

STOREPRESENT



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for the discerning dirtbag.**

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colin witucki

on the interwebz
<http://www.979represent.com>

emails to
redchapterjubilee@yahoo.com

materials for review & bribery can be sent to:
979represent
15530 creek meadow blvd. n.
college station, tx 77845

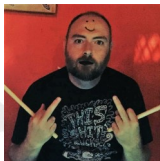
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STATES RATS



In yet another move designed to undo the legacy of the Obama administration, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded federal guidance that reassured states they would not be punished for legalizing marijuana. What this means, according to the Associated Press, is that Sessions, a long time critic of legalized weed, recommends that federal prosecutors crack down again on marijuana-related offenses. This, of course, creates massive legal nightmares for states that have some sort of legalized marijuana laws in effect.

As of January 8th, 2018, eight states in our union plus the District of Columbia allow for the legalized recreational use of marijuana. This means that residents may possess limited amounts of weed for private use. Some states, such as Colorado, Washington, and California, have state-regulated weed stores. Some states, like Louisiana and West Virginia, allow for possession of cannabis-infused products, such as oils and pills. Another 22 states approved ballot measures legalizing marijuana for medical purposes, as prescribed by physician. Federal law, however, prohibits doctors from prescribing medical marijuana. Doctors may write a "recommendation" for medical marijuana, which is different enough than a prescription to get around this technicality.

In 2013, the Obama administration issued the "Cole memo", requesting that federal prosecutors not use their limited time and valuable court and prison resources to convict and jail small time personal marijuana users. Sessions, who has gone on record as considering marijuana to be "almost as bad as heroin", has in effect redeclared the Reagan era "War on Drugs". So far, states Attorney Generals have either not responded or, like Washington state attorney general Bob Ferguson, have said outright that they do not intend to comply. What we have here is a good old-fashioned disagreement over "states rights", which is *very* interesting.

Republicans spend many an hour talking about the overreach of the federal government, that states usually know what's best for their constituency. The Civil War is reduced to being a disagreement over states rights, and Roe Vs. Wade treads atop state laws governing the accessibility to abortion. The U.S. Constitution does not make recommendations either way to the (il)legality of marijuana, so the states should have jurisdiction in this matter. The 10th Amendment states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people". The Federal Government, however, under the Controlled Substances Act, bans the use of marijuana. The Supreme Court in Gonzales v. Raich (2005) ruled that the feds have the authority to prohibit all use of marijuana. It does not say that any state laws allowing use are unconstitutional.

This will continue to play out in the courts for years, but with the turning of public opinion towards the support of personal and medical marijuana use, it places the Trump administration and the courts on the wrong side of history, not to mention it makes them a bunch of hypocrites who raise the states rights mantle when it suits their argument but bury it in legal tactics when it does not. More and more states, driven to replace federal funds slashed post-Recession, will eye the tax windfall states like Colorado have reaped from legalized marijuana. Sessions' approach will only serve to muddle up the courts and law enforcement while keeping offenders in jail, benefitting the shares Sessions owns in two private prison companies. Smell something skunky? It sure ain't the weed that's funky. **KELLY MINNIS**

CELEBRITY DEATH CURVE



It's sad when someone who has affected us deeply dies. I'm focusing on musicians here. I'll explain in a second. Angus, David, Prince, Tom, Chester, Chris. Seems like there's more lately, right? Seems like it's all the ones that were pioneers and are massive in our collective consciousness.

But here's what I want to focus on here. My theory is that there is a bell curve of deaths of musicians that have been movers and visionaries, and that bell curve is just now on the rise.

If you look at the history of popular music and recording, you've got a trickle at first, then a sort of "reverse funnel" as I call it. Basically, it's an exponential explosion. I'm gonna skip over Classical music all the way through the prohibition and into Big Band, but only until it develops into Jazz, and then the revolutionary "ripped speaker cone" sound and the overdriven amps break into the scene.

The distorted guitar sound, that I believe is the real revolution in music history, is where I see popular music really taking off. Maybe it was the counterculture digging its roots past the collective and edging out hoity-toity parents and teachers that didn't understand this "new sound". Whatever the case, this is where I see musical experimentation really blowing up.

And this is when the exponential growth of music and genres happened...in my opinion. Somewhere around the mid-fifties to the 60s.

This, along with the super important advent of radio and television bringing images and sounds and experiences to the masses, the proliferation of popularity was triggered. This was before the highly manipulative crafting we see today, but it was there for sure. But along with the music and attitudes against the cultural norms, there was a rebellion by radio disc jockeys, record shops and music promoters who saw the truth and adopted the new shit, and became the early adopters and fanboys.

And this is fatefully when all of our favorite, and most influential musicians were born, grew up, rebelled against and created the music that was the spark. And that was 70 years ago.

The handful of music groups that were making music, would fuel amazement for the next several decades, and would be forever remembered and revered...their influence felt, heard, imitated, built upon and revamped for ages to come.

I'm not saying there isn't amazement at the moment, there is. One of the coolest things about music is that the variables are seemingly endless, which means there will always be experimentation...some crap, some amazing, most in between crap and amazing, but just a whole lot of it...which makes it almost impossible for visionaries to emerge anymore...although they still do.

Back to the point: Average human life is conservatively around 80 years. Average Rock and Roll lifestyle life expectancy, I would venture to say, is about two decades shorter than that.

That means we are right on the cusp of all the young dudes, who were carrying the news, coming into their 60s and 70s. That, along with the highs and lows of performing, having hits and disappointments, traveling, loves lost, sex, drugs, alcohol, inconsistent sleep patterns, adrenaline, meeting local/opening bands that party harder than you do, etc. is gonna wreak some havoc.

Understand, this is just my own speculation, but my prediction is that in the next decade, we are gonna lose a ton of influential musicians...the ones that will hurt the most. The ones we will miss the most, not just because of their offerings, but because of the exponential saturation and overabundance of recordings and chaos that is happening at the moment makes us go back to the "classics" more often. Plus, that's "our" music, isn't it?

Here's a list off the top of my head: Willie, Paul, Ozzy, Mick, Brian, Art, Bob, Neil, Smokey, Leonard, Stevie, Don, Robert, Elton, Billy, Eric, Eddie, Alice, Olivia, Tina, Grace.

Man, this is super depressing. It's not like we can prepare for it. Maybe we should all write to them and tell them that we adore them before they are gone. — JORGE GOYCO



DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

Sitting at the computer in my shared bedroom house upon waking from a couple day black out with a terrible hangover and a beer

Me: Hmmmmmmm, Blacked Out Me & Drunk Detective Starkness, I'm gonna need you both to come in here, stat, and explain to me why I'm looking at an email from the chair of the English department requesting that I come by his office today so we can discuss what happened yesterday?

Drunk Detective Starkness: Sup, boss? I got nothing on this one. It's just a random e-mail. Far as I know, we've never met the guy or taken any of his classes. No idea what he would want from you. Although we were blacked out for a couple days, so no telling what happened.

Me: KK, kinda how I feel. Not gonna lie, I'm a bit scared right now. Blacked Out Me, you got anything to add?

Blacked Out Me: Oh, uh.....

Me: BO Me, what is it? Tell me now, you motherfucker.

BO Me: I, um, kinda have this hazy kinda impression that I might have taken our final for that Ancient Lit class. You have any memory of doing that? Cause it looks like it's past the date that it was scheduled for.

Me: OH FUCK. No, I don't. You're kidding me. You took it? WHHHHHHHY? Why would you do that? Why wouldn't you call in sick? Or say that your grandmother died? Or that you died? Or literally anything besides actually showing up and taking the exam?

BO Me: I don't fucking know, man? I was just stoked to have remembered. You're the one who did all the fucking blow and drank all the booze from the night before that carried into the morning, we had to take it. Don't you dare lay this at my feet. Strangely enough, I'm actually the responsible one in this situation. You can kindly fuck the hell off and say thank you for my miraculous memory.

Me: Fuck me, you're right. Alright. You're both dismissed. I guess I should get another beer, go take a shower and head in to face the music for whatever the fuck it is you managed to do on an exam that has the attention of a department chair when it was just an elective. Just get out of here. Let me bask in my shame alone for a minute, before they try to throw me out of school, AGAIN, thanks to you.

So I get more drunk, prepare my anus, and eventually arrive at the dept. chair's office.

Him: Son, do you know why you're here?

Me (*Oh shit I really don't? Please feed me more info.*)...
Um, is it about the final I took yesterday for Mr. (Some

long Greek name, we'll go with 'X' from here on out, because honestly I don't even remember's class?

Him: Yes. Yes it is. Specifically, the last essay question about Oedipus Rex, "Why is Creon stupid?" which you answered in excruciating detail and personally attacked Mr. X several times, over the course of well over 3,000 words. The question had a 500 word cap on it, but you started writing on the backs of the other pages of the test, and then in margins on the front pages of the test. While, admittedly, it was a very well-defended argument as to why Creon was not stupid, you personally attacked Mr. X several times for even asking the question. You understand that we can't let this kind of behavior, specifically students personally attacking visiting professors, stand, correct?

Me (*Oh thank God, I just wrote some stupid shit? This is bad, but it could be so much worse. I can get out of this one, right? Just use your drunken super powers and come up with an excuse.*): Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. It has been a very stressful finals week for me. I haven't slept much and have been drinking a lot of caffeine. And I take Greek plays very seriously. I'm so sorry I was over zealous. I understand that's wrong. I just wasn't thinking clearly.

Him: Well, considering we've never had any other problems with you, I think we can let this slide. I'll need you to write a full written apology to Mr. X. You have done decently overall in the class and the rest of the exam, so we're not going to fail you. Once you apologize, that will be the end of it and we won't escalate outside this department.

Me: I will, and I'm so sorry to you for having to intervene in this matter. Thank you so much, sir.

So, they let me stay in school. I got out of this one with barely a slap on the wrist. Which of course led me to go home and get even more fucked up.

Me: BO Me, are you fucking kidding me? You wrote a 3,000+ word slam paper against a Greek person who doesn't even speak English that well, because of some miswording on a single question and almost got us kicked out of school? That's like, almost impressive.

BO Me: Hey man, I was really high and drunk at the time, I had just taken an exam and I forgot he was Greek. It seemed really offensive at the time, what do you mean Creon is stupid? I just went off, my bad. BUT CREON WAS RIGHT IN THAT PLAY!

Me: Fuck you, man. Fuck you for real. But you're not wrong. Wanna go grab some coke before work?

BO Me: Sure. Why not? Been a helluva day. — STARKNESS

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WE'LL MEET AGAIN, DON'T KNOW WHERE, DON'T KNOW WHEN

I'm writing this on the day I had my first nuclear scare. I say first because I'm willing to bet this is not going to be the last time I experience this. Today I woke up and made tea. As I started drinking it, my phone went off. My screen read: BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

I have spent the last two months as a visiting scientist in Hawaii. While there, Hawaii reinstated their nuclear emergency warning systems. While working one day at the beginning of the year, I heard a nuclear siren, something truly out of anyone's nightmares, going off. After looking up the siren testing schedule, I knew it was a drill, and that any non-drill would be accompanied by the emergency broadcast system warning us of a strike. So I figured I could relax until I got a text on my phone with a warning. Then the following week, I got one.

