

STOREPRESENT



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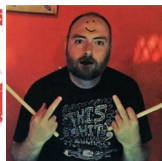
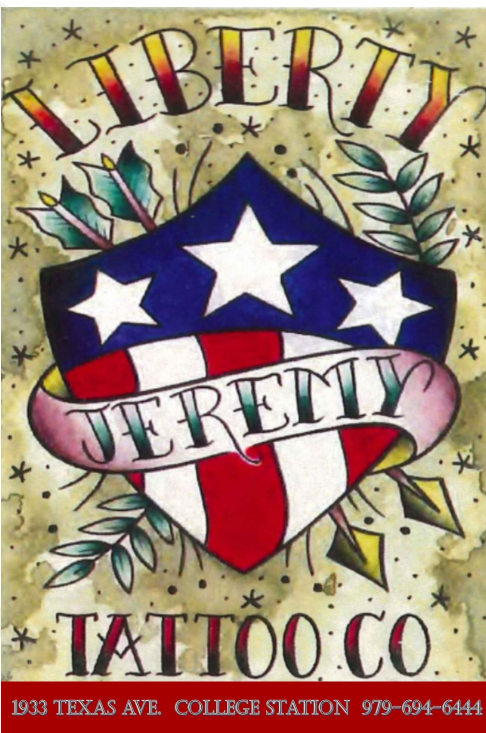
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for the discerning dirtbag.

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SUPER TUESDAY DECISIONS

It shouldn't have been this hard for me, but finding a candidate to choose from out of the enormous field of Democratic presidential primary candidates was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made in my life, let alone at a poll. But this month I, like many of you, will march myself down to my local precinct polling place and will push the touchscreen for the candidate of my choice, or at least for the candidate that makes me want to barf the least. Because really, I could not pull my lever 100% for any of them.

I went into this election trying to decide mainly whether or not I was a progressive voter or a centrist voter. That meant that my inner idealist and inner pragmatist went to war with each other. I support Medicare 4 All. I am at the age where I have begun to worry about what one well-placed medical crisis could do to my family. Cancer would wipe out what meager "wealth" we have. I grew up in a poor family and did not have health insurance until I had to carry a policy on myself in college. I have seen the difference between good insurance coverage and bad insurance coverage, the difference between working somewhere that self-insured versus a place where the insurance was provided as cheaply as possible. I have had to pay outlandishly for COBRA benefits between jobs. Health care insecurity adds a good bit of static to a person's basic signal to noise ratio that is truly unnecessary. Every other first world country gets it, why doesn't America?

I carry an immense amount of student loan debt. My undergrad, and my wife's undergrad, masters, and PhD. It's a hefty payment every month, and that's with it set on the 20 year payment plan. I graduated college 23 years ago yet I am STILL paying on my undergraduate loans; it's been 26 years for my wife. The student loan payment has soaked up the money we could have been saving for our sons to go to college, who will instead have to borrow for tuition, repeating the vicious cycle. Having those loans forgiven would allow my family to apply that money directly to the economy that is otherwise going to pay the government interest. A basic community college or trade school education should be provided for those that have the grades to be accepted. Having students come directly into the work force without student loan debt would only benefit our economy.

As a male I should not have the ability to make decisions that prohibit a woman's access to reproductive care, even if that care involves an abortion. Protecting a woman's right to that access is paramount. Promoting a center-liberal judiciary that will protect that access, protect civil rights, promote voter protections, and dismiss gerrymandering is just as important. I know how important fracking has been to the state economy but I would like more environmental safeguards. I do not support pipelines over native grounds or across parkland.

I am basically a card-carrying liberal. However, I don't see at this point how any of the things I believe in are capable of being promoted or protected under the current political reality. Medicare 4 All will cost an

enormous amount of money. True, if we stopped funding the military-industrial complex with endless wars we could divert that money or tax gazillionaires a higher percentage, but that's a very big "if". Americans have been filled with a mixed bag of anecdotes about national health in Europe and other countries, stories about waiting lines and death panels and such. Some Democratic candidates have opined that Americans aren't unhappy with their private insurance and want to have the opportunity to choose a plan. I don't think anyone who isn't rich is happy with their existing health insurance (if they have it to begin with) but I think people are nervous about whether or not they will have the same quality of health care that a privatized industry provides. America's system is so byzantine that replacing it with something European seems impossible. Our system now relies on a co-payment of premiums between their employer and themselves, with the employer paying the majority of the premium. In my family's case the portion of coverage for the four of us we pay runs over \$600 a month. A Medicare 4 All would have to come in below that since the portion that employers pay will mostly be pocketed by those employers and not passed down to employees. According to a tool on Bernie Sanders' website it will. But will it really? Same goes for College For All or loan forgiveness. Somebody has to pay for it, and that somebody will wind up being us and not the wealthy who could afford it. And that is if it can get passed in the first place. Let's recall that Republicans are still litigating and limiting The Affordable Care Act and have spent decades chipping away at Roe Vs. Wade. A hard progressive agenda will require not only the executive branch but also the legislative branch to get it to pass and the judicial branch to let it stand. At this point all three branches of government are run by decidedly non-progressives.

This is where my inner liberal collides with my inner pragmatist. These are all great ideas that will take a lot of explaining and a lot of deprogramming people about. Republicans have spent untold hours and dollars convincing the lion's share of our populace that the government is bad and limiting government is good. That approach has played very well for the rural and lower populace urban areas hollowed out by manufacturing and agricultural losses. I'm not sure a single presidential campaign is the perhaps the best place to communicate these fairly radical fundamental changes in how our country gets things done. The pragmatist favors increments. Only the comfortable can afford the expense of incrementalism. Many of you have no insurance. Many of you work for minimum wage. Many of you suffer under student loan debt. Many of you lamented the loss of easy health care access from our now-closed local Planned Parenthood. If you are in a crisis you do not want to hear "it'll get better... Eventually." You needed improvement yesterday and can't wait for tomorrow. I feel tone deaf reminding you that these things take time, true or not.

At this point seven major candidates are left. The Progressives (Bernie, Warren), the moderates (Pete, Biden, Amy), and the filthy rich (Steyer, Bloomberg). Steyer has

his heart in the right place but blowing millions on a doomed presidential campaign is a waste of money that could've been used to affect positive change elsewhere. Bloomberg is Trump 2.0. Mayor Pete's lack of real political experience outweighs the positive symbolism of voting for a gay veteran to be president. I don't think he's the racist banker bitch the Berners have painted him out to be though. Klobuchar impressed me during the Kavanaugh hearings but she has yet to impress me as a presidential candidate. Biden should never have run in the first place and his inability to deliver a cogent opinion on anything without derailing himself tells me he's not up to it. I love Meme Bernie but I feel like Bernie has made a lot of promises that he can't actually keep. And I have a big chip on my shoulders about the intensity of hardcore Berners. Elizabeth Warren has a plan for everything but in our soundbite headline age it's hard to focus on the details in a meaningful way and the Pocahontas thing disappointed me. Her plan for everything appeals to me most, and the more I thought about it I began to be mostly sure that I will vote for Elizabeth Warren.

I worry that Trump will paint her over and over again with that sobriquet in the debates and on the campaign trail and that is the one part of supporting Elizabeth Warren would give me pause. That was a very visible lapse of judgment that was embarrassingly easy to debunk in the 23 and Me age. I grew up in western Kentucky and if I had a dollar for every person I knew growing up that claimed Cherokee heritage (including most of my elder family members) I'd make my mortgage this month. I feel comfort that Elizabeth Warren's health care plan seems to straddle the incremental with getting something done immediately to help those who need the help. I worry that her foreign affairs chops aren't tip-top but I believe she will place the right people around herself. I think she can go toe to toe with Trump and he has shown that he has a weakness when it comes to arguing with strong women. See his responses to House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi. My wife already pulled the lever for Buttigieg in early voting. To her, Warren is shrill, Bernie wants to give away everything for free, Biden is creepy, and Klobuchar she likes but she's too far down in the polls to matter. She is more of a moderate like myself but her idealism dies hard. It chaps her to the bone that she will likely have to vote for Bernie after all of this. But she will even if her heart won't be in it.

