

# STOREREPRESENT



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*inside: ask creepy horse - medicare 4 all - a nod to the professor - how to know if someone loves you - drunk detective starkness - pedal pushing - selling time - silencing the fool - wrong side of history - good movies for bad guys - why dont my mother love me - anarchy from the ground up - dear senior burns - record reviews - concert calendar*





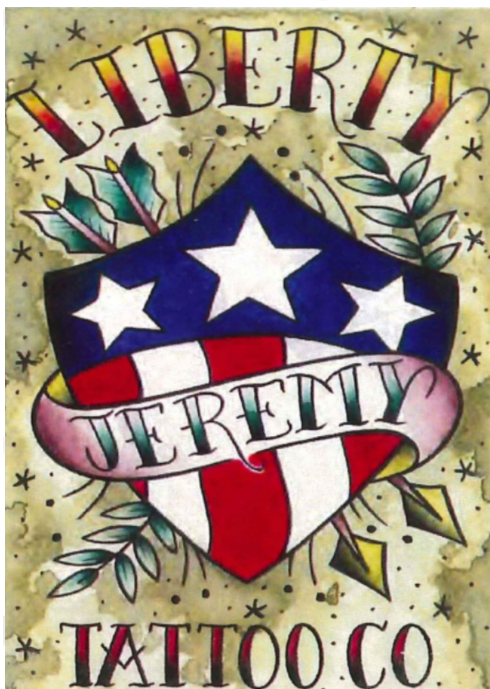
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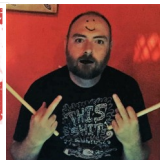
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# A NOD TO THE PROFESSOR

I have never openly balled outloud at the news of some celebrity's death. Some of them have hit me hard and given me the teary-eyed thing, like the passing several years ago of Prince and David Bowie. I told myself then that I would be experiencing this sort of thing more often as more and more of my cultural heroes of the 1960's and beyond would be slipping this mortal coil every day. However, I was drastically unprepared for the news about Neil Peart, drummer/lyricist for the progressive rock band Rush, dying of brain cancer at age 67 last month. In fact, it gave me a mighty pause.

My first favorite band of all time was KISS. They looked like superheroes and I was down. But the first band to *truly* connect to me in a deep and spiritual way was Rush. I shared a bedroom with my oldest brother and I was most times at the mercy of whatever he had on the tape deck. That worked in my favor, and at an early age I got hip to the aforementioned KISS, Rush, Ozzy Osbourne, Iron Maiden, Night Ranger, Judas Priest, Triumph, Led Zeppelin, and Def Leppard. While that was all enjoyable music, Rush was the one that I came back to in a large way on my own later in the '80s, when my brother had gone away to college and I could run the boombox as I saw fit.

At first I came back to Rush as a nascent musician. I started playing drums in school in 6th grade. It came easily to me. My dad played drums, my brother played drums. I had a practice pad and sticks for as long as I could remember and catching rhythms from the radio and replicating them was pretty easy. I learned to read music and play typical school orchestra stuff. But I was getting a greater education from plugging in my headphones and air drumming or banging on pillows to the classics: *Led Zeppelin IV*, *Are You Experienced?*, *We Sold Our Souls For Rock & Roll*, and most importantly, *Moving Pictures*, Rush's best-selling album (and what most consider their masterpiece). The more I listened to that album the more I connected with not just the outlandishly difficult drumming but the lyrics. The band made Tom Sawyer, a character from Mark Twain novels, sound like a true badass. What the fuck was a Red Barchetta? Some sort of radical car I suppose. I too dreamed of living in the limelight. I understood the witch hunt allegory in "Witch Hunt" and I also caught most of the technical terms used capgily in "Vital Signs". *Moving Pictures* was a righteous tape. I wondered if they had any more tapes? Sometimes late at night WKDF Nashville would play this song that sounded like Zeppelin but wasn't called "Working Man". Turns out that was a Rush song too, from earlier in their career when they had not yet found their own voice.

By 1988 I'd caught up with Rush and had every tape they'd ever put out. I fell headlong into a world of musical and literary prowess. They made songs about Dungeons and Dragons shit, and I was a fool for D&D at that time. But then they also wrote songs that sounded like cooler versions of pop radio songs that had *really* good lyrics about non-conformity, nuclear war, societal metaphors using trees and science fiction, running marathons, the space shuttle, and other subjects not found in

the average rock song. Those sword and sorcery songs were cool and stuff but it was the ones that the band wrote about not being cool, about dreaming about being something cool but not really getting there...those were the ones that really got to me. "Conform or be cast out", they sang in Subdivisions; "When I leave I don't know what I'm hoping to find and when I leave I don't know what I'm leaving behind" in "The Analog Kid"; "Some are born to move the world and live their fantasies but most of us just dream about the things we'd like to be" in "Losing It", and "he'd be climbing on that bus just him and his guitar to blaze across the heavens like a brilliant shooting star" in "Middletown Dreams". This is where Rush became *my* band.

I understood what being a loner was about. I was a complete dork at 13. I felt out of step with what everyone else was into around me. I had long hair and an earring and got made fun of for looking like a girl, for riding a skateboard, for carrying around Dungeons & Dragons books, for carrying around *any* books since reading for fun was certainly not cool, and mostly got made fun of for being poor and trying desperately to make thrift store clothes and K-Mart knockoffs look like something they weren't. I felt like that band really knew what it was like to be me and let me know that *it was okay and that it was all going to be okay*. I mean, those three kimono wearing dudes made it out alive okay, and they were telling me all about it from the other side.

By high school I knew their songs by heart, both words AND rhythms. I learned through picking up *Modern Drummer* and *Musician* magazines that not only was Neil Peart the drummer of the band but that he wrote almost all of the lyrics to the songs. That knowledge was an epiphany to me. I assumed that the singer always wrote the song. So I began to be interested in writing. I wrote some truly terrible songs at first about terrible things but it was a start. It led me to the literary magazine club. Then it led me to the journalism club. Sure, I can write record reviews! And so I did. I even saw them in concert for the first time in 1992 at Starwood Amphitheater outside of Nashville. By this time other sounds had largely taken over my listening habits. Indie rock, progressive rock, jazz-rock fusion, the cassettes my skateboarding and musician friends would loan me, the records I found in \$1 bins, and the weird records and CD's I borrowed from the library would all push my Rush tapes to the back of the tape drawer. I would be reminded of Rush's place in my life whenever a new album would be released but their album cycle was often two to three years apart and there was so much new music to discover! And this is where Rush, while still maintaining a very important place in my life, slipped out of the forefront of my life behind all the other new and older things I was discovering.

In the '00s I heard all about the tragedy of Peart's wife and daughter dying within six months of each other, that Peart had kinda gone off the deep end and ran off on a motorcycle to try and ride out the pain. I too had lost a child in that period of time and knew why he would want to run like he did. I stumbled on one of his travel books at a book store and would read each new one as they

Were published. It was cool to get to know more about Neil Peart the person. He was intensely private and guarded his privacy closely. As the '00s rolled over into the '10s I would see the band again live another time (The Woodlands in 2009) and enjoy the place in pop culture Rush began to occupy. It seemed like all things we were made fun of for in the '80s all of a sudden were cool to admit liking. The band featured prominently in the movie *I Love You Man*; several documentaries were made; and the Rush fellas started appearing on TV again. Rush rode this newfound acceptance through to the band's 40th anniversary, which would turn out to be the band's last hurrah. Both Neil and guitarist Alex said that their bodies were starting to prohibit their ability to continue to play the songs to the level they were accustomed to playing and did not want to go out on the road as ghosts of their former selves. So the band retired. I admired this approach. It was like Neil had put in 40 years at a union job somewhere and took the pension, the commemorative watch, and retired away to futz around in the garage and spend time with his second wife and their young daughter. But shortly after coming home from the road one last time Peart developed brain cancer and fought it proudly and privately, but ultimately in vain. He would succumb to it at the age of 67 early last month. For three years Geddy and Alex would continue to demure over questions of whether the band was ever getting back together again, keeping the secret of Neil's terminal condition completely to themselves. I can't imagine how hard that must have been.

The night after I heard the news I cracked open many beers and spent the night in my rock & roll basement bar (just like in "Subdivisions"! ) listening to my Rush albums and bawling like my best friend had died. And I supposed one of my best friends *had* died. I recognized that I wasn't crying because Neil had shoved off for parts unknown or for his grieving family and friends, but I was crying for the part of me that died that night, the kid who identified so strongly with the man's words, the kid who spent hours pouring over the man's drum parts, the kid who grew up influenced so heavily by the works of Neil Peart. I cried for that kid. This was why Neil was the private member of Rush. Fans could get really weird with him and act like they knew all about him based on the lyrics to the band's songs, like they had made some sort of personal connection to him that they never had. As Neil wrote in "Limelight", "I can't pretend a stranger is a long-awaited friend". I understood that what I gleaned from those songs was never about Neil Peart at all, it was all about me. And I think he knew that too and was happy to leave it to the listeners to make it their own. Why ruin it for everyone? That's the ultimate respect.

I am sure I will always get that catch in my gut from now on listening to the music knowing that there is no going back now. I know I can never repay Neil Peart for doing what he did. I am so thankful that fate connected me to the music when it did. It eased my adolescence and helped guide me through some very important phases of my life. I will be forever shaped by it. I hope Neil's spirit has found peace. He surely deserves it. — KELLY MENACE



# ASK CREEPY HORSE

I've recently started doing something for myself I've never done before. If something isn't positive or benefits me in any way, I cut it off. People, places or things that don't simply further me or make life better are now cast out. Drama is gone. Toxicity is out the door. It's old. Boring. Draining. And most important, unfun.

It hasn't been easy, but I don't care. Recently at a birthday party, I had four people confront me. What was my heinous crime? I unfriended them on Facebook. Now these weren't best friends or folks I'd know a decade or more. In fact not one of these folks have known me more than a year. They've never spent time with me one on one. They've never been to my home or even had an extended phone conversation with me.

I just felt they were leeches. They are tourists to the lifestyle I lead. I'm always more than cool to new folks or someone being new to something but someone that's just there to get their card stamped and look "cool" can get off my god damned lawn. I'd much rather hang with someone new, getting it all wrong, looking like a nerd but with their heart in the right place any day than someone preying on emotions to fit in and feel popular because I guess we're all still in middle school.

I didn't like these people. I guess I was supposed to like them. I guess I was supposed to be their friend because we had 24 mutual social media friends. Problem is, I don't give a fuck. I felt them all to be manipulative and narcissistic. So I cut them off.

I don't waste my time with explanations. I don't owe them one.

But I'm also not a dick. I don't need to rub their face in the shit of who they are. I can be cool so long as you respect my boundaries. If you don't, that's different but I've got no need to stare a bitch down and scowl and make faces every time they walk by. That requires too much energy and again, I just don't give that much of a fuck. We can not like each other and be cool. You cool to me, I'm cool to you.