I've thought about my own death a lot in the last year. Ironically, the contemplation of my mortality has been what kept me from acting on my suicidal urges last year, when my depression came to a head. And I thought a lot about nuclear war. Dan Carlin's *Hardcore History* episode, "Destroyer of Worlds", on the development and policies surrounding nuclear weapons, gave me a hell of a scare. Not to mention the world being held hostage by two immature pieces of shit with sycophantic entourages arguing over the size of their missile dicks. I tried to assuage my fears about nuclear war by talking to Baby Boomers who lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis, and by joking around about it and watching movies like *Dr. Strangelove* or *Mad Max*. But nothing prepares you for this.

So this is it, I thought. It was only a matter of time. So this is how I am going to die. This is how we are all going to die. I put on my pants, and grabbed my sandals. I found my keys, and tried to contact the couple I was renting a room from. They were not at home, but they told me to stay put. Waimea is in the middle of nowhere, no one has bomb shelters, and there is nothing of consequence here except some telescopes. Of course I was panicking, and I wanted to find a place to go, but I knew that if this was real, then there was no hope for me. I missed my cats, and it made me sad that I wouldn't see them again. I called James, told him about the alert, and that I loved him and needed him to take care of the cats. I called one of the other astronomers here, and he invited me over to be with his family. I started to drive over. Not safe if we were hit and I probably shouldn't have driven, but I didn't want to die alone. I called my parents and left goodbye

voicemails...neither of them picked up. I shook the whole time I drove. Most of the drive I don't really remember.

Eventually my astronomer friend called and confirmed to me that this was a false alarm. I had to pull over to calm down. Admittedly, I cried a little, and had to catch my breath. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to go. That is how I faced my, and everyone else's, death. It's hard to know how you will until it happens to you.

Is this what drove the Boomers crazy? Is this why our government and much of our populace is paranoid and aggressive?

I heard rumors that this was done on purpose, to test our response, or to build fear and therefore be willing to give up more of our freedoms to an increasingly authoritarian state. I don't know about any of that, but I feel like I am going crazy now. With propaganda everywhere, media lies, and insane leaders, I think I am starting to lose sense of what is real. But maybe that is what they want. This is why I would make a fantastic conspiracy theorist were I not a scientist.

This whole experience made me think about my life and my future. Maybe it is still the shock, but I've lost hope in a future. This is probably going to happen again. When nuclear weapons were developed, physicists hoped we could evolve to be able to use the weapons. I don't think we can anymore. We are completely unwilling to change because everyone thinks we can't. Climate change may kill us, economic collapse may destroy our civilization, authoritarian governments may enslave us, and nuclear war may obliterate us. I may not reach old age. We may not see tomorrow. Eat, drink, fuck, sing, smoke, trip, explore...for we die tomorrow. Do not face your death with regret. Live your life.

We have a new Cold War. Will we survive it this time? Will our finger-mashing leaders have the wisdom and cleverness to walk that knife-edge of annihilation? There is only so long this game can be played before someone fucks up.

In astronomy, we have an idea called Fermi's Paradox. If the universe is huge and the Earth unimportant (and, therefore, life is common), why have we not met our neighbors? One solution, and unfortunately, the one I think is the answer to this paradox, is that most civilizations destroy themselves when they reach a certain technological level. This is called The Great Filter, and I think we are facing it now. —LEO ALCORN

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GOOD MOVIES FOR BAD GUYS

GODZILLA: PLANET OF THE MONSTERS

Continuing my trend on love of giant monsters, *Godzilla - Planet Of The Monsters* debuted on Netflix last month.

In my previous review of 2005's *King Kong*, I mentioned my love for big monsters, Kong and Godzilla being the two front runners, that being said, it doesn't matter if it's a cheesy 60's rubber suit lizard or CGI monstrosity, I am going to sit down and watch it. So when it comes down to humans versus monsters, I'm going to root for the monsters every time.

And that's where *Planet of The Monsters* sucker punched me...

First, this is the 32nd Godzilla movie, and the first anime feature for the big guy, so that's already kind of a big deal. The saddening part of this is that this flick had all the makings of a modern giant monster classic, but fell short.

I love the theme of a creature, solitary and taken out of his element, attacked by the folly of mankind who feel the need to destroy anything bigger and more dangerous than them. But that is not this kind of Godzilla. Godzilla who is normally a warning to us all about the terror of nuclear war, is not seen as a creature who is just attacking a city. He took over a planet.

He's big... I mean he is BIG. Thousands of years of evolution has left him over three times the size of other incarnations of Godzilla and over 6 times the size of the original. But hey I'm getting ahead of myself...

The movie is set in the future. You see Earth has been attacked and invaded my monsters, including the King of Monsters, Godzilla himself. After a failed attempt of assistance by two alien races (which are hastily explained and don't really add much memorable story line) humans are forced to leave earth in search of another planet to live on. 20 years pass, resources dwindle and thanks to a human with an Ahab like obsession with an anonymously posted essay gone viral, humanity decides to return to earth to give it another go.

The kicker is, thanks to the wonders of space travel, that while 20 years have passed for the humans, 20,000 years have passed on Earth. So they return to a world they are totally not prepared for, including monsters that resemble dragons who seem to be sort of related to Godzilla himself.

Now why they didn't just let Godzilla have that continent

and move onto, oh I don't know... Cleveland or something like that we don't know, the humans decide to go down and investigate and even try a theory to kill Godzilla. Naturally all hell breaks loose.

And there's the kicker. Because while Godzilla used to be synonymous with nuclear weapons and the ever growing war machine, this new evolved beast has more in common with a mountain. It becomes apparent that this Godzilla is a force of nature in himself and that's something you may have a hard time killing.

So if Godzilla isn't the villain, that duty now has to fall on the movie's main character Captain Harou Sakaki, the monomaniacal Captain who has a blind hate for the creature he is willing to do anything to stop him. Which ordinarily I would love. I mean, I still love that idea. Ahab was a believable villain chasing his white whale, why can't Harou do the same. But due to lack-

luster development despite an 88 minute runtime, we just get a simple kind of boring main character, and it's not just him. It's everyone in the damn movie. You just don't really care about any of them. Is that chick supposed to be a leading lady or love interest? Is that hardened soldier someone important? Did that dude die? Or is it that dude? Who cares, as the body count mounts, it doesn't seem to matter as the almost identical cast is just fodder anyway.

In fact, the REAL Godzilla doesn't even show up until like the last ten minutes of the movie. (They spend a portion trying to kill his smaller offspring believing it to be him). Then you actually care about something. Godzilla is huge. He's slow, but it's a given hence his massive size, and his atomic breath is probably the coolest I've seen in a long time. But it's kind of like *Rogue One's* Darth Vader scene. You spend hours watching wooden characters and the only saving grace is the last few minutes of the movie.

The movie ends with no satisfaction. A cliffhanger in fact, promising more in the next installment. (This is supposed to be a trilogy after all.) And that might be it's only saving grace. The promise of a better sequel where hopefully more things, including plot and characters will be fleshed out.

It's an OK anime at best. A cartoon with a cool cameo of Godzilla.

3 out of 10 Atomic Bombs. — TIM DANGER



DEMOCRACY DIES IN DARKNESS

The Washington Post last year changed their byline to "Democracy Dies in Darkness."

That is precisely wrong. **Democracies don't die when they are not defended or reported on. Democracies die when they are not expanded.** Society's job isn't to protect yesterday's democracy. Society's job is to keep expanding and growing their government for tomorrow.

A democratic constitution is not a shrine, a fortress, or a holy relic. Government at its core is society. People working together to protect one another and expand inalienable human rights so they will not be yoked by the powerful. That power can be money, influence, military, it really doesn't matter, a democratic government is created to keep the powerful from creating despotic regime.

Why do so many look up to Europe's systems and say America is collapsing? European democracy is richer in three fundamental ways than American democracy. It is more empowering, it is more expansive, and it is more robust. Europeans treat democracy like a garden, not a shrine—something that is ever evolving, growing, changing. Parliamentary governments, more than two viewpoints at a debate, coalition governments all work to expand human rights, not protect the status quo, or worse dismantle existing safety nets.

European democracy is more empowering because Europeans have access to "cutting-edge" rights that Americans do not have. Rights to healthcare, education, income, employment, stability, dignity—written into their constitutions—and are consistently being updated and expanded. Europeans are citizens in truer senses of the word: citizenship carries with it more extensive, greater, and truer powers. Americans can carry guns to shoot each other with, but we don't get public goods or social institutions—like the BBC or NHS—that actually improve the quality of our shitty lives together rather than try to protect the little you have at the cost of someone else's shitty life. **Our democracy is static, dead, fixed while most European democracies are evolving, changing, flexible.**

Having living constitutions means that the next head of state cannot simply take these things away with the stroke of a pen—that means the government isn't being shut down every six months. Governing by executive order is not democracy. Precisely because there are many, many more layers of rights and freedoms that would have to be undone for tyranny to take hold once again many of the European democracies are still strong. Here in America, there are barely any defended rights that exist to begin with. We have 27 amendments two of which specifically contradict one another, and that is why authoritarianism has taken root so swiftly

and easily in America. Guns will not prevent today's fascists—but public education and media might, healthcare and housing might.

Why didn't we develop these rights? Because as a country we view democracy as a fixed state of being—not as a process, a way, a path. There is a constitution. That constitution is a holy book. It can never be changed, altered, updated, amended, except maybe once a generation. The last amendment to be ratified was in 1992, even though it was proposed with the bill of rights! The common view really seems to be if we change the way our Democracy operates we turn into the god damn commies.

Democracy is a living thing, it must change, develop, and grow. It is every bit as much as alive as its citizens because it is made up by its citizens.

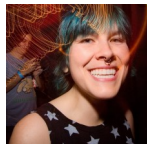
A democracy must grow if it is to last. Rights must constantly be expanded. Freedoms must always be not just renewed, or reinterpreted, but broadened, deepened, widened. Let me make that concrete. Rights to guns and religion might have been enough for the eighteenth century. In 2018, prosperity, if it is to grow, depends on rights to healthcare, education, media, and so on. How else can prosperity grow, ever, really? If these things are not rights, then the floor of prosperity—the minimum acceptable state of being never rises.

That's what we've got here in America today. The floor of prosperity never rose, because expanding rights and freedoms never really came to be. Nominally, perhaps—but not substantively. Now we suffer qualities of life that have never risen or are going backwards. Without a higher floor the general public's lives will never develop, and society stagnates. That stagnation, in turn, will drive a vicious circle of extremism, rage, tribalism, and division—making new rights even less possible.

Fuck the Constitution in its current form. You can't treat a governing document like a holy book. As a society our job is to expand the rights that are completely guaranteed. It needs to guarantee greater rights, and more accessible, generous, equitable freedoms. Then the floor of prosperity will rise. Sure, we've got Favor, we've got iPhones, we've got Amazon drones. That shit is real cool! But, we don't have guaranteed healthcare, we don't have guaranteed time away from work, we don't have guaranteed housing, we don't have guaranteed higher education, we don't have guaranteed open access to the Internet. Shit that actually matters! The things that we need to live at this stage of world history are not protected. These are things that in 2018, everybody should have, and the only way to do that is by rewriting the way we currently govern.—**STARKNESS**



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SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

Picture it. Texas, Valentine's Day 2018. Two lovers are converging on their favorite dinner spot to share some vegan spaghetti and smooches when one realizes they're showing up empty handed. Not a chocolate in sight for their favorite **Vegan Valentine!** What the hey?! Are there even vegan chocolates? Is that a thing?