None of these candidates is perfect. And I suppose that is the point. So many of us are split in many directions on who we support in the primary that I worry we will be unable to unite behind someone they did not pick in the primary. It is paramount to understand that Pete, Bernie, Amy, Joe, and Elizabeth are different shades of the same blue. Any of these five will be an immense improvement over Donald Trump. Any of these five will help to assure our allies that America's flirtation with authoritarianism has been laid aside, at least for the time-being. While choosing your number one in March may have been a difficult decision here's to hoping that choosing Democrat X over Donald Trump is an absolute no-brainer. — KELLY MENACE



DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS

You wake up. It's Sunday Morning. And for whatever weird reason, you're feeling pretty good. You hit the magic combo of "Still drunk from last night and not completely

body broken from the gallons of booze you've been drinking." You played your cards well with exactly how many drinks to take and when to take them, yesterday. It feels like you hit the fucking lotto.

So you figure, might as well make the best of this and get some shit done. Best practice says you should restock first. So you go get some beer and whiskey for the week, and some vodka and orange Fanta for the morning to create the world's most ghetto screw driver or two or ten or whatever.

Now you're ready for some chores. Laundry seems like a good candidate to start with. But remember to separate the loads. "Whites and colors" Oh, hahaha, no. "Pissed on and not pissed on".

Speaking of, you should probably spray down the bed with Resolve. Because that is totally a thing that occurs in your life. There is a line item in your monthly budget for Resolve. Cause that shit is kinda expensive. But you can't exactly go around wreaking of piss all the time. So, worth.

Oh, right, if you're feeling decent, you should probably go deal with all the empty beer/pizza boxes and plastic whiskey bottles. Today. You've been wicked lazy about breaking down boxes. But you know, just fold them up and put them all in one empty case, so it looks like you're just throwing away Saturday night's case of beer to your neighbors instead of the reality of a few hundred beers and case of half gallon handles from the past couple weeks.

Alright, you got that out of the way. Now it's about time to do some dishes. Wait. Are they all glasses from the liquor? Is there not a single plate here from food? For

the entire week? Literally just an entire dishwasher full of glassware? OK, guess that makes things easier, but Jesus. Thanks, alcoholism, I suppose.

Oh, right, you haven't showered in a few days and you look like hell and your hands won't even stay still long enough to hold your ghetto Fanta screwdriver, so you have to brace them. Looks like you should take care of that with a shower and another couple shots.

So now you go actually comb your hair, and you look like some kind of actual normal human being. You can go watch the football game at the bar and talk to people like you didn't go through this whole process all morning and you aren't half a fifth and a couple million beers deep at this point.

And you know that you'll go to work tomorrow, and people will be talking about what they did this weekend around the lunch table, and how they vacuumed, or walked the dog, or took their kid to the park or some other kinda bullshit. And you'll get annoyed. Because none of this makes sense. You'll have these weird reference points, to vaguely keep track of the conversation, while you detox the fuck out. Maybe you even say something, and maybe people laugh, but you can't tell them what really happened to you. You feel like you're living your life backwards, or alien, or maybe you just aren't a real person at all. You can't tell people that this has been going on for so long, that you have a set pattern of thoughts to deal with pissed on clothing, all the empties in the world, and you're fucking really good at this.

This is why I love each and every one of you motherfuckers. Cause you get it. You get the part where this is just another day. And I can sit here and laugh about all the horrors daily life and be happy, knowing that I'm not the only one. You bastards may not know exactly, but at least you care, and we'll all be there for each other. — **STARKNESS**

BRAZOS VALLEY ROLLER DERBY

VS

SOUTH SIDE ROLLER DERBY



MARCH 21 6:30 PM
SILVERWINGS

4100 TX-105
BRENHAM, TX 77833

Suddenly one day, everyone got a message in their minds. It said, "Do not be alarmed. We are kind. We are offering you an opportunity to see our planet. Our ship will dock on your Earth in one month and pick up whoever wants to come." That was it.

For the next couple weeks, the people of earth were having all the emotions. Many people prepared, some warned, some people died of anxiety or fear. A few governments partnered together to prepare for "attack" or "protection" or whatever the case might be.

The alien communication came back two weeks later with an apology for freaking everyone out. They uploaded to our internet a massive archive of their history, technology, landscape, culture, music, and even quite a few movies from various genres.

We found out they were hilarious, romantic, relational, interesting, and benevolent. They even had a "sci-fi" genre that at times used humans as monsters/lessons, and sometimes as satire and ridicule, but overall, we could tell they truly were friendly and interested in connecting and sharing.

They also apologized for spying on us, but told us it wasn't difficult with all the radio frequencies shooting out from all over the earth. They told us they had also done that at first during their adolescent societal and technological evolution, but no one had found them, although they thought they had made it pretty obvious.

They loved our culture and humor and struggle and entertainment. They had prepared for this contact for a long time.

Then, one day, the ship arrived. It was massive. It docked in the Atlantic and set up beacons at several major port cities. The beacons were holograms that stretched past the clouds. Then they sent out small shuttle ships.

They also sent out cargo ships with all sorts of goodies including gadgets, trinkets, produce, vehicles, candy, art, toys, books, jewelry, seeds, textiles, medical devices, small domesticated cute baby animals, and lots and lots of notes and drawings from school kids and scholars, scientists and writers, all excited and hopeful that our societies could partner, mingle and exist together.

Their whole planet had been anticipating the ship's arrival. It was a date that was looked upon warmly, cautiously, and with great excitement for centuries.

They were mostly excited about upgrading our monetary system. They said that was the ultimate release of the global burden of everything in their evolution as a society. They assured us they weren't going to force it on us, but they really hoped we would adopt our own version of it. Some of the plant life and technology and even the ideas in their art and movies they uploaded were already making massive waves in global thought. The seeds took very little resources, produced massive amounts of harvest, and rejuvenated the ground and atmosphere. The art was emotional, with varied perspectives and styles, and told stories of their history, culture, and displayed interpretations of beauty and hope.

THE MUA

One thing they were very careful about, as to not disrupt our spiritual ecosystem, was their adoration and gratefulness of their planet

and their minds, which partnered up, expanded and multiplied and furthered everything. They had theories about the creation of everything and why they had found us and how everything started. Mostly it turned toward the planet, but overall, gratefulness was theology, history, future, and truth.

One of the most intriguing parts of the upload's ideology was something they called "Mua". It was an experience that could be replicated and universally beneficial. It was a type of mind exploration that was a sort of an upgrade, but of understanding. They had included the Mua devices in the cargo ships with warnings and instructions, but we were expecting them, learning about the Mua in their expansive internet uploads, and many of us were eager. The Mua was a monument in their culture, permeating their art, math, technology, everything.

The first of us that partook of the Mua devices became the focus of every news outlet and article, music release, TV show, topic of conversation, and overall focus around the earth. When these "Nauts", as we started to call them, would speak of the experience, the truths would effect the listeners for weeks. They warned of the difficult nature of the "Passage", but even their warnings were innocuously infectious. They explained that the Mua was an "expanding". That's how they spoke of it. That everything made sense, that tolerances and offence were released, and that unity was attainable.

The Mua would change everything. The Nauts became inventors and soothsayers and chain breakers immediately after the experience.

Some Earthlings were still reluctant, but this was expected, and the Aliens warned of it, but advised to steer clear of ridicule and anger. They explained of their pockets of societies who had refrained from the Mua. These societies were loved and embraced, protected and cared for.

The Aliens also knew their disruption would cause some chaos, and they apologized for that too. The explosion and significant loss of lives at the Northern African port was devastating. The Aliens did everything they could to clean up and restore the area. They were affected greatly by this loss as well and had to consider postponing the travel opportunity.

But it turned out, it was an isolated event.

The Mua, and the growing numbers of Nauts helped with that.