I was at the party to have a good time. The first person to confront me was there to have a good time. There's no need to shit on either of our moods. This person felt the need to confront me and I wasn't having it. Our exchange went like this:

Them: Hey!! I noticed you unfriended me on Facebook!

Me: Yep. I did.

Them: I ain't gonna lie, I was butt hurt about it.

Me: Okay. Well, this is a celebration and I don't have time for this nor do I truly care.

That was it. I walked in and did my thing. I sang, danced, laughed, all the things one does at a celebration. I never gave the person dirty looks or talked shit, I was too busy living my god damned life.

After many drinks the person decided hours later to re-confront me.

Them: Hey!!

Me: Nope. No we are not doing this.

Them: if I've done something wrong, I'm sorry.

Me: That's cool you feel that way but I'm saying no.

(Now getting into my personal space)

Them: I look at you as a best friend and If I can do anything....

(Me backing away and also thinking to myself, "best friends" bitch I do not know you)

Me: I've said no. Please leave me alone.

(They continue to walk into my personal space)

Them: I'm trying to make amends...

Me: I don't care. Just be cool. I don't want your amends, I want you to leave me alone.

Them: WHAT?!! YOU DON'T WANT ME TO MAKE AMENDS?!? I'M TRYING TO MAKE AMENDS!!!

Me: Hey back off okay. I've said no. I'm asking you to leave me alone.

They took to following me shortly until I repeatedly said leave me alone while evading them.

I was never sharp or crude. I stated plainly what I wanted. I wasn't going to engage.

Another of the four, earlier, had run out of the house we met up at and wanted me to give them a ride. I don't know this person well and I also find them to be a psychic leech. I told them I didn't have room for them and smiled as I pulled out, with them looking into my empty

front passenger seat. It was true. I had no room for them.

Later, the third person would be someone I met and quickly realized was a very very fucked toxic individual. She asked if I got off Facebook. Maybe her ego couldn't handle I'd blocked her. I appeased her and said yes. She was cool and I didn't have to get shitty. It was a celebration. I wasn't there to dim her shine or mine.

The last was a guy that was "into me" no matter how much I told him I wasn't interested. He had nothing to offer and to be completely honest wasn't very interesting. From the beginning I've been absolutely honest with him. Still he felt the need to come up behind me and greet me with a very long, hard embrace in front of all. At first it scared the bejesus out of me. Also he smelled awful. I felt like Ludo in *Labyrinth*. Smell baaaaaaaaaaad! Then when I was able to turn around and see who it was, he tried to get very flirty. Uh-uh.

I'm standing there minding my own business taking in a punk show and you want to get handsy? No sir. Again, he got the "NO!" Treatment. He'd stand right beside me staring at me and I wouldn't even look at him. He'd tap me for my attention with dumb questions like "Hey do you want a beer?" I'd say no and go back to watching the show. I have been nothing less than straightforward.

So this guy wanders off and looks all downtrodden and is pointing me out to young dumb female friends who I guess since I disrespected their friend, try to shove me in the pit. I fell out laughing. I gave him and them the whole "c'mon" look and left.

I just don't have time anymore for people that suck the life out of a room. My life is short and I probably won't live forever. I used to really hang on to people. I used to be friends with people because my other friends were friends with them or I didn't want to be rude.

But I have found such peace. My life is so much calmer, happier and great now that I don't hold onto what doesn't matter. Sure there have been uncomfortable situations but I sure as hell did my best not to make it that way. Lots of motherfuckers don't like me. I don't cry about it, harass them publicly or lament any of it. I go oh well and carry the fuck on.

Fill your life with the things that make you incredible. Do whatever it takes to make and keep you happy. Don't let anyone you don't want in your personal space and never accept anyone that can't accept when you say no. Life is too fucking short. Be happy all the time and never accommodate others. — CREEPY HORSE

## HOW TO KNOW IF SOMEONE LOVES YOU

This is a list I made up. It might be a really tough and terrible thing for you to read. If so, you owe it to yourself to "Treat Yo-self!" and be true to you! Figure out if you need to get out of this relationship you are in that's bringing you down, or if it's worth fighting over...then fight for it. It's gonna take some sacrifice, negotiating and compromising, but if it's worth it, it's worth it, you know? It might work to have them read this too, but not everyone sees themselves clearly. It's not gonna be easy. But love and friendship and acceptance and belonging is super important.

When you are done reading through this list, flip it to be about you. Are you the person that's being a shit? If so, figure out if you can change, or if you are happy as is, or just like, fuck it, whatever! If you want to change, then this list becomes a guide. If you read this list and think, "I need better people in my life". Cool. They are out there. Go find them. I really don't think this is too tall of an order. I mean, we can't be everything, but we can at least try.

Are they paying attention to you or ignoring you? Do they care about your life and thoughts or do you seem to be irrelevant? Is there a sweetness in the way they treat you or are they assholes? Are they sensitive to your feelings or do they humiliate and ridicule you for having them? Are they truthful or secretive? Do they share things with you or keep things from you? Is there a physical attraction and acceptance or criticalness of being compared? Is there patience with you or are they annoyed? Are there apologies or just blame? Is there support for interests or are you met with opposition? Is there respect for who you are or contempt for how you are? Is time carved out or are you avoided? Is there service and sacrifice being performed or do they just receive? Is there physical touch happening or is the need not even being acknowledged? Is there communication or are you constantly being cut off and shut down? Are you a priority or merely a sideline? Is there any effort being expended to keep it healthy or is it brushed under the rug? Are you deemed interesting or bothersome? Is there intimacy or rejection? Are they open or silent when communication is needed? Are they responsive or do you get ghosted? Is there togetherness or are they always looking for a getaway? Are they trying to understand or do they mostly criticize? Are they accepting you as you are or are they wanting you to change? Do they give compliments or do they not even notice? Are they asking about you or talking about themselves mostly? Do they make time for you or are they always busy or tired? Are they afraid of your reaction or love the transmission? Are connections being made or assumptions? Do they miss you or do they need space to breathe? Do they care about your wellbeing or couldn't care less? Are they selfish or selfless toward you? Do they need you or merely deal with you? Are they addicted to you or can they be easily distracted? Are they obsessed with you or are you transparent? Are they encouraging your growth or threatened by it? Are they jealous or do they know there's no reason to be? Are they misunderstanding or trying to figure it out? — JORGE GOYCO

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# DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

So, fellow dirtbags, you ever get those mornings when you were supposed to wake up and give your girlfriend a ride to work and get a lot of shit done today, but whoops! You decided to stay up all night because your friend came over and then it was time to drink with him and your roommate (because you have drunken responsibilities, God Damn It, and drinking with the flesh of your flesh, at any time possible, is one of them) until about a half hour before your girl has to wake up and then pass out on the couch and have her find you there, unable to move, and just saying, "Just take my truck, I'll...um...figure something out later..."

No?! That's just me? Well, on the off chance that this very rare occurrence ever does happen to you, allow me to tell you how to proceed:

So of course, it being 6:00 AM, you make some coffee, and make a quick surveillance of your surroundings. Check. Turns out your very loving ladyfriend kinda knows what's up. She is dating you, after all. Not like this is new. So she's all like, "Ya, I figured, honey. You look pretty fucked up. Just chill out. I'll go to work and be back later." And she pours herself a travel mug and gets on the way to make that bread.

So you're all, "Hell the fuck yeah. I have lived my life right. I am loved for who I am. But oh shit, here come some shaky bits. Wow, that was quick? I'm still drunk. This hardly seems fair, body. It was just coffee I drank, not like that actually sobers us up, we're just more aware of how awful the world is. There is JUST AS MUCH ALCOHOL IN MY SYSTEM AS THERE WAS 15 MINUTES AGO!!!!"

But your Body is all like, "Motherfucker, you don't tell me how to act! It's my birthday and I will shake and wretch if I want to!"

Me: "That is a pretty big misappropriation of a song, if I've ever heard one, and really, what a weird song to reference. Are we listening to Dave Stewart & Barbara Gaskin, right now, because of this? Could you get much weirder? It isn't even your birthday. I know, cause yours is the same as mine?"

My Body: "Mother Cunt, you wanna see weird?!?!? Go buy me some beer and drink some more coffee! I am RAGE INCARNATE!"

Me: "Ok! Ok! Jesus Christ with hot sauce on a BBQ spit! I'm going to the store! Just please stop it with the

tremors!"

So I walk to the gas station and I procure said beer. I get home and I'm all like, "Whelp, GF is at work, roommate is asleep, friend is gone, but I guess I'll just have a quiet, beer drunk morning to myself." But then I go to drink my first beer, and as soon as it hits my lips, My Body is all like: "Aha! You fool! You've fallen for my trap! Now we are vomiting, uncontrollably! And it's all your fault!"

And after I get my head out the toilet bowl, I'm all like, "But you said you wanted beer?! This was your call, not mine! I've got shit to do today! But fine. This is why we keep vodka around. How would you like a Bloody Mary?"

My Body: "Hmmmmmmmmmmm, yes. That sounds lovely. Do that."

Me: "Ok, fine, I'm making one. I'm MAKING ONE!"

But as soon as I do that, My Body is all like, "Aha Ah Hahahahaha, you've fallen for the same trick twice in one morning! Take even more morning puking, you asshole!"

And after I get my head out the toilet, a second time, I'm all like, "Body, are you secretly a time travelling 15 year old, cause this hasn't happened to me since high school? Are you about to ask me to Prom?"

My Body: "No, you fuckwit. I just need food. You know that one and only thing I've ever asked you for that you have denied me for about two days. Food and water, on occasion, Starkness, that is literally all I ask of you, and you still fail me, constantly. Making you puke your guts out, twice, really felt like the only way I could get your attention."

Me: "Ohhhhhhhhhhhh, right. Food. I forgot that existed. KK, lemme eat a bag of chips or something. Looks like we have some cheese in the fridge too. And then can we go back to loving each other and drinking beer?"

My Body: "Yes, please, I'm on the beer train just as much as you are, but we have to make a pit stop to re-fuel every now and again. Do that and we're golden."

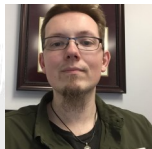
And so I did. And now the drink is going down, smooth as ever and I'm typing shit up for 979 and life is good, and I'm sure whatever I had to do today, I can probably take care of tomorrow. — STARKNESS

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# SILENCING THE FOOL



For 2020, my wife has accepted a reading challenge of various works, one of which is a Shakespearean play. Since I'm an English major, my wife employed my opinion and asked which play she should tackle, to which I replied, "*King Lear*, of course!" I have fond memories of this play from college, as it is one of my favorites. I offered to tackle it with her, and insisted that we watch a performance of it. After all, plays are meant to be seen, not read.