You're closest to an **Aldi**—they have vegan stuff sometimes, right? A little lookie in the chocolate section uncovers some interesting **Moser Roth** dark chocolate bars—nested among sea salt and almond bars are **orange almond** and **spicy chili** bars! You grab the chili one, hoping it will spice up the evening. The orange almond goes home with you—but will your date?

A mad dash into **Target** reveals that none of the frilly pink and red chocolates are vegan friendly. **NONE!** One scamper later, in the chocolate aisle, you strike gold! **Justin's dark chocolate peanut butter cups** (in minis and romantic 2 packs!) jump off the shelf into your basket. You hastily grab a couple of **Bark Thins**, choosing from the dark chocolate covered pretzels, almonds, cherries, peanuts, and coconut. You spy a little bag of dark chocolate coconut squares from **Ocho**, but can't remember if your VV loves or hates coconut. On your way out, you try to grab a single fancy dark chocolate bar, but in your rush knock a few in—**Green and Black's, Endangered Species, and Equal Exchange Chocolates**, with tasty almonds and sea salt.

You're back in the car and you find yourself pulling into the **HEB** parking lot. **WHY?!** You're already so late! You grab some more **Bark Thins** (it was very hungry in the car) and another bag of **Justin's mini PB cups** falls into your arms like a basket full of puppies you can't resist, even though you have 5 cats and 2 dogs and 3 humans at home.

This is getting ridiculous. Your date has texted you that

they're at the spaghetti spot, and you're still checking out the chocolates at **Brazos Valley Naturals**. You've already stocked up on the rest of the **Bark Thins** flavors and some **PB and coconut Ocho bars** at **Village Foods**, but then you spy them. **TWO** different types of **vegan-friendly Nestle Crunch bars!** You don't even notice the cute pink-haired girl behind the counter as you check out, practically peeling the wrappers off the bars intended for your date as you lope back to your car.

Chocolate bar in mouth, melted chocolate on shift knob, you make one last stop at a **Kroger**. Your date's still waiting on a table, there's no rush. Strolling into the Natural Foods section, you uncover some **Unreal Crunchy PB cups** nestled among the Justin's. You've done the math and there is literally no such thing as too many PB cups. You pop what basically looks like a **vegan Almond Joy** made by **Theo** in your basket to pass off to your mom (only moms eat Almond Joy) and relish tossing a couple of bags of **Little Secrets**, dark chocolate M&Ms lookalikes, into your basket. A package of coconut milk caramels, cleverly named **Cocomels** (are they cock-a-mels or co-co-mels, you think to yourself?) catches your eye and joins the inventory.

You finally make it back home, just in time to get a text from your forlorn, abandoned date, and see your **true Valentine** in the mirror, face smeared in dark, luxurious vegan chocolate.

BONUS GIRL SCOUT COOKIES GUIDE!

It's that time of year and we're fortunate to have **ABC Bakery** as the cookie supplier for the Brazos Valley Girl Scouts, so there are **FIVE** vegan girl scout cookies to choose from! **Lemonades, Thanks-A-Lots, Peanut Butter Patties, Thin Mints**, and the new **S'mores** cookies are all vegan friendly! Compassion patches for all the Girl Scouts!—**KATIE KILLER**

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TODD LIVES IN A FILM

The first time I saw you I knew you were someone I could understand, and could understand me.

THE SHAPE OF WATER

peacefully keep to myself like every other rider. It's an



You know what it's like for people to look at you, pick out the one distinguishing trait about you, and then categorize you in that box from then onward. You know what it's like to not fit into others' definition of normal. While everyone has their own "defects" from what a person should be like, if they appear to be close enough to what a normal person looks like or acts like, they don't become The Mute Girl or a freak. When you're not looked at as a normal person, you end up picked apart unless you can keep your head down and nod along to directions. The latter means leading a somewhat normal life, but I've come to recognize that keeping quiet and out of sight is only a slower way of recognizing how differently people see you.

My daily routine has always been good to me, both in its predictability and relative ease. The morning always begins by drawing a warm bath, taking my time to clean and perhaps touch myself if I'm in the mood. I boil some eggs for a sack lunch to bring to work along with a sandwich for my neighbor Giles and get dressed in my issued uniform. Then I go check on Giles in the apartment next door and usually wake him up from whatever project or television program he fell asleep during. He's an older professorial type who loves to go on about the arts and claims he wouldn't be able to function without my support. It's true that sometimes he can get lost from the rest of the world cooped up in his place, and if it weren't for his commercial paintings I'm not sure how he would cope with his "defect". In a way I suppose we're both doing the same thing in our apartments above the old movie theater, but with different things each of us try to keep out of plain view.

Once those tasks are all checked off I make my way to the bus stop to begin the commute to work. On the bus people are not expected to make conversation with other strangers riding along. In fact, it's passively discouraged—everyone is supposed to just sit and politely mind their business—everyone has other places that they're going and things to get to. I've wondered how long a person can actually remain strangers with the same set of familiar faces that take the same bus trip nearly every weekday. It's just as well that there's little talking on the bus, as I wouldn't be able to reply in a normal way, and then I'd be the mute girl on the bus that makes someone feel awkward and less secure. Instead I just smile when I board, find an empty set of seats, and

easy place to blend in. Usually I take a nap during the trip once the bus gets on the highway, with my sweater against the window so I can rest my head there. On nights when I'm restless I'll daydream and gaze outside instead, and the ride is long enough to fantasize about other lives not lived.

Zelda has been a dependable friend since practically the day I started working at the lab. We're nearly always paired up on the same shift and have most of our cleaning tasks delegated and synchronized. She can be a bit bossy at times—sometimes her task is simply telling me where to mop up or lamenting about other people working there, but I'm fine with obliging her gabber because she watches out for me. She always lets me cut the line to time in on the clock, to the displeasure of the other girls, and she's even picked up some sign language over time to help interpret my words to others at the lab. Sometimes I can even reply to her in conversation, when she's looking at me that is. Zelda can be frustrating and slip into treating me like a meek follower rather than a friend, but I share the blame for letting her do so, for trying to go along with the order.

Once they brought you into this place I recognized that the routine I've grown accustomed to had changed. The laboratory has always had secret projects going on in the background, but you were a loud flash that couldn't possibly be kept quiet. New faces began walking the halls and talking about you like an animal, led by the military man who anyone could instantly recognize cruelty as their defining quality. The military man doesn't smile, he only grins—not because of joy but to show that he has the upper hand, the power in the room. He has a name but actively chooses not to learn mine, so I don't bother using his. He certainly frightens me, not because of subtle threats or advances he makes towards me, but because it is unmistakable that he only intends bad things for you.

I am the only one in this place that sees there is more to you than one or two or whatever number of easy descriptors the men lazily use. I want to talk to you the way that other people don't know how to talk to me. I want to show you how to dance. And in return I ask that you show me how to stop being normal. —TODD HANSEN

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The man I learned to call Pappa came home from a five-year journey the winter I turned three years old.

He was large, and his pale face was hidden behind a thick, dark beard. The rest of him was wrapped in snowy clothes, furs, and a giant pack on his back. When he saw me that first time, an emotion I'd never seen flickered in his eyes.

Mamma gave him her chair by the fire. She fed the fire so it rose and raged, and he removed his stinking fur jacket and fur lined over-pants. His garments steamed as the snow on them melted. When he took off his boots, the ripe stench from his feet chased all other scents from the room.

Mamma warmed wine on the stove and added spices. She ladled stew from the pot over the fire into the biggest bowl from the shelf, the one we never used, and set it on the table by her chair.

"Who is this child too young to be mine?" the stranger asked Mamma.

Mamma said, "Snow is his father. I went out to feed the cow during a storm three winters ago," she said, "and the wind blew my skirts up, and snow came in underneath. Nine months later came this babe. His name is Ice. He is a good babe, and already speaking. He is so strong and helpful!"

The edges of Pappa's mouth under his mustache tugged down into a frown. Then he smiled with all but his eyes. "Well, how fortunate Snow could give you the son I could not." He rubbed his big, calloused hand over my hair. His hand was warm on my head, yet it cupped cold in its palm, colder than any weather I'd ever felt.

"Show Pappa how you help, Ice," said Mamma.

I took my bucket out into the winter night, and filled it with snow.

Sleet whipped past the golden light from the small windows in the thick walls of our cottage. The wind brushed my cheek in a caress, then hugged me. I closed my eyes and welcomed that cold embrace. Then I took the snow inside and set it by the fire to melt.

Mamma kissed my forehead. "Thank you, my sweet. Will you play a tune for your Pappa?"

I got the wooden flute Mamma had made me and sat in my chair away from the fire. While Pappa ate and drank, I played.

After the last note, Pappa smiled. "Yes, he is clever. And I am weary."

I put my flute away.

Pappa said, "I brought home treasure, my love. To find the price I wanted for the jewels I found in the forest, I traveled far. I missed you every moment." He brought his pack to the big table by the kitchen window, and shook out its contents. In addition to his bedroll, three loaves of journey bread wrapped in waxed paper, and clothes heavy with dirt and stink, a small purse fell out. He upended it and spilled gold coins on the table. "I know you've dreamed of a better life, my love. Now we

WINTER

can have it."

"Oh, Pappa!" Mamma hugged and kissed him. "At last we can move into town!"

In the thirteen years that followed, I learned to stay out of Pappa's way. He never hit me, but nor did he ever look at me with fondness. We lived in a house in town, and Mamma was happy to be close to friends, and to buy bread instead of bake her own, and to walk to all the shops in minutes instead of hours. I liked town, too, though winter wasn't as strong there. Mamma used some of the money from the sale of the blankets she wove to buy reading and calculating lessons for me.

Pappa wanted to apprentice me to the blacksmith. The fire made me sick. I couldn't stay in that room.

I made some money taking people around through the snow, finding them solid footing, and clearing snow from paths. For me, it moved aside. In spring and summer, I went up into the hills to find fruits, herbs, and roots to sell.

Pappa carved miraculous things from wood he cut in the forest. Some he sold, but the best he set aside.

I was sixteen by the time he decided he had built up enough inventory. He said, "It's time for me to journey south again. This time I'll take Ice with me."

"Oh, Pappa, must you?" Mamma asked.

"It's time he learned more of the world."

Mamma hugged me hard before we left the house, and I held onto her until Pappa grasped my shoulder and pulled me away.

We took a ship over the sea to a port on the southern continent, where people burned by sunlight lived in sand and wore minimal, brightly colored clothes.

Pappa had me pull a cart of wares, for he had brought not only his own carvings, but other things easy to get in our northern home and rare here—dried forest fruits, pine nuts, thick-furred animal pelts. I had pulled the cart easily when we left the north, but here in the sunny south, it felt very heavy.

Pappa led me to the marketplace, a wonder of cloth-roofed stalls bright with red and orange and yellow fruits I had never seen before, cloth spun fine and colored golden and purple and night-sky blue, treats and goods I didn't recognize. Languages flowed around us with words that sounded like birdcalls and tools clinking against each other, and the smells were sharp and sweet and spicy.