The sigh of relief and global release of anxiety was evident and palpable. Everything was changing, and it was good. Very, very good.

This was going to change everything.

Today is the day I'm gonna take part in the Mua. I'm on my way now.

Next week I'm getting on the ship. — JORGE GOYCO



ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

I am sitting in the Clara B. Mounce public library, northeast corner, upstairs, headphones on, Orville Peck singing sweet songs of seduction into my ears, sun shining, clouds floating by and it's a goddamn beautiful day. It has been several beautiful days in a row now! February is coming to a close and Spring is stretching out from her long winter nap. Buds are unfurling on native trees. Bulbs are bursting through the dirt. Bees are foraging for food again. Why the fuck am I so damn depressed?!

I'm not going to write about depression when I am depressed to potentially perpetuate more depression on such a beautiful goddamn day. This is just me holding myself accountable and showing up again, forcing myself to be seen. I began this day with an email to redchapterjubilee that said "Hey man. I just don't think I am going to be able to do it." And he was like "It's cool." That was enough to motivate me to pull the covers back and get out of bed.

On days that feel like the 11,743 day in a row of sorrow or despair or pain or grief or addiction, it feels impossible to face the world. Shame and guilt and isolation became more desirable companions than friends or work sometimes. I know this feeling. I know some of you who know it too. When I make myself face the feeling of guilt (like not meeting a deadline for a writing assignment) and I show up authentically to friends or co-workers, more times than not I am met with compassion and grace.

This is one of the most fulfilling facets of the human experience. Vulnerability and connection. You cannot have one without the other. Each time we make the choice to be vulnerable in the world, we risk rejection. Sometimes it is overwhelming. Sometimes it begs to be numbed. Sometimes it's AMAZING!! Sometimes it makes our hearts burst open with joy and love!! If you numb the vulnerability, you also numb the connection.

When I first began having the idea of opening a booth at the Farmers market, it revolved around connection with our community. I wanted to connect with my local consumers as a farmer who cares about food security. I wanted to bridge the gap between two successful sides of our 979 community and create an alliance that allows more space for each of us to shine. And to do so I had to put myself in a place of vulnerability and it scared the shit outta me.

If I have learned anything about bravery, it is a duty to yourself to do thing that scares you the most. That is why I got out of bed today. That is why I will get out of bed tomorrow. That is why you will see me (and Katy) at the Brazos Valley Farmers Market on March 7 for our First Saturday!!! Each time each of you show up for a jar of pickles or you hug my neck at Rev to tell me that you love me so hard or we drink beers into the night and scheme a collaborative graffiti project for the alley way between the realms, I remember why I choose to be brave. I love y'all. — **HALEY RICHARDSON**

ECHOES OF A HOLLOW HEAD HIDE THE COST!!!

How much is that puppy in the window there? Seriously though, how much is it? Or how much are these chips, or this drink? These are rhetorical yet real questions that could very easily be asked in today's current economic climate. This isn't exactly anything new by any means, but it was a tactic typically left to the grifter who would slyfully ask something along the lines of, how much is it worth to you?

Hopefully now images of an unregulated market and Mad Maxian landscaped are filling your mind by now. The lawless nature of not disclosing the price of the specialty cookies on display by the register that my inebriated ass at 4 am could care less to think about checking even though the two cookies are \$5. That's a meal some places. But with no displayed price I didn't even think twice about the twice, though it adds up and I am not rich, so I should probably budget better. It doesn't help.

The tactic the convenient stores and now some chain stores are starting to do in the face of gross inflation and mass gentrification, is simply to NOT post the price of items. The theory operating along the principles of cards over cash and the mental concept of magic money. If you can't see it, it's not there. I think they believe that most people will find it embarrassing to ask for a price check on EVERY item at the register and will instead opt to just bite the proverbial bullet and pay the cost, whatever the price. While, this may prove beneficial to merchants it is certainly not to most consumers in the market. I personally find the trend terrifying by what it implicates the futures out come to be. If left unchecked, where do we draw the line?

The Power's that be know they can only keep pulling the wool over our eyes for so long. So now they are getting ballsier as they see the clock ticking down. With Progressives in the popular consensus, those hoarding and extorting are starting to get nervous and are doing what they can to make sure unquestioning self-obsessed Snookie type celebrities are the archetypes for immediate future generations so they can be left alone to secretly work unquestioned and unchecked behind closed doors at resorts the likes of which you and your children's children will most likely never even get the chance to even glimpse inside and decide to let inflation go unchecked while draining the lower and middle classes of the rest of their wealth while making you pay \$10 for bottled water with a fancy design because you can't drink the ground water because they already went ahead and polluted it for you. Bastards.

So next time you see something like this no price game, my advice, check 'em. Make them just as miserable as they are trying to make us. Ask them why the sudden change. Express your opinions on the matter. Write your editors. But whatever you do, don't just hand over your hard earned money to someone who doesn't care how hard you worked for it or how bad you need said item. Solidarity my friends. Keep up the good fight and stay woke — **WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON**

TODD LIVES IN A FILM

My name is Da-Song and I am ten years old. I live with my mom, dad, and sister in our big house. I didn't used to think it was very big but one time I heard Mom's friend say that she wished their house was as big and beautiful as ours. My room is upstairs and has all my toys besides the ones I keep downstairs in our living room and outside in my teepee. Our kitchen and dinner table is next to the living room and then on the other side is the downstairs storage room, but I don't like going down there. When Dad's away at work I like to put my headdress on and shoot arrows around (they're just plastic, not real ones) or draw stuff with my art supplies. Mom gets me any toys I ask for but also says that I need to get even better at my drawings, so I'll do that if I get bored of playing. My favorite toys are my all of my Indian stuff. I saw them in a movie from America once and I thought they were really fun, but I don't know much about them other than that. One time when I was secretly listening from upstairs I heard Mom say that I was too wild to handle, which I think sounds cool.

We also have the hired help that are with us in the house a lot. They don't actually live in the house, but sometime they're there for so long that they might as well. We used to have just a housekeeper and sometimes my sister's old teacher Min-Hyuk there, but now there are new people with us. Min-Hyuk went away for college, which made my sister cry all day long. But then his friend Kevin became my sister's new teacher instead. I guess my mom showed him some of my drawings and then Kevin suggested that she hire an art teacher that he knew, Jessica. I didn't want to have a teacher of my own but Mom said I had to, and Dad said I had to listen to her. Jessica is okay, I guess. Most of the time she just watches me as I draw and says "very good", but sometimes it seems like she's not paying attention.

Dad also hired a new driver, Mr. Kim, pretty recently, too. I think Kevin recommended him as well after my mom got mad at the old driver for some reason. I never used to see the old driver very much, but Mr. Kim comes in the house more often than the other man did. Our old housekeeper was pretty nice an would talk with my mom a lot, but then she got really sick one day and now we have a new housekeeper. They smell dirty and gross when I run by them, so I mostly keep away. Maybe they don't take

PARASITE

showers very often. Jessica sometimes smells bad, too she told me not to talk about it or she'll ask me about the ghost in my drawings.

I don't like to talk about the ghost, Mom can't make me no matter how many times she asks. I saw it in our kitchen the night when I turned eight, and then I blacked out and don't remember what happened until I woke up with Mom next to me. Sometimes I black out and then wake up with a big headache, which Mom says is my medical condition that we have to be careful about. I think it happens when I get too afraid of something, which is why I don't ever like to talk about the ghost. I haven't seen him since my eighth birthday but I know that I saw it in our house. Sometimes I put him in my drawings, just 'cause I can't help but see him. My mom says my drawings are "abs-track", whatever that means. When Dad's home he'll let me stay outside in my teepee and read and stuff for as long as I want to, and we'll play on the walkie-talkies. I feel safe out there and can stay up all night without getting afraid.