Upon reviewing *King Lear*, I still find myself drawn to the Fool. The Fool is a charismatic, quick-witted, and often cynical character. His speech is both vulgar yet sophisticated; his personality both comical and foreboding. His presence is so critical to *King Lear* that had Shakespeare not cast him, the outcome of the story could have been vastly different. The reason is because the pivotal role of the Fool is not mere comic relief, but a voice of polemical foresight, discernment, and, ironically, reason.

The Fool, like any good court jester, serves as entertainment for Lear and his court royals, but also as a critic. The Fool is uninhibited in his witty criticism of Lear and his associates; his boldness only protected by the nature of his profession. His comedy is not only his weapon against those with power and influence, but also his armor. The Fool's unique position serves to reveal underlying truths to the audience, as well as enlighten Lear to his folly, contrasting bogus foolishness from genuine foolishness. Without giving away spoilers, the absence of the Fool would mean no foreseeable hope of Lear awakening from his madness. One important aspect concerning the Fool's function is that, though he is often threatened by those he criticizes, he is never actually silenced.

Whether they be academics, comedians, or YouTube sensations, modern society still has its own "fools". But as the increasingly politically correct culture continues to take root, voices of criticism are slowly, but surely, being silenced. Some examples which come to mind in recent years are Prof. Richard Dawkins whose invitation to speak at Berkeley College was revoked due to his criticism of Islam, Steven Crowder whose YouTube channel was monetized due to his criticism of American liberalism, Kevin Hart who was fired from hosting the Oscars due to an insensitive Tweet he made nine years ago, and now, at the beginning of 2020, Joe Rogan's podcast is now being challenged.

When fools are silenced, it is society who pays the price. In the cases of Richard Dawkins and Steven Crowder, their commentaries should be seriously considered, especially by those who are opposed. As the great philosopher, Aristotle, once pointed out, an educated mind can entertain a thought without accepting it. Those who box themselves into "safe spaces" lose the

benefit of processing opposition maturely, which breeds willful ignorance. In the case of Kevin Hart, there is different lesson to be learned, as he has conceded that his tweet was insensitive. This is the perfect example of a fool whose humor goes too far, and the public's ability to echo the sentiment of Lear's response to his own fool,

"Take heed, sirrah; the whip." The ability to respond to poor criticism with intelligent criticism is mutually beneficial because the fool learns to temper his humor (likewise, becoming a better fool) and society can then receive better, yet still humorous, criticism. Lastly, unlike many other podcasts which have become echo chambers, Joe has offered a platform to controversial figures from across the political and social spectrum whom many of his contemporaries have already silenced, allowing his guests to speak for themselves by upholding the core principle of free speech, all while he levies fair criticism and communicates it through humor. Whether one agrees with the opinions of the aforementioned people or not, the punitive actions taken against their speech should be a cause for concern.

I can remember when I was a strapping young lad in the 90's and many overtly protective parents and clueless politicians wanted to censor video games like *Mortal Kombat*, books like J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, and music like heavy metal and rap. One of the greatest weapons which staved off the attacks of the censors was humor. Gamers, authors, musicians, and fans alike levied criticism at the censors through the lens of humor, painting them as bigger fools than themselves.

One of the greatest principles of free speech is that which is exhibited by Lear's fool: the ability to speak without censorship or punishment. The ability to make the public recognize its own folly is crucial to creating a civilized society, and comedians, musicians, authors, and other famous personalities have the uncanny ability to communicate truths to the public in a way that is both entertaining and meaningful. The danger that comes when society begins to silence its fools is that tyrants are able to operate unchecked. One may object and say, "Well, I don't see Ricky Gervais being silenced for his harsh criticism of Hollywood at the Golden Globes," to which I answer, "Not yet."

With that in mind, let us take a lesson from our friend Bill Shakespeare: without the Fool, the likeliness of society devolving into a nation of mentally sheltered adolescents who cannot face reality when it stares them in the face becomes greater. The Fool is an important, and greatly needed, figure for every time and place, and he must be allowed to speak freely. Let us also be so bold and to dawn our fool's motley and coxcombs when the opportunity arises! — CALEB MULLINS

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# ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

Hey y'all.

I had this idea blast into my skull before the end of the decade came about and I am not one for ignoring ideas. In fact, I turn them around, poke them quite a bit, feed them, tell my friends and slowly that idea begins to grow.

This idea I had was about showing up and being seen. Granny Moon Farm is on the brink of extinction and my heart is heavy with grief about it. Every day has been an energetic struggle for me to show up, be seen, remember my goals and work towards them. And if you struggle with mental health, you know how that feels.

One thing that gets me outta bed every single time is a pickle order. I could be three days into a blanket cave, binge watching IGTV tutorials on Earthship Biotechture and getting stoned, then someone (almost always Cindy or Kat) sends me a message that says,

"Hey. Do you have any more pickles?"

Hell no. I don't have any more pickles. Do you know how many y'all bought the last time? Can you even remember the obscene amount of money you handed over to me for just one more jar? I can't make enough pickles to keep all you fools happy! But I sure as shit will continue to try.

That is how I came about my idea! I will keep making .

pickles! I will make them every week. I will sell them every weekend. I will cut and slice and pack and pour and can and seal and offer them back to you with love.

I am going to be putting in an application at the Brazos Valley Farmers Market as the local Pickle Lady. I am offering an extension to any and all makers in our realm of 979 community to show up and be seen with me! I want to have a booth that represents our paper, our musicians, our small businesses, our talents, our art and our love to make our community grow. Our goal is to present a booth every First Saturday of the month throughout the year. I will have my pickles and the paper. What can you bring to the table?

Katie over at Salacious Vegan Crumbs will be joining me in my efforts to make this a reality (and she brings cookies!!) We have a deadline of Feb 15 for the market application and anyone who would be interested in participating can contact us for more information. The Patron Saint of Downtown Bryan has covered our application fee (so many pickles have your name on them, sir) and now all WE have to do is SHOW UP!!!

Reach out and let us know if you wanna be a part of something new!

[grannymoonfarm@gmail.com](mailto:grannymoonfarm@gmail.com)

[publicdisease@gmail.com](mailto:publicdisease@gmail.com)

— HALEY RICHARDSON



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# GOOD MOVIES FOR BAD GUYS

You gotta love a movie that is going to divide people. Since the first social media comment about the title *Gretel & Hansel* you knew this movie was going to have a stronger border than well...our own borders. Boy does it ever.

It's not just the title. The movie is weird. It has a minimal cast. It has gorgeous cinematography. It has an atmospheric soundtrack. It behaves like an indie movie that stumbled into a mainstream theater stage.

Edge lords, fragile egos and traditionalists hate the title. But there is a good reason Gretel's name is listed first in this movie. In the fairy tale we are familiar with, it is Hansel who is the clever one, he is the one who uses pebbles and breadcrumbs, he is the one who fools the Witch and comforts Gretel. But in this rendition, things play out a little different...

The movie opens (after some backstory about a beautiful child with a terrible gift) with Gretel (being a few years older than her brother) looking for a job. Her future employer has less than honorable intentions with her being a young girl so she declines. This sets up a theme for the movie... nothing is free, and the world is bad. She returns home to her mother who tells her that she and Hansel will have to leave the house since she has fallen on hard times and the house has become too "crowded" and she is unwilling and unable to care for them.

After an unexplained encounter with a zombie like creature, a woodsman with a warning to stay on a path and eating some trippy mushrooms, the pair find themselves at a curious house with an old woman who seems very kind and offers them lots of food and a bed to sleep in. Cautious of her rule that nothing is free, Gretel is uncomfortable with their stay, but Hansel is perfectly content to eat copious amounts of rich food and pretend to do woodsman's work (which is where he was planning to go).

Gretel has visions and dreams that frighten her and when she enters womanhood via her period, the Witch takes an interest in her and begins to see her as a kindred soul. Talking to her and teaching Gretel some of her knowledge, in one of their sessions she talks of communicating with things (a talent which Gretel has suppressed and not shared) and coats a staff and their hands with a salve. Through the salve, Gretel can "talk" to the staff and tell it what to do, she then practices this talent further in the woods with a tree.

Eventually Hansel feels uncomfortable and asks Gretel if they can leave, but Gretel has begun to enjoy some of the knowledge she has gained and the two have an argument. Gretel dreams of a weird white brick room and Hansel is in a corner in a comatose state. While there, a young Witch materializes and proceeds to throw a bunch of bloody body parts on a table which she enchants into delicious looking food revealing this is the delicious food the kids have been eating. Gretel awakens knowing she has to get out, but Hansel is gone and she can't leave without him.

The Witch proceeds to tell Gretel that it is good Hansel has left, that he was holding her back and now she is free to do the work she needs to do in order to become powerful and wise.

The Witch reveals that she was originally the mother of the beautiful child in the beginning of the movie and after the death of her husband she followed her daughter to learn witchcraft and free herself by eating the poisons of her life. She does this by...eating her kids. By logic, she insists that Gretel has to eat Hansel since he is her "poison" so she can be free too. Gretel finally kills the Witch with the salve and staff (touching forehead with Hansel to tell him goodbye he rubs salve on her forehead).

With the Witch gone, Gretel sends Hansel away to follow his own destiny and she embraces the solitary life of a Witch on her terms...setting free the souls of all the children the Witch devoured, she looks at her hands as they turn black, making her the new Witch of the woods.

So if this movie divides people, you can put me in the pro-Gretel camp. First, I like the aspect of using a girl coming of age as a catalyst for power. It's nothing new, We've all seen *Carrie*, but really with so many campy and teen witch movies like *The Craft* and *Hocus Pocus* it is nice to watch a movie with occult imagery, horror aesthetic, and witchcraft which has a long history of women coming into their own power by using an old fairy tale as a plot device. The Witch sees males as food, and remarks how they will fear Gretel once she becomes what she is meant to be. If more internet trolls stopped to think about it, swapping the names in the title not only makes sense, it is required because in this movie, Hansel is surely not the clever one and the one in need of saving.

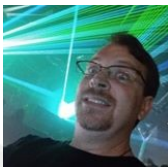
There are a few downsides of course. At less than an hour and a half, they should have fleshed out more stuff. What's up with the zombie thing? Who was the woodsman? How did she get the other kids? Can we give Hansel something else to do but eat and complain? Personally I would have liked to have seen the use of breadcrumbs in some sort of fashion because the fairy tale is significantly famous for that and the term is used to help people retrace their steps.

The good however more than makes up for it. I mentioned the camera work is superb, the colors and visuals made me smile. The triangle shape is featured throughout the movie in a smart manner as well, and the Witch's house is a goth girl's Pinterest dream. Not to mention the weird looking shed and crazy matte black wood the house and shed sported.

Besides the visuals, the other worldly soundtrack by ROB set a tone for the movie that didn't feel like it belonged at first, but on reflection I can't imagine a better soundscape. And "tone" is exactly what is achieved... it's not a slow burn or a fast pace like so many horror movies. It is a tone. An eerie uncomfortable and beautiful tone.