Pappa took the cart from me and paid a man to watch it, then took me to a different, stinking market place. Here a man stood on a dais and gestured to chained children, men, and women, led up on the dais one at a

time. He spoke as he pointed to their features. Men crowded around the dais, studying the people on display, calling out in languages I did not know.

Pappa stood behind me, his hands clamped on my shoulders, and we watched until I understood the nature of this commerce.

"Here, Ice, I shall sell you," Pappa whispered to me. "I shall tell your faithless mother you melted."

I stumbled as he pushed me forward and gave me to a bearded man beside the dais. The man's eyes gleamed as he looked at me. He spoke to Pappa in an alien tongue, and Pappa nodded and stepped away.

Pappa had never been kind to me, but he had never hurt me before. I mourned for my mother, who loved me and would miss me, and whom I knew I would never see again.

A boy and a girl were sold, and then the bearded man led me up onto the dais, and the other one, the auctioneer, spoke about me. He took my shirt off and showed my pale torso to the hungry-eyed men. They bid on me.

In my core I felt all the cold of winter. I closed my eyes and invited the cold to take me. S now, my father, freeze and save me. I never called to my father this way before. At home, I could walk outside to find the cold I craved. It was ever present at home.

Even in this sunbaked place, cold had a toehold, and it climbed out of the shadows to embrace me.

Snow swirled around me. People cried out. I looked at the auctioneer. He tried to grab my shoulders and fell back as the cold in me scorched him.

I looked at all the sun-loving bidders. My father, paler than these southern folk, stood to the back of the crowd. His eyes were wide.

I pulled my shirt back on and strode away from that market of souls, snow traveling with me. At the harbor, the sea froze under my feet. I walked out to a ship with a name I could read, climbed aboard, and asked for passage.

"Can you control the weather?" the captain asked.

I called the snow back inside me. Warmth surrounded me.

"Can you control the winds?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Can you work hard?"

"That I can do," I said.

"I'll give you passage to the next port in exchange for hard work. We will see how it goes from there."

"Thanks, Captain. You won't regret it."

That is how I started working my way back to Winter. —
STARKNESS

NO CROWN, NO COKE

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Who? MIKE JONES! (William Grant & Sons)
What? Scotch (100% Malted Barley)
When? Now
Where? Any big box store, a myriad of bars and restaurants
Why? Because you've been thinking about making a foray into single malts or you have a friend that needs a proper introduction
How much? \$50

I think there are more misconceptions about scotch than there are of any other spirit and one of them in particular seems to prevent people from taking the leap:

"I don't like smoky things."

First of all, barbeque is amazing and I don't see you putting down the brisket any time soon. Secondly, I'm sorry that someone handed you a dram of Laphroaig 10 on your twenty-first birthday. It's always good to have some foreknowledge before you get facefucked by a campfire and that friend let you down.

I'm not that friend. Scotch is made in either five or six regions depending on whom you ask. But I'll draw your attention to: **Speyside, Highlands, Islay, Lowlands, Islands, and Campbeltown**. Pretty much all of your peaty, smoky monsters are Islay malts. **Laphroaig, Lagavulin, Kilchoman, Caol Ila, Bunnahabhain, Bruichladdich, Bowmore and Ardbeg**. If you're looking for a punch to the sinuses and very core of your existence, go there. If not, *go literally almost anywhere else* but a "Glen" (**Glen Moray, Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, Glenfarclas, Glen Grant, Glen Elgin**, etc) is normally a safe bet.

The Glenfiddich 14 is the scotch I give to bourbon drinkers and novices alike. It spends 14 years in barrels that previously held bourbon, then finishes for an undisclosed period of time in new, level-4 char American oak barrels—the barrels that make bourbon—straight from Kentucky. It's sweet, fruity, and wonderful.

Nose: Light fruit, vanilla, malt, and a little spice. Imagine if you cut up apricots, peaches, and bananas and put them in a crackling bowl of Rice Krispies, then gave it a dash of nutmeg. I don't know why you'd do that, but that's what I smell.

Taste: A lot more of the same fruit, but the cereal and malt really start to come through here. I keep expecting to taste some caramel but then I remember I'm drinking scotch.

Finish: Medium-to-long, warm, and oaky, with a hint of chocolate and spice at the very end. Absolutely lovely and it doesn't lend itself to an alcohol burn.

This bottle deserves a spot in your bar. Whether you have a friend that wants to get into single malts or you want a solid dram that won't break the bank or your nostrils, the Glenfiddich 14 will do nicely. 88/100 —
JARED TUCKER

It has been a long two years and three months since The Ex-Optimists have gone on an extended walkabout. This is how the band refers to its weekend warrior style tour excursions outside of Texas. We have done a half dozen of these over the years, usually within the interior Southeast but on occasion we've made it out to the mountain West and the Pacific Northwest. This particular jaunt found the Xops in Houma, LA, Hattiesburg, MS, and Hot Springs, AR.

Part of the reason the band has taken a couple of years to get back out was due to a fairly catastrophic personnel change that occurred on the last day of that previous tour, leading to the addition of one Colin Wintucki to the band. It took him a while to get worked into the band, and then LOUDFEST happened, and then we wound up recording a bunch of stuff, and then playing a tribute show that required a lot of rehearsal, and we share Colin with Mutant Love and Katie with Girlband and Charm Bomb and my wife travels a lot for work and I've got kids I can't just leave at home and...yeah. Life is messy for the hobbyist musician. Suffice it to say, we were all stoked that a tour was planned and we actually made it.

Yet forces beyond our control nearly colluded to keep it from happening anyways. Last month's ice storm that closed down Brazos County the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day was a bigger deal along the Gulf Coast than it was up here. As anyone who travels along Interstate 10 will tell you, they's a whole lot of bridges down there. Miles and miles of them at a time across bayous and swamps and bays and inlets. Many of those froze over, forcing interstate closures in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. It was questionable up until the morning we have left for Louisiana whether or not we would be able to get through. But fortunately the weather warmed up and the roads to Houma (about 40 miles southwest of New Orleans) were reopened, although the roads north out of New Orleans were still closed that first day. Our drive to Lafayette was uneventful, but Hwy 90 into Houma had been closed the day before so we were still nervous. There were still signs of ice on the shoulders of overpasses but otherwise we encountered no issues. The drive past New Iberia at sunset was particularly beautiful, with the cane farmers burning their crops in clusters of small fires to get at the sugar.

The Intracoastal Club itself was situated across from a bayou canal and it turned out to be kinda cool and funky on the inside. A little bit of that dirtbag downtown vibe we are all so accustomed to. Ataris and TV's piled up on stage, mannequins, lava lamps...interesting décor. But also gambling video games and *indoor smoking*. Ah yes. You can still smoke inside. But amazingly enough, the ventilation worked pretty well and it wasn't an issue. We drank up a whole bunch of **NOLA Irish Channel Stout** on tap and a whole bunch of **Yuengling** (pretty much the

XOPS ON WALKABOUT

mascot beer of this whole walkabout). The show was scheduled to start at 8 but the show was pushed back a bit to wait for Colin to show up. He does not ride with the band ever. He's particular and he's gotta drive separate.

Our hosts for the night were



Blare, a post-rock/shoegaze instrumental quartet from Houma. They have played at Revs once a couple of years back. Imagine the metalgaze stuff like True Widow, Jesu or King Woman but with a much more pronounced ambience and you've got the right idea. In a similar vibe were New Orleans' quartet **LORO**. Attendance was decent, considering it was 25 degrees out and some folks still had issues crossing the bridges. We were pretty chuffed about it. Met some cool new people and had a good time playing a completely new place to us.

For the first time, the band moteled up for the entire tour. Usually we sleep on people's floors and junk, or even just drive through the night. Our first stop was a Super 8 in Houma, after hitting the Taco Bell next door. I have to give a big shout out to the Houma Taco Bell crew who managed to get our hella Bonquiqui Complicated Order absolutely perfect and in record speed. I am pleased to announce that after several years of knowing him I *finally* saw Colin eat something. And not just once! He ate things all walkabout! The things that will amaze you about people sometimes. Speaking of Colin, he and I were bunkmates all trip. Didn't seem right to make Michael and Katie split up (I mean, y'all may not know this and I hope I'm not breaking anyone's confidence here but *Michael and Katie live with each other and sleep in the same bed together, like, every night!*) Amazingly, Colin did not get fresh with me. But I noticed he would rollover and drink something from the side of the bed throughout that first night. The next morning I was saddened to discover it was a water bottle and not the ol' Who Hit John.

The next day all the roads to New Orleans were clear and we stopped off at **Breads On Oak Bakery**, a vegan food paradise. You see, Katie is vegan (as you may have noted from reading her new column *Salacious Vegan Crumbs* found elsewhere in this issue) and it's super hard to maintain that lifestyle on the road. In this case though it was super easy. Vegan sandwiches and pastries were gobbled up gladly. A quick stop by **Louisiana Music Factory** in the Frenchmen to consign some Xops records (and for me to snag Fripp/Eno's *No Pussyfooting* LP...original Antilles pressing no less!) and then we were headed Northeast out of Looziana towards our next step, Hattiesburg, MS.

Once upon a time, when I was the manager for WWHR, the college radio station at Western Kentucky University (my alma mater), I was "pen pals" with a dude named Mik Davis, in a similar position for the station out of Southeast Mississippi State University in Hatties-



burg. I'd always wanted to make it down that way but never had an excuse to go. Our tour was originally routed to Nashville for this second date but that show was cancelled so... Hattiesburg answered the call. We rolled into town and checked into our hotel (another Super 8 run by an Indian family...to pay for my room they used the old handcranked carbon copy card dealy...swiper no swiping at the Hattiesburg Super 8!) then out to consign some Xops records at **T-Bones**, H-burg's version of Waterloo. Unfortunately, its prices were just as bad as Waterloos so we wound up buying nothing...that is, except for these bomb-ass Macho Man socks for Colin, who spent a good portion of the previous day's drive listening to old WWF clips from Randy Savage. It seemed like kismet so Michael and Katie gifted the socks to Colin. We also stopped by **C & M Music** on the recommendation of Blare Alex, who works at the Houma branch of the store, where I finally put my mitts on a Fender American Pro

Jazzmaster (that neck felt mighty fine...I'd play one) and the Fender Offset Special Mustang (which also felt surprisingly great) and also looked at a bunch of Mesa amps I'd not actually seen in person and discovered that, just like Vox, Mesa puts an extra 25 pounds of spite into each combo amp. That Electradyn 1x12 easily weighed 100 lbs. and that's just gatdamned ridiculous. The best part of this day for Colin was passing a strip club along the Mississippi interstate named SCUTTLEBUTT. He's probably still chuckling about it.