Today we are going on a family camping trip. Mom is not very excited and my sister cried about it, but Dad said he had already taken the time off work for us to do it. We're going to be in the car for a long time and my sister will just talk about how great her teacher Kevin is the whole time. I guess it will be fun, though I'd rather be at home playing with my bow and arrow set. Dad let us pack it in one of the suitcases in the car, and said if I was well-behaved on the drive over we could play Cow-boys and Indians at the campsite. Mom didn't want me to bring the bow and arrows because it might make me disruptive, but Dad said I would be fine and said he was tired of discussing it.

Dad said as long as it didn't rain too hard we would have a good family weekend. He said goodbye to new housekeeper before we got in the car and told her what to do while watching our house. She looked happy while our car was backing up out of the garage. I wonder what she will do will we're out camping. I wonder what my teacher Jessica will do this weekend, or my dad's driver Mr. Kim, and I guess Kevin, too. I wonder what they do when they're not with us in our house. — TODD HANSEN



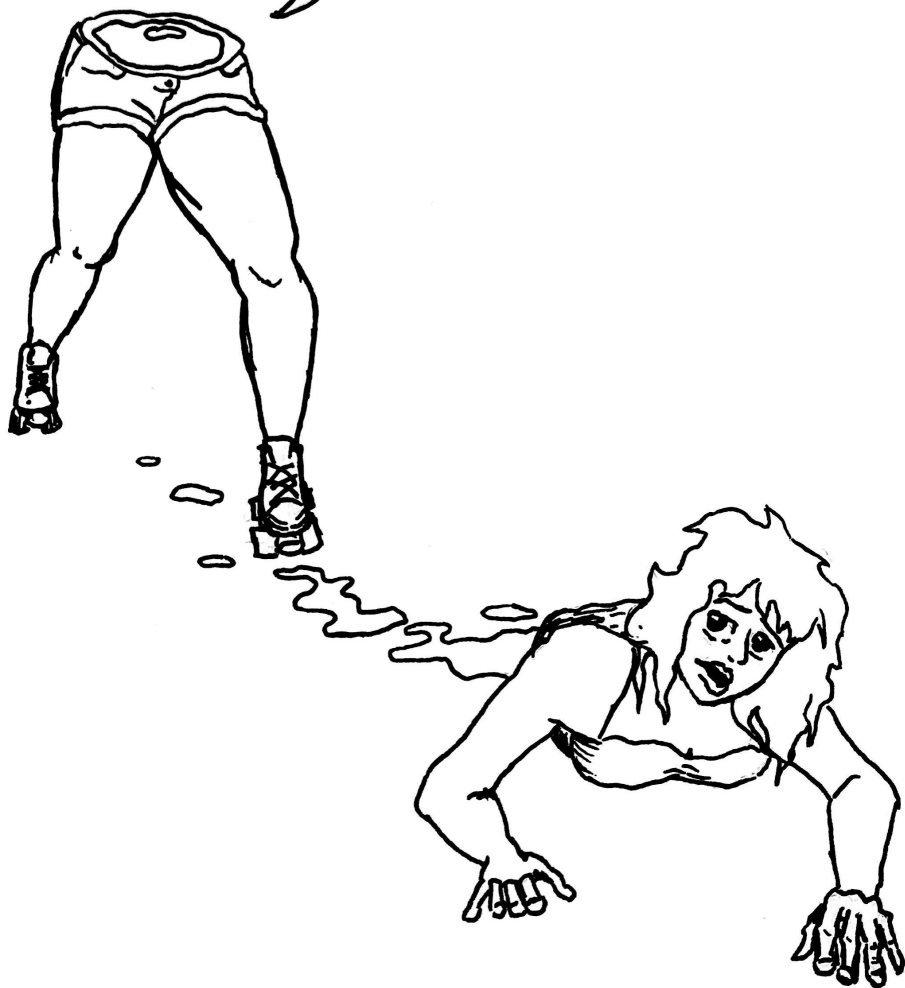
Visit us at the Brazos Valley Farmers Market downtown!

Every First Saturday March 7 8AM-12PM

Pickles by Granny Moon Farm
Vegan Bakes by Salacious Crumbs

Come be part of the community!

SKATE OR DIE!



WASTING

MY

TIME



IN MEMORIAM OF JACKLYN MELLON



[HTTP://WWW.HANDDRAWNPRODUCTIONS.TUMBLR.COM](http://www.handdrawnproductions.tumblr.com)

When I was growing up, I'd bake chocolate cookies with my mom. It was never hard to find the recipe in her cookbook because it was the dirtiest and most loved page, sprinkled with flour and splashed with vanilla. I still love baking and cooking, and I have a little shelf of cookbooks, partially hidden behind an amp. I grab a stack and pore over them on the weekends. They're all carefully selected and curated because I only have a little bit of room, and I'm not allowed to buy a new book unless I get rid of something I no longer user. These are my favorite vegan cookbooks and their dirtiest pages.

Isa Does It Isa Chandra Moskowitz

Dirtiest Pages Butternut Squash Alfredo, Chai Spice Snickerdoodles, Red Hot Buffalo BLT, Chipotle Sausage & Potato Hash

Great For First Time Vegans, Weeknight Cooks



Isa is the queen of vegan cookbooks. She has an empire and has been writing books since *Vegan with a Vengeance*, another kitchen shelf staple, came out in 2005. *Isa Does It* takes a different approach from most typical vegan cookbooks in that it's made up of fully fledged meal recipes instead of sides, mains, condiments, etc that you have to flip back and forth and pair together. If you're just starting out as a vegan, that's fantastic. It also has a handful of breakfast recipes, vegan protein staples, and Sunday night dinners (aka for when you have more time). I've made countless recipes from this book for myself and to share with you guys, and there are no duds. No fancy ingredients, no time consuming techniques, all doable. If you pick ONE book out of this list for yourself or to gift to a friend, this is that book.

Vegan For Everybody America's Test Kitchen

Dirtiest Pages Ultimate Vegan Chili, Belgian Waffles, Potato Vindaloo, Muhammara, Fudgy Brownies

Great For First time vegans with a little cooking experience, Omnis cooking for vegan friends, Technique seekers

My dad likes to send me America's Test Kitchen books, and I was so excited when their new vegan book showed up at my door. ATK's shtick is that they pick a dish, try a bunch of different techniques and variations, and land on the "perfect" version of the dish. They explain their missteps and successes along the way so you know why the recipe works. This book has an incredible spread of great recipes, but it also has a great section up front that's sort of an overview how to untrain your brain from cooking in an animal kitchen. Things like rethinking how you use vegetables, a guide to different types of tofu and their applications, keys to boosting flavors without animal products, quick, easy staple recipes for things like mayo, parmesan, and ricotta, and a great baking guide that covers dairy and egg substitutions (and why). It also has nutritional information at the back of the book

\$ALACIOUS VEGAN CRUMBS

if that's something you're into. It has fantastic salad and bowls sections, and a solid baking section. You'll also get a great variety of veggies throughout the recipes

Minimalist Baker's Everyday Cooking Dana Shultz
Dirtiest Pages Creamy Tomato Bisque, Vegan Parm, Moroccan Orange Spiced Nuts, BBQ Jackfruit Sandwiches, Spicy Red Lentils

Best For New vegans with little cooking experience, Whole-foods Plant-based, Healthy people
Dana Schultz runs Minimalist Baker, a food blog that specializes in easy recipes with few ingredients and mostly whole foods. It's very white vegan lady. Like vegan white ladies on the internet who had ALL just quit their jobs to be food bloggers five years ago. It was a definite scene. Everything I've made from this book has been good. As. Fuck. You guys have had the BBQ jackfruit, the spiced nuts, and vegan parm at my parties. I have the tomato bisque in my fridge right now (BTW, I adapted this recipe in an earlier episode of crumbs for a red pepper variation). She has really great taste when it comes to flavors and sauces, so even if you bomb at the technique (there are no hard techniques), the recipes are delicious. She makes good use of vegan protein sources like beans and lentils, and doesn't use crazy ingredients, so you can cook on the cheap.