You either love it or hate it. I like it enough to give it 7 out of 10 breadcrumbs. — **TIM DANGER**





# WHY DON'T MY MOTHER LOVE ME?

From about 10 years old through high school, my hair length and style was a battle with my parents. That was the 80s for me. You know, Van Halen, Iron Maiden, Motley Crüe, Ozzy Osborne, Slayer, Scorpions, Ratt, etc. That's what I was into, so I attribute my wanting of long hair to who it was that I looked up to. And by "looking up to" I also mean from the perspective of my bed to all the walls in my room full of posters with dudes with long hair.

Long hair on dudes was cool. Why? I assume it's because what these dudes were doing was cool. They were making cool music, they were famous, I assumed they got all the chicks, and they knew how to just look cool. I don't know. It's weird. But nevertheless, I wanted it.

I had friends whose parents were "cooler" than mine and they allowed them to have long hair. Or, my friends were uber-confident and worked that "I'll do whatever I want!" and "You can't control me!" attitude that I didn't have. My dad was in the Air Force and was pretty much in a constant state of shame toward me. How I looked, how I acted, how tight my pants were, how untied my high top tennis shoes were, etc. So, no, he wasn't gonna have a "hippie" living in his house.

Well, I still wanted it. Not necessarily because I couldn't have it, mind you. I wasn't really that type of rebellious, but it seems like that was the consensus as to why rockers kept their hair long. I just thought it looked cool.

Listening to music my parents hated was my rebellion. Smoking pot and lying to my parents about what I did after school was my rebellion. Hating church and disrupting Sunday School and school with loud farts and bad words was my rebellion. Hair was just something I never really had a choice over.

I can understand if I wanted a foot tall green mohawk or liberty spikes. Sure, that was crazy. That hair style was anarchy. That hair style was a "Look at me, fuck you!" to all onlookers. They got on Ricky Lake and Donahue and Jenny Jones, and good for them! They were cool in a different way. But I didn't want that. Seemed like too much of a hassle.

So, we mostly settled on a mullet. A little long in the back, but kinda short in the front and spiked on the top. Whatever! I got the (semi) long hair. But we had to keep it clean and combed, and had to go to a stylist whenever my mom thought it was necessary. No questions asked, so I had my big comb in my back pocket at all times.

Not that little military black one, the big ones, with a handle.

Couple questions have lately been in my mind. Why the opposition to long hair on dudes, and why was long hair on dudes a thing? Hippies did it, British parliament wigs were long, Native Americans kept it long, Zeus and Jesus are depicted as having long hair. Samson's power came from his long, uncut hair. What's the deal with long hair?

Is it a sign of opulence? Like white, untanned skin and a bulging belly? Is it a sign of importance? Like fine clothes and a fancy walk? Is it a sign of authority? Like a throne or women who cling to your leg as you stand on a pile of corpses? Maybe it's all those things, maybe it's just style, maybe it's just long hair. But is it rebellion? I don't really think so. Well, maybe it was at some point.

Like when the Beatles came to town. That length hair was the norm in England at the time, but not in modest, separated, haughty America. All these people who were trying to keep traditions of oppression and keeping the right appearances were appalled at the length of hair on those boys. And it wasn't even that long, not at first anyway.

Then the hippies. Maybe they were against the war and soldiers and their short cookie cutter un-individual buzz cut lameness. Maybe the Hippies were fighting for something with their long hair. I don't know. I'd have to ask a Hippie I guess.

I do see how long hair on rock stars could be a way to rebel against social norms, and by this I mean moms. But if so, it seems kinda weird. I'm growing my hair out. I've done it a few times in my life, and here's what I've found: It's a pain in the ass, it looks terrible while growing out, it gets in my mouth and eyes when it's windy, it takes longer to dry, it clogs drains and it needs more products and upkeep. That doesn't really sound like rebellion, or even enhancing the free spirit that is embodied in Rock music. That sounds like self-flogging.

So, these rockers with their constant head flipping to get bangs out of their face, or pulling it back to light a cigarette, or making sure it's not doing the fly-away thing for the pictures for *Circus*, *Hit Parader*, *Metal Edge*, and *Rolling Stone*. Seems like a "not" rock star thing to be concerned about. They look all tough and intense with their angry eyes and tongues sticking out and devil horns, but the fleeting thought of, "I hope my hair looks OK" for sure happens. I mean, someone has told Alice Cooper or Lemmy, "Hey, can we get another shot, your

hair was sticking up on the side?"

I think about some of those tough-looking metal dudes coming out of the shower and having to put their hair up in a towel so it dries and also not flicking water everywhere. I think about how nice their hair looks and can imagine they have to pay a couple hairdressers to come on tour with them. I wonder if Tom Araya has a favorite curl detangler and hydrating conditioner. I wonder why James Hetfield hasn't come out with his own brand of dry shampoo.

So when those dudes cut their hair, I'm like, "Yeah, I get it."

It's a pretty interesting thing to have long hair. I like it, but it's a struggle. It still looks awkward, and I'm on maybe eight months. Hair normally grows about a half inch every month, so it's a loooooong awkward stage. Also, I'm almost 50, so my hair is different than it used to be as a teenager. It's more wiry and has odd places where it wants to wave and not lay down. I just hope it looks cool when I bounce around on stage. I don't head-bang anymore. I used to do it all the time. Windmill, Half Circle, Side to Side, Up and Down, Figure 8, Whip-lash, etc. Now it just makes me neck and shoulders ache for a few days afterward. Still, I like (at this point anyway) that my hair needs to be flicked out of my face. I don't know why. It makes me feel cool somehow. But the 100% truth of it is this: I see all these rocker dudes and metal dudes with their luxurious locks, and I'm impressed, jealous, and at the same time, know they have a love/hate relationship with their hair. Ladies with long hair know what I'm talking about.

Then one day they cut it and it's like, "Woah, you look fucking respectable. You could get a job now!" And that's weird.

The title of this piece, "Why Don't My Mother Love Me" is a lyrics from the rock opera, *Hair*. My parents had this record that I listened to so many times. It's about hair, drugs, war, racism, sex, love, acceptance, peace, politics, loyalty and friendship. It was a play and they made a movie.

I have always thought my mom didn't love me unless I had a nice haircut. I grew up with, "You want to look like a girl?" and "If you aren't going to follow our rules, we're going to take you to the barber and cut off all your hair!" and "Ay, mijo, no quieres que las nenas te den quenta?"

I'm not rebelling...well, maybe a little bit. — JORGE GOYCO

## WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY



In today's Twitter-twitchy times where past history can be the morning's tweet by the evening, looking back at real history can be enlightening, depressive, or even optimistic.

Guilty of lying and slander, this Republican in the 1950s impeded serious congressional activity for years, backed efforts to curtail religious freedom, and lowered morale throughout the federal government. He even damaged America's international prestige, according to biographer Thomas C. Reeves.

And he was just a junior senator from Wisconsin. As misguided as Joe McCarthy (and McCarthyism) was, those who were on the wrong side of history were leaders who could have stopped him before the ugliness he unleashed for nearly a decade: Everett Dirksen, Richard Nixon, Dwight Eisenhower. They could not rise about party politics to do the right thing.

President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was impeached in 1998 by the House of Representatives for lying under oath and obstructing justice due to his sexual relationship with a White House intern and a sexual harassment lawsuit against him. Despite the evidence from special prosecutor Ken Starr, just five Democrats voted in favor of three of the four original charges of impeachment including Texan Charles Stenholm.

Even more telling in the 1998 impeachment is the 81 Republicans who voted *against* the abuse of power charge, dooming it to failure. Those Republicans and Democrats bucked party politics to follow the truth. Ironically, Starr has chosen — decades later — to align himself with the wrong side to support this 2019 impeached Republican president.

When Republican President George W. Bush pushed the country into the Iraq War in 2002, Congress passed the Iraq Resolution with only one Republican senator in opposition and a mere six Republican representatives against it. Again, party politics trampled doing what was right for the country. If the war was right, why are 5,000 American troops still needed there nearly two decades later?

When President Clinton was impeached, Congress focused on what constituted "low and tawdry actions involving private matters". The current president's action to blackmail a foreign nation seems like a clear-cut abuse of executive power in national matters. However, one wouldn't know that after listening to House Republicans or the Senate Republican majority leader.

They apparently have abandoned their legislative duties as a check and balance on executive power to excuse the illegal actions of the White House inhabitant. As long-time conservative Republican Rick Wilson noted, "Republicans are failing the test of our time, and slipping into the warm bath of totalitarian language, practice, and politics."

In the past, many of our elected representatives in Congress have made the tough decisions, the right decisions, despite party politics. In this current crisis, we must call upon those on the Republican side to put the future history of America ahead of whatever thumb-powered social media they may fear from this president. A stand now for the right thing, for truth instead of Trumpism, is more lasting than any tweet.

It's never too late for these Republicans to do the just thing to counter this president. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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I'm a lucky son of a bitch. I've been in the workforce after college for about a decade now and never been laid off. I have always had health insurance. My entire life I've had it, either through my parents or through my job. I've never had to be on Obamacare. I've never had to face the reality of "shit if I had to go to the hospital for any reason I'm basically fucked for life".

But whatever. What happens when I get laid off due to some dumb drunken thing Blacked Out Me did?

Your options for health insurance when suddenly unemployed are dismal:

- You pony up the massive sums for COBRA (to retain your former employer's coverage). When I left my last job COBRA was going to cost a 30-year-old single man with no pre-existing conditions \$2,674 a month. To put that in perspective, that's a mortgage on a half a million dollar house).
- Instantly get hired for another job — that provides health insurance.
- Sell a kidney.
- Buy a high-deductible plan and be impervious to the laws of physics or any communicable, genetic, age or pollution-related diseases.
- Apply for Medicaid.

And thank your lucky stars if your state offers a Medicaid plan for which you qualify. (Which here in Texas, you probably won't, because we didn't expand Medicaid and Texas fucken hates its people.)

But even then, many doctors either don't accept state-supported coverage or have stopped taking new Medicaid patients due to the fact that they can charge private insurers so much more. Many people who initially get approved for Medicaid still have to wait upwards of six months for their first appointment after finally finding a doctor who will accept Medicaid for preventive care. On the plus side, that's prolly enough time to learn how to biopsy your own tumor.

To clarify though, long wait times are NOT innate to publicly-funded healthcare; they're a function of a bullshit system that intentionally undermines any alternative that doesn't make money for stockholders.

Beyond the current anemic hodgepodge of state-sponsored care, if you're employed you may be blessed with an employee benefits package. I've gone through at least half a dozen health insurance programs during the course of my working life. I've changed jobs, moved, had insurance companies cancel my plan and had employers switch carriers. All of which required I get a new doctor and learn what is and is not covered to determine whether I can or cannot afford to find out if this chest pain has anything to do with the fact I rarely eat a meal without some type of hot sauce or if I'm actually dying.