The show that night was booked at The Thirsty Hippo, thanks to a type from a nice Hattiesburgian I met online, Lane. We didn't know a single person in town. Wasn't sure what we'd get. Dinner at the Hippo was rad (more vegan stuff for Katie yay! and weird hot dogs and burgers) and more craft beer and Yuengling was quaffed. The show was opened by an acoustic singer songwriter guy, **Him Horison**, who looked a lot like Jackson Satellite all grown up. Lestat hair, black lipstick and leather jacket and all. He played for ten minutes, looping his voice, and playing his acoustic guitar along. Then some band from New Orleans whose name I forget that made me feel really damn old played. They looked hella cool (the singer dude looked like a combination of Luigi, Cheech Marin, and John Oates) and played a sort of updated ironic yacht rock for Millennials while wearing Cosby sweaters. Luckily, they played for like 20 minutes, tried unsuccessfully to pick up some local girls, and then split. The hosting band, **Dumspell**, was a bunch of USM grad students playing smart and smarmy punk rock. We were suitably impressed, but also intrigued that they as well played like 15 minutes. Turns out that Hattiesburg has a pretty big houseparty scene and bands play in a hurry to be able to

get some tunes in before the cops show up. All in all, we were really really stoked about our experience in Hattiesburg and look forward to making that one a part of our next big walkabout.



After some Waffle Horsing for the day, we made the longest drive of the trip, across northwest Mississippi, across

the Old Man River, and up into southeast Arkansas. This part of the trip was alternately beautiful and mindnumbing, driving almost all state highways across the flatlands along the Mississippi's banks. In the rain. Once we crossed into Arkansas there were fields upon fields of Canadian geese down for the winter. It was rather peaceful. And then on up to Hot Springs, in the foothills of the Ozarks. The Twin Peaks of Arkansas. Boy, did it ever live up to that billing on this trip.

In previous years, playing at Maxine's Live in Hot Springs has

CONTINUED >>

been a highlight for our bands. This time it was a pretty big letdown. The overall tone of the place had changed since our last walkabout at the end of 2015 brought us that way. Less of the cool drunk vibe we had before but now replaced with a more meth vibe. The hallmark of playing at Maxines is that the bands are given a couple of free pizzas as part of their payment. The pizza at Maxines in 2015 was one of the best pizzas I'd ever eaten anywhere in this country. The pizza in 2018...well, it was still good but not great. Katie and Michael ordered a vegan pizza without cheese. They made it without sauce. Not a big deal really, just bring us a side of sauce and we'll dip it. That's cool, it's a free pizza, cool. What proceeded was an escalating Monty Pythonian sequence of duncery. First, the bartender had to come and inspect the pizza. "It has no sauce?" No ma'am, it don't. "Was it supposed to?" Yes. We can just take a side of sauce and it will be cool. Bartender disappeared, then returned with the cook. "The pizza has no sauce?" No, it still has no sauce. Can we get a side of sauce though? Not yet, as the cook and the bartender disappeared again, then came back with another guy who never spoke but also inspected the pizza. The cook then said, "We will make you another one" but Katie and Michael were just like, "just bring us a side of sauce, it'll be cool". Then they disappeared and finally brought some sauce back, but then the cook came back another four times to ask the same question about the sauce on the new pizza. It was a simple mistake expanded into a gigantic production. Turns out that same night *Saturday Night Live* aired a skit similar to what we were experiencing live in Hot Springs.

The show itself was okay. Maxines has a cool stage. We played a fairly long time since the local band dropped off (which happens pretty much every time bands from elsewhere play at Maxines). We felt kinda bad for all the cowboys and cowgirls that made up a third of the crowd and were assured that we sounded somewhat like Bob Seger. But otherwise we got some folks interested in us and the show went off okay. The band after us, **Carlton Heston** from Tulsa, were a kind of Black Keys/Black Angels blues psych thing that were pretty cool. The vibe of the whole night was just ruined by that pizza thing though and the weirdness that surrounded it, so we ducked out as quick as we could pack up our gear and went to drink more Yuengling in the hotel, set on a bluff above Lake Hamilton. The next morning our view from the room's balcony of the overcast sky above the lake really accentuated the *Twin Peaks* vibe we felt from the previous night.

Another refill at the Waffle Horse (Katie and Michael had a road game replacing "house" with "hole" in business names and somehow Waffle House became Waffle Horse) and then the long drive back home past Texarkana and across northeastern pine forest Texas, where we experienced some serious cross winds. So much so that the spoiler done got blown off the back of Colin's sporty sedan. We'd later find out that we drove through a tornado watch in the piney woods outside Tyler. Finally all of us were deposited safe and sound back home.

I'm looking forward to taking our next walkabout, an extended nine day trip to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the band later this summer and the release of our next album, *Drowned In Moonlight*, which should also appear this summer. — **KELLY MINNIS**

STILL POETRY

PLANT BASED

I wonder if a person could fall in love with a plant
There is a lily on my porch
That is sensually sweet
To smell it, to look on it
And to above all touch her
Who makes the sound of a voice
And why can't I hear my lily's
Maybe her voice is everything I hear
She cannot speak; she's a radio
Everything she says is a broadcast
Necessarily precomposed, practiced
And she cannot say that she loves me
If only she were a rose
Edit: I got so drunk that I fell over and killed every stem of the lily

— **DAVID LANDER**

SEASON'S END

for Jack Ketchum (1946-2018)

Whiskey coats a wall of glass
differently than water. As it does
one's throat, one's conversation,
one's drive home.

Whiskey, that calming fire,
leads no where safe. It is
a neighbor with wayward eyes
and an unlit room -

an approaching car on a stranded
road - a barrel in the scope
of a child's wild eyes - teeth
of a dog in the mouth of a

Man, you rattled my ice,
Jack. You showed me things
I can never un-see. You are whiskey
in words, burning and catching

My breath even after the bottle
Of your book slammed shut.

— **KEVIN STILL**

#17

The world is a wonder
One epiphany squaring It's breathing down my neck
We wander
Breathless under booming electric
Storms in the vibrating night
Shocks reflected in the rain puddles
Strafing sheets of water
Where the night lights through the
Puddles of brain, electric there, too
Hoping for a thought, a sight
Of the night all thick around us
We echolocate our lives, friends
Family, loved ones
We divine them sometime or other
And they blindly fluctuate
And we reecho
And for the most part we're sentient
The night around us coated in rain
Wet trees rebound to us
And there are still birds in the void
Still reminders
The great dark forest and we're
In the maze, choking for air
But otherwise fine, frolicking there
Solemn, lone wanderers
With a flick on from the lights
Of perception once in a while
And that's enough for us
— **DAVID LANDER**

THE VIETNAM WAR

WHERE DIVIDED AMERICA BEGINS

The current deep divisions between Americans can be traced to the country's participation in the Vietnam War. The same divides that erupted then—and continue to boil up — are an unfortunate part of our history.

I recently finished watching *The Vietnam War*, the 2017 documentary film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. It is a commitment: 18 hours in ten parts. However, the ten years of research is apparent in every frame. It's almost too much to comprehend; I had to pause between parts because it's so overwhelming and distressing.

The core of the film is how wrong so many were for so long and how many suffered and still suffer on all sides. The distrust Americans have now for their government and their leaders—and each other—is rooted in the lies about the war told us by our presidents: Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, even Ford. Those lies led to a massive as part of the country supported the government and the military—composed mainly of their brave sons, husbands, brothers, and friends—while a part opposed the war due to all the lies and pointlessness. Hundreds of thousands of Americans turned out for antiwar protests. The majority of the country grew to oppose the war, but war president Nixon was re-elected overwhelmingly in 1972. Baffling.

However, the worst lie during the Vietnam era was in 1968 by a presidential candidate: Nixon. He was the Republican candidate for president. Incumbent President Johnson was not running for reelection in 1968 due to the Vietnam War even though peace talks were ongoing at the moment. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey was the Democratic candidate following the assassination of Robert Kennedy.

Nixon secretly convinced South Vietnam to abandon peace talks with the promise of better concessions once he was elected president. A private citizen contacting a foreign nation to influence an election, sound familiar?

Candidate Nixon didn't want Johnson or Humphrey to have a political victory before the election since it would hurt Nixon's election chances. Although Johnson had Nixon's treason on tape, he didn't make it public since he would have to reveal the FBI and NSA were tapping the South Vietnamese government's phones.

Nixon then called Johnson to lie that he interfered in the peace talks. He lied to the president. And of course, he lied to South Vietnam. Nixon was elected president in 1968. America would remain in the Vietnam War for another five years; Nixon would be forced to resign as president before the war ended due to the Watergate scandal.

Thousands of American lives and billions upon billions of dollars were wasted for political advantage by the evil Nixon, our president.

No matter how well Americans fought, and tens of thousands fought so well, the war could never be won since the goal was never understood.

I thought I knew the history of the Vietnam War since it is my generation's war — I received a draft card, took the physical, and only escaped because the draft was ended while I was in college. However, I learned so much about the war.

For example, a young Ho Chi Minh, the revered leader of Vietnam, tried to meet with President Woodrow Wilson during the peace talks in Paris after World War I to argue for a free Vietnam. However, Vietnam would remain under French colonial rule for decades more. Even after Ho and Vietnam fought with American forces in World War Two, the United States would not back him to free Vietnam from French rule due to fear of Communism.

That Communist threat that drove American policy for decades led the U.S. to bankroll the French war in Vietnam, covering 80% of the cost by 1952, something Americans were lied to about, naturally. Imagine—American taxpayers were paying for the French to fight in Vietnam in the 1950s.

America sent hundreds of military advisers to Vietnam during this time, none who spoke the language or knew the culture, a practice that continued for decades as tens of thousands of American soldiers were sent over with little or no cultural training. It's no wonder the 1968 My Lai massacre took place where American soldiers murdered more than 500 innocent Vietnamese villagers — men, women, children, babies. But the divisions were there even then.

American soldiers who prevented the massacre of more innocent citizens at My Lai at that time were criticized by the U.S. military and government officials for trying to stop those war crimes from taking place. They later received medals.

Then back in the United States, you have the 1970 Kent State shootings where American soldiers killed four American students on a college campus during a protest against the war. At the time, more than half the country thought the college students were at fault for getting themselves killed. President Nixon called protesters "bums." More divisions.

Days after Kent State, another divide example was apparent when more than a thousand high school and college students held a memorial for the Kent State students in New York City. A labor official organized a counter-protest of construction workers — the Hard Hat Riot — in support of the war that entailed students being pummeled with clubs, hard hats, and steel-toed boots.

Only six people were arrested, but 70 went to the hospital. The labor official was later made a Nixon Cabinet member.

More than four million college students went on strike after Kent State — nearly 500 colleges closed — to protest the war and the Kent State shootings (see "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young). About 100,000 protesters showed up days later in Washington, D.C. which was protected by the military and described as an armed camp. Examples of divisions abound.

A divided America then due to lies about a bungled war planted the seeds for the wide rifts in the United States today. How to heal those chasms is another issue altogether.

Hopefully, knowing our history can help find solutions.
—MIKE L. DOWNEY

IN DEFENSE OF RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS & OTHER EMBARRASMENTS

I belong to a private group Facebook group called **Now Playing**, a group devoted to showing off the music that you are listening to at any given moment. It has to be a photo of an actual physical medium (record, tape, 8-track, CD,) while it is being played. I was added by one of my former editors at Amazon.com where I was in the early '00s for about 18 months a music writer and assistant editor. It is a good place for me to learn about interesting new and old music as well as to drunkenly post photos of "bad" '80s 45's from my **DJ Skullbone** sets. It is very much a music snob's refuge. There are the rare posts about '80s country or current pop music but for the most part one sees photos of obscure, critically acclaimed music.