The Homemade Vegan Pantry Miyoko Schinner
Dirtiest Pages Lemon Curd, Cultured Butter, Peppy Unpepperoni
Best For Old vegans, Seasoned cooks, DIYers
Miyoko is most famous for her cultured vegan cheese, but she's also got a couple of cookbooks. This one spans the gamut of anything you could ever possibly want to make from home because you're

paranoid that there's going to be whey in something from the store, even when the packaging says it's vegan (it happens!). There are stocks, including a seafood stock, sauces, mustards, dressings, dairy substitutes and cheeses, a variety of seitan, tofu, and tempeh meats, breads, and dessert staples, including pastry cream. There are even recipes for mixes like a mac and cheese mix and homemade Bisquick mix to save time. Not for the faint of heart or the low on cooking skills.

The Superfun Times Vegan Holiday Book Isa Chandra Moskowitz

Dirtiest Pages Truffle Alfredo, Cashew Queso, Chipotle Mac and Cheese, Challah Bread, Chocolate Pecan Pie
Best For Entertainers

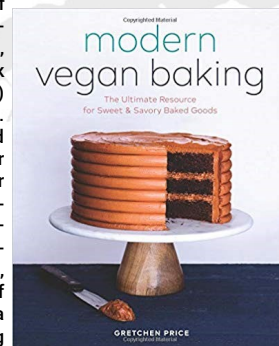
Isa rules. This book rules. She took what could have been any old normal, disjointed cookbook and turned it into a vegan holiday extravaganza! Mardi Gras? CHECK! Once I made the king cake for Charm Bomb V 1.0 and we ate the whole thing at one practice. Cinco de Mayo? CHECK! Halloween? CHECK! Hanukkah? OF COURSE! The recipes are grouped so you don't have to think about what foods fit what season and what sort of party vibe. There are a lot of Jewish recipes in here because Isa grew up in a Jewish family in Brooklyn. I make the challah bread for Michael regularly, and you've all eaten recipes from this book at parties and Loud!Feast. It's got a slightly different perspective than some of the other books, because it's meant for celebrations, so the recipes are a little more fun and a lot of them work well when prepped ahead.

Modern Vegan Baking Gretchen Price

Dirtiest Pages New York Style Cheesecake, Easy Vanilla Cupcakes, Bulk Streusel

Best For Bakers of all skill levels, Friends of vegans

Gretchen is the face of Gretchen's Vegan Bakery YouTube channel, and she owned a brick and mortar (omni) bakery for a decade. She went vegan and decided to switch over her recipes, too! Her book has a great selection of vegan treats – breakfast bakes, cookies and bars, desserts, breads, a little bit of pastry. She does a good job explaining why she uses certain ingredients, especially egg replacers, and there are recipes for everyone in here, from people who are barely comfortable with one bowl bakes to people who make bread for their family every week. She's an indispensable resource in the vegan baking world, and in a category where good recipes are few and far between, this book gives you a really great foundation to build off of. And yes, I keep a jar of bulk streusel in my freezer.



Honorable Mentions

The Chicago Diner Cookbook Jo Kaucher

Dirtiest Page Ranch Dressing, Cheesecake, Pastrami
This book is based on recipes from the Chicago Diner restaurant in...Chicago – killer American diner style food like pastrami on rye, Cobb salad, and milkshakes, without the meat sweats afterward.

Mississippi Vegan Timothy Pakron

Dirtiest Pages Red Beans and Rice, Frito Pie, Mama's Pralines

Timothy is from Mississippi and makes no compromises in his recipes for things like gumbo, dirty rice, or biscuits and gravy. Incredible flavors, authentic methods, much mushrooms for a slow kitchen.

Street Vegan Adam Sobel

Dirtiest Pages Cinnamon Snails, Maple-Miso Brussel Sprouts, Salted Caramel Turtle Bars, Beer Battered French Toast

This book is based on recipes from the Cinnamon Snail, a vegan food truck. There are really modern flavors, imaginative flavor pairings and fun techniques, and big drinks and yeasted donut sections. Definitely for someone who enjoys playing in the kitchen.

Viva Vegan Terry Hope Romero

Dirtiest Pages Yellow Rice with Garlic, Venezuelan Style Black Beans, Sofrito, Corn Empanadas, Tres Leches Cake

Terry Hope Romero was the other half of the Post Punk Kitchen with Isa Chandra Moskowitz, and broke off and wrote her own book about Latin foods – arepas, recipes sin carne, salsas galore, and an entire section on empanadas. I once threw a dinner party and made seven recipes from this book and they all were hits.

Smith and Daughters Shannon Martinez & Mo Wyse

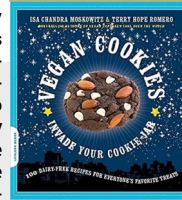
Dirtiest Pages Dark Chocolate & Olive Tapenade, Spicy Ground Chorizo

Smith and Daughters is vegan restaurant in Melbourne, so this book has chef-developed recipes that skew heavily towards Spanish dishes and influences, with killer boozy drink recipes, that will get you out of any rut in the kitchen.

Vegan Cupcakes/Cookies Take Over The World Isa Chandra Moskowitz & Terry Hope Romero

Dirtiest Pages Roll and Cut Sugar Cookies, Rocky Roads, Mexican Chocolate Snickerdoodles, Golden Vanilla Cupcakes, Banana Split Cupcakes, Vegan Fluffy Buttercream Frosting

These two are staples for easy vegan baking – each has classics like vanilla cupcakes and chocolate chip cookies, as well as interesting combinations like pistachio rosewater cupcakes and rocky road cookies (you might recognize this combo from my booth at the Punk Rock Flea Market). No special equipment required. – KATIE KILLER



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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.

DR. KING HAD A DREAM

My wife and I communicate quite differently. Last night she spoke to a group of girls. She gave them paper hearts and told them to write on the outside of the heart the things they love. Then she told them, "The less temporal the love you listed, the more time you should devote to it. The more temporal the item, the less time." She pushed them towards cultivating legacies that will outlive them, relationships that will benefit beyond their presence. Her advice was beautiful. Her delivery kind and full of life. Lyrical even. I try to convey the same sentiment to my students, but I do so by reminding them as often as possible that they will die soon. "You will all be dead before you know it. You're wasting away now. What are you doing today that is any different than yesterday?" Some students giggle at my goth-like pedagogical gloom. Others roll their eyes and pray / hope / curse me to fulfill my own destination sooner than later. My wife inspires. She caffeinates. She's an Enneagram 7 — the Enthusiast — with a need for pleasure and to avoid pain. I suck air out of rooms like a Hope Hoover. I'm an Enneagram 4 — the Individualist — with a need for melodrama and a penchant for hyperbole. My wife: "Live forever with rightly chosen loves." Me: "You're expiring, so don't be stupid." My wife's name is Latonya, and people actually call her "La La", as in a musical notation. My name is Kevin, and for a long time people called me "Hamster", as in a rodent. She does not have any tattoos because she needs to keep her options open. I tattooed a hamster on my leg in the summer of 2011 because I'm deflating anyway so why not paint the bag. She likes to dance and eat spicy Indian food and drive with all the dashboard lights flashing warnings because it will all be okay. I enjoy my couch and black coffee and walking my dogs by the creek that smells like turtles because they're heroic in their isolationism. I tell people all the time our race — like our gender — is the least of our differences. She's the penultimate of four children born to Pentacostal pastors in the bustling suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri. I hail from the sticks of South Arkansas' oil country, the only child of a Vietnam veteran and a Southern Baptist pragmatist who split when I was seven and left me to make siblings with a cat named Oreo and a Beta-player VCR. She was raised on gospel music with a gaggle of cousins, napping under the back pews of various churches while her parents prayed new hands on stubby arms. I was raised on BMX bikes and urban legends about the devil living in tall trees, fearing occultists would peel my cat like an apple when it wasn't even Halloween. Growing up, Latonya wanted to be a lawyer because she liked to argue. Also, her Aunt Stephanie was a lawyer, and her Aunt Stephanie was super cool. As a child, I wanted to be Alex P. Keaton, from *Family Ties*, because he was so smooth. As a teenager, I wanted to be a professional