I find it despicable that certain douchebags are still

# MEDICARE 4 ALL

claiming that true M4A policies want to take away your "freedom to keep your insurance" as if that's a thing people actually give a flying fuck about. It's right up there with the "freedom to go to Walmart". *"Oh please, Mr. Politics bogeyman, don't take away my right to get disoriented and hypoglycemic in a giant, windowless department store!"*

This insurance we're gonna "lose" could already disappear in a heartbeat at the whim of Blue Cross Blue Shield, your employer, or any number of other variables over which you have zero control.

Which is why this "choice" argument is bullshit. You only have two options.

**Option 1:** You can have insurance.

OR

**Option 2:** You can *not* have insurance (or have insurance reject a claim), contract the plague and die painfully in the metaphorical (or literal) gutter, like a decent, god-fearing, American.

In other words, you're "free" to get drunk and fall off the roof and find out what it's like *without* Aetna staring at your fucked up face trying to decide whether or not it's in their fiduciary interest to cover your trip to the emergency room and just gamble with the hospital billing department.

I don't know about you right now, but I'm humming the national anthem and seriously considering getting a motherfucking bald eagle tattooed on my dick.

When our health is just another commodity it's reduced to balance sheet morality — a source of wealth for some, and debt for others. The result is preventable deaths, the rising number of uninsured, and the high percentage of bankruptcies related to medical debt.

The fact that stockholders are owed more consideration than a patient is the putrid rot at the core of the entire US free-market healthcare scheme. Health insurance, as a notion, for anything other than non-essential services, is an abusive scam perpetrated on a disempowered populace. And don't try to argue about what is essential and what isn't. It's like good ol' Potter Stewart said — "There may not be an exact definition, but you know it when you see it".

So, can we do better than private insurance and some sacrificial, doomed-to-fail public option that keeps us beholden to our employers for health insurance anyways? Hell fucking yeah we can!

Unfortunately, Republicans, with the help of more than a few Democrats, persist in voting behaviors intended to

"starve the beast," or otherwise cut government resources, which deliberately reduce the efficacy and success of any government-funded (read: welfare) program.

Plans like Medicaid suffer not because the concept of society pooling resources and creating a more equitable system is faulty, but because plans based upon low-income qualifications mean one thing: "it's for the poor and I'm not one of *them*. And if I am one of *them* it's only temporary."

And remind me again who has the most influence in our society?

What petulant class of squeaky wheels manipulates congressional policy to suit their own needs?

Which country club cohort keeps yelling, "Look unto me serfs and rejoice, for I am job creator!" to drown out the sound of their tax-avoiding sharts?

And which demographic is it that decides to run for president halfway through an election season by procuring millions worth of primetime advertising?

If you answered "the poor," you've probably suffered a traumatic head injury and fingers-crossed you don't live to see your medical bills.

When we segregate service of any kind by financial need, we run the risk of isolating the most vulnerable people within a defective system they have no power to improve or escape. The reason universal programs, such as M4A are the best route, is for the profoundly simple fact that everyone participates. There is no private for-profit insurance to undercut the government single-payer plan and everyone is invested in the success and the quality of care.

Sure, if you're Lex Luthor — I mean, Jeff Bezos — you're more than welcome to pay a plastic surgeon to give you a less punchable face and you can certainly buy some top-notch, elective health insurance to cover your new skinsuit (as if Jeff would need insurance, like a peasant). In either case, you probably don't give a shit about M4A, but you're sure as shit gonna contribute to it.

So yeah. We should do this Medicare For All thing. ASAP. No more insurance, no more premiums, no more costs at the point of service, and no more surprise bills. We all chip in, and we go see the doctor when we need to. Period. If you currently have health insurance and you lose your job, you still get to see a doctor! If you don't currently have health insurance, you still get to see a doctor! If you really just don't want to go to the doctor, no one is making you! You actually DO have a choice!

For those understandably worried about the loss of jobs when the health insurance industry becomes obsolete, that's a legitimate concern. A few points:

- We'll need folks to administer the new M4A plan.
- We should implement a serious jobs program prior to the full rollout of M4A. (Which Bernie and Warren are also championing.)
- Since when is it acceptable to maintain an unjust, immoral practice because some people will lose their jobs? I mean, honestly, always. It's always been "acceptable". But it shouldn't be! It should be remembered with shame that we fought a civil war because some assholes thought ending slavery was super mean to slave owners and that they might become one of *the poor*.

And to anyone who whines, "We can't afford it," may I just ask, what the absolute FUCK world do you live in?

Haven't you noticed all the other bullshit that we blow prodigious wads of cash on with literally no return on investment? We regularly spend money on all kinds of shit all the time. How long have we been in Afghanistan?

Don't tell me that we can't afford to provide high-quality healthcare including mental, dental, vision and long-term care for all of us. Stop believing America is only capable of exporting jobs, devastating the environment, and droning people who don't appreciate our dick wagging war-profiteering.

It's never been a question of money; it's *always been and always will be* a question of will.

And look, no one ever said it would be easy — I also live in hellworld. It's hard as fuck to change any money-making system. But the only genuine power we the people have is the uniquely human ability to imagine something better and the determination to fight for it.

To be clear "fighting for it" doesn't mean sitting around and moaning:  
"It'll never pass."  
"It'll never work."  
"I watch CNN."  
"If you studied history you'd know that socialism is just another word for the government giving people free stuff."  
"As a Democrat, I'd rather keep my expectations buried in the earth's crust and vote for someone who preempts all negotiation by rolling over and playing dead."

I mean, holy shit. Are we really that pathetic?

Don't answer that. Talk to folk about what we need, and then vote for it. Or revolt about it.

To learn more about the original M4A plan, visit the Physicians for a National Health Program website. <https://pnph.org/what-is-single-payer/senate-bill/> — STARKNESS

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# SALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

Last month, the City of Bryan announced that the drive-thru recycling center at the Briarcrest Wal-Mart, the ONLY recycling center in town, is going to be closing so that Wal-Mart can redevelop its parking lot as part of the Wal-Mart Reimagined initiative. That means we'll get a Panda Garden, a redesigned Chick-Fil-A, room for food trucks, and maybe a little park — and a whole lot more trash going into landfills instead of being recycled into something else useful.

This is a really crappy time for that to happen. The actual planet we are sitting on top of right now, as I write and you read, is in peril, and a whole swath of the population, who happens to be the population in political power, thinks that it's not happening. And it's frickin' WAL-MART making our recycling center close. COME ON!!!

You're already doing a fantastic job of reducing your environmental footprint, friendly fellow vegan. You're no longer mainlining almonds because you've seen how the almond industry has devastated bees and the landscape of an entire state. You're no longer contributing to the animal agriculture industry, which accounts for almost 90% of water use on this planet. And you aren't taking part in the spewing out of greenhouse gases that animal agriculture contributes to — going vegan is way better for emissions than switching to a hybrid car!

But there are still things you can do. Water and air are paramount to life on earth, but what if suddenly your water and air was made of plastic? You're doing a fan-fucking-tastic job of saving our oceans just by opting out of eating animals from the sea, but you may be suffocating those very fish you're trying to save by loading up on plastic. So I'ma tell you some lil things you can do to be less of an asshole to the Earth.

The lil'est thing you can do is to STOP BUYING SO MUCH STUFF! Everything you buy eventually goes out of use (practically, I mean, maybe 400 years down the line, when we're all part of the ever expanding Sahara Desert, Antiques Roadshow will stop by in what used to be Bryan, TX, and one of your great-great-great-great grandchildren will have Wonko's Jazzmaster, and will be using it to start their own desert dirtbag dingo band). When The Thing goes out of use, you can repurpose it, donate it, recycle it, but most likely, you chuck it. That's fair, lots of The Things made nowadays are simply not made to be repaired. But you can always donate clothes, cast off your freshly replaced small kitchen appliances and electronics to friends in need, and sell your old car instead of giving it a Viking funeral in Galveston Bay.

That makes The Thing pass into the second good lil thing you can do, REUSING YOUR STUFF! In this case, someone else is reusing your stuff. But you can also reuse your own stuff! If you buy pickles from Haley, DON'T THROW THAT PICKLE JAR AWAY! Give it back, or keep it at home to throw your leftover soups, your lil shiny baubles you collect (I see that racoon tail under your skirt), or as a holder for your extra long paintbrushes. I use mine as water jugs when I take Zoot on long

walks because I don't own one of those fancy reusable water bottles. And I have cool, refreshing, slightly pickley water on our walks!

If you or someone else can't reuse The Thing, RECYCLE IT! Take it to a friend's house who has a recycling bin (any of your College Station homeowner friends, or any of your Bryan homeowner friends who are cool enough to opt in). If you live in Bryan, and you aren't already, sign up for the recycling pickup through BVR. It's ten bucks a month, and they'll take all of your glass, paper, cardboard, metal, and number 1 and 2 plastics. Ask your employer if they participate in a recycling program and urge them to. Not every The Thing that goes into the bin will be recycled, but some of it will, and you fucking tried. Word on the street is they're trying to move the recycling center to another location either in the Bryan Wal-Mart or Target parking lot, but you can make do in the meantime with a little help from your recycling friends.

BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

First stop, the grocery store! You have to eat, and you're here every week. You stroll in with your reusable bags and your vegan shopping list. But wait! Did you realize your bags are made of plastic? Even the ones that seem woven, are made from [very occasionally recycled] plastic. They're like a buck each, easy to buy, and they WILL break down because you WILL overload them with avocados and cartons of oat milk because one trip from the car is better than two. I know people that buy these things serially. I have amassed a collection from people that buy them just to tote their The Things to my house for a party and leave them here (Please, stop doing that, take your bag home and stop being wasteful! I don't want your bags! They're a terrible hostess gift!). That's more plastic than you would have used if you had just gotten a plastic bag! In general, it's better to just use some bag you have lying around the house. If you don't have any, it's better to buy a natural fiber like cotton canvas. I LOVE my canvas bags — I bought a big Lisa Simpson one specifically for this purpose, but have a oops-I-messed-up-the-print Charm Bomb one and another one I got at a show because I thought it was so cool and had never seen hand-screened totes as merch. These are my favorite, best grocery bags. They put the woven ones to shame. Plus they roll up tiny to store so easily and you can wash them, which is important...because they tote your food. Don't rush out to buy a set of new canvas bags right now! But as your old ones break down and become unusable, replace them with something more sustainable!

