *Ravening Iron*, the band shows no interest in compromising what they have accomplished thus far. So, bust out the beer, blades, and bosoms, we're charging headfirst into the fray!

The album kicks off with a triumphant fist-pumper in the form of "A Face in the Glare" before leading into the speeding gallop of the title track. Eternal

Champion holds nothing back with these first tracks and instantly pulls the listener in. The third song thunders in with slow-paced, doomy, bruiser that sounds like the march of a great army, hungry for battle. The fourth track speeds things up "War at the Edge of the End" inspiring vigorous headbanging. Another slow-pacer follows with "The Coward's Keep"; what I like about this song in particular is that Jason's vocals are truly allowed to shine, and we are treated to some new ranges not heard before. "Worms of the Earth" showcases what is likely the only song that comes close to being mid-paced before speeding up again. The riffs and solos of this song are very reminiscent of Manilla Road, and it is sure please any trad metal fan. The listener gets a nice instrumental refrain with "The Godblade" before closing the record with nearly six-minute, doomy, finisher known as "Banners of Arhai."

As mentioned before, the ethos of *Ravening Iron* is darker, heavier, and more aggressive. Production wise, Eternal Champion's sophomore record is much cleaner. Don't get me wrong, there is still enough grit and reverb to keep things true, but what I mean is that everything can be heard much better than with the debut. One of the problems with the *Armor of Ire* was that it sometimes felt like the guitars and Jason's vocals were at war, but with *Ravening Iron*, the two were perfectly harmonized to allow both to be heard and distinguished with the utmost clarity. What's more is that this record has a slightly longer than the first; this satisfies many fans who wished to have a longer listening experience, but it's still under the forty-minute mark which encourages multiple spins. The only complaint I have with *Ravening Iron* is that it has far less soaring melodies and triumphant choruses than *The Armor of Ire*. I'm thinking of songs like "The Last King of Pictdom" and "The Cold Sword". This element is something I love about trad metal, so I was a bit disappointed that Eternal Champion opted for the more dark, brooding melodies and epic doom vibes.

When steel meets bone, I have to give a hearty "Huzzah!" to Eternal Champion. While I have many bands I love, Eternal Champion is truly a band that gets me. Everything I love about metal is wrapped up into their sound and ethos, and for that, they are easily one of my top ten bands. While *The Armor of Ire* was instantly loveable, *Ravening Iron* is different and takes a little more spins to

appreciate. I find that the more I listen to it, the more the record begins to grow on me, begging for yet another listen. For that, it gets a solid 4.5 out of 5 from me. — CALEB MULLINS



## Gentlemen Rogues Do the Resurrection!

All the hallmarks of '90s power pop are presented on both sides of this two-tone 7" single with deft aplomb by Gentlemen Rogues, Austin's long-time defenders of the sadboy pop power chord. Big guitars, winsome melodic rock songs, clever college-educated lyrics, etc. are all packed onto this fine single. Some pithy reviewer will likely make a comment tying the song title to the band's reverence for the kind of song that would've crowded up 1's and O's on a teen movie soundtrack in 1999, but I will not. Sounds like vocalist/guitarist Danny Dunlop is trying not to dig up the fossil of a broken relationship but he really kinda wants to stick his finger back into the light socket again to see if it shocks as hard the second time. "I want you but I don't want to" he sings. But that flipside confirms these fellows do indeed kinda want to have a resurrection to a certain extent, knitting together pieces of Superdrag's Destination Ursa Major (from their excellent major label debut, 1996's *Regretfully Yours*) with Lemonhead's "Rudderless" from their commercial breakthrough, 1992's *It's a Shame About Ray* (album). Both songs slide together perfectly and Dunlop sings them with a splattering of grit that neither John Davis or Evan Dando applied to the originals, while lead guitarist John Christoffel (you'll know him from Economy Island) quotes a touch of My Bloody Valentine's "When You Sleep" to pull it all back in together (you see, "Destination Ursa Major" was originally an inspired collage of power pop and MBV). Yeah, this is all high level Gen X record collector nerd stuff here but Gentlemen Rogues sticks the landing. 10 minutes and \$10 well spent. — KELLY MENACE



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