drummer and then a minister. Neither of us became any of those things. Latonya doesn't like to argue anymore. And I now prefer Michael J. Fox as *Teen Wolf* rather than a Republican. Latonya always saw herself marrying a dude who wore a suit to work. Who played music in the evenings. Who cooked extravagantly while she read books on the sofa. I foresaw a hippie gal in overalls sharing longneck beers, who collected old records and recited bawdy poems in barefeet. We could not have chosen more differently. The choice could have only been made for us, outside of our hands and apart from our immediate conscience. We met in line at a concert in Kansas City, Missouri. Waterdeep recorded their *Live At New Earth* album in March 1998. She traveled with friends from school in North Missouri. I traveled with friends from school in Central Arkansas. We met in line through mutual friends I had met at summer camp. She thought I told good stories. I liked the way she laughed. We parted and found each other again at summer camp — the same one where I had met her roommates years earlier — and that was that. She called me "Little Man", which I thought was cute until I learned that she called all the guys at camp "Little Man". But I really was a Little Man! That summer was 1999. That summer was 21 years ago. A child born that summer could now legally drink alcohol, gamble at casinos, buy weed, go to nightclubs. At 21 years of age together, we do none of those things. 21 one years later, we chase two pugs, worry about parents, grocery shop, avoid each other's music, tolerate each other's music, occasionally jam Modest Mouse or Patti Griffin or Eryka Badu together, kill half a bag of salt water taffy during a *Saturday Night Live* recap, read the same books, read different books (so the other doesn't have to), drink too much coffee, play too much backgammon, debate commute paths, complain about the youth, pour selves into the youth, give wildly different advice to the youth. She travels. I stay home. She attends lunches and brunches and wine nights. I am a good turtle. But we are 21 years old as friends. 15 as bearers of the same name. My wife can eat literally anything. Drink it all to moderate, even-keeled relishings. She is an Enneagram 7 — dining lavishly as long as the day is called today. I can eat rice and scrambled eggs. Drink nothing funner than a simmered down Topo Chico. I'm an Enneagram 4 — counting every calorie like it's my last before Skynet pimp-slaps me through the may-length of a flip-phone. She invests in the least temporal things she can imagine. I try each day not to die a little more. We do all this together. In song. In word. In deed. In similarities and differences. In blessings and Pull-n-Peel Twizzlers. I quoted Johnny Cash in my wedding vows, assuring Latonya I would "walk the line", but we should have danced instead to Paula Abdul and MC Skat Kat: *Opposites attract*. Her hair up and bulbous. My beard down and broom straw straight. A four year old once told Latonya her hair would protect her from predators. Same kid ran his fingers through my beard, clutched them tight, and picked up his feet to swing. She inspires children to create dinosaur adventures. I invite them to practice Biblical scouring. She buys packs of 22 different Paper-Mate colored pens. I use the same Black Uni-Ball Signo 207 for everything. But we make it work. We make it more than work. We've had 21 years of practice. 15 in close quarters. And I look forward to getting better at all of this. — KEVIN STILL

GLORIOUSLY-MESSY DEMOCRACY

Those despairing about the fascist Republican bigot currently in the White House while the Democrats fumble through the process of finding any sentient being to run against him in November should consider just how messy democracy is ... and always will be. A recent academic essay entitled "Democracy in the Long Throw of History" by retired Admiral James Stavridis and Colin Steele can be reassuring to those pessimistic about America's future.

Stavridis and Steele note "Much of the hand-wringing about the state of democracy in the United States either conflates the systemic flaws of our society and government with the flagrant personal flaws of our president—or skips right over the former to bemoan the latter." In other words, we combine the inherent problems of democracy with the defects of the current president or just whine about the bonehead. Neither are very productive, no matter how satisfying it may be to savage him. "One of the fundamental premises of democracy is that no one person or group has or can ever have all the answers," Stavridis and Steele write. They note that checks and balances are enshrined between the different levels and branches of government as well as our political parties.

So, how did we as Americans get stuck with a boorish hack as President? People dislike what appears to them to be slowed or non-existent positive change on the river of life. This is why an autocracy, a system of government with one person with absolute power, a dictatorship, seems so appealing. Stavridis and Steele contend: "Knowing people are tired of being tossed along by the current, the would-be autocrat offers easy answers and promises to restore a comfortable, numbing sense of consistency."

Just think of the cheesy slogan we heard ad nauseum in 2016 only to have it burnished to a honed edge now in 2020 ... wait, it's still the same hoary phrase: "Make America Great Again." Stavridis and Steele unequivocally state that "No leader can restore to us life the way we remember it, which is never the way it actually was in the first place."

"By nature, autocracies tend to push decisions inward and upward rather than downward and outward, and are invariably warped by this process as the decisions become too dependent on one person's judgment."

And we all know how flawed this one person has been in the past and will be in the future, at least until November.

Stavridis and Steele remind us that "Though the American Founders surely felt the world was moving plenty fast, information in their day moved at the speed of a horse or a ship. Today, of course, it moves at the speed of a tweet."

"Today, our on-demand culture only adds to the challenge: always-ponderous processes of governmental decision-making to begin with. This preference causes us to conflate efficiency with effectiveness." Just because things move quickly, that doesn't mean they are moving in the right direction. Anyone who has been driving on the interstate and has taken the wrong turn, despite what Google Maps says, can attest to that. You are making great time, but you are not any closer to your destination. Democracy moves slowly by its very nature.

"Democracy forces us to have a second look at the trade-offs, because there are competing voices at play," Stavridis and Steele write. "But the advantage is that many, many more interests are involved in the ultimate progress of the nation."

This democratic process of ours is messy; it's confounding; it's flawed, but it is resilient. And it will work. Stavridis and Steele recognize that "It is unquestionably frustrating to feel unable to walk directly towards a goal that seems to be right before our eyes. This back-and-forth is an essential part of democratic governance, however, and is rooted in an important insight about the way people function."

Finally, autocrats like Putin, Xi, Kim and others that our president drools over ultimately find their countries and their rule worsening in short order. Remember, our minority president lost the popular vote by millions in 2016. The Republicans lost their chance to correct their error of 2016 by groveling before the stubby-fingered one and not fielding a viable conservative for 2020. The Democrats will find their leader and fall in line behind him or her in time. Democracy — messy as it can be — will win out in the end for our country. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



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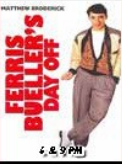
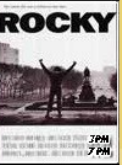






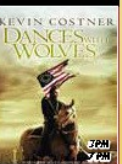
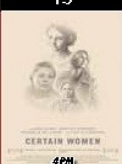






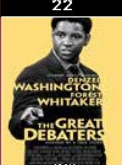





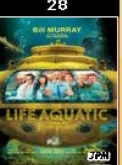
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**HISTORIC
DOWNTOWN BRYAN, TEXAS**

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The cockroach population has had it with the land of the living humanoid's consistent attempts at genocide. After years of

evolution their final solution seems to be to infiltrate the human problem. One by one they have practiced the process of overtaking the human shell and puppeteering them towards misdirected goals, while the roach population works tirelessly to take down the system.

Some fall prey to the social benefits of human life and fight within to protect their stakes in human society wishing to remain hidden game piece players.

Welcome to today, where the "human" population is really only a very small portion human in all actuality. Most of the rest are cockroaches parading around as humans. Some have become so complacent with the ruse that they themselves believe they are humans.

As such they have begun to look down on their kind of origin. Picking trades in pesticide and formulating roach death camps. The heart of the matter is self resilience and loathing. The vile pests feed on verbal garbage just as actual trash. Word vomiting correspondents pollute the airwaves not knowing why they do what they do.