Okay, so your grocery bags are taken care of, but what about all of the produce bags you get for your lettuce, onions, and tomatoes? They're plastic! First of all, you don't need plastic bags for all your produce. Just toss your onions and potatoes straight into that cart. A big ol' wet head of lettuce might benefit from being in a bag, to keep the rest of your food dry. Second, those bags (just like the normal plastic grocery bags) are recyclable #4 plastics, and you can drop them off outside the door when you shop at HEB. You can also reuse them for other things when you get home. I try to get plastic

bags just for things that need them, and I reuse the bags instead of plastic wrap to wrap my cut veggies and fruits in. If you're really gung ho, you can buy reusable produce bags, just make sure to buy ones made from natural fibers instead of polyester or something, because that's just more plastic. Your checker should be able to tare the weight of the bag, which is usually listed on a tab on the side of the bag, so you're not paying for produce + bag weight-worth of food. You can do the same with bringing in reusable containers for The Things you get from the bulk section!

Speaking of HEB, start sending them suggestions to switch from using plastic bags, or at least give us the option of paper bags. They are the WORST about not having paper bags!

If you already do recycle, you'll probably notice something dumb about vegan grocery products. They're almost ALWAYS in #5 plastic containers. I get it, it's a very fancy, heavy duty container, and YES, you can reuse it as a tupperware if you're gentle on it in the dishwasher, but it's less likely that it's able to be picked up in curbside recycling, and it's more difficult to break-down and reuse #5 plastics. If you wanna talk plastics and how they break down, start a conversation with Bobby Browning. He's a materials master! Anyway, don't hesitate to email these companies asking them to switch to more sustainable materials in their packaging. Vegan food companies seem more receptive to their customers, especially since they are a value-based company, and want to make sure their products fit their customers' values from start to finish. But seriously, I'm so sick of #5 plastics.

Alright, done with the grocery store. You're fridge is full. But it's chilly outside, and you could use a less holey jacket to keep you warm. How about a sweet pleather motorcycle jacket?! You'll be like one of those Ramones brothers! But just a heads up, most vegan leather that's accessible to us here is plastic. Straight up plastic. Buying a super softy sweater from Target? Check the tag. Acrylic. That's plastic. Every time you wash that sweater, tiny particles of plastic get into the water system and into lil fishes' gills and junk. Go for cotton. You're already vegan, so you don't participate in energy and resource heavy materials like leather and wool that are stolen from animals, so good on ya! But be conscious about where the plastic in your clothes is coming from. Lots of places nowadays are filling jackets with recycled plastics instead of down (double win) or turning recycled plastics into shoes or making pleather out of pineapple, mushrooms, and other organic materials. If you have the need for something and the means to buy something that's a little friendlier to the environment, fuckin' do it!

Another lil thing, we depend so much on one time use plastics outside of just food storage and transportation. One thing that drives me crazy is the amount of waste produced at a party. Styrofoam plates, or paper plates coated in plastic. Plastic silverware. Plastic cups. Plastic decorations and mylar balloons. If you're having a party at your place, just use your own plates, cups, and utensils (it saves you money!) If it's a big bash, ask a

good friend to bring some plates and stuff, or use uncoated paper plates, like Chinnet, and compostable utensils. Or have finger foods and chips and dips instead of things that use plates and forks. Use wood toothpicks instead of the little swords. Crepe paper streamers, paper decorations, and latex balloons instead of mylar balloons and plastic decorations. Draw something silly in frosting on a birthday cake instead of buying some plastic thing to throw on top of it (the birthday person will like you that much more, too). Make sure the recycling at your house is clear and marked with a big bright sign so even drunk people on the way to the trash can see it. Don't take booze in a small plastic bottle. Get that big, hefty glass bottle and have a rager!

Aside from parties, just try to buy less one time use plastics. If you're on the road a lot, buying bottled water all the time, start bringing a reusable bottle (maybe it's just one of Haley's old pickle jars, reuse!). Save your bottles and drop them off somewhere that takes recyclables next time you can (stores like Target offer recycling just inside the doors and are ubiquitous) instead of throwing them away at the next stop. Take your own to-go container when ordering food (I hear people do this, but I have way too much social anxiety to go through with this one). Use reusable candlelilla- or soy-waxed food wraps instead of plastic wrap and washable, reusable fabric bags for snacks.

There are lots of little things you can do to help the environment, but be aware that there are companies trying to really take advantage of this whole green movement. They want to sell you everything, and make you switch out everything you own for something eco-friendly. That's great, if you don't own anything. But if you do already own plastic instead of glass or steel water bottles, or you've already got those woven plastic HEB bags, KEEP THEM! Use them until they are kaput! If you ditch them now, they're unnecessary waste. Those glass and metal and fabric alternatives will be there when The Thing you have has worn out, and you can replace it then. Things cost money. Don't let capitalism take advantage of you and force you to replace things you already own just because you want to feel more environmentally friendly. That's the opposite of what you want to do!

Your lil changes are awesome and great and fantastic, but there's only so much you can do as an individual and a consumer. Contact companies you really like and encourage them to use more sustainable methods and materials for production. Talk to your employer about recycling programs that you can get your workplace to participate in and keep an eye out for other changes you can make at work. Contact your legislators and tell them that reducing single use plastics and using more sustainable materials and methods of production are important to you and your stupid kids (they won't fucking listen, if you're in Texas, but whatever).

Oh, and one last lil thing. Driving, especially one person, creates a lot of emissions. Stay home, alone, in the dark, under a blanket with your dog, a cold leftover pizza, and a glass bottle of whiskey for the ultimate environmentally friendly night in! — KATIE KILLER

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# SELLING TIME

I will not give up today.

I will not give up today because I have learned that every day is necessary. Every day is precious.

Like all of you, I have given up plenty of days. It's a good deal: trade the bad days, the quiet days, the nothing days for some cash. Let rich people buy them and live longer. We've already lived those days, what does it matter?

It's a good deal — on its surface. And like you I took advantage of it, especially early on when I didn't know the worth of each day.

*But it's just a day, you say. It's not like giving up a week, or a month, or — God forbid — year. It's just a day. We have plenty of days, plenty to spare.*

That's what I thought, too. A day is nothing, especially when you can choose to give up a tedious day — a work day or a day spent standing in line. Or a bad day, like the one when your wife... ..

Yes. Well.

Our natural instinct is to keep the good days, the exciting days. We give up the bad days first. Then we give up the quiet days.

Today was not a good day. It was not an exciting day. Live it with me, then decide if you would give it up.

It begins well enough, with a minor victory in that you drag yourself out of your bed to make your shift on time — a first this week. But your day was more than quiet: sit at a desk, stare at the screen, try to wade through the technical specs of *Designing Quasi-Sentient Geodata Entities*, stumble over unfamiliar polysyllabic jargon. Stare more at the screen. At lunch, you realize your account is dry and you forgot to make lunch this morning, and without any money you're not going out. Instead of hitting up your coworkers for a few bucks, you rummage in a far drawer for emergency snacks and hope they aren't infested with mold. And after lunch, your only desire is to take a nap, but there's still that Geodata document waiting to fill your afternoon.

Still with me?

When your shift is done, you go back home, sit on the chair and watch whatever entertainment is on, hoping for something — anything — worthwhile, but eventually

it's bedtime, and you still haven't cleaned up the dishes from your solo dinner. So you go to bed and wait for sleep, and it's a long time coming.

Today was a nothing day in a string of nothing days. This is a day that you give up. It's an easy decision. This is a day that you trade for the going rate of return — twenty bucks for a day like today, if you're lucky, less most of the time though.

And you do this in the hope that whatever you can get with that twenty is better than the day you've lived.

But this is the day that you can't give up. Today — this nothing of a day — is the day that acts as the glue that holds the other days together.

It's interesting. If you trade enough days, your past condenses. It begins to compress upon itself.

Without today, the sharp bright days that remain rub and crack against each other, pushing and shoving as they attempt to claim their places in the remaining span. And you realize that they are seeking those given up, those good memories are losing their place in your history. And the noise of their loss gets louder and louder, until you can't stand it anymore.

Eventually those good memories are pushed against one another and so tightly compressed, without any frame of reference, you start to lose those days, and months, and years all on their own. For nothing.

And when that starts happening, you discover that you have no days left behind you. That when you sit by a fire and look back over where the days of your life should be there is nothing.

Just the emptiness. And you stand at the edge of it and look down into the chasm, and the wind blows up from the black depths — from your depths — and that wind is cold and empty. You have no history. You've lost your entire personality. There is nothing to do but start over like a child. But you have no parent to show you the way. You have that same aged body, but the mind of a newborn without any of the curiosity. None of us knew that would happen when we started selling our time.

I am one of the lucky ones. I'm still here. So no. I will not give up today. I now keep my days, all of them, and the ones that I want to give up the most, those I cling to even tighter. — STARKNESS



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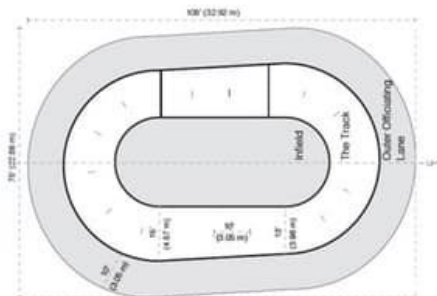
## WANT TO ROLL WITH US?

### WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR:

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- Bathroom in or near the facility
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# DEAR SENIOR BURNS

*Goal: To write more. Process: simple and free.*

*Step 1: Choose a topic.*

*Step 2: Write topic on first line of a Word doc or piece of paper.*

*Step 3: Scribble or type till the bottom of the page. Write any and everything that comes to mind. No stopping! Follow every wild hare. Explore every cognitive loop and creative vortex. Afterwards, look back. Is it poetry? Is it bologna? Irrelevant. You achieved the goal. You wrote. You are different now. The world is not necessarily a better place, but you are a better person. Now, hark, go forth and repeat.*