In recent months there have been some growing pains for Now Playing. As more people have been added there have been some folks who are perhaps more combative or defensive about the music they share. A person was banned from the group last month for getting belligerent about the responses to his post showing his love for **Red Hot Chili Pepper's Californication** LP. Take it, the original poster complained about how stuck-up and elitist the group was because they didn't like RHCP, but also the group earned his belligerence by then spamming his post with well over 500 posts complaining about how awful the Chili Peppers are as a band, as people, and condescending to the poster for thinking anything else about the group. It was ugly old school record store elitism at play, the sort of thing that makes you chuckle when watching/reading *Hi Fidelity* but was unpleasant to experience. It reminded me of being on the wrong side of the store counter from a smartass record store clerk whose taste was far "better" than yours.

It got me to thinking about RHCP too and how that band has become a very safe object of scorn for evolved music fans. It also makes me think of a conversation I've had on band van trips with Michael the Wonko about whether or not it is proper or fair to say a band is just outright awful. My argument has always been that if a band can actually identify a goal or aim and then pursue that aim to a successful point that the band doesn't just inherently "suck". That a band's particular aim, like marrying pop reggae with doom metal and misogynistic hip hop, may not be your thing doesn't mean that band "sucks". It means that you don't like it. Michael the Wonko argued that no, at some point you have to admit that a band or a movie or novel is just bad. Not that you don't like it, but that the universe would consider such art to be awful and it does not deserve to exist. I think that's a particular elitist point of view and I eventually just had to concede we would not agree.

When it comes to Red Hot Chili Peppers the lion's share of the folks on Now Playing would concur with Michael the Wonko. The music is awful, the singer can't sing, their misogyny does not hold up to modern listening sympathies, the drummer is terrible, other bands did it better or were ripped off by them, and there is intrinsically nothing artful, interesting, or worth listening to again in the band's output and anyone who thinks so is a really bad person. This is not a singular point of view. Many famous people, including Nick Cave, hold such an

Opinion. I certainly find it humorous, but I also don't think RHCP were all that bad. From 1986-1991 the Chili Peppers were a fairly important band and their success helped to create a commercial conduit for other like-minded "college radio" bands that ultimately begat the success of Nirvana and the commercialization of grunge and alternative rock. It also led to the emergence of nu-metal and hip hop/rock fusion.

I first heard the Red Hot Chili Peppers in a key scene of the movie *Thrashin'*, a skate-sploitation film that is short on story but long on cool skateboarding stunts and punk rock. The movie does not hold up today, but that movie was the first time I'd seen the '80s version of skateboarding counterculture that I'd just started getting into from reading *Thrasher* and *Transworld* magazines and learning how to ollie and grind a curb on my piece of shit flea market Powell Peralta copy. Two key scenes led me to track down music from this movie. One was a street chase set to Circle Jerks' "Wild in the Street". Another was a club scene featuring the Chili Peppers playing "Blackeyed Blonde" from their second album, *Freaky Styley*. It took me a while to figure out who these bands were, but eventually I found a friend who put *Group Sex* and *Wild in the Streets* on a C60 for me and my brother's bandmate Allen had what was then the new Red Hot Chili Peppers' tape *Uplift Mofo Party Plan* to dub for me. I fell in love with that tape. I was 12 years old. It was dumb, jockish, boorish, but had some cool music and turned me onto something else going on other than '80s pop radio and what I saw on MTV. I began to recognize other Chili Peppers songs played in movies and on Vanderbilt's college radio station, WRVU. I saw the band with my brother in 1989 at the Armory in Nashville, the first such show I'd been to. It gave me the confidence to go the next month to see **Bad Brains** and **Corrosion of Conformity** and other local bands in a similar vein. The Chili Peppers was my gateway drug to an entire music scene I had to that point known little to nothing about.

I eventually grew out of my Chili Peppers phase and every few years I'll go back and listen to *Mother's Milk* and *Uplift Mofo* for nostalgia purposes (I never did cotton to the band's first two albums). Sometimes it makes me smile. Sometimes I cringe. There are other bands of that era, **Fishbone**, **Follow For Now**, **Living Colour**, **Bad Brains**, **24/7 Spy**, whose music holds up to different degrees of effect. It is sometimes easy to forget that Red Hot Chili Peppers did not emerge from a vacuum and had peers and other bands that mined similar territory to different degrees of effect. A lot of it sounds like a time capsule being opened and it does not hold up well these days or it sounds dated. Today I listened to the first three Chili Peppers all in a row. I do not understand what is so awful about this band. Okay, Anthony Kiedis could not sing well for the first half of his career. His rapping is sophomoric, daterapish at times, and mostly pretending to a sophistication that it does not earn. I know many who hold similar opinions of Bono and Robert Plant. Let's talk about the genius of Flea's bass playing and how he help to popularize, for better or worse, a style of playing that had been used in soul music for years but not in the context Flea would apply it to. Punk funk was a revelation. The guitar playing of John Frusciante was also groundbreaking and his work

as a solo artist continues to be challenging and interesting. The band's other former members have included some real powerhouses that have played in other more acceptable bands. Cliff Martinez played drums in **The Weirdos and Captain Beefheart's Magic Band**; Blaykbyrd McKnight played in **Parliament-Funkadelic**; Jack Irons eventually played in **Pearl Jam** and **Eleven**, etc. The level of musicianship on the albums is high and many well-regarded producers, such as Andy Gill of **Gang of Four** and George Clinton of **Parliament-Funkadelic** have worked with the band.

Some of the sex rap stuff is truly embarrassing and uncomfortable in the current #MeToo climate. It does not hold up. It sounds tone deaf. Anthony Kiedis's approach to rapping early on has no nuance. He couldn't sing in tune. At least guitarist Hillel Slovak could and helped to guide Kiedis's vocals on some of the more melodic material. Still, "Fight Like a Brave" is a great empowered funk jam. "Behind the Sun" is a very pretty psychedelic soul flashback. "Hollywood (Africa)" is a cool little soul song that benefits from James Brown's horn section. "Police Helicopter" certainly fits in the mood of what L.A. was like at that time and the tone and lyrical content could be considered as a part of the beginnings of the gangsta rap movement. The band's covers of Dylan and Stevie Wonder helped introduce another generation to those important artists and I certainly learned a lot from reading music magazine interviews with Flea, Frusciante, and drummer Chad Smith. I was turned onto **Ohio Players**, **Funkadelic**, **Shuggie Otis**, **Betty Davis** and many other hard and heavy '70s funk/rock artists.

I cannot defend post-*Blood Sugar Sex Magik* Chili Peppers. When I reviewed that album in my high school newspaper I found it to be overlong, too self-serious, and where the band strayed from its own sound it veered too much towards that of Jane's Addiction's. The albums only got more self-serious from there. At least for the most part the rapping was gone. I can't say that when "Can't Stop" would turn up on the radio that I would immediately turn the channel, but I didn't like it enough to want to purposefully hear it. I have heard much worse stuff on the radio besides them. They are a rock band that generally when you hear a song by them you've not heard before you can tell right away who it is, even before the singer opens his mouth. There aren't a lot of bands these days that you can say that about.

For me, a certain part of my history is tied to listening to *Mother's Milk* and *Uplift Mofo Party Plan*. It will always be a part of my context. It is not a fandom that I regret or feel wary of revealing. I don't like the meme culture of making fun of someone for liking something that isn't cool or is weird or dumb or even very mainstream. My many years of being married to someone who could care less about that two year period of Guided By Voices when they were the kings of the world, or Sebadoh or Sonic Youth or what have you has helped me to understand that what a person listens to does not make who that person is necessarily. Taste is what taste is. I'm not gonna goof on you for having RHCP records stashed away. It's not that weird. Better hide those Limp Bizkit CD's though. — KELLY MINNIS

LIFE CAN BE SWEETER THAN HONEY



Besides, even if you didn't do it, I'm going to punish you, because I'm big and you're small, I'm right and you're wrong, and there's nothing you can do about it!
-- Agatha Trunchbull in "Matilda"

The Beeler and I will sometimes sit down to watch *Matilda*, the movie based on the Roald Dahl book of the same name. It's not that we haven't seen it a million times before...we used to own the DVD when we still had young 'uns in the house. Nor are there now any kids around to give us an excuse to watch it. It's just that sometimes you need reassurance that the Miss Honeys of the world prevail and the Trunchbolls in our midst don't end up succeeding.

"I'm right, you're wrong...I'm big, you're small...and there's nothing you can do about it." It's the philosophy of Matilda's dad and of the Trunchbull. Throughout much of the movie it seems to be true too. What can a little kid or a sweet, mild mannered teacher do in the face of that kind of power or that kind of attitude? But by the end of the story, the narrator tells us that "Matilda found to her great surprise that life can be fun...and she decided to have as much of it as possible. After all, she was a very smart girl."

It's one of those kinds of stories that, as a grown up, I need to be reminded about every so often. The fact of the matter is that I do believe that Miss Honey's way is better than the Trunchbull's and I do think it's better to be like Matilda than to be like her parents Harry or Zinnia. I know that it is better to be loving than hateful, better to be kind than to be mean, and that it is better to suffer at the hands of unjust power than to wield unjust powers over others. But it is one thing to know those notions in my head and quite another to remember them in my day to day dealings with other people when lashing out in anger seems so much handier or it seems like the bullies always get their way while the meek get put in the Trunchbull's chokey.

I think that over the past couple of years remembering has been hard for all of us. When up becomes down, when wrong is justified as right, when so much evil, darkness, and just plain meanness seem to prevail, it is easy to succumb to the temptation to give up or to entertain the idea that goodness, truth, and beauty have no meaning or no power.

So, I'm suggesting that all of us watch Matilda at some point this month. Watch it and laugh at how ridiculous the Trunchbull can be, roll your eyes at how horrible Harry and Zinnia are as parents, but most of all, delight in the fact that a very smart girl who loved to read books and a very kind teacher who recognized the good in every child find out that heroes don't just appear in fairy tales and that real life can have happy endings.

Adulting can be very hard, very tiring, very soul-draining work. Living in a darkened world can make us feel all alone and helpless. But every so often we can do childish things like watching a children's movie and we can rediscover, once again, that life can be fun and we can make the decision to have as much of it as possible. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER



STILL DRINKING

from Tampa, Florida. (Bless that Todd!) Interestingly enough, distribution is not all Cigar City has own in these parts. According to deep web secret reports to which Todd won clearance, Cigar City is also brewing small batches for their Texas sales at the **Oskar Blues** location in Austin.

First off, what the hell? Oskar Blues has a brewery/tap room in Austin? And since 2016? Right about right now, a collective genuflection seems in order. . . . Okay. I'm still digesting this information even as I'm typing it, so let's just genuflect again for a moment. . . . I mean, Oskar Blues is seriously one of America's—crap, I don't want to get all hyperbolic here, but, fine, I'll say it—top ten breweries. That's lofty, but not hard to debate. Even sober, that's not difficult to debate. And to think that they're here now. Like right down the road actually—like, at this moment, right now, there's **Dale's Pale Ale BREWING** in Texas. That's like saying that suddenly babies are being born with Converse All-Stars ALREADY attached to their feet that they'll just keep growing into so that they'll never have to worry about it. OR discovering that Oskar Blues is brewing in Austin is like learning that my pugs suddenly can speak so that I'll never need to answer my phone again. It's borderline miraculous. It's reason enough to buy a stamp, an envelope, and write a letter home, which I won't do because I'm writing this. Still, the frickin' thought of it . . .