Music has become a last resort of the resistance, tirelessly searching each and everyday for new ways to reach the remaining actual human populace to inform them of the infestation. Double agent insect informants makes the struggle that much more real. The walls and even the floorboards are always listening, watching, reporting, and recording. Just as every new desktop, laptop, smartphone, SmartTV, SmartCar, what have you. The agents want to slowly steer humanity's path to the scrapheap so they can feast on our filth for eons to come. Eventually they will have to eat themselves but they will be at the top and bottom of the food chain, and the world will be remade into their own. Or so they hope. The reality is there is still hope, and that the resistance is growing steady.

In fact, a rogue team of scientists found a way to shrink some human agents and disguise them as roaches in hopes of infiltrating the roach high command's line of command and uncovering some vital piece of intel that'll lead the humans in the right direction and finally give the human race a fighting chance to rise up and

ROACHES

exterminate the roach menace once and for all. There have however, been a few hangups including the realization that the tech-

nology required to return said agents to human form was neigh impossible to operate and ultimately almost lost to them since the untimely murder of some of the greatest remaining human minds. Thus making each procedure an almost certain suicide mission.

One unforeseen problem that arose from this rather unique expo of the wills of two similar parasitic species that no could have predicted was that once word got out to some of the more slobbish human elements that there was a process to turn into roaches. Some of the sloven elite rallied to procure the technology in hopes of becoming and joining the roach populace permanently. It was an interesting predicament to say the least. So as you can imagine there were moments in this secret war when the humans fighting the save the human race were actually roaches incognito, the roaches fighting to exterminate and manipulate the human element were in actuality humans who just got confused and caught up in the world of the roaches.

The streets piled high with more manufactured goods of obsolescence and the filth of the common folk poured out into the streets. Nuclear bombs were dropped sporadically to insight fear and make way for more roach colonies during the drawn out invasion. Pop culture was even more of a hoax then it already is and garbage at the center of every stage; both actual and intellectual.

The bottom will rise to the top eventually was a common slogan many a common man could be over heard parroting night after night in dives across the globe, rolling off tongues of every shape and size. They used it as a cry to unity and hope for the down trodden man, yet little did they realize that they were merely echoing the battle cry of their invaders.

There was a strange sense of beauty in that ignorant circular logic. Life went on as it always had. Us versus them. The only thing that ever really changed perhaps was the notion of what constituted the two warring factions defining senses of self. They both thrived as they always had filthy and self righteous.

....PESTS — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



GOOD MOVIES FOR BAD GUYS

Even though I try to write these reviews about movies without bias going in ... I am going to admit that after watching *Fantasy Island* a few weeks ago, I was probably never going to see another Blumhouse movie without thinking "sucks" in my head. It's just a bias I have, kind of like any animated kids movie that isn't Pixar I have to sit through in a dentist office as I am getting my teeth cleaned. That being said, there are two reasons I decided to shell out five bucks (early bird special bay-bay) of my hard earned cash to see *The Invisible Man*.

First, because it's the G-D Invisible Man, a character originally thought up by the father of science fiction H.G. Wells, and a bonafide "Universal Monster".

Second, because Leigh Whannell directed it, and even though he had his had in things like *Saw* and *Insidious*... he also directed *Upgrade* which I personally feel was the best Science Fiction film in 2018 and totally underrated, so for that reason alone was worth me checking out this flick.

The movie opens with Cecilia Kass fleeing her boyfriend's house almost becoming caught in the middle of the night as her wealthy boyfriend Adrian smashes the car window in an attempt to grab her. While she is in hiding, she learns Adrian has committed suicide and leaves her five million bucks tax free, Cecilia figures now is a good time to pick up with the rest of her life.

Picking up with her life proves difficult as little things start happening. Things are being misplaced, the stove seems to catch food on fire, and she even faints at a job interview.

Armed with this circumstantial evidence, and the fact that she is drugged and swears there is an invisible person, Cecilia begins to insist that Adrian has found a way to turn himself invisible, and well, everyone thinks she is crazy.

The viewer however is treated to the truth, they see the scenes where an invisible person is stalking her, setting her up, taking pictures of her sleeping, stealing her portfolio and even hitting her teenage friend in the face, all leaving Cecilia isolated and looking like the bad guy.

Cecilia continues to try to prove her innocence and the ante is upped. Her sister is killed in a crowded restaurant, leaving Cecilia holding the knife. In her confinement she is able to stab Adrian causing the suit to malfunction which leads to the movie's final act and

THE INVISIBLE MAN

endgame.... And what an endgame.



I was pleasantly surprised at the last ten minutes of this movie. Definite shades of *Upgrade* and if you have never seen *Upgrade* ... what part of the best science fiction movie of 2018 did I not explain? Go see that too.

I think the best thing about *The Invisible Man* though are the things we DON'T see. The movie doesn't open with a backstory. There is no explanation of Cecilia and Adrian's relationship. You see a lavish mansion over looking a cliff and an ocean and think. "Damn girl is living the life" but realize she is actually running away from it. But within minutes the viewer goes from "Why is this chick leaving the easy life?" to "Damn girl be quiet you gonna wake ol' scary dude if you loud". I mean ... what the hell does this dude do to her anyway? Later when she learns Adrian is "dead" she talks about their past and how controlling he was. When asked if he hit her she nods and says "among other things" leaving the torture up to the viewers imagination. And I have a pretty weird imagination.

The pacing is slow and deliberate. There are few jump scares and more tension which makes for a great thriller. And although I like my villains to be more fleshed out and human, it is more of the way that Cecilia reacts to even the idea of Adrian that is interesting. Without giving us much information on Adrian (other than a controlling scientist) we understand him to be a sociopath who is after the only person who dared to leave him. And when you put it that way, Adrian is more real than any villain out today, especially to any woman who has ever had to put up with an abusive ex boyfriend who wouldn't go away.

The idea of a person who can be invisible is not a good one. A random study shows that even the nicest people who would use technology to be invisible for devious means. Get that? Even the nicest people would probably steal money or spy on someone. Now imagine giving that to a person who would stalk and prey on another. Putting that power in the hands of a sociopath is quiet frankly terrifying. Which makes this movie even better than what I thought it would be.

I can't believe I am saying I found this to be an engaging, anxiety inducing, remake. But damn, it's worth the price of a ticket.

7 out of 10 — TIM DANGER

RECORD REVIEWS



Tame Impala
The Slow Rush

Ever put on a new album from an artist you generally like and immediately want to rip it off the system and punch people in the face? This was my reaction to "One More Year", the opening track on *The Slow Rush*, the new album from Australian psych rockers Tame Impala. While I have not been as much into the synthy-new wave approach founder Kevin Parker employed for the band's previous album *Currents* (I MUCH prefer the band's more rock-oriented earlier work) I recognize that an artist has to grow and incorporate new sounds and follow its own creative path. But "One More Year" has almost everything I hate about modern music wrapped up in one neat hateful package: neon-lit vapid dance music with vocals stuttered and vocoded, four-on-the-floor Ibiza EDM grooves, gauzy synthesizers with nary a hook in reach, and truly horrible lyrics. This is memorable about this song except how mundane it is.

Had I followed my initial instincts and pitched this record before getting past that first song I would've missed out on what is otherwise a very solid follow-up to *Currents*. Parker is still mostly reaching for synthesizers instead of guitars, but what he has accomplished on this album is to create a non-sampled version of the work Kanye West made with L.A. production genius Jon Brion. Where Kanye had to selectively curate samples to blend with the cinematic aspects of Brion's production on mid-'00s classics like *Graduation* and *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Kevin Parker recreates the entire approach with his own instrumentation and replaces Kanye's awful rapping (c'mon, Kanye has always been more interesting as a producer than an MC) with Parker's John Lennon-esque falsetto, almost like what MGMT did on their one good album but with a touch of Tame Impala's druggy whooziness still intact from the band's more guitar-based origins. The songwriting isn't great but the scenery Parker sets up in these

songs, like the breezy disco of "Tomorrow's Dust", is more than pleasant to put on while doing other things. — **KELLY MENACE**



Breaking Benjamin
Aurora

Breaking Benjamin (BB) has always held a special place in my heart as one of my favorite rock bands because they are partially responsible for why I love heavy metal music so much. I was intrigued when I heard the band was releasing a new album, titled *Aurora*, in 2020, but what I came to realize is that it's not quite a new album. Upon further inspection, there is but one new song, while the others are acoustic versions of previous songs spanning the band's catalog, some with added guest singers.