## PUGS

I was working the morning shift at Starbucks in super south Kansas City — the location where all the Chiefs and Royals players hit the drive-thru for Frappuccinos — when I randomly told a customer with a French Bulldog, “Yeah, one day I’ll have a pug, and I’ll name him ‘Chicken Dinner’ cause he’ll be a winner-winner”. That idea, spoken like Biblical prophecy in the Spring of 2006, stuck with me. Pugs had always seemed the perfect dog to me. Stubbhorn. Unintentionally comical. Never quite silent. Much like my digestive track. But six long years, enough time to forget a dream, lapsed before I found my pug. An email shot out through the Blinn Humanities Listserv: “Pug puppies for sale”. I knew the English instructor selling the pugs. I trusted her. And I immediately emailed an enthusiastic request before asking my wife. I was first to reply to the email, which meant I received pick of the litter. My wife and I went to look at pug puppies that weekend. They were tiny. Their eyes barely opened. Yet they already snored. I held two, but one curled closer into me. He was my Chicken Dinner. We brought him home in May 2012. And, like me, he’s been one medical mystery after another. So far, Chicken has had two teeth pulled, three tumors extracted, and a couple of Nylobone chews surgically extracted from his intestines. He also developed a nearly debilitating allergy to chicken — his name sake — which required a lengthy, almost year-long, food trial to properly diagnose. We have endured many a convalescence together over the years, me and my pug. He is a good friend. One thing to know about pugs is that they are not solitary dogs. They don’t like being alone. Pugs — like all good comedians — struggle with depression. No really. They

can pout worse than a wet cat when left alone. They are social creatures. A pug needs a dog of his / her own. That’s not to say that pugs are extroverts. Not necessarily. Pugs can wheel off by themselves, curled up on a freshly clean pillow or a stack of especially foul laundry, for hours. But when they feel ready for a familiar face, that face better be accessible. Perhaps it’s for this reason that, a year after inviting Chicken Dinner into our family, I answered another email from the same English teacher and we brought home another little pug. This time a black female to attend our fawn male. My wife named her Josephine Baker, after the famous singer and dancer of the Harlem Renaissance. Some people have pointed out that we obtained pugs that look like us, that we mirrored ourselves in our pets, but to say such a thing is racial, which we are, but still, it’s true. Confession: I did not like Josephine Baker for the first six months she lived with us. Chicken Dinner took to house-breaking within weeks. Josephine required six months — SIX MONTHS!!! — to submit to such training. The girl peed on our bed at least once a week for the majority of those months. But she eventually relented. She even learned to request her walks. I had secretly considered selling her on the Deep Web, or maybe trading her for a Corgi and hoping my wife wouldn’t notice, but things never quite came to that. I can mention that I have two pet peeves when it comes to my pet pugs. One, I despise when people see me walking my pugs and they say, “Oh, it’s that dog on *Men In Black*” Oh my poop in a plastic bag — no it is not. Yes, they are both pugs, but that’s still such a lame and unoriginal comparison. It’s like the time a student told me I look like Rick Ross because we both have beards. Son, you just don’t know enough men with beards. Second pet peeve: when people ask me what my dogs’ names are and, when I tell them, they make a snide remark about how dumb Chicken’s name is. Who asked you? Not to mention, I don’t even know you. And when someone says something like “That’s a dumb name”, and I respond with, “I didn’t name the dog for you”, they always act like I’m the one who’s being unreasonable. One lady at Tanglewood Park, after I told her Chicken’s name, rolled her eyes, scoffed loudly, and said, “Well, at least he *looks* cute.” I wanted to show her the contents of Chicken’s little plastic baggie. Truly, animals are better than people. People are why I need Jesus. Maybe that’s why people end up in plastic bags like the stuff that falls out of my pugs. From dust to dust and turd to turd. Selah. — KEVIN STILL





# PEDAL PUSHING: STRYMON IRIDIUM

We have come a long way since 1999 when Line 6 stunned the guitar market with The Pod, their easy to use guitar amplifier emulator box. For the first time a guitarist could plug into a box that could reasonably emulate a guitar amplifier that one could plug in headphones for silent play or plug it out into a recorder or PA with better than acceptable results. True, that tech pre-existed Line 6 from Rockman, Palmer, and Sansamp, but The Pod made it sound really good at an affordable price. In the 21st century the technology has advanced to high end emulations from Kemper and Fractal to more budget-minded products from Atomic and Helix. Kemper and Fractal are the accepted industry elite for digital approximations of tube amplifiers and analog effects processing products. Their emulators sound amazing and have the utmost of flexibility, but they are expensive (well over \$1000) and nearly require a CS degree to learn how to use. The Helix and Amplifire are less expensive emulators but they do not have the accuracy of tone or ease of use. This is the hole in the market Strymon Engineering aimed their staff towards with the Iridium, their new amp emulator and IR cab loader pedal.

Strymon made its reputation last decade as a designer of well-crafted, great-sounding, and easy to use delays, reverbs, and modulation effects. True, they were a touch pricy for an effects pedal but the sound and functionality made them well worth the price of admission. The Iridium is no exception. It features three amplifier models (Round = Fender Deluxe Reverb, Chime = Vox AC30, and Punch = Marshall Plexi) with three speaker cabinet IR choices each, a preset slot, a room reverb, and a full stereo signal flow for \$400. The feature count versus the dollar amount is admittedly low. But what Strymon has prided itself upon is maximum tone and ease of use, and that is certainly the case here. The three choices of amp models run the panoply of popular guitar amplification and although the cabinet IR choices seem curious on paper they will work for most users who won't get hung up on what source the IR was culled from. One can also add their own IR's via USB.

The Deluxe model has all ceramic speaker IR's, one recorded from a '78 Deluxe cab, one from a blackface Vibroverb (10" speaker versus a 12") and another, oddly, from the Blues Junior. It is weird to model a Deluxe Reverb but not emulate that drippy, wet Fender reverb tank or throbbing tremolo. If you miss those effects then I highly recommend adding a Strymon Flint to your pedals. It is almost as if the Iridium and Flint were made for each other. Fender also made non-reverb Deluxes over the years and cranking the mids on the added mid control (DR's only had treble and bass controls) shifts the tone of the emulation from scooped blackface to mid-forward tweed. Loading a more appropriate IR to the amp you are looking to emulate (JBL or Jensen 12's for a Twin, alnico 10's for a 59 Bassman, alnico 12 for a tweed Deluxe, or even EV12's for a Mesa Mark thing) would get one close to any flavor of Fender amp.

The AC30 sounds brittle and glassy in a good way. It comes loaded with two different alnico Celestion Blue IR's (one with open back, one closed) and, again oddly, a



mixed Mesa 4x12 with V30's and EV's. The Blue IR's give the classic AC sound and can go even farther in that direction towards the Matchless sound. The middle control acts as a tone cut, a familiar feature on Vox amps. One can get that cutting blizzard of nails dirty clean tone as well as the more compressed sweatshop sound of Brian May with this model. The Plexi doesn't have a lot of gain and really needs to be cranked on full bore to get that classic Marshall roar. There is an odd IR choice here as well (an 8x12 alnico cab) but the three sound right and one can get the expected range of Marshall tones from Hendrix to Judas Priest.

I received my Iridium in the initial delivery of the preorder. I put it to work immediately on tape for the forthcoming Ex-Optimists 7" EP. I found myself using the Chime model far more than I ever expected to. It blended well with the real Fender amps I used in double-mono with the Iridium and recalled the tones I got on a previous Xops album when the engineer stereo'd my Mesa Mark I with the house AC30. The Round definitely has a Deluxe thing going for it if one trades out the ceramic IR's for alnico and dimes the mids, and the Marshall, well, it sounds great isolated but I've not been able to find a situation for it to work for me yet. The room function does add that sound to the mix. It's hard to describe but if you have ever heard what a close-mic'd amp sounds like in the monitors at the same time you can actually hear the amp from the next room at the same time then you know what that means. The front end of the pedal has FET circuitry and that means that the "preamp" of the pedal acts a lot like an amp's pre-amp. You can punch this pedal with overdrives, boosts, fuzzes, and distortions and the Iridium behaves like an amp would. I find that I like doing this much more than just turning up the gain on the models as it sounded more realistic to me. Most importantly, the Iridium sounded and felt like an amplifier to me in use and at playback. I dialed up good sounds within seconds.

For live use the stereo IR option gives users the ability to add a "null cabinet" to one side of the stereo spectrum so one could run the emulated cabinet out to the PA and the null side to an onstage amp for monitoring purposes. For that matter, one could load a completely different mono cabinet IR into each side and mix between the two, as many people load a mixture of speaker styles in one cabinet and mic both styles. Hear your AC30 with a Greenback and a Blue at the same time, or your Deluxe with a ceramic and an alnico. Or eventually as far field IR's come into play one could mix a close field IR (the mic right on the speaker cone) to a reflection free room mic'ing of the same speaker. Or set it to sum and stay in glorious mono. There have been some complaints online that the Iridium does not have an XLR output and that many who would use this as an amp replacement would still need a direct box. I find the addition of a good headphone out to make up for the lack of XLR. I wish that Strymon had relied less on stereo TRS connections and used a 1/4" each for left input and right input. To maintain a proper stereo flow it would require a LOT of stereo TRS to dual left/right 1/4" adapters. Others have also complained about the lack of an effects loop. Strymon has indicated that the emulation of the power and preamp stages is integrated and could not be separated to allow for a loop. Also that headphone out would not monitor any effects down the chain from the Iridium and many users have noted that the Iridium does well with modulation and delay effects down signal from it as well as at the front.

Some have noted that the Iridium does not sound like an amp in a room, and it does not. It sounds like what a microphone hears when buried against an amp run through a speaker cabinet. It is in this capacity that we hear most guitars on recordings and in most medium to large stage live situations. Many complain that there are only three amp models on the Iridium. The Helix and Ampli-Firebox pedals cost about the same or less and offer more amp models and the Helix has effects as well. What makes the Iridium stand tall above those modelers is that it is less complicated to use and it makes the most of those three models. Anyone who's ever plugged into an amp can get a tone out of the Iridium within minutes of seeing it for the first time. It takes a lot of time with the manual to figure out presets on the Helix and Amplifire. Its basic tone even rivals the modeling of the Fractal but is certainly not going to replace the high end emulators purely on tone. But for ease of use versus cost of entry there really is no competition for the Iridium. The Iridium is more expensive than most Strymon pedals of that size (most are \$300, the Iridium is \$400) and I can't help but think that Strymon will eventually make a three switch sized Iridium Deluxe that will add more amp models and/or a small amount of effects. That will undoubtedly cost more and will undoubtedly be more complicated to use. As it is, the Iridium is an amazing tool that will make a great entry into direct recording and ampless live performance for many and a lateral move for those like myself frustrated with the other amp emulator pedals on the scene, ready to step up to Strymon quality and user-friendliness. Either way, Strymon should have a major hit on its hands. — KELLY MENACE

## DEATH OF THE FAMOUS

The deaths of retired basketball star Kobe Bryant and eight others including three teenagers in a helicopter crash are dreadful indeed, but what seems like a national focus on the tragedy is somewhat baffling.

That NBA players and even Los Angeles fans would feel a personal connection to the loss of a superstar is understandable, but the tributes that have crossed into other levels of basketball and other sports as well as other mediums including television seems to be an over-reaction. Even the Superbowl half-time show is supposed to include a Kobe memorial of sorts. Is the NFL playing on national sympathies, or is there a legitimate reason for a former basketball star to be remembered at a championship football game? I mean, he did just play a game.

Granted, millionaires are not supposed to die at age 41. Neither are teenagers typically dying in helicopter crashes. Personally, I don't follow professional sports closely that much anymore, but I certainly knew over the years about Bryant's skill, his championship rings, the sexual assault issue, the family man he became in his retirement years. However, was he ever that beloved that such an outpouring of grief is to be expected? Apparently would be the answer, but I don't think it's that simple.

Americans always have lived vicariously through the lives of celebrities, whether singers, athletes, or movie stars. And, when that life ends, the grief feels real. Rudolph Valentino, David Bowie, Marilyn Monroe, Babe Ruth, John Lennon, Joe DiMaggio — pick an era, and a celebrity, and there was grieving that might have appeared unseemly to outsiders. That faux-intimate relationship with a celebrity today is likely enhanced by the minute-by-minute influx of visual and text details via social media.