So does the fledgling Florida brewery (Cigar City) that gets to brew with the amaz-nuts Colorado brewery (Oskar Blues) make Texas worthy beers? I'll stifle a Shiner jab here and simply say HELLS AND YEAHS. I stumbled across Cigar City on tap at our local World of Beer—where five ounce samples now sell, for the most part, at \$2 a pull—and promptly ordered all three offerings on tap. **Cigar City Lager** (4.5% ABV / 22 IBUs) poured as pristine as one would expect from the style, but **CC Lager's** nose and mouth-feel exceeded such. Hop-notes here made this sucker reminiscent of a Pilsner—a bit less cracker-heavy sweet (like a backyard beer), more grassy, spicy and inviting (like a good Kolsch). **Guaybera American Pale Ale** (5.5% ABV / 50 IBUs), which is named after a Latin American shirt of all things, was somehow super fruit forward, even dat tart, while still remaining bright and not syrupy. Slight apricot notes got me smacking and moaning for more.



Finally, the **Jai Alai IPA** (7.5% ABV / 70 IBUs)—named after a game native to Spain with a ball that flies at 188 mph, sure, why not—seemed to take everything in the APA up a notch. Personally, I was digging the Guaybera APA just fine. The balance in the APA felt perfect. I saw no reason to kick things up with extra hops and sharper fruit notes. Had I not tasted the Lager and Guaybera first, I probably would have bathed myself in Jai Alai. It's a great IPA, especially for non-hop heads.



My overall impression of Cigar City is that they keep things mellow. Their strength is in their reserve. Nothing here is overpowering. Everything is welcoming. Flavors are full, but not too demanding. It's like their emotionally

healthy: they are who they are and who they are makes me feel beautiful. Again, bless Todd.

If you're still with me, hear me now: do not miss the chance to grab the following beer on tap. **Lone Pint's Knecht Ruprecht Toasted Oatmeal Porter** (6.7% ABV/36 IBUs) is a limited, single-batch holiday offering. And it's more beautiful than Christmas year round. Like **Saint Arnold's Divine Reserve** and **Stone's Anniversary IPA** and **Anchor's Christmas Ale**, Lone Pint's Knecht Ruprecht takes on a different dark-beer format each year. In the past, most KR's have been some variation of stout. The Toasted Oatmeal Porter, KR #5, features Lone Pint's first break in style. Personally, I don't know what they're calling a Porter here—this sucker is stout all the way. Totally opaque, light-absorbing, abysmally black, the KRTPOT doesn't squeeze a single ray of purple luminescent hope around the edges of the glass. The nose boasts dark chocolate and sweetened coffee, which is immediately what shines in the initial mouth-feel. A bit oily with a lingering un-smoked tobacco tease, this "Porter" flourishes as its temperature rises. If the tap you find serves only chilled glasses, I recommend ordering two: you'll recognize a distinct difference between the first and second pint. Lone Pint refuses to brew a bad beer. From their poetically balanced **Yellow Rose IPA** to their genre redefining **Gentlemen's Relish Brown Ale**, Lone Pint keep calling us to suffer a wait for their next creation. Now that I know the Knecht Ruprecht will release again and anew next Winter, I have yet another reason not to protest the holidays. —

KEVIN STILL

TALES OF EXCESS & OUTRAGE

Episode 7: The Curious Incident of Judy McCargo and the Quincy Oatmeal Bubba

If you're an only child, you might not understand this. Keep reading anyway. It's an important life lesson in humiliation, frustration, and revenge.

My older brother, Blayne, loved to tease the fuck out of me. Being the sensitive little geeky bastard I was (still am), I took no small amount of umbrage to said teasing. He was 16 when I was eight. He was also a keen fan of the Doors. Had Jim Morrison known of Blayne's appropriation of Morrison's ad libbing, that rock icon would have heartily approved.

Blayne listened to the Doors from MORNING TO NIGHT. He knew every nuance of every utterance of the Lizard King. In the closing jam of the Doors' "The Soft Parade," Jim screams out "AAAAAHHHHH-HEE!" Most of us sane individuals would hardly notice, but brother Blayne not only noticed but made it his motherfucking mantra, ending every taunt of me with "AAAAAHHHHH-HEE!"

He employed multiple variations. A long, rising-in-pitch/volume "AaaaaAAAAA-heeeeeEEEE!" would en-core a heartbreaking disappointment I'd just experienced, while a snappy "A-HEE!" punctuated a quick name-calling. No matter the version, it drove me to apoplexy.

But the name-calling was even more maddening. One Christmas, we were watching the scene in *Frosty the Snowman* when the children are giving a name to the snowman they made. One noisome little squib says, "Let's call him 'Oatmeal.'" I laughed uproariously, only to find Blayne saying "That's the perfect name for you, Oatmeal! A-HEE!"

My laughter was snuffed.

That Spring, I related to Blayne and my Dad that one of my gym teachers was nicknamed "Bubba," which seemed a novelty to me. Guess what? "Why should that name be strange to you, Oatmeal Bubba? A-HEE!"

Fast forward another month. Blayne, my Dad, and I were on a road trip, playing a quiz game to pass the miles. One person thought up a name from a category—say, U.S. Presidents. The players then had to, Wheel-of-Fortune-style, guess letters until one of them could figure out the President. My Dad fatefully chose John Quincy Adams, and I was thereafter known to my brother as "Quincy Oatmeal Bubba"...with the attendant "A-HEE!"

The A-HEEs and name-calling were bad enough, but one practical joke pushed me into festering vengeance. One day, I came home from school and walked in to this strange guy sitting in a chair, reading.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing,

waltzing into my home? I'm gonna call the cops on you! Matter of fact, I'll throw you out myself!"

I was soon sitting on my front stoop, crying and screaming, "This is my house! You're the stranger!" and wondering what in gaslit hot fresh hell had happened. Blayne came out from his hiding place, laughing his ass off, while his friend who'd thrown me out of my own home, high-fived him.

This aggression would not stand. Yes, I'd beaten Blayne at knob-hockey in a seven-game, do-or-die series. That rankled him. Yes, when he once let me play street hockey with him and his friends, I serendipitously waled a slap-shot to his nuts. He wore a cup in the goal crease after that. But those were mere happenstances. I needed to savor a comeuppance that only a pre-pubescent could render.

One night, Mom and Dad were in the bedroom at the far end of the house, getting ready to go out. That meant that Blayne would torture—er, uh, *babysit* (gawd, I hated that fucking term)—me that night. Oh, joy.

Blayne primed me for the evening's festivities from his reclining post on the couch, watching a TV show I hated. "Hey, Quincy Oatmeal Bubba! That little girl on TV looks like Judy McCargo, your lover!" (Judy didn't ask to be involved in any of this. She was a girl of questionable hygiene in my 3rd-grade classroom, and I not only had no interest in her but was abhorred at the idea of being her lover. Blayne pounced on that like pre-diet Oprah on a pot roast.)

"Shut up, Blayne!" I screeched, my overweening sense of injustice rising in my little-geek gorge.

"No!" he laughed in glee and blew his congenitally atrocious breath in my face. "AaaaaAAAAA-heeeeeEEEE!"

I snapped. Like George McFly, I'd had enough. I punched him in his sneering face as hard as I could. Then I played the only card I had left—screams from the damned in hell. "MOM! DAD!!! Blayne's hitting me! AAAAAHHHH!" (I would've added a "Hee" at the end, had I the presence of mind, but I was booking it the length of the house to my parents' bedroom, Blayne hot on my heels.)

Cradled in my mother's protecting arms, I winked gleefully at Blayne as my Mom said to him, "Don't you touch a hair on this precious angel's head! If I hear that you laid one finger on him tonight, you'll be grounded for a month!"

We watched my favorite shows that night.

And the moral of the story is: Don't make your little brother have to resort to sneaky shit 'cuz you're a dick.
— RANDY BEELER



PEDAL PUSHING: *FORUM TRUTHS*

I've been perusing gear forums since I was an overnight radio producer in the late '90s/early '00s. I had a lot of time on my hands and a T1 line when I barely had dial-up at home. I read anything I could on the Internet and freaked out when I discovered Harmony Central and Vintage Synth Explorer. I could spend hours reading gear reviews, but these were one way streets at the time. User reviews, but not discussion boards. Those were still in Usenet. VSE started a forum in 2000. A year later I discovered Drummer Café. I signed up, and I've been a participant on one forum or another ever since.

Forums then weren't quite as contentious. It seems like the internet itself really took until the social media age to get truly mean. But I learned fairly quickly that while there may have been a lot of arguments and misinformation that there were a handful of points made that seemed to be the universal takeaway from the whole thing. A series of truths that most of the people on the forum could concur with. This seems to be cross-forum. There are universal truths I've learned from other forums as well. Just good solid advice. I'll share a few of those here.

DrummerCafe 1.) 42-strand snares can make nearly any snare drum sound beefier, larger, and snappier. It's not a sound that I want all the time, but I certainly like to record with it because it certainly seems to bring out the right frequencies and tone.

2.) Any drum with good edges, the right heads, and proper tuning can sound great. This means the cheapest drum all the way up to the most expensive drum. It doesn't matter the materials, the shell construction, the name brand, the country of origin, none of that matters as much. A well-cut bearing edge (rounded 30, sharp 45, soft 45, double 45, whatever, just so long as it is cut well and waxed if there are imperfections in the edge); heads chosen specifically for the type of edge, the amount of "headroom" or "bandwidth" you prefer (thinner heads for more resonance, thicker or pre-muffled heads for less overtones and more control), the overall volume and durability. Heads and tuning win the day.

3.) Every drummer should own a Ludwig Acrolite or Supraphonic. It may not be your main drum but it is worth having one around. It is the most recorded drum in history for a reason. The aluminum affords for a lower pitch and drier overtone. Acrolites are student drums (8 lug as opposed to 10 lug) and can often be found below \$100. It is the best \$100 a drummer will ever spend.

Vintage Synth Explorer 1.) There are miles and miles HTML devoted to conjecture over the merits of analog subtractive synthesis versus virtual analog and sample-based synthesis. Which is better? Neither. It is, always, about the application of the tool. People who need realistic sounds probably want them sampled from real instruments. People who want fat dubstep bass probably want analog waves and filters. There really is no one is better than the other. Early digital, due to the expense of DSP's, memory, and sampling rates, often

have what's known as "aliasing". Digital is a stair-step sampling of analog's natural curve. If the curve isn't sampled enough times, the staircase is more pronounced and a facsimile of a curve is not present. Modern digital does not alias.