So, who are these guest singers you may ask? BB called upon the vocal talents of Michael Barnes of Red, Scooter Ward of Cold, Spencer Chamberlain of Underoath, Adam Gontier formerly of Three Days Grace, and Lacey Sturm formerly of Flyleaf. With the exception of Spencer Chamberlain, the choices for guest vocals are a bit predictable, but they pair well with Ben's vocals. Most all these singers tend to have a dark and melancholic bend which makes sense as to why BB chose them to compliment the mood and particular sound that the band creates. Acoustic instruments and additional vocals definitely have the potential to give old songs some new life.

However, there is a risk that comes with rehashing songs. You'd think that after two years since the last album that BB would have something new to say, but aside from the song "Far Away", they don't. What I did not like about these acoustic versions is threefold: 1. At least half the songs on *Aurora* could have been replaced with far better song choices; 2. The production is far too clean; I prefer acoustic songs to be rawer, with limited editing and additional instruments; and 3. Ben clearly didn't record his vocals afresh for *Aurora*; instead the band opted to use

the original vocal recordings from their previous records and mix them with new acoustic instrumentation and guest vocals. So what about that new song, "Far Away"? Well, it is pretty damn good! The piano is eerie, the classical stringed instruments are marvelous, the atmosphere created is quite beautiful, and of all the guest vocalists on *Aurora*, Scooter Ward certainly fits in with BB best. It is exactly what someone should expect. However, despite "Far Away" being a good song, I do not feel that it warrants me buying the record as a whole.

Overall, *Aurora* is disappointing. If one were to remove the acoustic instruments and guests vocals, it ends up being a record with an odd choice of songs from previous albums and an added bonus track. Everything about *Aurora* seems half-hearted. If a band is going put out a record of acoustic versions of previous songs, they need to be newly recorded with fresh vocals, limited instruments and mixing, and better song choices. The timing of this record is also terrible. After two years, new materials should have been in the works, but alas, all fans are greeted with at the start of a new decade is recycled songs with one new track to spare. If there is only one new song, and it's a good song, I will download it. *Aurora* gets a 2.5 from me for no other reason than "Far Away" is a good song. — **CALEB MULLINS**

synthesizers are a little more in the forefront and the *Miami Vice* Simmons electric drum flourishes in album opener "Beyond Night and Day" are a nice new touch, as are the vocoder vocals on album closer "Fading Hero". Otherwise the same. In fact, *Conundrum* could be the b-side of a 60 minute tape with their previous album and you'd never know they were not the same album. The only thing missing from *Conundrum* is a winning hit single like "Star Rider" from *Excerpts From a Future Past*. "Carry On" gamely tries, with its fast flurry of 16th notes on the hi-hats and soaring harmony vocals, but it lacks the cosmic noir that made that previous single so compelling. That said, if you enjoy that period of progressive rock in the early '80s when it somehow began to find itself on the Billboard Singles charts with a bullet then Hällas is certainly your band and *Conundrum* is a fantastic continuation of the band's work. — **KELLY MENACE**



Anafell Lights / great unwashed luminaries
Split CD

New music by great unwashed luminaries, the electronica persona of Kelly Minnis, is always welcome as is the output by the artists he's shared these split albums with over the past dozen years. Past splits with GUL have included the singular Atarimatt of Bryan/College Station, Army of 2600 from Nebraska, and Charlie Naked from Houston. This split with Anafell Lights is Fort Worth's own Darren Miller, a longtime indie rocker, with his first electronica release.

Anafell Lights features edgy, almost brittle, synthesized sounds that are bordered with blurred and mostly buried vocals. None of the seven tunes rock out by any stretch of the imagination. "Machine" conjures up a Transformers movie vibe while "Iron Lung" is the martial metal pulse one would expect. "Another One" chants a list with doubled vocals under an electronic throb.



Hällas
Conundrum

I went head over heels for Swedish prog metal band Hällas's previous album *Excerpts From a Future Past* when Atarimatt turned me onto them. It's a modern band that writes, performs, and records like a band from 1981, channeling bits of FM prog-AOR crossover bands of that era like Yes, Saga, Alan Parsons Project, and Asia. On *Conundrum*, their recently released follow-up, the band continues in that vein, deftly balancing '80s action movie montage themes with delicate ensemble playing. The

CONCERT CALENDAR

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

3/6—Colton French, Mary-Charlotte Young, Samuel Current @ 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, Mutant Love, Skunk Money, Mary-Charlotte Young @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

3/12—Carnage Guisada, Curve Lip @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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

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

3/21—Brazos Valley Roller Derby vs. South Side Roller Derby @ Silver Wings, Brenham. 6:30pm

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

3/21—Carnage Guisada, The Shoobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

3/22—Hangover Matinee feat. SkyAcre, Mutant Love, The Ex-Optimists, Electric Astronaut. Wisdom Cat, Swallow the Rat, From Parts Unknown @ Revolution, Bryan. 2pm

3/26—Sarah & The Gringos, Joey McGee @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

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

3/28—Carnage Guisada, Mad Rant @ The Beer Joint, College Station. 9pm

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

3/29—School of Rock Festival @ Revolution, Bryan. 2pm

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

4/3—Unified Space, Charm Bomb, Rudical @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/4—KANM Fundraiser Show @ Revolution, Bryan. 8pm

4/7—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/9—ManifesIV, Rudical, Atarimatt @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/10—Chris Edwards, Johnny Ray @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/11—Kerosene Pipedreams @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/16—Carnage Guisada @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/17—The Swift Drag, Jay Satellite, Antique Gardens @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/18—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/19—Punk Rock Matinee with Some Kind of Nightmare, Madeline @ Revolution, Bryan. 2pm

4/21—Keep Flying, Nominee, Skunk Money, Dozer @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm

4/23—Puente @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/24—Lady Starbeast, Gandhi's Gun, de Casa @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

4/25—Ride The Panda, The Shoobiedoobies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

The sequencing is interesting as the album opens with two AL tunes: the buzzy repetitive "The Tank Falls" with the repeated "planned obsolescence" line and the aforementioned "Machine." The almost-soothing eight-minute instrumental "Stable Genius" follows by GUL, a steady rhythmic melody with bumbles of synths and layers of sound. Two more AL tunes, a GUL song, two more AL songs, GUL, then the longest AL composition (10 minutes)

and the album closer, an 11-minute GUL piece. "Rips, Reps, Revelations" by GUL is reminiscent of early tunes like "Body Rocking" with its insistent Mobyesque dance floor beat that segues into a meditation midway before churning back the rhythm. "Hart" harkens back to 2009's split with Atarimatt — *Contest at Neonworld* — with vocals by Minnis, a departure for GUL although he sings plenty in his other musical ventures. "Hart" does feature a

gloriously-majestic mellotron coda. "Sadly No" is likely the best tune by AL with a nice synth opening that settles into a jittery gait although the extended "Something Elusive" has its charms. The urgent riff and the intoned hazy vocals (was that "time wounds all heels?"), coupled with dynamic shifts, keep the long tune intriguing. "Buried at Sea" by GUL is a rich arrangement that opens with a simple but evocative melody that builds to a

tranquil majesty limned by guitar chords. Although the longest tune on the split, it almost seems too short with its gradations of swirls and sounds.

This split by a burgeoning electronica artist and one who has been working in the field for more than a decade gives the listener a wide palette of sounds to enjoy. Check it out on Sinkhole Texas Inc. Records.
— MIKE L. DOWNEY

HANGOVER MATINEE



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MUTANT LOVE ... WISDOM CAT
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ELECTRIC ASTRONAUT
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