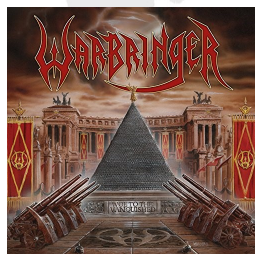
So, when a celebrity dies, it feels like a death in the family. Yet, it's not a real family; it's a family, a relationship, that you have curated and nursed on your own terms, often shorn of the reality of blood ties and all the messiness that entails.

To be clear, this is not to trivialize the deaths of these people in this helicopter crash. The stories of the coaches and the young girls and the others are, to me, as heartbreaking, if not more, than Bryant's death. Again, he was the celebrity and others feel that association to him.

For me, I was more taken with the death of longtime newsman Jim Lehrer at age 85. Lehrer had lived a rich life, worked for newspapers for years, spent decades as a television commentator, moderated numerous debates of presidential and vice-presidential candidates from the first George Bush through Obama and Romney. He also managed to write nearly two dozen novels, had a family with grandkids, and collected bus memorabilia (whatever that is). Lehrer also exemplified what a true journalist is all about: balanced and objective reporting of the facts that then allowed the reader or viewer to form his or her own opinion. It could be the fracturing of journalism that has been ongoing for the last few years that makes his loss felt even more keenly. Calm presentation of information has been replaced by opinionated sneering and screaming to the point it's news disservice instead.

Finally, and sadly, Americans will move on from their sorrow over Kobe's death. Perhaps, another reason for the attention on it is in order to ignore the turmoil in the White House and Congress. Of that, I think everyone understands. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

# RECORD REVIEWS



## Warbringer

### *Woe to the Vanquished*

A new year is here, which means new music to explore. Although the prospect of new albums from my favorite bands and artists is always exciting, I often find myself more excited by older albums which had somehow flown under my radar, and this has happened to me consistently year after year. Oftentimes, I find myself more amazed by albums that I missed rather than those that were recently released.

For 2019, I actually picked up an album from band I had listened to before, and at the time, thought little of. I'm talking about *Woe to the Vanquished* by Warbringer, released in 2017. What made me give the band a second chance was listening to interviews with frontman, John Kevill. He has cited personal musical influences such as Eric Adams of Manowar, Bobby Blitz of Overkill, Chuck Billy of Testament, and Dio. He has elaborated on the importance of why musicians should take great responsibility and be professional in crafting quality music, why bands owe a great debt to their fans, and why it is morally reprehensible to require fans to pay to meet their heroes. Furthermore, he has expressed personal interests in *Conan the Barbarian* and war history; in fact, it is his intent to finish graduate school and becoming a professor of history someday. A nerd with identical music and entertainment tastes, a philosopher, and an academic. To say the least, this guy is a man after my own heart!

After being captivated by Mr. Kevill, I picked up *Woe to the Vanquished* and gave it a more critical listen. This second listen made me realize that Warbringer's thrash formula boasts some of the most

impressive musicianship in the genre. The record has a variety of influences layered within the overall sound which is comparable to sipping on a blended red wine: there's a dominant merlot flavor, but then you get those hints of chianti, pinot noir, oak, and dark cherry after every swallow. Warbringer can crank out pummeling high-speed rippers like Slayer all day long, but they can also administer chunky punk riffs, hardcore-esque vocals echoed with a gang chorus, and some rock n' roll drumbeats thrown in for good measure. What is yet more is that John is a great storytelling lyricist and his bandmates create music to match his lyrics perfectly.

To say the least, I have fallen in love with this Warbringer. *Woe to the Vanquished* showcases thrash with old school nostalgia and new school creativity, both primitive and sophisticated. Rarely do I find a band where I like the band members as people as much as I like the music they produce. All considered, I give *Woe to the Vanquished* a solid 4.5/5. — CALEB MULLINS



## Konvent

### *Puritan Masochism*

Those who love metal music, especially extreme metal, understand something that those who do not simply never will, and that is how a music so immediately dark often reveals brightness, even while explicitly challenging it. The idea is similar to horror cinema and literature: that which deals in mayhem often points most vividly to virtue. It's the law of opposing forces. The dance of irony. The reward of the initiated. If the Devil can appear as an angel of light, perhaps the flip begs possibility for his adversary, as well. Crazy things have happened and will again. Ask Job.

Konvent is a four-piece hailing from Denmark. After a ridiculously successful demo released in 2017, which shot the band into immediate prominence on festival line-ups, Konvent released their first full-length album, *Puritan Masochism*, on January 24 via Napalm Records. An initial listen offers a blazingly solid assurance about these ladies: they're not messing around. *Puritan Masochism* is a crushing, full-fisted, steel-toed blow to the solar plexus. It's a massive record with big bass grooves (from Heidi) and murky guitar riffs (from Sara). Percussion (by Julie) is minimal, slowing the pace, annunciating the sludginess of intended doom. All while Rikke's deeply spat guttural vocals crawl over the band's miasma of thickly wired muck like a stubborn rot that just will not die. It's really quite beautiful.

The genre here, if you're a genre-nerd, that Konvent has been slotted into is "death-doom", a style of doom-metal made more off-putting by death-metal style vocals and themes. Sure. Whatever helps you compartmentalize your library. But what stands out most about Konvent is their ability to make more of the moment than genre labels allow. Yes, the doom is dense here. Absolutely, the death-y vibes clamber about. But something else is in there as well. There's something larger than those simplistic elements in these songs that lifts *Puritan Masochism* above monotony and a checklist of genre tropes. It's the thing that draws listeners back repeatedly and that will make this record a big conversation piece during Album of the Year debates in December. I believe the key element that Konvent possesses and successfully infuses into their music, the thing that sets them apart and makes this album worth celebrating, is conviction. These ladies seem to have something to say — and they say it as much in their music as their lyrics.

Vocalist Rikke has stated that a primary theme in *Puritan Masochism* is chaos, particularly a striking out against chaos, seeking an antidote to chaos. This theme is evident in the album's artwork which features a waterfall on the cover and a swirling, whirlpool in the open gatefold. The black-and-white color palette also appears to

challenge notions regarding chaos, particularly the idea that life can only be one way or the other: totally chaotic or ultimately divine. And this same question lurks in Konvent's music, bristling about those crushing doom beats and shining like a shaky nimbus around the crowns of shattered debris. These songs feel much more like a stomping march into and against the void rather than a celebration — or requiem — of one's own defeat. Second album track "Trust" is a call against cult behavior, against wagering vulnerability as a commodity. "Bridge" exposes the ruse of suicide as a solution. "World of Gone", with its chorus "tick tock/poison clock", examines the ethereal weightiness of time. And the closing couplet, two tracks simply titled "Ropes Pt. I" and "Ropes Pt. II", uses bleak pastoral imagery, in a fashion more typical of black metal, to explore the oft barren nature of life's drudgery. Album opener and title track opens this barrage of questions with an indictment against patriarchal systems, one that denies the yin and yang balance of the king requiring a queen. Such a lack of balance, particularly staged in a deceptive power play — "Your safe sense of comfort is as warm as an octopus embrace" — is a bedrock of chaos. We begin with the album with the death of the queen. We end the album with barren landscapes. In between are all the fixtures that cause us to potentially lose hope. The construction of this record is nothing short of sheer artistry.

So where is the hope mentioned earlier? Where's the silver linings and the antidotes? Good question. All I can say is that it's in Konvent's delivery. It's in the evidence of their conviction as musicians and women seeking to restore balance to an art form they love. But there's also this. I don't mean to sound peacock-ish here. The antidote may also be in the listener. As previously stated: not all viewers see virtue in the dark arts, and not all ears hear the rise towards resurrection scratching beneath the dirt. Some only hear the dirt. However, according to Konvent, these dirt will not remain barren long. With an album as large as *Puritan Masochism*, I believe these ladies have begun a career promising enough to reveal what's itching to break forth. — KEVIN STILL

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# CONCERT CALENDAR

**2/1—Great American Boxcar Chorus, Kerosene  
Pipedreams @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 8pm**

**2/4—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan.  
10pm**

**2/7—From Parts Unknown, Mutant Love ,Cosmic  
Chaos, Acid Carousel , Wisdom Cat @ Revolution,  
Bryan. 9pm**

**2/8—Brother Moses, Antique Gardens @ Grand  
Stafford, Bryan. 8pm**

**2/8—Jay Satellite, The Prof. Fuzz 63, Carnage  
Guisada @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/11—Foreigner @ Rudder Auditorium, College  
Station. 7pm**

**2/13—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bry-  
an. 10pm**

**2/14—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/15—Temptress, Rickshaw Billy's Burger Patrol  
@ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/18—Otonana Trio, Charm Bomb @ Revolution,  
Bryan. 10pm**

**2/20—Pete & Tay @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/21—Grady Spencer & The Work @ Grand Staf-  
ford, Bryan. 8pm**

**2/21—When Particles Collide, Mutant Love, Wis-  
dom Cat @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/22—Zzyzx, Sultan Subdued, DeCasa, Cheap  
Wave @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm**

**2/25—Kristy Kruger @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/28—Bright Light Social Hour, Mobley @ Grand  
Stafford, Bryan. 8pm**

**2/28—Grifters & Shills, Brightwire, Kerosene  
Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**2/29—UptightSick, Pink Eye, Mutant Love @ Rev-  
olution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/3—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan.  
10pm**

**3/6—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/7—Isonomist, Distance/Here (last show), The  
Vinous, Talk In Theory, Aphotic Contrivance @  
Grand Stafford, Bryan. 7pm**

**3/7—North By Northwest, The Lonely Wheel,  
Skunk Money @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/13—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan.  
10pm**

**3/20—Such Marvelous Monsters, Mad Rant, Boy  
Wonder @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/21—Brandon Rhyder @ Grand Stafford, Bryan.  
8pm**

**3/22—Hangover Matinee feat. SkyAcre, Mutant  
Love, The Ex-Optimists, Cool Moon, Wisdom Cat,  
Swallow the Rat @ Revolution, Bryan. 2pm**

**3/26—Sarah & The Gringos, Joey McGee @ Revo-  
lution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/27—We Are the Asteroid, Frog Hair, Mutant  
Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**3/28—Brandon Burnett, Mary-Charlotte Young @  
Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**



## WHEN PARTICLES COLLIDE MUTANT LOVE WISDOM CAT

**REVOLUTION CAFE  
FRI FEB 21ST**



# Acid Carousel Cosmic Chaos

## 2020 Texas Tour



**\$5**

**18+**

**Cosmic Chaos - Acid Carousel  
From Parts Unknown**

**Mutant Love - Wisdom Cat**

**8:00 PM**

**February 7th**

**Revolution - Bryan, TX**