2.) Polyphony is overrated. Many people complain bitterly about not having as many synthesizer voices as they feel they need. Me included, as I like to set long releases on pads for the stoner-new age music I make with **great unwashed luminaries**. Others create intricate sequences that have lots of notes going at once and find a lack of voices to be inhibiting. These days nearly everyone records with a DAW. We have infinite numbers of tracks at our disposal. So perhaps instead of running a single sequence or part that has to use a maximum number of voices, why not overdub them? Instead of thinking about playing a chord with seven notes in it, perhaps overdub a monosynth seven times playing single notes? Most non-stringed classical instruments create single notes (brass and woodwinds in particular). Think of chords as a series of parallel melodies instead of as blocks of melodies. It can create interesting results this way.

The Gear Page 1.) If TGP is crowing overwhelmingly about a pedal, you should probably suck it up and give it a try. Gear hype is prevalent in the forum world. Whenever something new comes out, people gotta jump on it and have the first opinions about it. Combing TGP you will find overwhelming consensus about a handful of pedal designs for a reason. Those are generally pedals that will work for a wide variety of players and rigs. These can be new boutique circuits like the Klon, Timmy, King of Tone, Blue Sky, El Capistan, Belle Epoch or tried-and-true readily available gear like the Tubescreamer, Carbon Copy, Rat, Big Muff, Phase 90, CE -2, etc. Great tone is achieved with expensive and inexpensive gear alike.

Offset Guitars 1.) Replace that bridge. Mustang, Staytrem, or Mastery bridges are your friends for Jaguars and Jazzmasters.

2.) Blue Loctite is your friend. Apply it liberally to saddle grub screws and bridge posts to keep the vibration of the strings and your playing from working the screws tight or loose.

3.) MIJ/CIJ Fender pickups suck. This could be a truth for all Fender guitars, not just offsets. There are dozens of options from post-market stalwarts like Seymour Duncan and DiMarzio and boutique winders like Novak, Lollar, Fralin, Pickup Wizard and many others.

TDPRI 1.) You don't gotta spend big bucks on boutique winders to get great pickups for your Telecaster. Onamac and Cavalier make fantastic \$100-ish a pair pickups for your Tele ranging from vintage to modern noiseless styles.

Now, there are also a lot of widely held misconceptions repeated ad nauseum on the forums. Next month we'll dig into some of those. But the positives generally outweigh the negatives. — **KELLY MINNIS**

CONCERT CALENDAR



Audn

Faryegir Fymedar

While nature conducts its dying symphony, the icy tomb of winter begins to close on the earth, and what better season to release a black metal album. As if on cue, metalheads are graced with an album that captures the mood accompanying the colder months; Audn's sophomore release offers atmospheric black metal (ABM from here on out) that is sure to bring a chill to your bones, and perhaps, a tear to your eye.

From what Google Translate can comprehend, Audn's name is Icelandic for "desolation," and the title, *Faryegir fymdar*, means something like "The passengers endured." One of the difficulties in reviewing this album is that it is entirely in Icelandic. Encyclopedia Metallum has not yet released any lyrics for the album, but it does indicate that lyrical themes include sorrow, loss, and nature. By the look of the album's artwork, that certainly could be gleaned without speaking a lick of Icelandic. Like many ABM albums, the artwork depicts something of nature, but this one is rather vague and abstract. Best I can tell, it looks like barren earth and a tree trunk with a passageway through the center. Colors of gold, brown, and black permeate all; it certainly creates a bleak feeling.

If the artwork isn't enough to set the mood, the music certainly is. Audn delivers a nearly fifty minute journey that takes the listener through a forest of the themes mentioned earlier. Where most black metal albums try to capture winter's bite, this one feels more like autumn's melancholy. The guitars have that classic black metal twang which is layered with the vocalist's shrieks in such a way that produces an echo effect, giving off a feeling most ethereal, and there is no folk instrumentation (Thank God!). The vocals are not lost in the mix; they are clear and separate from the guitars. Most of the songs tend to be slow tempoed, but we get a peppering of mid and fast tempos which keeps the album

is truly beautiful. What I love is that the songs average about six minutes, something not very common to ABM records where songs can average fifteen minutes or longer. Despite this fact, the songs do tend to lack individuality and feel like they are continuations of the one before, but this creates an effect which causes the listener to play the record from start to finish repeatedly. Definitely a plus!

I'll be honest, I'm usually not the biggest fan of ABM; I prefer my black metal to be fast, aggressive, and pomeling like an assault of icesicles in a blizzard. Think Immortal or Frosthelm (a new black metal band which I hope to cover later). ABM tends to bore me rather quickly due to the ridiculous song lengths, poor production, and heavy flirtations with folk metal that blurs the genre lines. This, however, was the first ABM album that I was able to listen to on multiple occasions, and enjoy it. Audn has produced a record that avoids many of ABM's chronic pitfalls and creates something that is well-balanced. Overall, I give *Faryegir fymdar* a solid 3.8:5. — CALEB MULLINS



Sneaky Pete

Texas Musical Malarkey

The first of three albums planned for 2018, *Texas Musical Malarkey* by local DIY musician Sneaky Pete Rizzo leans more in the direction of folk music with prominent harmonica and ukulele, along with the occasional banjo and acoustic guitar. However, Rizzo doesn't stray far from his core of short tunes laced with humor and the random barb.

Overall, the album deals with changes, often wrought by the passing of time. The narrator in the R&B-flavored "Stud Buzard" laments about being depressed, having "lost my taste for women my age." "Seen It All, Done It All" features a great harmonica with lyrics about "I'd never thought I'd see the day/When I'd be old and gray, but 'inside I'm still the same old me." The melancholy

"Final Goodbye" and the harp-driven "Ghost Town" are self-explanatory by their titles. "Roadkill Grazer," "Moonshine Nightmares," and "Roamin' Texan" ("Got crocked in Luckenbach/Learned some skills in Huntsville) are what you'd expect on a Sneaky Pete album. However, "Boobies on the Barbie" mixes Barbie dolls, a movie beach, and barbecue in such a twisted way that repeated listenings haven't cleared up yet. The sly "Sour Grapes" starts off sounding like an outtake from a Carter Family recording about lovers—"You were so sincere"—until a Chuck Berry riff intrudes as the lyrics reveal her duplicity. The song concludes spiritedly with likely the only time these expressions have been linked: "Hallelujah! Kiss my ass." "Friends and Family Reunion" is a straightforward folk tune with harmonica and perhaps banjo while "Liver Rot Rhapsody" is an instrumental that portends Rizzo's upcoming non-vocal album. The bonus cut—"Wagon Wheel, MA to TX"—is a playful telling of Rizzo's move from up north back to Texas last year (although he actually did break his back before moving back).

(Music historical note: back in the 1980s-early 1990s, Sneaky Pete was a stalwart of the local B/C/S music scene, often playing venues before or after a young Lyle Lovett) — MIKE L. DOWNEY.



Dagon

Back to the Sea

It's 2018, and barely a month into a new year, metal bands around the world are firing up the machine of war to bring us an onslaught of expectations for album releases. To my ecstatic surprise, a band from my youth has returned after a near decade in hiatus. If you have never heard of Dagon before, you are in for a treat because these Michigan melodic death metal masters have returned with an album straight from the heart of the sea.

With a name like Dagon, the works of H.P. Lovecraft come to mind; his work is certainly no stranger to metal. Dagon is a band that makes no apologies

for their love of Lovecraft, thrash, and the Gothenburg melodeath sound. After their release of *Terraphobic* in 2009 (an album I cannot recommend enough), Dagon became one of the best kept secret of the Michigan metal scene among better known bands like Battlecross, The Black Dahlia Murder, and Acid Witch.

After nearly ten years, the obvious question is if Dagon has changed all that much; and to many pleased fans, the answer is no. *Back to the Sea* is an appropriate title that communicates a rebirth of their sound. Like previous albums, the guitar work is very well-rounded with a nice balance of Gothenburg melody and thrash, and the duel shriek and guttural vocals of the band's drummer and bassist give it a nice edge. One different approach for the band is the lyrics which still focus on the ocean, but draw on historic and current events. *Back to the Sea* also shows more variety of pace. The opening title track, "A Feast of Flesh and Silent Death," and "The Drifting Isle" have Dagon's familiar fast tempo, but in "Walk the Plank," the tempo is slow and ominous, giving off a feeling of imminent dread. What's more is that the band has graced us with not one, but two, seven-and-a-half minute tracks! Usually, tracks that long don't get much praise from me, but without doubt, "The Battle of Lepanto" is my favorite song on this record. What's more is that these songs are not gimmicky. As melodeath bands tend to do, Dagon tries to get us to feel something. The track that shows this intention off the best is "Erased by Fathoms" which recounts the woes of countless flood victims.

Everything about this record from the arrangement of the songs, the progression of sounds, and the overall mood of the lyrics is done perfectly. Maybe I'm a bit biased, but there is not a song on this record that feels out of place or like a filler track. Such a long hiatus has proven to be a good thing for Dagon, as they have produced an album that has truly outdone the masterpiece that is *Terraphobic*. For me, *Back to the Sea* scores and easy 5.5. — CALEB MULLINS

CONCERT CALENDAR

2/1—Colton French, Desdimona @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/2—Bad Hombre, JC Juice, HYAH!, YeeHa! @ Shiner Park, College Station. 7pm

2/2—ST37, Hearts of Animals, The Ex-Optimists @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/3—Josh Glenn Experiment, Billy King & The Bad Bad Good, Electric Astronaut, Hand Me Down Adventure @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/9—YeeHa!, The Fox In The Ground, Griffin Carter @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

2/9—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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

2/16—'80s Prom Dance Party @ The Village, Bryan. 9:30pm

2/16—Jay Satellite, LUCA, Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/17—Beige Watch @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/22—Odd Folks, Corusco @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/23—Three33, Wellborn Road, The Lesser Evil @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

2/24—When Particles Collide, Unicornog @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/1—Zynius, The Tron Sack @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/2—Dollie Barnes, The Cover Letter, Wiretree @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

3/2—Texas Birthday Bash with Magic Girl @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

3/3—LUCA (CD release), Charm Bomb, Vodi, Magic Girl & Skullbone @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm

3/3—The Mammoths, Citizen Banned Radio @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/8—Gnar World Order, Blast Dad, Unicornog @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

3/9—From Parts Unknown, Breaklights, Mutant Love, Electric Astronaut @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

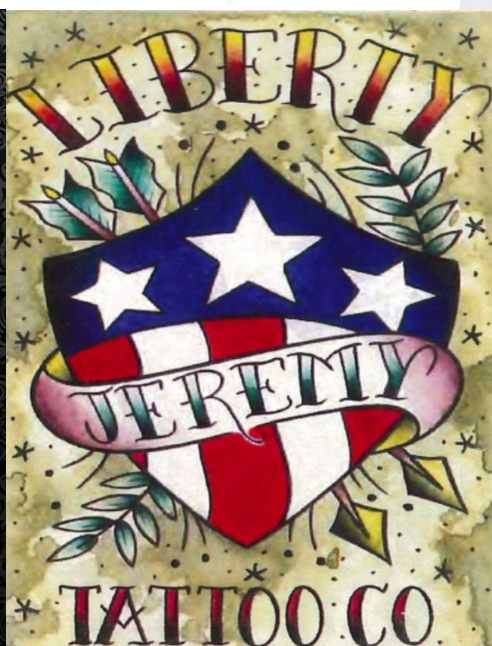
3/10—TGTG @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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936-588-9603
Poke;nprints@gmail.com
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